

East-west contest for Asian finance students

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High ambition: a graduate in Hong Kong. Asian schools are getting better © AFP

Why do Asian students study at Emmanuel Métais's business school? They need only to look out the window of Edhec's Cote d'Azur campus on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, says Mr Métais, the school's dean. "They will see palm trees and the Mediterranean Sea."

He is joking, of course. [Edhec Business School](#) has consistently been near the top of the [pre-experience masters in finance ranking](#) for its quality of teaching and research, not its location. But high-ranked and well-located schools know they face greater competition for the lucrative Asian student market.

About a quarter of students on Edhec's MSc in finance are Asian, but at other schools in Europe and the US the proportion is much higher. Asians account for two-thirds of newly enrolled students at schools in the 2018 pre-experience masters in management ranking. Meanwhile, US and European schools are acutely aware of the rapid rise of competitors in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and India.

While no Asian schools featured in the inaugural masters in finance rankings in 2011, six now occupy seven places in this year's tables. Much of this rise is because of the growth and development of the Chinese and other Asian economies, says Chun Chang, executive dean and professor of finance at Shanghai Advanced Institute of Finance (Saif). "Many Chinese students going abroad now want to come back to China because of opportunities or for family reasons. Over the past 10 years in China there has been huge and fast growing demand for students in finance."

Because of a shortage of talent, financial sector pay in China is growing at about 8 per cent a year for junior and mid-level positions, according to the recruitment company Morgan McKinley.

At the [Chinese University of Hong Kong \(CUHK\)](#) business school, Joseph Cheng, the MSc in finance director, notes a similar trend. "Only a couple of years ago . . . three months after graduation, 80 per cent of our students were staying in Hong Kong, with 20 per cent moving back to mainland China. Now, that trend is reversing. More Chinese students are willing to go back to mainland China because the economy is getting better. The pay may be lower . . . but our graduates can see good prospects."

There were no Asian schools in the masters in finance rankings in 2011. Six occupy seven places in the latest tables

Meanwhile, Asian schools are improving, says Mr Chang. "Asian schools can already offer some advantages over western competitors in terms of local curriculum content, placements and networking," he adds. "But increasingly they are run according to

international models and standards too. More schools are gaining accreditation from organisations such as AACSB [Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business]. At Saif, for example, we have an international faculty, many of whom were tenured at North American universities.”

Mr Cheng says that core course content is similar in Asia to that elsewhere, but that his school is introducing elective courses tailored to local need, such as the characteristics of Chinese equity markets.

Some Asian schools can also give students an international experience. People on the two-year MSc in finance at Peking University HSBC Business School spend the first year in Shenzhen and the second at its new campus in Boars Hill, Oxford. The growing strength of Asian schools has yet to affect recruitment at colleges such as Edhec, says Michelle Sisto, associate dean for graduate studies, who says applications from Chinese students have remained steady, while Indian applicant numbers rose this year.

“Asian students bring different perspectives,” she says. “When we talk about the growth of capital markets in China, many of our Chinese students are able to bring insights to the classroom as they have experienced those markets via parents, siblings or colleagues.

“It also creates impetus for faculty to consider what’s going on in markets other than Europe or the US. Many of our Indian students . . . have experienced micro-financing, so that’s something we’ve built into our curriculum.”

Alex Stremme, assistant dean for Warwick Business School’s masters in finance, reports similar statistics: applications from China are static, but those from India are up 33 per cent. “The challenge is to develop and build on the unique strengths of critical and lateral thinking that we have built for centuries, while the opportunity is to seek collaboration and synergies,” says Mr Stremme. Warwick has a student exchange programme with Guanghua School of Management in Beijing.

Amaury Goguel, head of the MSc in financial markets and investments at Skema in Lille, northern France, says European and US schools can attract Asian students by “presenting a good price-quality ratio”.

The Skema MSc, run on campuses in Paris, Sophia Antipolis in the south of France, and North Carolina is one of the cheapest in the rankings, he says.

Mr Métais says that schools such as Edhec will not give up their Asian students lightly: “Competition is good for everybody. It obliges us all to be better.”