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Swissnex Network Country Report Education, Research and Innovation in China

Science, Technology, Education and Innovation Section
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1 Executive Summary

- Like the Chinese political landscape, the Chinese education, research and innovation (ERI) landscape is **highly regulated, top-down and policy-driven**. The Communist Party Central Committee's leading groups on education, research and innovation play a key role in defining policies and priorities, which are implemented by the competent ministries under the State Council.
- The central leadership in China has put **ERI development at the center of national priority**. The strong political will secured consistent investment on ERI over years, helping China make impressive progress on research and innovation. China is now the world's 2nd spender on R&D. It ranks 10th in the Global Innovation Index 2025. It produces the largest number of scientific journal articles and PCT patent applications. It is planning and building large science infrastructure, including a larger-than-CERN collider which is currently in consideration. It is hosting the largest number of "unicorns" in the world and is home to Asia's best university. **Tech self-sufficiency** stands at the center of China's ERI strategy.

China is undoubtedly **very advanced in top-end applied research** such as AI, robotics, smart cities, or quantum computing. These achievements, however, do not cover some of the weaknesses of the Chinese ERI landscape. Patent applications are high, but the patent commercialization rate is low, as is the overall impact-factor of scientific publications. China is losing some high performing young researchers to foreign countries. Expenditure on basic research is low (6,91% of total R&D expenditure in 2024) compared to international peers (15%-20% in developed countries) and is mostly funded by the government. China pledges to increase expenditure on basic research to 8% of the total R&D expenditure, amounting to CHF 38.1 billion. Industry spending on R&D is limited. And finally Academic freedom in China operates within frameworks established by national policies and regulations.
- Switzerland and China intensified exchanges over the past **75 years of diplomatic relations**. Cooperation in the field of ERI has diversified, with regular dialogues and projects on government level, between institutions and people, as well as among the private sector. The interests of Swiss ERI stakeholders are represented by the Science, Technology and Education Section in the **Swiss Embassy in Beijing**, in close partnership with **Swissnex in China in Shanghai**.
- The innovation ecosystem and the overall business environment of China need to be further developed to allow for fair competition. Furthermore, there is a huge regional disparity in the quality of education. The vocational education sectors are yet to be perfected to train the highly needed skilled labor for the industry and services.
- China is proactively seeking more active participation in international research organizations and communities. While the country offers numerous funding programs to attract global ERI talents, some international researchers may find it challenging to pursue their careers in China due to differences in language, culture, and regulatory practices, as well as concerns about intellectual property protection, academic censorship and administrative procedures.
- Geopolitical dynamics, particularly in relation to the USA and often focused on technology, have posed challenges for China's attractiveness as a partner in bilateral research collaboration. Factors such as concerns about technology transfer, the influential role of national institutions, and differences in legal and regulatory transparency—particularly regarding research data sharing—contribute to the complexity of engaging in ERI collaborations with China.

2 Who is who

China

Head of State	XI Jinping, since March 2013
Prime Minister	LI Qiang, since March 2023
Minister of Education (MoE)	HUAI Jinpeng, since August 2021
Minister of Human Resources and Social Security (MoHRSS)	WANG Xiaoping, since December 2022
Minister of Science and Technology (MoST)	YIN Hejun, since October 2023
Minister of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT)	LI Lecheng, since April 2025
President of Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC)	DOU Xiankang, since April 2023
President of Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS)	HOU Jianguo, since December 2020
President of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)	GAO Xiang, since December 2022

Swiss Embassy & Swissnex in China

Ambassador	BURRI Jürg, since September 2022
Science Counsellor/CEO Swissnex in China	OLIVER Raphaëla, since August 2025
Additional team members	STE & Swissnex in China Team (Link)

3 ERI Metrics

Finances (2024)

Gross domestic product (GDP)	CHF 16.3 trillion (nominal, 2 nd global rank)
Gross domestic expenditures education	CHF 779 billion (4.0% of GDP) 2023 (110 th global rank out of 198 countries, percentage)
Gross domestic expenditure on research and development (GERD)	CHF 436 billion (2.68% of GDP) (2 nd out of 88 countries, amount) (12 th out of 88, percentage)
– R&D funded by the private sector	CHF 302 billion / 77.7% (2023)
– R&D funded by the public sector	CHF 48 billion / 12.4%

Students and Mobility

Total number of students in CN	293 million
Total number of HEI students in China	55.3 million (26.98m undergraduates, 3.33 million graduate incl. 0.5 million doctoral students)
Total number of CN degree students in CH	4476 (2024/2025)
Total number of CH scholarship students in CN	19 CH students in CN on Chinese government scholarships (2025/26)

Rankings

IMD World Competitiveness ranking 2025	16 st out of 69 countries
Global Innovation Index (WIPO) 2025	10 th out of 133 countries
IP filing rank globally 2024	1 st in number of patent applications
Nature Index (research output) 2024	1 st out of 193 countries
PISA Ranking 2025	2

Publications

% world high impact publications	27.7% (2023)
% most highly-cited publications	33.8% (September 2024)
% int. collaboration	20.4% (2023)
field-weighted Citation Index	1.14 (2025)

Patents

% world PCT applications	25.6% (2024)
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4 Education

4.1 Education

4.1.1 Overview/Structure

As in Switzerland, the first 9 years of school education is mandatory in China (primary & secondary). At tertiary level, China has 3'119 Higher Education Institutes (2024, 1'257 universities, 51 vocational universities, 1'542 vocational colleges and 249 adult universities), hosting a total of 48.4 million students.

4.1.2 Strategy/Priorities

Priorities/focus areas during the 14th Five Year Plan period (2021-2025): promote equal access to public education, improve permeability between academic and vocational track, improve the quality of higher education, intensify professional training for teachers and improve employability of graduates. A strong focus is placed on ideological education at all levels, for example through the adaptation of the "Patriotic Education Law" in October 2023 (effective in January 2024) which outlines the responsibilities of government departments, schools and families to provide patriotic education.

4.1.3 Key stakeholders

- **Central Leading Group for Education** is the highest-level decision-making unit for China's education policy and strategy, with a focus on ideology education.
- **Ministry of Education (MoE)** regulates all levels of public and private education institutions and national exams in mainland China. MoE certifies teachers, standardizes curricula and textbooks, establishes standards, and monitors the entire education system and its funding. It runs 75 universities and 322 affiliated institutions. It also represents China in international exchanges on education, such as UNESCO.
- **Local education administrations** implement the decisions of the Ministry of Education. Provincial government (cantonal level) and municipal government (city level) fund and manage higher education in their jurisdiction.

4.1.4 Ties/Links to Switzerland (e.g., institutional partnerships)

Existing (institutional) collaboration include, but not limited to: Tsinghua-University of Geneva Dual Master of Public Policy for Sustainable Development Goals (MPP-SDG) Program, Renmin University – University of Geneva Confucius Institute, Hainan Lausanne Tourism University – independent campus of EHL in China. In the framework of a bilateral agreement, China Scholarship Council offers 25 full and 30 tuition-free scholarships to Swiss students per year, and up to 20-25 Chinese scholars can receive ESKAS scholarships each year if they meet the requirements (currently circa 4-6 Chinese scholars).

4.1.5 Approach towards SERI transversal topics in more detail:

Digitalization: Top priority of the Ministry of Education. Extensive investments for digital infrastructures in rural areas, hosting of [World Digital Education Conference](#) (every two years), big offer of MOOCs, include EdTech into VPET, national campaign on digitalization of education.

Sustainable development: National goal is carbon neutrality by 2060, carbon peak in 2030.

Equal Opportunities: National scholarship programs for high school and university, special university admission programs for students in underprivileged areas. School partnerships between developed and underdeveloped regions. VPET as poverty alleviation tool.

4.1.6 Student & Staff / Research Mobility

Information & figures on mobility (in-/out): In 2022, 1'088'466 Chinese students in foreign universities. In 2024/25 4476 Chinese students in Switzerland.

Funding opportunities: The China Scholarship Council (CSC) offers a variety of different scholarships to Chinese students.

4.1.7 Adult and continuing education

Lifelong learning: China is promoting lifelong learning by supplying more training opportunities, and by setting up a national credit bank to better recognize professional education.

4.2 Vocational Education and Training

4.2.1 Overview/Structure

In secondary education, 30% of the students are in vocational track and 70% are in academic track. Vocational education has long been the fallback option of students with lower academic performance. In tertiary education, the vocational vs academic ratio becomes 46% vs 54%. Tertiary vocational education includes vocational colleges (diploma) and vocational university (bachelor degree). Vocational education is financed mostly by provincial (cantonal) governments. Traditionally regarded as a means to alleviate poverty, the VET system in China is increasingly being recognized for its role in developing a highly skilled workforce to meet the needs of industry and addressing youth unemployment also in urban areas.

4.2.2 Strategy/Priorities

The biggest priority for China is to increase social recognition of vocational education. Strategically, China leverages public events such as WorldSkills, National Skills Week and ChinaSkills to step up promotion efforts. School-company partnerships are encouraged to increase job-market fit.

Other Priorities:

- Improve VET teaching quality via digital technologies (ex. open access databases, MOOCs)
- Improve permeability of VET system and provide further training opportunities
- VET as a development cooperation tool, particularly in Belt and Road countries and in Africa. The international program of Chinese VET combines Chinese language with skills training.

4.2.3 Key Figures

Total number of secondary vocational schools	7'201
Total number of tertiary vocational institutions	1'613
Total number of students in secondary VET	12 million
Total number of students in tertiary VET	18 million
Expenditure per student in secondary VET	CHF 2'011 (2023)

4.2.4 Key stakeholders

- **Ministry of Education (MoE)** oversees policy making on vocational education and professional education. It accredits schools, confers degrees and trains faculty members. It represents China in international dialogues on vocational education.
- **Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MoHRSS)** oversees employment, technical and skills training for labor and professional certification. Due to historical reasons, it also runs and regulates schools (at secondary education level). It represents China in international dialogues and organizations on skills, labors, skill certifications, etc (including WorldSkills). It organizes the annual ChinaSkills.
- **Local governments** are responsible for the planning, implementation and financing of all levels of vocational education.

4.2.5 Ties/Links to Switzerland (e.g., institutional partnerships)

SFUVET-CEAIE have a partnership on training programs for Chinese schools. The Swiss VPET Alliance (hosted by Swisscham China) aims since 2022 to support cooperation projects between Swiss companies in China and Chinese vocational schools. Hainan Lausanne Tourism University, an EHL project, received the first cohort of bachelor students in September 2025.

5 Research

5.1.1 Overview/Structure

China restructured its national science and technology administration system three times in recent years (2018, 2023, 2025) hoping to promote S&T advancement. However, in parallel with these reorganisations, it becomes more and more difficult to get information about MoST's strategy and activities, moving the ministry towards more secrecy and less transparency. In addition, China's S&T planning is defined in Five-Year-Plans, but such policies are no longer publicly disclosed.

5.1.2 Strategy/Priorities

Research priorities/focus area are defined by government funding programs, usually aligned with the national plans and most of the research funding available in China are competitive public funds. China has 5 types of governmental research funds to support 1) S&T mega projects of national priority (comparable to NCCRs in Switzerland), 2) R&D in priority fields (comparable to program funding at SNF), 3) R&D activities for startups and SMEs (comparable to Innosuisse), 4) research infrastructure and talent training (comparable to infrastructure and career funding at SNF) and 5) curiosity-driven research (comparable to project funding at SNF). R&D funding continued to increase in recent years due to unprecedented priority placed on indigenous innovation. Funding for social sciences has steadily increased in recent years, reaching RMB 4.68 billion in 2024. However, it remains modest compared to the allocations for science and technology and is guided by closely regulated standards and review processes.

Other Priorities:

Over the past decade, China has emerged as a global research powerhouse. In response to heightened geopolitical tensions and intensifying technology competition, knowledge security has become a priority in China's S&T policy. In recent years, the Chinese government has introduced several key strategies:

- Establishing a high-level management body within the central committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to centralize and coordinate S&T policy-making.
- Increasing investment in basic research to enhance China's foundational scientific capabilities.
- Improving research infrastructure and expanding research funding in order to make China a more attractive destination for international researchers and innovative talent.
- Prioritizing mission-driven research, such as in semiconductor chips and other strategically important fields, to achieve technological self-reliance and advance national goals.

5.1.3 Key Figures

R&D expenditure (2024)	CHF 405.7b.
R&D/GDP (2024)	2.68%
Basic Research/Applied Research (2023)	6.7%/10.9%
Government R&D investment / Company R&D investment (2023)	77% / 23%
Number of publications in SCI (Science Citation Index) Journals (2023)	728'700
Number of patent applications to the PCT (2023)	69'610
Number of R&D staff (2023)	7.24 million
Proportion of enterprises doing R&D activities (%)	34.2%

Publications from China concentrated in **material sciences, engineering, chemistry, environment and computer sciences** in 2024. International co-authorship with China went through a decline (20.4% in 2023, down from 26.2% in 2019).

5.1.4 Key stakeholders:

- **The Central Science and Technology Committee:** highest decision-making body for science and technology, led by high-level members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s central committee and hosted by the Ministry of Science and Technology. Newly created in 2023 to replace the various national leading groups, marking the politization of science and technology in China.

- **The Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST)**, since the 2023 restructure, is responsible for implementing the decisions taken by the Central Science and Technology Committee and coordinating between ministries on S&T matters. MoST represents China in international research initiatives and organizations such as ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) and GEO (Group on Earth Observations). MoST, in addition to the NSFC, runs around 60 bilateral joint funding schemes with government counterparts.
- **Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT)** is responsible industrial innovation, emerging sectors and small and medium enterprises when it comes to S&T. MIIT represents China in multilateral discussions on telecommunication and AI governance. In the 2023 restructure, MIIT has been mandated to promote technology commercialization, to manage national science parks and technology markets – all former MoST responsibilities. The **China National Space Administration (CNSA)**, affiliated to MIIT, represents China in international dialogues on space affairs.
- **Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS)** is a ministerial-level research flagship, directly under the State Council. CAS is a network of research institutes, a learning society with merit-based membership of “academicians”, and a higher education system. CAS consists of 104 research institutes, 12 branch academies and 3 universities. CAS runs the lion’s share of the **research infrastructures** in China, including the world’s largest radio telescope FAST, the world’s fourth spallation neutron source CSNS and the first P4-laboratory in Asia BSL-4. CAS has 819 academicians, of which 124 are foreigners.
- **The Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC)** was merged into MoST in 2018 but maintained its independent budget. **NSFC** is the largest Chinese research funding agency for basic research and application-oriented research in natural sciences. NSFC does not fund research in the social sciences and the humanities. NSFC’s 2024 budget is RMB 64 billion (CHF 7.7 billion). NSFC has 17 types of grants, supporting research projects, careers, special programs, infrastructure, innovation and international cooperation. It runs 103 bilateral funding schemes with international counterparts.
- **Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)** is the largest academic organization and comprehensive research center of China in the fields of philosophy, social sciences and humanities. It includes 31 research institutes and 45 research centers, which carry out research activities covering nearly 300 sub-disciplines, such as Philosophy, Literature, History, Economics, Political Science, Law, International Studies and Marxist Studies. It is the advisory to the Chinese central government on governance
- **Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)** manages cross-border data flow, big data management and cybersecurity in China and participates in bilateral dialogues on data transfer.

5.1.5 Approach towards the SERI transversal topics in more detail

Digitalization: Research in the fields of artificial intelligence, quantum computing and semiconductor development. Digitalizing traditional economies/industries is an ongoing priority.

Sustainable development: Currently a lot of bilateral research cooperation projects with European and North-American countries are focused on sustainable development projects, such as green energy and clean tech.

Equal Opportunities: MoST releases national policies to encourage and support career development for female scientists. NSFC offers special funds and more flexible funding conditions for female researchers.

5.1.6 Ties/Links to Switzerland (e.g., institutional partnerships)

Joint funding opportunities: Since 2016, NSFC has a bilateral program with the SNF. No new bilateral call was launched since 2022 due to uncertainties regarding the Data Law of China.

6 Innovation

6.1.1 Overview/Structure

China's innovation ecosystem is at a crossroads. On one hand, vast domestic market scale, government policy support, and a dense startup landscape empower rapid commercialization and growth, particularly in digital and green technology. However, challenges are obvious: tightening US sanctions and geopolitical tension limit access to leading-edge semiconductors and foreign know-how; intellectual property protection, while improving, still lags global benchmarks; and regulatory framework creates uncertainty for both domestic and foreign investors. Nevertheless, these challenges push China to focus on driving indigenous innovation ("tech self-sufficiency"), particularly in deep tech and supply chain security. Looking ahead, China's capacity for large-scale infrastructure, digital adoption, and a huge talent pool forms solid foundations for it to remain a global innovation powerhouse—if it can navigate global headwinds and foster a more open, globally integrated approach to science and innovation. China currently ranks 10th in the Global Innovation Index 2025, up from 29th in 2015 and 43rd in 2010. Chinese leadership expects innovation to drive economic growth, help China climb up the value chain, and to safeguard national security.

6.1.2 Strategy/Priorities

The 14th Five Year Plan of China has identified the following **innovation priorities**: New generation artificial intelligence, Quantum information, Integrated circuit, Brain science and Brain-inspired intelligence, Gene and biotechnology, Clinical science and health, Deep space, deep earth, deep ocean and polar exploration.

6.1.3 Key stakeholders

- The **Central Science and Technology Committee**, established in the 2023 restructure, is the highest decision-making body for innovation policy.
- The **Torch High Technology Industry Development Center (Torch Center)**, affiliated to the **Ministry of Industry and Information Technology**, is responsible for developing high tech industry and fostering innovation in China. The Torch Center manages national high tech industrial development zones, national technology markets and university science parks. The Torch Center and Switzerland Innovation Park entered into a cooperation agreement in 2021 to facilitate collaboration. Torch Center was transferred from MoST to MIIT in 2023.
- The **State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR)** is governing **China's National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA)**.
- **Science parks** (similar to Switzerland Innovation) are often located in proximity to universities and research institutes, provide good support to transfer and commercialize research. National University Science Parks (141) and National High Tech Industrial Development Zones (141) are the two most important brands. Tenants often benefit from a range of incentive policies, such as tax breaks, seed funds, administrative and HR support, etc.
- **National Technology Transfer Centers** (11) act as regional platforms of technology transfer. The centers are funded primarily by provincial and/or municipal government, often in partnership with the local industry. From 2018 to 2022, annual technology deals in China have increased from 412'000 to 773'000, the amount of trade increased from CHF 215 billion to CHF 582 billion¹. After the restructure in 2023, MIIT will take over the management of technology markets.

6.1.4 Approach towards the SERI transversal topics in more detail:

Digitalization: A focus on the data economy is visible with the establishment of the new National Data Bureau (NDB). The regulation on cross-border data transfer, which requires inter-ministerial coordination, has negatively impacted the motivation of global innovation cooperation with China.

Sustainable development: A lot of national and provincial projects in the area of renewable energies, circular economy.

Equal opportunities: Digitalization have created more economic empowerment opportunities. An official report from the Chinese government to UN Women shows that 45.8% of the STEM

¹ Speech made during 2023 Z-Park International Technology Transfer Conference:
http://www.std.cas.cn/qzdt/202305/t20230530_4917657.html

professionals are woman. 55% of entrepreneurs in mobile internet sectors are women. The Chinese central and local governments provided a series of support framework and coaching programs for female STEM workers and entrepreneurs. Government-sponsored coaching programs for e-commerce entrepreneurship is widely available for underprivileged groups and in underdeveloped regions.

6.1.5 Startup Ecosystem

2023 Forbes China report shows that China is home to 394 unicorns, 23.8% of the world total. The Chinese unicorns are mostly based in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Zhejiang, in proximity to the tech giants (Baidu, Tencent, Alibaba, Huawei), top universities and financial centers. Their fields of operation are mainly internet, finance, IT and entertainment/media.

To leverage global research capacity, China encourages multinational companies to set up their innovation centers in China, while encouraging Chinese companies to place R&D centers abroad and stepping into global market. In 2025, China is home to 301 unicorns, 28.4% of the global total.

Startups receive help from various incentive policies, including seed funds, free office spaces, tax breaks and coaching. Promoting entrepreneurship is a priority, particularly important in the public research sector. Over the past years, the Chinese government has perfected the legal framework to allow and encourage entrepreneurship in universities and research institutes. Various cities have special programs to attract and support international startups, as well as entrepreneurship endeavors of domestic and international university students. Tech universities such as Tsinghua University offer mentor programs, incubation services and seed funds for students and faculty. Since 2024 China eased visa requirement for young expats to intern and to start business in China, hoping to attract more young talents – and to recover from the brain loss during covid-years.

Compared to a decade ago, venture capital is much less active in 2024. Deep tech sectors such as AI (especially generative and industrial AI), new energy vehicles (NEVs), renewable energy, chip design, and quantum computing attracted the most investment.

7 China's International Cooperation Strategy in ERI

7.1.1 Overview/Structure

The goals, strategies and instruments of China's international cooperation in ERI are laid out in the 14th Five Year Plan for International Science and Technology Cooperation. The document was expected to be released in March 2022 but is yet to be published.

7.1.2 Key Figures:

- In 2022, RMB 4.97 trillion allocated for international cooperation in ERI (science and technology: RMB 1.01 trillion, education: RMB 3.95 trillion)
- Education cooperation with 188 countries and regions, Confucius Institutes in 160 countries and regions (incl. Geneva), mutual degree recognition with 58 countries and regions (not including Switzerland)².
- 2'356 joint academic institutions/programs with foreign universities by the end of 2021 with more than 600'000 students enrolled. Collaboration with more than 1'000 foreign universities in 39 countries and regions³.
- 146'500 scientific publications (300% compared to 2013 but decreased since 2019) with international co-authors from 204 countries and regions in 2022. USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Germany and Japan are the most important collaborators⁴.

7.1.3 Key stakeholders:

- **Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST)** represents China in bilateral and multilateral international science, technology and innovation collaboration.
- The **China Science and Technology Exchange Center (CSTEC)** is an affiliated organization of MoST, in charge of implementing the international cooperation strategy of MoST. Through local centers in provinces, CSTEC supports ERI international cooperation needs of the local government by helping to identify potential international partners.
- The **Ministry of Education** represents China in bilateral and multilateral international education collaboration. Affiliated institutions manage various programs.
 - **China Education Association for International Exchanges (CEAIE)** is in charge of the implementation of cooperation programs.
 - The **China Scholarship Council (CSC)** manages government scholarships and bilateral scholarship programs.
 - **Headquarter of Confucius Institute** manages Confucius Institutes globally.
- The **Ministry of Industry and Information Technology** represents China in cooperation in technical domains, e.g., International Telecommunication Union.
 - The **China National Space Administration** represents China in space cooperation.

7.1.4 Key Instruments:

Bilateral programs (Joint research programs, open calls, mobility programs, joint institutions, scholarships through the CSC, etc.), Multilateral programs (international organizations, international research programs, etc.), Large Science Infrastructure, Talent programs to attract foreign researchers

China is very active in **multilateral organizations** and has laid out its global priorities in three policy initiatives. Additionally, the global AI governance Initiative was launched recently. China is reinforcing its ERI collaboration with **BRI countries**. VPET is a new collaboration priority and in 2023 China launched the International Science and Technology Cooperation Initiative. China participates in **large research infrastructure** projects, such as CERN, ITER, SKA etc. and is also planning to host large research infrastructure in China, such as the FAST telescope.

² Press conference of the Ministry of Education, September 21. 2022, <http://www.moe.gov.cn/fbh/live/2022/54849/>

³ Annual Conference of China-Foreign Joint Institutions 2022, <https://4g.dahe.cn/news/202212141150599>

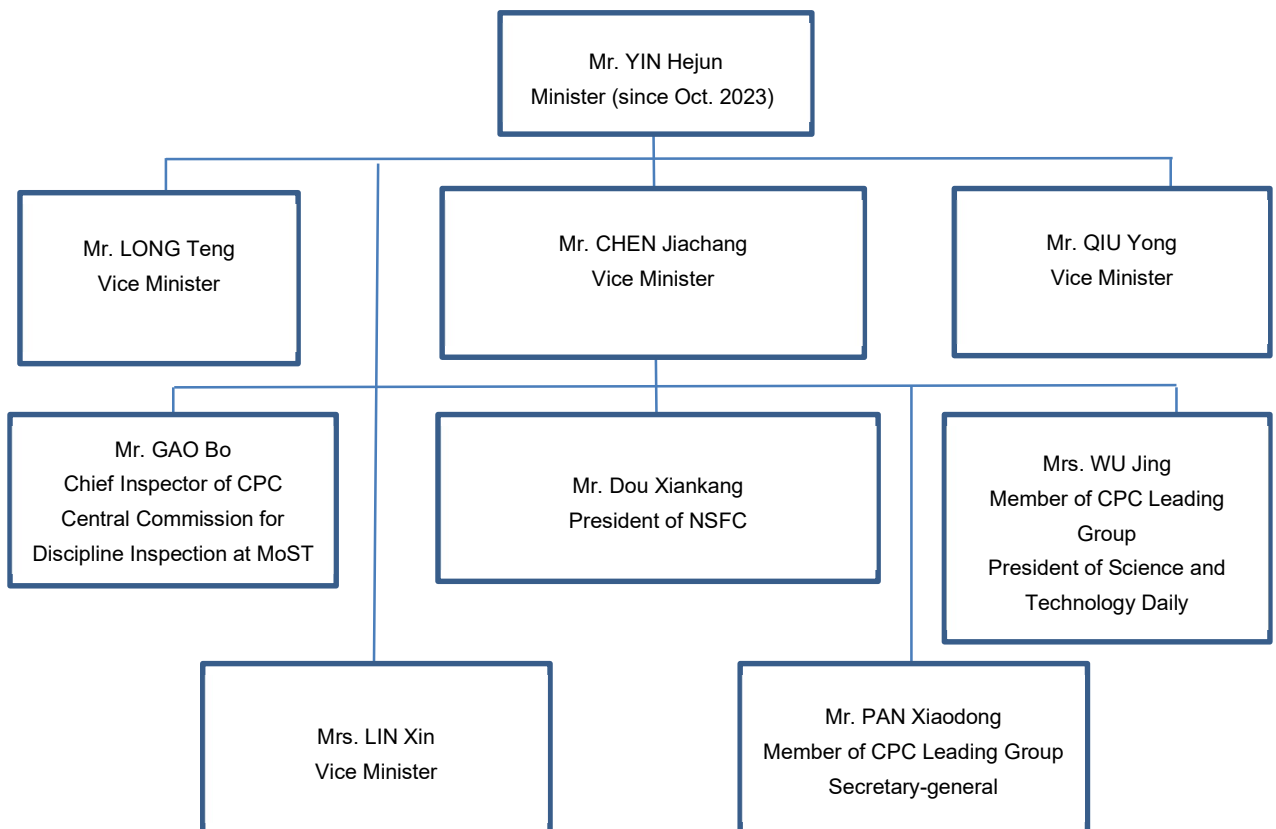
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9 Appendix

Organizational Chart, Ministry of Science and Technology



Organizational Chart, Ministry of Education

