



## Higher education in Chindia. They try harder, but...

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As we have seen in a recent SECOR Campus, there are those who BELIEVE and, well, the others. The more I read about higher education in India and China, the more I believe that Chindia is going to drown us under a tsunami of brilliant young PHD of any possible kind. Why? Because they have the crowd and they try harder.

But when will this happen ? There I am puzzled, I just don't know.

Let's gather some facts. Like everybody, I read and used the 2005 report from the American National Academy of Sciences which findings mesmerized the business and academic community : in 2004, stated the report, China graduated 600 000 engineers, India 350 000 and the US 70 000.

It seems right to assume that the definition of what makes an engineer varies greatly between the three countries. And indeed, journalists from the Wall Street Journal and several academics went to India and China to check the facts. The number of real engineers seems to be half of the figure stated above. And among them, if we believe another study produced in 2005 by McKinsey, a small percentage is really up to par with the western engineers and able to work efficiently in our multinational corporations.

Good, why don't we relax then? Here is one guy who thinks we should. In his last book – The Post American World – an author I admire for the clarity of his thoughts and his apparently exhaustive documentation, Fareed Zakaria, maintains that « *Higher education is America's best industry* ». Born in India, he thinks he can correctly assess Indian capacity in terms of higher education. And what he delivers as his decisive argument is this: « *In India, universities graduate between 35 and 50 PhD' in computer science each year ; in America, the figure is 1,000* ».

But Zakaria gives us a hint on the fact that not all higher education institutions are just so-so in India. Commenting on some famous engineering academies of India - above all the Indian Institutes of Technology – he writes: « *Their greatest strength is that they administer one of the world's most ruthlessly competitive entrance exams* ». I found a confirmation of this last week in a story from the Wall Street Journal that said : « *In April, 310 000 students took the entrance exam to enter the IIT. Only the top 8,600 were accepted* » A mere 2.7 %, that you can compare with the acceptance rate for Harvard or Yale, which is 9 or 10%.

The story was about a special kind of private school that prepares Indian students for the IIT exams. 40 000 youngsters trap themselves for two years of intense study in the dusty little town

of Kota, in the state of Rajasthan. No fun, just work, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. and then homework until midnight.

And what about secondary schools in China, just out of curiosity? I could tell you stories my chinese friends told me, but I'd rather give you a quote from a nice little piece I read in the New York Times in 2002 (I know, it sounds like ages ago), by a man called Nicholas D. Kristof, who at some point represented Harvard in China to interview High school students applying for admission. That is what he has to say about the N\*2 Secondary School in Shanghai, supposed to be one of the best : « *The students live in dormitories, going home only on weekends, an they're mostly studying from 6:30 a.m. until lights-out at 11 p.m. On Saturdays, they attend tutoring classes from 9:40 a.m. to 5:10 p.m., and on Sundays they do what one girl, Gong Lan, described as six hours of « self-assigned homework ».*

Spooky, isn't it ? « *When will this happen ?* », was the question. The answer is « *just a matter of time* », I believe.

Some sources: The Post American World. Fareed Zakaria. Norton, 2008. « India's cram-school confidential. Eric Bellman. Wall Street Journal, 2008-09-30. « China's super kids » Nicholas Dé Kristof. New York Times. 2002-11-22.

