

China sees biggest overseas returning wave in recent years

Chinese students celebrate their graduation from Columbia University on May 20, 2015. [photo/Xinhua]

At the National Science and Technology Awards Conference held in Beijing on January, 2017, Ren Xiaobin and his team won the second prize in the 2016 National Natural Science Award.

“It is the best time to do scientific research in China,” said Ren. “China has a larger stage which provides more chances and room for growth. We can expand our ability and achieve greater value of life.”

No one would expect Ren to achieve so much from nothing in only nine years. As one of the second batch of experts enlisted in the national “Recruitment Program of Global Experts”, or Thousand Talents Program, he returned from Japan to establish the Frontier Institute of Science and Technology in Xi’an Jiaotong University and lead a group of young people to conduct research on intelligent material.

Ren is just one of the many outstanding examples of many overseas returnees. Since the program was introduced in 2008, more than 40,000 high-level talents have come back to homeland and have found jobs.

The number of returnees at professor level has been more than 20 times than that of the total number between 1978 and 2008, forming the biggest overseas returning wave since the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

"We are close to realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than any time in the history and we are eager for talents than any time in the history," said President Xi Jinping at the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Western Returned Scholars Association.

"Most overseas Chinese want to come back to China," said Wang Huiyao, vice-president of the Western Returned Scholars Association.

As China is improving its national strength, the ratio of the number of going abroad and returning people has fallen from 3.15:1 in 2006 to 1.28:1 in 2015. Talents are coming back at an unprecedented speed.

According to official statistics, more than 70 percent of project leaders working at key national research projects are overseas returnees. A large number of academicians at Chinese Academy of Sciences and at China Academy of Engineering are overseas returnees.

Experts estimate that China will transform from the biggest brain drain country into one of the main brain reversal countries in the world in five years.

The change of research environment is a major reason why overseas scholars are choosing to do research in China.

Shao Feng is in charge of a laboratory named after his name at the National Institute of Biological Sciences, Beijing. Two months ago, a research paper produced by his laboratory was published by world-known medical magazine Nature Microbiology, achieving a major breakthrough in the field of bioscience.

Shao said the key to success is that the laboratory is run in a similar mode to international scientific research institutes, breaking the constraints such as budget report, assessment standard, which are usually seen in the traditional management of scientific research.

Favorable policies, exploding high-tech industry, innovative atmosphere and sustainable investment are appealing to more and more overseas students.

Currently, there are more than 300 overseas returnees' pioneer parks and about 24,000 enterprises in the parks across the country, with about 24,000 overseas returnees being employed.

"Many ask me why I came back. My answer is simple: I'm still young and I want to pursue my dream," said Zhu Xiang, 30, who turned down the offer of a research institute in France to start his own business in China.

Zhu with his friends established a mobile medical platform at an incubator in Tsinghua University and now has millions of users. He thinks the fast-growing China now has a very good platform for overseas returnees to realize their aspiration.