  
  
**University of Birmingham   
China Institute Annual Report 2020**

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# **Welcome**

On behalf of the University of Birmingham China Institute, I am delighted to introduce our annual report, which covers the calendar year 2020.

Our interactions with China this year have, understandably, been heavily influenced by the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has severely curtailed travel and direct contact, necessitating new ways of working. Nevertheless, the China Institute has remained a central hub for Chinese interests at the University of Birmingham, bringing structure to the many interactions that our diverse university community has with China, encouraging new interactions, facilitating communication and engagement, and managing our broad portfolio so as to maximise the benefits to all of our stakeholders.

Our strategy has always been to establish partnerships that develop mutual trust and appreciation, and that help to provide sustainable and resilient collaboration, especially in difficult times, which this current year has, of course, exemplified. We already have many longstanding partnerships that we have sought to consolidate over the last year, including with regional governments, higher education institutions and businesses, in fields such as health, transport, engineering, energy and the environment. We have also sought to forge ahead with new ventures, particularly with the aim to involve disciplines that previously have limited involvement with China from an educational articulation or entry agreement perspective,  such as modern languages and hydrogeology.

Demonstrating the value of partnership and the China Institute presence in Guangzhou, the University has been able to maintain good communication and push forwards with many plans and new initiatives. In education, our joint institute with Jinan University in Guangzhou typifies how we have been able to adapt our teaching through online delivery and assessment, while promotion of degree programmes to prospective students has been highly effective through online platforms. On our Edgbaston campus, we have adapted our education provision to allow students to study safely, delivering bimodal teaching to allow students access to a mixture of online and socially distanced in-person teaching, and also allowing for the provision of the entirety of semester one online, to allow students to remain in their home country whilst undertaking their studies.

Although research exchange has looked very different from previous years, much has still been possible between collaborating partner laboratories, and discussion of results and future plans have continued through online workshops and seminars. Later in the report, a selection of case studies will be provided, outlining the way we have continued to collaborate across both education and research.

Other highlights in 2020 included our annual Chinese New Year concert held in January, featuring an exciting musical fusion of East meets West organised and led by world-class pianist Di Xiao, and featuring the winner of Chinese X-Factor, Mary-Jess Leaverland. Also, in November, we were delighted to stream our annual Li Siguang Lecture, which this year was delivered by Kevin Sui, Controller of China Hour UK, and entitled: ‘China-UK: Cultural Understanding  Beyond Language’.

Although the last year has been incredibly challenging for all, I believe we can be proud that those working with China, as well as the teams that support our stakeholders, have enabled the University of Birmingham to maintain productive interactions with our partners, and in some cases to grow activity. As a consequence of keeping the momentum going, we will be in a strong position to make our links with China even more productive in 2021.

Professor Jon Frampton, Director of the China Institute,  Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (China)

# **2020 Year in review**

* 1,274 Twitter followers (as of 17 December 2020)
* 24,187 Weibo followers (as of 14 December 2020)
* 16,492 WeChat followers (as of 14 December 2020)
* >4,000 visitors/viewers for China Institute events (live and virtual)
* 85 billion potential views International media reach (as of 17 December 2020, based on all mentions of University of Birmingham in Chinese online and print outlets)
* £826 millions Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE) (as of 17 December 2020 based on all mentions of University of Birmingham in Chinese online and print outlets)
* 8,797 international media publications (as of 17 December 2020, based on all mentions of University of Birmingham in Chinese online and print outlets)
* 802 joint publications between the University of Birmingham and Chinese institutions in 2020 – an increase of 13.9% on 2019 (as of 17 December 2020)
* 4,694 Chinese students studying at the University of Birmingham (as of 18 December 2020)
* £2.1 million External research income
* 2 major events

**Support from Chinese Partners during the Pandemic**

It is not an understatement to say that the challenges posed by COVID-19 have changed the world, however, the strength of our partnerships is never demonstrated more clearly than through the solidarity shown during these difficult times.

Through our connections in China, we were able to facilitate the provision of vital personal protective equipment (PPE) to local medical services in the West Midlands. In April, eight Chinese partner institutions joined forces with the University to send PPE to healthcare staff in the local area. Partners pledged over 105,000 items of protective clothing – including masks, gloves, coveralls and goggles – for use by doctors and nurses at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham and other local medical services. Among the incoming equipment were 4,800 face masks destined for Selly Oak Community Response to COVID-19 and GPs in the Selly Oak/Edgbaston area.

Given the strength of our Medical School, the University of Birmingham played an important role in fighting the virus, supporting both the central government and individuals through its research and facilities. The University Hospitals Birmingham group has been treating very large numbers of patients, while researchers in the University’s College of Medical and Dental Sciences have been heavily involved in expanding the virus screening capability for Public Health England – working day and night to find ways to combat COVID-19.

The Student Guild of the University also organised  volunteer groups to help the community in need. Under current circumstances, the donations of PPE materials and the support from our partner institutions  were massively important.

Thank you to all of our partners and stakeholders who contributed to this effort, in particular:

* Guangzhou Municipal Government
* Sun Yat-sen University First Affiliated Hospital
* Huazhong University of Science and Technology
* China Railway and Rolling Stock Corporation
* Bioscience College of Nankai University
* Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics
* East China University of Science and Technology
* Southeast University
* Guangzhou Women and Children’s Medical Center
* International Ecological Economy Promotion Association

## **Case Studies**

## **Partnership with the Nanjing Municipal Government**

The significance of the link between the University and the Nanjing Municipal Government, which was formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2018, continues to be well illustrated in 2021 through their support of a new joint institute with SEU dedicated to the application of data science, AI, imaging and education research in the study of brain health. Birmingham academics will play a leading role in the institute by advising on the strategic direction and delivering innovative research. The importance that the city government places upon the partnership with the University of Birmingham has also been reflected by the recent appointment of Professor Frampton as their ‘Talent Ambassador’ for Nanjing in the UK.

## **SUSTech**

Since 2016, the University of Birmingham has had an agreement with the Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech) in Shenzhen to offer split-site PhDs. Students are supervised by academics at both institutions and to date, over 40 students have joined us via this partnership. In October this year, we signed a new agreement that will provide funding for up to 15 PhD students per year across a range of disciplines.

Ranxi Duan studied under this scheme on a project on 3D printing of advanced titanium alloys for medical implant applications, leading to a publication in *Additive Manufacturing* (a leading journal in this field). Ranxi writes:

‘The amazing thing about the partnership is the combination of advantages from both universities. I can learn lots about 3D printing and X-ray synchrotron technologies from my supervisors at Birmingham (Professor Moataz Attallah and Dr Biao Cai), and access advanced characterisation facilities at SUSTech. Professor Attallah also provided many opportunities to present our work to other researchers in conferences held in the UK and USA. My supervisors collaborated closely, which is really important to my PhD project.’

## **New engagement with Tsinghua Shenzhen International Graduate School (TSIGS) during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Professor Zhibing Zhang FREng Co-Director of the China Institute

Professor Zhibing Zhang, FREng, Co-Director of the China Institute, provides an overview of our new engagement with TSIGS. In November, a virtual workshop on Biomedical and Engineering Health Engineering was jointly held by the University of Birmingham and TSIGS, after several months’ preparation. The workshop was officially opened by Professor Hong Gao, Executive Dean and Provost of TSIGS and Professor Jon Frampton, our Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (China) and Director of the China Institute.

One hundred and ten people attended this workshop.  Five academic staff from the Healthcare Technologies Institute (HTI) of the University of Birmingham and five from the Institute of Biopharmaceutical and Health Engineering (iBHE) of TSIGS presented their research work, covering a wide range of topics, including biotechnologies for health and biopharmaceutical engineering, biomedical optics imaging and sensing, stem cells in skin repair, scar reduction therapies, enzyme re-engineering, regenerative medicine and cell therapy, micro-tissue engineering for personalised medicine, functional materials, mechanisms and platforms to translate medical technology. The presentations were of high quality and well received.

A lot of synergy in research and technology translation between the two institutions was identified. Towards the end of the workshop, participants from the two institutions expressed their enthusiasm and willingness to collaborate in several areas, including specific scientific research projects, joint application for research funding, technology translation, and joint supervision of PhD students, which has laid a very solid foundation for future extensive collaborations.

## **Birmingham Energy Institute update**

Professor Yulong Ding, Director of the Birmingham Centre for Energy Storage

Professor Yulong Ding, Director of the Birmingham Centre for Energy Storage, reports that five new projects have been developed with China during 2020 as follows:

* Global Energy Interconnection Research Institute EU of State Grid Corporation of China (started September 2020) – project on thermal energy storage for electric vehicles, direct funding at Birmingham
* Beijing District Heating Group – project on thermochemical storage for district heating applications, via joint University of Birmingham–University of Science and Technology Beijing Centre for Energy and Environmental Research and Education.
* Jiangsu Province Frontier Research – project on next generation thermal energy conversion and storage, via joint University of Birmingham–Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics research team for Energy and Power Research, involving Southeast University, Nanjing University and Nanjing University of Science  and Technology
* Jiangsu Industrial Technology Research Institute (JITRI) – feasibility study on liquid air energy storage-based combined heating, hot water, cooling and power systems, via University of Birmingham–JITRI and JITRI–Jinhe Energy collaborative platforms, involving Jiangsu Ligang Electric Power Co Ltd
* Jiangsu Industrial Technology Research Institute (JITRI) – feasibility study on thermal energy storage-based telecommunication base station/data centre cooling technologies, via University of Birmingham–JITRI an JITRI–Jinhe Energy collaborative platforms

## **Atmospheric pollution and human health in a Chinese megacity**

Professor Zongbo Shi, Professor in Atmospheric Biogeochemistry,

Professor Roy Harrison, Queen Elizabeth II Birmingham Centenary Professor of Environmental Health,

Professor William Bloss, Professor of Atmospheric Science

The University of Birmingham coordinated a consortium engaged in a series of major research projects concerning air quality and human health in Beijing, including the ‘Atmospheric Pollution and Human Health in a Chinese Megacity’ programme (funded by the UK NERC and MRC, and the National Science Foundation for China-NSFC), Newton Advanced Fellowship (funded by Royal Society and NSFC), and Met Office CSSP-China programme (Newton Fund)

APHH-China comprised five separate projects, with the UK side funding totalling around £10 million, £2.5 million coming to the University of Birmingham, with the overall programme including over 20 UK and Chinese universities and research institutes. The programme has been considered by NERC as an exemplar for UK-China collaborative research.

The centrepiece of the programme was a series of field measurements performed during 2016 and 2017 in central Beijing at the Institute for Atmospheric Physics, and work since then has focused on analysis of the data obtained and distilling policy recommendations for the best strategies to reduce air pollution in Beijing, which has led to the publication of over 200 scientific papers.

A further focus for 2020 was to have been a Royal Society of Chemistry ‘Faraday Discussion’ meeting, with the discussion recorded and forming part of the formal record. The meeting was originally due to be held in Beijing in early 2020, but was ultimately run as an online-only event in November, co-hosted live by UK and China researchers and spanning the time zones, which proved to be a successful format. In general, although virtual engagement has been effective with partners to deliver science outputs, our tentative conclusion is that face-to-face exchanges are a key part of cementing the impact of findings with the policy community – not least due to the competing immediate demands many have faced in addressing the COVID-19 crisis, and technical challenges for some videoconferencing platforms – and we look forward to resuming these contacts in 2021.

## **Reflections on using online platforms for engagement**

Dr Yufeng Zhang, Head of Procurement and Operations Management Group (POM)

Reflecting on how to continue research and collaborations in a time of COVID-19, Dr Yufeng Zhang transferred collaboration communication to online webinars to keep connections warm and maintain momentum in key research areas. He initiated a multidisciplinary research theme around social systems for future manufacturing together with a team of colleagues with complementary expertise in institution, policy, employment, work, organisation and technology.

The initiative involved colleagues from social sciences, engineering and computing sciences from major economies around the world. Partners in China included the Tsinghua University-Chinese Academy of Engineering institute for engineering strategy development, Zhejiang University national institute for innovation, and major companies from automotive and heavy engineering sectors, all of whom played a major role in the initiative.

The use of online platforms enabled Dr Zhang to host world-class experts including the chair of UK manufacturing professors, the CTO of IBM global industry, and the General Secretary of Industrial Global Union, whose diaries would have prevented attendance at a face-to-face event. These discussions provided valuable insights, enabling the calibration of research ideas and refining of the research agenda to address emerging challenges and uncertainties in the digital economy.

## **Supporting education partnerships and profile raising**

Dr Simiao Sun

Lecturer in Hydrogeology, Deputy Head of Global Engagement (Education) in GEES

In her role as Deputy International Lead (Education) for the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES), Dr Simiao Sun, Lecturer in Hydrogeology, led on supporting students throughout the pandemic. This took the form of providing online webinars and events with sessions specifically tailored to Chinese students. In the past, some Chinese students have not been aware of the vast amount of resources, support and events in place for their academic and cultural enrichment when they engage with the University of Birmingham. Hence, a series of events was organised from pre-departure to induction and mid-term to introduce and communicate via a ‘culturally and linguistically inclusive approach’ to inform on these differences, COVID-adaptation, and to facilitate direct communications with our Chinese cohort. The result was pleasing, as the Chinese cohort found the events informative, friendly, reassuring and to-the-point.

Dr Sun has also been instrumental in the development of a 3+1+1 partnership with Jilin University, leading to a Study Abroad year at the University of Birmingham and further postgraduate taught study in Hydrogeology.

During 2020, Dr Sun led on a project to increase the visibility of programmes within GEES in China, as Chinese search engines and social media sometimes do not pick up key information regarding programmes on websites based in the UK, and can also be prone to translation errors, which can give an incorrect impression of our offering at Birmingham. In collaboration with the China Institute and colleagues from marketing and recruitment, Dr Sun has been working across a variety of UK and Chinese platforms to develop Chinese language resources, signposting University of Birmingham websites and correcting translation errors. All this work contributes to further raising the profile of the University  of Birmingham in China.

## **Artificial intelligence-based brain tumour decision support system using multimodal magnetic resonance imaging**

Professor Andrew Peet, Professor of Clinical Paediatric Oncology (NIHR)

Dr Yu Sun, Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Associated Professor, Institute of Cancer and Genomic Sciences

Dr Yu Sun and Professor Andrew Peet have a project with the Jiangsu Industrial Technology Research Institute (JITRI) entitled ‘Artificial Intelligence-Based Brain Tumour Decision Support System using Multimodal Magnetic Resonance Imaging’. On November 10, the mid-term inspection meeting for this project was successfully held in the Southeast University Suzhou-based Institute of Biomedical Devices.

Dr Sun was happy with the progress made despite the pandemic:

‘2020 is an unusual year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we encountered a lot of difficulties in the development of the project, the Chinese and Birmingham teams have finally achieved the expected milestones through hard work. We will continue to work together to strive for an early launch of our Decision Support System product.’

‘This project had been approved in 2019 through the international cooperation project of JITRI, and jointly delivered by the research teams of the Southeast University and University of Birmingham Joint Research Centre of Biomedical Engineering. The assessing peer group confirmed their strong support for the innovation and market value of the project, and gave practical suggestions around aspects of clinical application, data standard establishment and market promotion. It is hoped that the project will illustrate the advantages of the brain tumour database, novel features of data processing and standard formulation, continue to expand the scope of clinical application and form a standard model in the market as soon as possible, making it possible to realise the commercial value.’

## **Collaborations on the Palaeontology and Geology of China**

Dr Jason Hilton, Reader in Palaeobiology

Dr Jason Hilton, Reader in Palaeobiology, has had an exceptionally productive period during 2020 and beyond, despite the challenges of lockdown. Some of his key collaborations are outlined below:

* Jason is part of an international team led by Prof Yu Jianxin at the China University of Geosciences in Wuhan. In November, the team was awarded 2,500,000 RMB (about £290,000) from the National Natural Science Foundation of China. The project originates from papers Jason produced with PhD students from an existing collaboration in which several important questions arose that required further investigation. Despite the pandemic, Jason was able to devote more time to the project by working remotely.
* Jason has a collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Sciences at Nanjing Institute of Geology and Palaeontology, and, following productive research visits in 2018/2019, is the leading international collaborator for a large research group working on exceptionally preserved fossils from the Permian of China. This research is now undertaken remotely and has multiple manuscripts in progress and associated and ongoing funding applications. This highly productive collaboration has resulted in 7 publications from 2020-21 so far and has led to two visiting scholars from the group coming to Birmingham in 2021-2 supported by the China Scholarship Council.
* Jason also has a collaboration with China University of Mining and Technology (Beijing) where he has been an active research collaborator since 2003. Work with Professor Lu Jing, formerly a China Scholarship Council visiting Scholar at the University of Birmingham, and his team, has led to 3 papers in 2020-21 so far, with many more in preparation and being considered for publication
* Collectively, Jason published 10 papers from Chinese collaborations in 2020 and continues to publish more as we commence 2021, marking his position as an international expert on the Palaeontology and Geology of China

## **Education**

## **Jinan University-University of Birmingham Joint Institute**

In September 2020, we welcomed our fourth cohort of Mathematics students into the Panyu campus of Jinan University (JNU) in Guangzhou. Established in 2017, the Jinan University–University of Birmingham Joint Institute (JBJI) is one of the most important activities for the University of Birmingham in China, with students experiencing both international and local teaching methods, and receiving degrees from both institutions in Mathematics and Applied Mathematics, Information and Computing Science, Economic Statistics, or Economics.

In 2020, we also confirmed pathways to allow for progression for JBJI graduating students to enroll onto postgraduate taught programmes in Birmingham across a range of mathematical and medical disciplines, and we look forward to welcoming the first cohort of these students in September 2021.

2020 has presented many challenges for JBJI but the swift response to moving all teaching online for the start of the 2019/20 semester two meant that students were able to complete that year’s academic study with minimal disruption. The lessons learnt from this were then employed to great effect for Birmingham-based colleagues and students for the 2020/21 academic year. Students have continued to work hard, with a mixture of bimodal lectures provided in person by JNU when campus re-opened in September, and online by Birmingham. Support via live Q&A and example classes have helped students remain engaged throughout.

Anqi He, Student Representative of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics in JBJI 2018 cohort, notes

‘The online courses benefit students with different learning abilities. When we have problems in digesting information in prerecorded lessons, we can click the pause button and replay the videos. Live sections are provided for students to raise questions so that we can receive the lecturer’s guidance immediately.’

Looking forward to 2021, we will graduate our first cohort of students in July, at our first JBJI graduation ceremony.

## **Entry agreements from partner institutions**

We have a significant number of entry and articulation agreements through a network of partnerships, working closely with over 40 high-quality institutions, which, in 2020, has enabled over 200 undergraduate and postgraduate taught students to enter onto University of Birmingham programmes through bespoke arrangements with their Chinese institutions. In addition to these agreements, we also welcome students from our partnerships and beyond onto student exchange and study abroad programmes. This year, we have been delighted to welcome students through these partnerships into areas as diverse as Education, Psychology and Philosophy, as well as more traditional disciplines such as Engineering, Mathematics and Business.

## **Chinese students at the University of Birmingham**

Every year, a large number of Chinese students choose to join us in Birmingham. In September 2020, over 4,400 Chinese students were studying at our Edgbaston campus for both undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications, and 46 Chinese students were studying at our Dubai campus.

The challenges brought by this year meant that the University of Birmingham had to adapt its education provision to allow students to study safely. Some Chinese students came to the UK and studied a mixture of online and socially distanced in-person teaching, whereas others stayed in their home country to undertake their semester one studies online. In addition, some Schools, like the School of Mathematics, used additional communication tools such as WeChat to keep in contact with Chinese students, which has been appreciated.

Students have adapted well to the hybrid model, as outlined by Chenlen Shu, a second-year student from Nanjing studying for an Education BA:

‘This year, I participated in online learning, and the format of the lectures at Birmingham helped me to be more confident in sharing my ideas in the group, and I tried to contribute as many ideas as possible. I felt that the lecture content could be easily learned when the lectures were held online, and I had plenty of opportunity to pause, take a break, and catch up on any content that I had missed.’

‘My lecturers answer all my questions via email as they would do on campus, and make sure I know which books I need to read for my course. The first thing my tutor does in the weekly tutorial is to ask how everyone in the group is and provides the opportunity for students to share their experience of their studies and lives, in both the breakout rooms and the entire group. So, I feel the learning experience is quite positive and I receive as good support from the University as I would do if I was learning face-to-face.’

The Birmingham International Academy delivers pre-sessional English language programmes to students planning to undertake an academic qualification at the University of Birmingham.

Hayley Maxwell, Director of English for Academic Purposes in the Birmingham International Academy noted:

‘Ensuring the students were able to take quality language and academic skills courses over the summer to aid their eventual conversion was a key priority for our unit, so we flipped all our provision online, including live-streamed classes to ensure the best possible outcomes. Over the summer, we taught 1,085 students, which was positive given the circumstances. The feedback received was very high indeed with many students showing real appreciation for the efforts of the team to keep their study plans on track.’

‘Taking pre-sessional English is a very popular option for Chinese students and very much forms part of their experience in the UK, as they develop both language skills and make the important transition to UK higher education in a very supportive environment.’

‘With our large summer pre-sessional English programmes suddenly shifting to online and our students grounded, it was an uncertain time. Central to planning was a very clear mission that we needed to maintain a strong sense of community for our students. Strong social relationships underpin effective language learning both inside and outside the class and ensure students grow into confident language users. Innovative use of Zoom technology enabled the mini-poster presentation conference to continue with students reviewing their peers’ posters through Zoom rooms, all easily accessed through our VLE. The academic programme was complemented by a social programme enabling students to broaden their networks and practise their language skills in a fun and engaging way, boosting levels of interaction within the classroom as well as ending a sense of isolation for many students studying from home during lockdown.’

## **Culture and Events**

## **Chinese New Year**

The highlight of our cultural calendar is our annual Chinese New Year concert, which is known all around the city, being hugely popular with the local Chinese community and never failing to sell out. Guests from within the University, the local community and even further afield join us for a spellbinding evening of music, hosted and curated by world-class pianist Di Xiao. Our 2020 concert was one of the last in-person events to be held in the beautiful Bramall Concert Hall, and it had a suitably star-studded line-up to celebrate the Year of the Rat, featuring a host of outstanding artists, bringing together a magical fusion of East and West – and a special appearance by Mary-Jess Leaverland, the winner of ‘I Want to Sing to the Stars’, a TV singing contest watched by over 70 million people across China, often referred to as the ‘Chinese X Factor’. The concert also featured multi-instrumentalist Ruth Angell and guitarist/composer Sid Peacock, as well as dance performances and a face-changing artist, one of only 200 proponents of the art that originated in Sichuan province.

## **Li Siguang Lecture**

Perhaps our most famous Chinese alumnus is the celebrated academic Li Siguang, who studied in the University’s School of Mining during the early part of the 20th century. He received his BSc in 1917 and his MSc in 1918. He was later awarded a doctorate from the University of Birmingham, based on his landmark research into the geology of China and a resulting definitive book on the subject. Li Siguang went on to become Professor at Peking University, and then progressed to become an academician and Vice-President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, along with other prestigious positions such as Minister for Geology and President of the Chinese Society for Science and Technology. Li Siguang’s findings ultimately led to the large-scale development of oil fields, making China one of the world’s major oil producers.

Given the amount of time he spent in the UK, Li Siguang would probably have approved of the third annual lecture delivered in his name in 2020, during which journalist Kevin Sui, Controller of China Hour UK, delivered a lecture entitled ‘UK-China: Cultural Understanding Beyond Language’. Through his talk, Kevin explored how media outlets and the English language are vital in promoting communication and exchange between China and Britain, describing how language can bring people and countries together – but not without an in-depth understanding of people and culture in each society. Following the lecture, a panel discussion took place, chaired by Professor Jon Frampton, Director of our China Institute, and featuring Dr Berny Sèbe, Head of Internationalisation in the School of Languages, Cultures,  Art History and Music; Dr John Goodyear, who is a lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages specialising in English as a Modern Foreign Language, and Shiyu He, a postgraduate researcher in Linguistics, also in the Department of Modern Languages. The panel explored themes such as how, along with language, understanding of culture and society is key to communication, how language learners can improve their skills through roleplay and other practical steps, and the role media has to play in cultural communication.

Kevin’s lecture and the panel discussion were hosted entirely online, streamed to YouTube, Facebook and WeChat. To date, over 3,000 people have viewed the lecture across a range of platforms, far in excess of the reach we would have achieved through a traditional ‘in-person’ lecture, and we will consider how best to integrate the good practice gained during this period into future events.

## **Media and Digital Communications**

We promote the work that we do in China through a variety of channels, including official Chinese social media channels, WeChat and Weibo, and Western-focused platforms such as Twitter.

Our Twitter account has 1,274 followers1, and is aimed more at stakeholders outside of China (as Twitter is not accessible in China). Our most popular Twitter post in 2020 shared an excerpt from our Chinese New Year Concert, with 3,465 impressions, and other popular posts focused on the Mid-Autumn Festival, our Li Siguang Lecture and a post on the Asia University rankings in *Times Higher Education*.

The University of Birmingham also engages with Chinese students, staff and stakeholders based in China and in the UK through its official WeChat and Weibo accounts. These two accounts have 16,492 and 24,187 followers respectively2, and these numbers continue to grow. Weibo and WeChat stories that received the most engagements (reposts, comments, likes for Weibo and views for WeChat), have, perhaps unsurprisingly, focused on COVID-related information and updates. As an example, the most-viewed article on WeChat over the last 12 months focused on the University’s partnership with a travel agency to support students travelling to the UK from overseas, at a time when flight options were limited, which was read 16,104 times. The second most-viewed article highlighted updates for students starting in September, and the third most-viewed article was a message to students from our Vice-Chancellor, focusing on the measures the University is taking to keep students safe on campus.

In terms of international media coverage, over the course of 2020, the University of Birmingham had 8,797 media ‘hits’, with a reach (potential views) of 85 billion, and an Advertising Value Equivalent of £826 million.3

*1  As of 17 December 2020*

*2  As of 14 December 2020*

*3  As of 17 December 2020, based on all mentions of University of Birmingham in Chinese online and print outlets*

## **Contact**

For more information about the China Institute, or for further details on any of the projects and engagements referenced in this document, please contact Nina Morris, China Institute Officer [uobchina@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:uobchina@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

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