

Using SWOT method to analyze advantages and disadvantages of Renmin University withdrawing overseas university ranking

Hanyuan Lei*

Economic and Management School, University of Torino, Torino, 10124, Italy

*Corresponding author: lei_.hanyuan@edu.unito.it

Abstract. Renmin University decided to withdraw world university ranking from 2022, some other Chinese prestigious Universities announced to follow the withdraw decision of Renmin University, this may impact the future development of the University and related stakeholders such as students and faculty in Renmin University, and may impact the future of world University ranking institutes and Chinese University ranking institutes, too. This research applies SWOT method to analyze possible impacts on the involved stakeholders after the decision, and found out the withdraw decision will have positive impact for the University, students and faculty, Chinese University ranking for development in China, however, will bring negative impact for international activities and reputation for the development in International educational environment, consider Renmin University is one of the best University in China to provide elite graduates for Chinese Government and organizations, the benefit could be considered more than damages for University development in China. The purpose of this research is to provide more references to other Chinese Universities who is going to follow the withdraw trend and more references to other researchers.

Keywords: world university ranking, advantage and disadvantage, SWOT.

1. Introduction

Some China’s universities, was announced that it would not participate in overseas rankings, as reported by China National Radio (CNR) and China Daily in May. In its 2022 World University Rankings [1], QS ranked Renmin University at 38 within China and in the 600-650 bracket internationally. US News ranked Renmin University at 48 in China and 525 in best global universities ranking. Nanjing University, Renmin University of China and Lanzhou University will no longer participate in overseas rankings (e.g., QS, THE), according to Chinese main stream media, the action is to focus on “educational autonomy” and “education with Chinese characteristics”, some academics say such movement from Chinese Universities could make the world rankings landscape less globally representative as Chinese universities pursue a different path on university ranking.

Unlike Nanjing University, which is in top 200 Universities in world’s ranking, ranked by QS at number 7 within China and 131 globally in 2022 World University Rankings (Table 1), Renmin University was not in top 500 of world ranking Universities, from subject ranking published by US News, the strong subjects of Renmin University are Economics and Business, ranking 98 and follow with Mathematics, ranking 163, the main reason of low ranking for Renmin University is the other subjects have low rankings.

Table 1. Nanjing University’s performance in each ranking

THE	QS	ARWU	US News
2022: #105	2023: #133	2022: #101-150	
2021: #111	2022: #131	2021: #101-150	
2020: #144	2021: #124	2020: #101-150	2022: #135
2019: #134	2010: #120	2019: #151-200	
2018: #169	2019: #122	2018: #151-200	

As the first Chinese prestigious University who announced to quit world ranking, it will have both short-term and long-term impacts on the stakeholders involved for Renmin University.

It is detected the way the withdrawals have been flagged up in China's official media appeared to suggest the decision had come from higher up than the university themselves and that others in the second tier of universities could follow.

Starting from 2022, three Chinese universities (Renmin University of China, Nanjing University and Lanzhou University) will no longer participate in overseas University rankings (e.g., QS, THE, US News).

This decision came after a visit of Renmin University in late April by Chinese President Xi Jinping, Chinese media report. During the visit, President Xi said China has a unique history and culture. We should strive to create world-class universities with "Chinese characteristics", not simply follow standards set by foreign universities. It is important to reflect national uniqueness rather than follow foreign University ranking models [2].

Actually, the idea of Chinese Universities withdrawing from world university ranking was disclosed since year 2020, from decisions of Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science and Technology: the ideology of China should not be driven by UK/US world universities rankings, the assessment of teaching and research of those rankings are not applicable to some Chinese characteristic subjects like Marxism-Leninism. The MOE and MOST of China also claims that UK/US world universities rankings stress the volume and citation of publications in international journals, which drives Chinese researchers' publications, and some China researchers even jeopardize the images and interests of China to get published in international journals.

This research selects Renmin University as case because Renmin University was the first University in China that announced the withdraw decision, and it is also a flagship institution for humanities and social sciences and the teaching and research of Marxism, meanwhile, with relatively limited subjects construction and investment in science and engineering, we can find proof from subject ranking of US News in 2022: subject of Economics and Business(No.98), subject of Mathematics(No.163) and subject of Social Sciences and Public Health(No.233) are in relatively high subject rankings, but subject of Chemistry(No.690), subject of Physics(No.645) and subject of Engineering(No.630) are in relatively low subject rankings, this gives Renmin University disadvantages to participate in world University ranking.

In many years, the Chinese prestige universities invests a lot in World University Ranking, in order to match the standards of the most famous world ranking institutes such as QS, US News and THE, and the result is remarkable too, for 2023 QS World University Ranking, for 100 regions total 1418 Universities, China mainland has 71 Universities on the list, increased 13 Universities compare with 2022 QS ranking. Peking University ranked 12th, 6 positions higher than previous year. Meanwhile, more famous Chinese universities have begun to announce their withdrawal from the world university rankings, this huge contrast between reality and future trend generated many questions, it is important to understand the reason Renmin University withdraws world ranking, at the same time, to study the advantages and disadvantages of such decision could provide more references to other Chinese Universities who is going to follow the withdraw trend and more references to other researchers.

This research will first investigate the reason why Renmin University withdraws world ranking, then will use SWOT analysis to indicate the advantages and disadvantages of the decision made by Renmin University, in order to have a better understanding on the impact of withdraw decision, the SWOT analysis will also talk about each stakeholder involved(Students, Faculty, Chinese and overseas ranking institutes and University), using SWOT analysis to find out possible impact for each stakeholder, then from the SWOT analysis, it is possible to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the decision made by the University, then from the result of the research, will provide decision-making suggestions for other Chinese Universities who would like to follow the action of Renmin University.

2. Methodology and case selection

SWOT methodology is specifically applied in this research for several reasons. First, this research aims to disclose possible reasons that Renmin University withdraws the world ranking system, using SWOT analysis could provide a general view of logic behind this decision and the transformation of the university development model in the context of Chinese education. Second, the purpose of this research is to explore advantages and disadvantages Renmin University could have after the University decided to withdraw world University ranking, from Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and threats four aspects analysis, SWOT analysis can reveal the gains and losses of each stakeholder involved after the decision is made, then to discover the gains and losses of Renmin University after making the decision to withdraw from the World University Rankings. Considering the financial sources of different Chinese universities are different, and the advantageous disciplines of different universities are different, also due to the geographical location of the Universities, the sources of teachers, the source of students could be significantly different, and the influence of the education policy of central government could also be affected by geographical location, there will be many variables in the quantitative approach. Theoretical analysis using SWOT analysis can better present the research results. Third, academic researches on Renmin University withdraws world university ranking are still very limited and at the exploratory stage. This research explores the reasons behind Renmin University's withdrawal from the world rankings and analyzing its advantages and disadvantages, it can provide more reference materials for other research scholars. Selecting Renmin University as the object of this research is based on the following consideration. First is that Renmin University was the first University in China that announced the withdraw decision, by studying the case of Renmin University, we can find more objective reasons behind relevant decisions. Therefore, the analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of relevant decisions will be more objective, too. Second is that Renmin University is a flagship institution for humanities and social sciences and the teaching and research of Marxism, provides a large number of professionals for Chinese government. Since none of the major world university ranking institutions (QS, US News, THE) can objectively reflect the dominant disciplines of Renmin University, although Renmin University is one of the best humanities and social sciences universities in China, its world ranking has always been out of 500. Study case of Renmin University could provide us a more objective understanding on the main purpose of the relevant decision-making of the University.

Since more famous Chinese universities have begun to announce their withdrawal from the world university rankings, the research in this paper can also provide more reference materials for other researchers. The university makes relevant decisions for reference.

3. Withdraw decision Analysis

3.1 Analysis of the reasons behind the decision

In order to give suggestions of relevant parties for similar decision makings, it is important to find advantages and disadvantages of the withdraw decision. Chinese prestige universities quit World University Ranking is not only impacting the future of relevant Chinese Universities, may also provide opportunities to the famous world University ranking institutes to improve their ranking system for regional university rankings that are more in line with Chinese characteristics, and provide opportunities to the development and improvement of Chinese ranking system such as ARWU, this could also significantly change the current situation of world University Ranking institutions that are dominated by US and UK.

Analysis on the problems:

Before we start to analyze the possible advantages and disadvantages, it is important to understand the reason Renmin University withdraws the World University Ranking, there are two main reasons behind this decision:

3.1.1 Reason One: The world University ranking of Renmin University cannot accurately reflect the education strength.

In THE 2022 ranking, Renmin University is ranked at 601 (ranked 28 in China region). In US News 2022 ranking, Renmin University is ranked at 599 (ranked 49 in China region) and in QS ranking, the University is ranked at 601 (ranked 31 in China region). The world ranking of Renmin University is significantly lower than other double first level Universities (985 project, 211 project), even lower than many Chinese universities both non-985 and non-211, which are not considered as prestige universities in China.

Furthermore, in Table 2 we can find year 2021 China's university entrance examination score for Renmin University in two most important provinces (Henan and Jiangsu), we can find that Renmin University only accepts the top 0.25% students in Jiangsu province for the strong subjects, and accepts the top 0.04% students in Henan province, from university entrance score point of view, the standard is only slightly lower than Peking University and Tsinghua University, Renmin University is one of the best universities in China. None of the world University rankings considered entrance examination score as an indicator for Chinese Universities.

Table 2. 2021 China's university entrance examination score for Renmin University

2021 China's university entrance examination score for Renmin University				
Province	Subjects	Entrance score/ Total score	Student rank in province/ Total examinee passed National entrance line	Top ratio
HENAN	Literature and history related	662/750	121/310000	0.04%
HENAN	Science and Engineering related	671/750	1290/416000	0.31%
JIANGSU	History and any subjects	629/750	141/55510[3]	0.25%
JIANGSU	History and Politics related	629/750	141/55510[3]	0.25%
JIANGSU	Physical and any subjects	638/750	890/150598[3]	0.59%

Finally, the ranking methodology of THE and QS ranking all have indicator of proportion of international Students/Faculty, in QS ranking, International student ratio score and international faculty score are only 6 and 7.8, till year 2022, the number of international students in Renmin University is around 1200, only 4.23% of the total student number [4], due to COVID policy in China, this ratio created disadvantages for Renmin University.

3.1.2 Reason Two: Chinese Universities are more dependent on government policies.

In order to achieve the educational autonomy and education with Chinese characteristics for Chinese Universities, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science and Technology started to make decisions since year 2020, to construct an independent knowledge system of Chinese universities to rival the West [1].

Furthermore, Ministry of Education criticizes using overseas rankings as the university assessment standard because "the number of SSCI, CSSCI and other papers including citation and impact factor shall not be simply linked to resource allocation, material rewards, performance pay, etc. to prevent high rewards for papers" [5]. The target is to less focus on paper publishing on international journals in order to release some pressure for faculty in Chinese Universities.

The direction of government policies is very important for Chinese prestige universities, for example, Fudan University, the bylaws state "the university sticks to the party's leadership, fully implements the party's policies on education" [6]. Other Universities such as Nanjing University also have similar bylaws. This is because the development mode of Chinese Universities are different from US and UK ones, in order to become global leaders in short period, considering none of the Chinese Universities have 300 to 400 years history, using state power to legitimate the priority of the

development of Chinese Universities is necessary, although the universities in China may have to sacrifice autonomy freedom in some ways [7].

Finally, Government grants is a very important income source for Chinese Universities, for example, from Table 3 and Table 4, we can see income source of Renmin University in year 2021 and income source of Nanjing University in same year.

Table 3. Income source of Renmin University in year 2021

Financial Income	2021 Amount (10 thousand CNY)	2021 Amount (Million USD)	2021 income percentage
Total Year	574295.67	\$ 861.44	100.00%
Tuition and fees	209620	\$ 314.43	36.50%
Government Grants	176773.11	\$ 265.16	30.80%
Other income	140302.56	\$ 210.45	24.40%
Research grants and contracts	31600	\$ 47.40	5.50%
Endowment	16000	\$ 24.00	2.80%

Table 4. Income source of Nanjing University in year 2021

Financial Income	2021 Amount (10 thousand CNY)	2021 Amount (Million USD)	2021 income percentage
Total Year	496205.02	\$ 744.31	100.00%
Government Grants	212080.42	\$ 318.12	42.70%
Research grants and contracts	130000	\$ 195.00	26.20%
Tuition fee	87320.71	\$ 130.98	17.60%
Other income	65853.89	\$ 98.78	13.30%
Income from affiliated units	950	\$ 1.43	0.20%

From the tables we can find out Renmin University has 30.8% of income source comes from government grants, and Nanjing University has even higher percentage. Since there is no official data of Autonomy score of Chinese universities, we can use as reference the university Autonomy scores published by EUA, the EU countries who have more government grants as income source have lower Autonomy scores (Such as Netherlands and Italy), this could also prove that Renmin university is more dependent on government policies, since government grants have big part of its income source.

3.2 SWOT Analysis

3.2.1 Strength

First strength is the withdraw could remove the shackles of low world university ranking in previous years, the University could focus on its best subject development, follow a Chinese university ranking system, and keep its position on top Chinese University ranking list;

Second strength is the withdraw follows the government policy, this will create trusts from Chinese government and be benefitable from future government grants.

Third strength is the withdraw decision to the students and faculty is obvious, for many years Chinese universities are working hard to achieve world university ranking indicators, ignored the limitation of self-development, for example, many Chinese universities register large quantity of foreign students from less developed countries such as Africa without setting standards to select the best student sources, only to reach a certain portion of international students to improve rank in world University ranking, the withdraw decision could force the university to focus on education development, to provide better education service level to the students. Meanwhile, the withdraw could release pressure of publishing papers on international journals, and could have more time on researches and studies to improve personal abilities.

3.2.2 Weakness

First weakness is that it will be difficult to find reference universities based on overseas ranking institutes standards, this will reduce the university's world reputation.

Second weakness is that the university will lose some opportunities to provide a multi-culture environment to the students and faculty, for students, they will lose opportunity to stay in a multi-culture environment, to exchange multinational experiences in Renmin University and lose some international resources to do researches, the withdraw could give negative impact on international research communications in short time, and the faculty may also lose chances to use more international resources to assist personal researches.

Third weakness is the graduates and faculty in short term will be impacted when applying overseas study and teaching, if the graduates and faculty want to apply for foreign universities, or work overseas, it could be difficult to provide reference of similar level foreign universities of Renmin University.

3.2.3 Opportunity

First opportunity is the withdraw decision will push the Chinese ranking institutes to develop and improve a better ranking system based on Chinese education culture and education policies, for Chinese ranking institutes is that it is a good opportunity to develop and improve the Chinese ranking system, and if many Chinese prestige universities withdraw world university rankings, the authoritative of Chinese ranking institutes will increase since they will keep having indicator data from all the Chinese prestige universities while overseas ranking institutes will not have such data. Meanwhile, if the withdraw decision becomes the trend in China, without Chinese universities in ranking, the world ranking institutes could have less impacts than Chinese institutes such as ARWU, lose a part of competitiveness.

Second opportunity is the withdraw decision may push the overseas ranking institutes to improve their ranking systems based on Chinese education culture and education policies, to be more objective for regional universities, to gain trust of Chinese Universities, there are many published news proved the overseas university ranking still have many space to improve, for example, the 2019 US News best undergraduate universities ranking announced UC Berkeley and four other schools removed from best colleges list for misreporting statistics(CBS NEWS, July 29th 2019). In March 2022 another news also increased the doubts on objectivity of the US News university ranking, it is published on NewYork Times, U.S. News ranked Columbia No.2 but a Math Professor has his doubts.

3.2.4 Threads

First thread is the withdraw could create doubts in international opinions, decrease international institutions' trust in Renmin University by following government policy, the autonomy image of Chinese Universities could also have negative impacts on this decision.

Second thread is current Chinese ranking institutes are still improving in order to be more objective on the universities ranking, normative third-party evaluation is still not complete, nor did they consider indicators of the educational cultures of Chinese universities, how to gain trust of foreign universities while applying Chinese educational cultures in ranking system could be a problem for Chinese ranking institutes, if we can't create an objective ranking system in certain period, we may lose authoritative in front of international institutes.

4. Suggestions

Suggestion 1:

In order not to lose international atmosphere and multi-cultural environment for students and faculty, Renmin University should provide global programs that train international students and faculty to learn about China and the world.

CEIBS could be a good example for such strategy, CEIBS not only teaches the most advanced international business theories, but also attaches great importance to the practical application of these

knowledge and skills in China. The Chinese depth elements are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

-While introducing Western cases in teaching, a large number of Chinese market cases are used, and management concepts are taught in combination with Chinese practice. For example, uses the real-world teaching method to gain a more in-depth and specific understanding of China's enterprise ecosystem through case studies and field observation of the real business conditions of enterprises.

-As an elective course, the course "China Integrating into the World" allows students to understand the responsibilities and roles China plays in the fields of global politics, economy, society and culture, and stimulates students to think deeply and explore the meaning and related issues of internationalization and diversity.

-China Exploration Series course, organized a series of lectures on topics such as economy, decision-making, management, marketing, finance, accounting and Chinese culture in the context of Chinese business, providing students with insightful insights and perspectives on Chinese business in an international context The unique perspective of seeing the overall situation provides important guidance for students to grasp the opportunities in the Chinese market in the future.

-Offered Chinese language courses for international students to enhance their competitiveness and employability in the Chinese market.

Flexible and diverse teaching methods: While teaching methods vary from course to course, lectures and case studies come alive with the professors' extensive experience in academia and business. In addition to cases selected from top business schools such as Harvard Business School, Stanford Business School, Lausanne International School of Management, INSEAD, IESE, etc., there is also a case library for Chinese business compiled by the Case Development Center of China Europe International Business School [8].

At CEIBS, classes have a good mix of 70% Chinese and 30% overseas students in a typical year. International students' study at CEIBS primarily to get experience within China, and domestic students go to CEIBS to acquire more international business experience. "It's a great opportunity for the two sides to meet." [10]

Suggestion 2:

The University could hire more foreign faculty to increase the diversity of staff and research output after the withdraw.

Suggestion 3:

The international cities in China should set more benefitable standards for Chinese ranking institutes, and improve the ranking system to gain more advantages for work visa application in other countries.

For example, the policy for talents having resident rights in Shanghai, China (in June 2022, issued by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Human Resources and Social Security). From "Notice on Implementing Special Support Measures for Talents in Helping Resumption of Work and Production" in the new policy on "increasing the introduction of talents from world-renowned universities" mentioned that international students who graduated from the world's top 50 universities will not need social insurance premiums Payment base and time requirements, as long as the persons who are considered as talents and come to Shanghai to work full-time, they can directly apply for the resident permit. International students who graduated from the top 51-100 universities in the world can also apply for the registration after 6 months of full-time work in Shanghai and after paying months social insurance premiums. ARWU is one and only Chinese university ranking institutes this policy is considering.

In Netherlands, if people wants to apply for admission and residence in the Netherlands for an orientation year as a highly educated migrant seeking employment. they need to have completed a master's or postmaster's programmed or they have obtained a PhD at an educational institution that is listed in the top 200 of at least two separate publishers of the: Times Higher Education World University Rankings, QS World University Rankings, Academic Ranking of World Universities.

In UK, If people want to apply for the High Potential Individual Visa to work in the UK, they need to hold a degree for top 50 universities around the world. The list of top 50 universities is established from top 50 rankings which appeared on 2 or more lists.

ARWU is the only Chinese ranking system that is currently recognized by foreign country work visa policies. Chinese graduates who apply to those visas require their home university to perform well in overseas rankings. If there's one more Chinese ranking system that is recognized globally, then Chinese graduates may have more opportunities in such circumstances.

5. Conclusion

After SWOT analysis of the withdraw decision from Renmin University, it is disclosed that the decision will have positive impact for the University, students and faculty, Chinese University ranking for development in China, however, will bring negative impact for international activities and reputation for the development in International educational environment, consider Renmin University is one of the best University in China to provide elite graduates for Chinese Government and organizations, the benefit could be considered more than damages for University development in China.

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