

After China and India, the École Centrale of Paris starts a new campus in Morocco

This document is a **non official translation** of that article published in Le Monde on the 29th of Octobre 2014. (C) Le Monde, 2014

The only changes with respect to the original article that I made (Lilian Besson) are adding some links and a better layout.

A PDF version is also available! Read it in French? (original article)

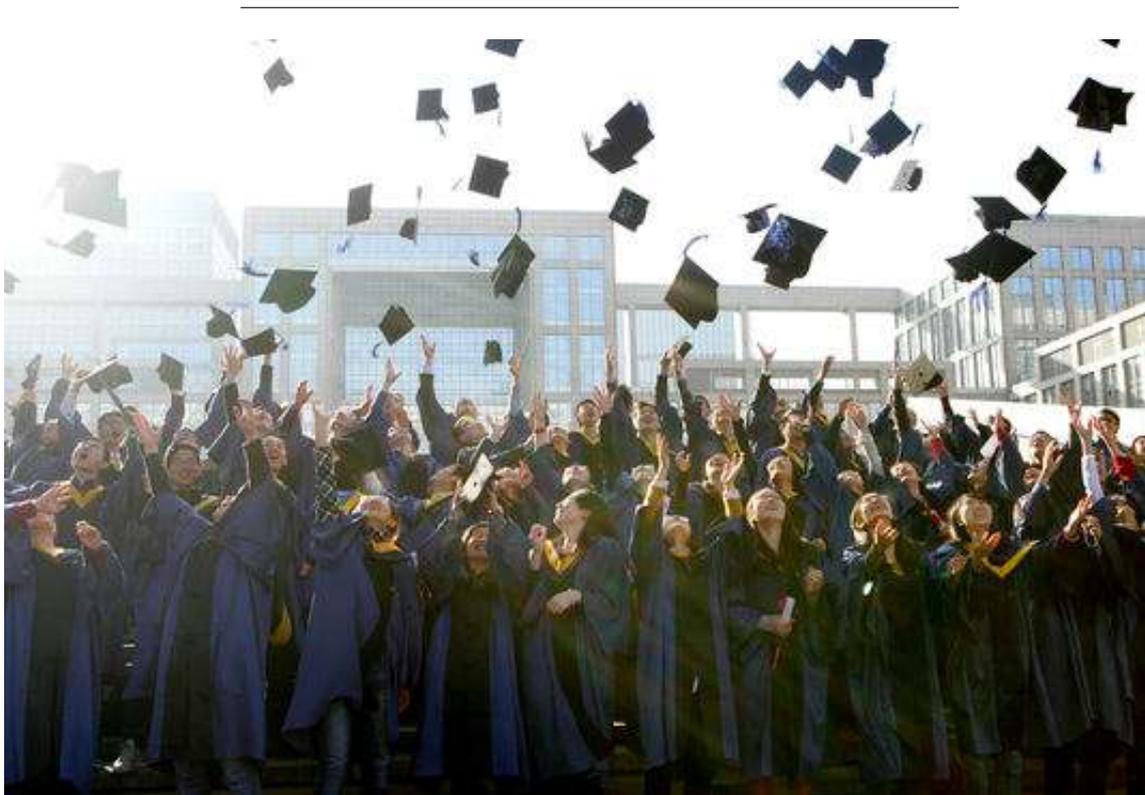


Figure 1: Graduation ceremony at the École Centrale of Beijing in 2014. | © École Centrale Paris

Interview by Benoit Floc'h.

The École Centrale de Paris (ECP) referred to Monday, October 27, the first stone of their future campus in Casablanca, in Morocco. A new location for the prestigious engineering school, after China and India.

« It's much more interesting to be in those countries that attract their students to ours », says the to « Le Monde » Hervé Biaisser, director of ECP.

Why such an international frenzy?

Locate in these large countries that have emerged and where the future is built, that brings us a lot. Africa is an area of strong growth. The continent have 4 billion in 2100, four times more than today. In the meantime, the number of Francophones (French-speaking people, note from the translator) will have tripled. For France, it is a natural orientation. It is important that our system higher education expands into Africa, and particularly in Morocco, which has a real sub-Saharan vision.

As for talk of frenzy... Beijing, with École Centrale Beijing, is an opportunity that arose in 2004-2005. We have developed an experience there, and now that new opportunities arise, we are leveraging.

It's much more interesting to be in those countries that attract their students to ours. First, because it is being there that one feels the mood and spirit of the place. Then, you know, the French model of engineering education is specific: it is going from the fundamental sciences to applied sciences, in close cooperation with companies. This pattern is popular in emerging countries. By being there, we feel its strength, we confront different realities to make progress. It is a way to build our brand. Finally, these locations provide opportunities for mobility our students, while maintaining a frame forming the same.

So these campuses host French students?

Not yet. They first receive local students.

But now that Central Beijing has graduated its first Chinese promotion, she will receive French students. And it will be the same for India and Morocco.

Is it a truly international experience for the French, if they find the same training system in France?

Life is just not the same there! In these countries, the growing local is very strong. Our campus welcome French teachers, but also foreigners.

The following are their studies students are predominantly non-French, which is not the case in our institution Chatenay-Malabry (Hauts-de-Seine, near Paris, France). So our students will discover other cultural bases, and this is a very rich opportunity.

Why?

This is an extraordinary way to make account that cultural assumptions are different elsewhere in the world. And discovering this in the beginning of the twenty-first century is particularly important.

The former (French) Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hubert Védrine, said: « this is not the fall of the Berlin Wall that marked the end of the twentieth century, but the fact that, contrary

to what happened during the last four centuries, it will no longer be the West who decides everything alone ».

The major centers of power in the twenty-first century will not be those of the twentieth century. And new decision-making centers are characterized by cultural references that are, in fact, very different from ours. Our students must take some height from that.

By multiplying your offices abroad, do not you feed the brain drain?

Everyone knows, since the beginning of XXI century, we all are in competition. Students and teachers are increasingly mobile. And we're still counting! In this context, our role is to be as attractive as possible. So that if they leave, the brightest minds come back one day, and foreigners, meanwhile, come in France.

So we are in a logic of open landscape. Mobility is not a concern in itself. It would become if trades were not well balanced.

Do international locations allow you to earn money?

No, and this is not the goal. But the budget is balanced.

In the area of initial training, wanting to expand abroad in order to make money is a bad strategy. This is obviously different for continuing education. No, for us it is really a tool of attractiveness and brand.

Other articles on that subject?

- MEC — École Centrale of Paris: an innovative collaboration of excellence for engineering (October 10th 2014, Libération),
- Anand Mahindra: « France has a huge potential » (October 20th 2014, Le Figaro).