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Winners and losers. It is in these terms that regular rankings like the Nature Publishing Index (NPI) are often perceived, with the rise of one institution, city or country inevitably leading to the slide of another.

Yet this might be too simplistic a picture. Given the vast number of researchers in China, even a small uniform increase in the quality of their research output will have a huge effect on global progress in science and technology.

So with the rest of the science world looking on, where are the biggest strides being made in this burgeoning powerhouse? The Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) continues to be the dominant force (page 10), with the University of Science and Technology of China, Tsinghua University (page 11), Peking University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University (page 12) rounding out China's top 5. These institutions have dominated NPI China for many years (page 8).

In terms of the cities, Beijing and Shanghai still account for the lion's share of the country's high-quality research output (page 16). Meanwhile other major Chinese cities jostle for positions in the top 10, with Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Tianjin (pages 19 & 20) notching up significant achievements this year.

The general landscape of Chinese research is healthy. But there is considerable scope for improvement. Academics have expressed a need to continue the expansion of funding for basic science and to improve the processes for prioritizing to which projects these funds are allocated. There have also been calls for the establishment of a coordinated approach to training and retaining of good researchers as well as more clarity in how the best scientists are recognized (page 2).

In addition, the level of collaboration with international researchers illustrates the direct contribution China is already making to improve its own output alongside that of other nations.

So in many ways, China's rise means that this is one game that is not zero-sum: in science, everyone wins.

Nick Campbell

Head of Nature Publishing Group, Greater China

CONTENTS

- 2 A LARGER SLICE OF THE PIE**
A broad look at another year of scientific gains for China
- 8 TOP CHINESE INSTITUTIONS IN 2012**
CAS continues its unchallenged NPI dominance, while the depth of quality improves with many newcomers
- 16 TOP CHINESE CITIES IN 2012**
Talent plus results equals funding: how authorities are luring the best academics to raise the scientific status of their cities
- 24 A GUIDE TO THE NPI**
Get the best out of the NPI with our navigation guide
- 26 CHINA TOP 100**
Who reached the highest echelons of Chinese science in 2012?
- 28 TOP INSTITUTIONS BY JOURNAL**
Which institutions contributed most to Nature's specialist journals?
- 38 ASIA-PACIFIC TOP 200**
How China compares with countries across the region
- 42 GLOBAL TOP 100**
How does China, with its large population and growing economy, stack up against the world's best?

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