



Cao Xuetao, President

cyberspace security, statistics and data science, and materials science. In May 2019, the faculty set up the CAMLiNK station—a collaboration between Nankai University and the University of Cambridge that aims to attract talent from the United Kingdom to work more closely with their Chinese counterparts. This new partnership marks the deepening of research relations between the two famous universities. A three-day international seminar launched the research platform and included talks on subjects such as solar energy and lithium battery materials, photoelectric materials, and the application of artificial intelligence in materials science.

In the area of biomedical research, the university has forged an alliance with 12 hospitals in Tianjin City. It is also in the process of setting up international joint research centers in the fields of medicine and biological sciences with the University of Oxford and the University of Birmingham, respectively.

Cao, who is also an immunologist, says he wants to create a state-of-the-art pharmaceutical R&D system at Nankai: "I'm interested in fostering a culture of interdisciplinary health research and integrating teaching, research, and medical practice."

Cao also feels that the university could benefit from the cross-fertilization of ideas between the liberal arts and natural sciences. Moving forward, the university will focus on "macro-research topics," such as ecological civilization, big data, and media convergence, he says.

"These specialized topics will make the most of Nankai's status as a comprehensive university," he observes.

A global network

A cornerstone of Cao's planned reforms is to build Nankai into a global academic leader, with the launch of his "Global Nankai" initiative. To ensure the university's visibility on the world stage, research will focus on issues of global importance; the university will establish a global network of research partnerships; and staff and students will be encouraged to become more globally minded.

An essential element of Cao's plan is to encourage more prominent scholars, academic leaders, and talented scientists from abroad to work and study at Nankai.

A new program called "Studying in Nankai" aims to increase the number of international students. There are also plans to enhance the attractiveness of campus culture by improving salary levels for faculty, enhancing the quality of research facilities, and improving the management of everyday services.

"We will make this a world-class university, combining Nankai's character and Chinese attributes," he says.

Cao went through some basics of China's higher education system with us. In recent decades, the system has expanded quickly, with dramatic results. The government is investing 4% of GDP per year in education. The number of students in higher education is now 37.8 million—one-fifth of the total number of students in the world. Between 2012 and 2018, the number of Chinese universities ranked in the top 500 by *Times Higher Education* increased from 10 to 72, while the number of universities grew from 91 to 246.

"Now China's higher education is developing from a model of scale expansion to a model of quality improvement and structure optimization," says Cao.

He points to a recent collaboration with the University of Glasgow as an example of how to create a global academic atmosphere that produces first-rate students who are equipped to contribute to society at large. The newly established two-year postgraduate dual Master's qualification provides students with degrees from both universities.

Anniversary celebrations

In October 2019, Nankai University will celebrate its 100-year anniversary. Alumni from all over the world will return to Tianjin to celebrate the university's achievements with a series of lectures, workshops, and social events, during what Cao believes will be a remarkable occasion.

Since joining the university, Cao says he's learned a great deal from his talented colleagues.

"I've fallen in love with Nankai," he says. "I've learned so much, not only about its history but also about the research being done here. Our faculty members are the most important asset of this university, and I want to create an academic atmosphere that is conducive to top-quality research and worthy of their talents."

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