

# Can liberal arts thrive in China? One college suggests they can

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since its establishment.

From its humble beginnings in 2001 as a

experiment that grows with the competition among Chinese graduates higher than ever before, compelling many people to re-examine their liberal arts education in the workplace and beyond.

In the past 20 years, most of the professors at Yuanpei come from the background of liberal arts, and the majority of them have been trained in the liberal arts from the beginning of their professional education and then spent a period in the workplace before returning to the university to teach.

"In the beginning, we had a lot of challenges in the beginning because students and professors from other departments didn't want students from Yuanpei," Professor Sun said.

Since then, the students' performance in their classes has helped shift the dial, convincing reluctant professors "that a student not picking any major in beginning and who could change major for without any restriction could perform even better than those students who study professional knowledge from the beginning", said Professor Sun.

He credited Yuanpei's students' drive, which stems from a true interest in the subjects they eventually settle on.

"In China many students come to university to study economics, engineering, or medicine, but not because they know what they want to pursue in university," Professor Sun said.

Students there have the freedom to choose what to study, with no core curriculum and a wide range of electives. They can pick a major in the beginning, but they can also change it at any time.

By design, the college doesn't have its own professors, a decision that still sometimes puts it in tension with the broader faculty at PKU, some of whom see Yuanpei students as lacking in commitment to a discipline and competing for limited resources with the students inside their own departments.

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