

CHINA

Promoting TCM

Students in Xinghua, Jiangsu province, learn to prepare traditional Chinese herbal medicine under the guidance of a pharmacist on Tuesday. They not only learned the basics of TCM but also had the opportunity to touch and identify a variety of common medicinal herbs. "Chinese Medicine Day" is observed on March 17, with various activities held nationwide to promote TCM culture.

ZHOU SHEGEN / XINHUA



UK still No 1 pick for mainland students, US slips to third spot

Policy environment, cost of overseas education are major considerations

By ZOU SHUO
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The United Kingdom and Hong Kong have emerged as the top two overseas study destinations for students from the Chinese mainland in 2026, according to a report released on Tuesday.

This marks the first time Hong Kong has ranked second in 12 years, while the United States has slipped to third place amid policy uncertainties, according to the 2026 Report on Chinese Students' Overseas Study by the New Oriental Education and Technology Group.

Based on an online survey of 6,904 students and parents, the report shows a significant reordering of preferred destinations. The UK has held the top position for seven consecutive years, supported by stable education quality, flexible visa policies and a mature international student ecosystem.

Hong Kong's rise to second place is particularly notable. Over the past 12 years, the city has steadily gained

popularity, with its proximity to the Chinese mainland, safe environment and linguistic familiarity cited as key advantages.

The US, long seen as a top destination, has fallen to third position for the first time. The report attributes the decline to an unstable policy environment that has made prospective students and their parents more cautious. The US ranked first from 2015 to 2019 and second from 2020 to 2025.

Australia, Japan and Singapore ranked fourth through sixth, respectively, in 2026.

One of the report's most notable findings is the growing significance of cost considerations. Tuition has become the second most important factor in university selection, while scholarship policies are also playing a larger role.

The average study-abroad total budget for Chinese students reached a 12-year high of 605,000 yuan (\$87,800) in 2026, driven by global inflation and rising tuition and living costs. Despite the higher

financial burden, demand for overseas education remains strong, underscoring its perceived value as a long-term investment.

This more pragmatic approach is also reflected in application strategies. More than half of prospective students plan to apply to universities in two or three countries or regions simultaneously to hedge against policy changes or admission uncertainties in any single destination.

In terms of academic preferences, engineering remains the most popular field for the 10th consecutive year, accounting for 22 percent of applications in 2026. Its strong employability and global recognition have reinforced its appeal, the report said.

Guo Yuqi, 24, from Taiyuan in Shanxi province, chose to study at Lingnan University in Hong Kong after failing China's postgraduate entrance exam three times. She graduated in November with a one-year master's degree in artificial intelligence and the future.

Despite challenges — only three out of 40 students in her program have secured work visas so far — Guo said she feels fortunate to have found a job in Hong Kong.

She said obtaining permanent residency could give her future children access to better educational resources. She added that job prospects in the UK and the US are nearly impossible due to strict work visa policies.

"I once considered the UK but decided against it, feeling that spending 500,000 yuan on tuition would not yield a worthwhile return," she said.

Zhao Mengyuan, 23, is pursuing a master's degree in corporate economics at Goethe University Frankfurt in Germany. She said she chose Germany partly based on a family recommendation and largely for its affordability.

Her university charges no tuition fees, requiring only a semester fee of several hundred euros, bringing her total annual living costs to about 100,000 yuan — significantly lower than in English-speaking countries.

Zhao, who is from Henan province, said she plans to return to China after graduation, believing a foreign degree will improve her job prospects. She said she does not yet have clear salary expectations or specific career plans but is confident that studying abroad has given her a competitive edge in the job market.

Handicrafts offer young Chinese joy amid uncertainty

By LI SHANGYI
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From assembling tiny fuse beads and shaping modeling clay to crocheting, young people in China are increasingly devoting both time and money to hands-on activities, offering a tangible sense of certainty in their lives.

"These activities transform the virtual into something concrete, resonating with our deep longing for certainty and tangible experiences in an age shaped by the digital world," said Zhou Yuwei, a 21-year-old craft enthusiast in Beijing.

In Beijing, handicraft stores have become popular leisure destinations. Offering DIY experiences such as pottery, fused bead crafts, perfume blending and glass fusing, these shops are often arranged like classrooms, with rows of tables and chairs surrounded by tools and completed pieces on display.

Customers spend hours meticulously placing hundreds of tiny plastic beads onto pegboards and then using an iron to fuse them into finished creations.

Cui Yichen, 26, has worked at a Beijing DIY store for two years and has noticed a steady increase in customers in recent months.

"Handicraft activities are a good way to relax," Cui said. "After work or school, people come here to unwind. They can focus on small crafts without overthinking."

The growing enthusiasm is also evident online. Social media platform Xiaohongshu, also known as RedNote, ranked handicrafts as one of the top three trends on its platform in 2025. The most popular craft-related hobbies include fuse beads, crocheting and clay art.

On RedNote, creators at home and abroad share their handmade pieces and step-by-step tutorials. Colorful strands of yarn are transformed into patterned bags, garments and toys using intricate crochet techniques. British diver Tom Daley, well-known for his passion for knitting and crochet, has also posted his work on the platform, inspiring many users to showcase their own creations.

Super-light clay has also become increasingly popular. Soft and easy to mold by hand, it can be shaped into fridge magnets, miniature figurines and other decorative items.

Creativity, security

According to a RedNote report, these small creative activities provide a sense of security and reassurance that effort leads to visible rewards, helping people find tangible joy amid uncertainty.

In particular, fuse bead crafts, or *pindou*, have gained remarkable traction. The topic has attracted more than 8.8 billion views on RedNote, and related videos on Douyin — the Chinese version of TikTok — have garnered tens of billions of views. On the e-commerce platform Taobao, searches for fuse bead-related products increased by nearly 500 percent year-on-year.

The activity, often known overseas as perler beads, is typically marketed as a children's craft toy. Adam Gomez, a 21-year-old from the United States, shared his original perler bead designs on RedNote, where he connects and exchanges ideas with other creators.

"Most of our customers come specifically to make fuse bead crafts, and they are usually between 12 and 25 years old," said Cui, the Beijing DIY store staff member. She noted that the trend gained momentum at the end of 2024 when fans of the popular Chinese drama series *Love Game in Eastern Fantasy* started creating themed designs with fused beads.

"As the designs have become more diverse and elaborate, the activity has attracted a broader range of people," she added. Trending social media posts now feature designs ranging from popular anime, comics and games characters to well-known cultural and entertainment franchises. For example, some have started using fuse beads to create pixel-style portraits of Olympic skiing medalist Gu Ailing.

These activities transform the virtual into something concrete, resonating with our deep longing for certainty and tangible experiences in an age shaped by the digital world."

Zhou Yuwei, a 21-year-old craft enthusiast in Beijing

Though the technique is easy to learn, placing each bead onto a pegboard requires patience. Handicraft stores typically charge around 100 yuan (\$14.5) for a whole-day session, during which customers can complete as many pieces as they like.

Hao Yike, an 18-year-old college student in Beijing, sees the appeal in the pace itself.

"Assembling fuse beads requires a great deal of patience and time, and its slowness is a form of resistance to an era obsessed with efficiency and instant results," Hao said.

Zhou said that when she assembles fuse beads, she temporarily forgets the pressures of schoolwork and social life as the activity requires intense concentration. "You have to carefully count how many you need to place because it's very easy to misalign them," she added.

Beyond stress relief, fuse bead crafting is relatively affordable. Many enthusiasts now make them at home, purchasing materials online. A set of 24 colors, containing roughly 500 beads of 2.6 millimeters per color, typically sells for between 30 and 50 yuan.

Taobao ranked fuse beads among its top 10 products for 2025, describing the trend as a reflection of young people's evolving lifestyles. According to Mooring Market Intelligence, a market research and consumer insights service provider headquartered in Beijing, total fuse bead sales reached 290 million yuan from January to December, marking an almost ninefold year-on-year increase.

Li Qianya contributed to this story.



An enthusiast devotes herself wholeheartedly to creating a fuse bead handicraft in Shanghai on March 10. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Bookstore fosters love for Tibetan language among kids

By PALDEN NYIMA in Lhasa
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In Lhasa, capital of the Xizang autonomous region, a small bookstore is quietly encouraging young Tibetan children to discover stories in their mother tongue.

Founded by Tashi Tsering, Nornor Children's Bookstore has become a hub for early childhood education, publishing Tibetan-language picture books and hosting reading programs designed to spark a love of language and culture among young children.

Originally from Gyalze county in Xizang, Tashi Tsering launched the initiative in 2017 as an online storytelling platform. Over time, it evolved into a physical bookstore and cultural center dedicated to children under the age of 6.

"Every weekend, our bookstore hosts reading sessions that help children engage with Tibetan-language books while also incorporating Mandarin and English through trilingual storytelling," said Tashi Tsering. The sessions often include handicraft activities that encourage creativity and participation.

Today, the bookstore serves as both a cultural space and a childcare center. It offers daycare services for children aged 1 to 3 and organizes weekend reading activities that attract families across the city. Parents can purchase flexible session cards for the two-hour programs, each costing about 69 yuan (\$10).

Tashi Tsering said the programs fill an important gap in early childhood education while also easing the burden on extended families.

"I feel these services are not only vital for the healthy development of preschool children, but they also help relieve pressure on grandparents, who often shoulder childcare responsibilities in many Tibetan households," he said.



Tenzin Drolkar, a Tibetan language storyteller at the Nornor Children's Bookstore, conducts a Tibetan reading session. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

Beyond Lhasa, the bookstore team also organizes reading programs in libraries across neighboring counties, expanding access to Tibetan-language children's literature.

Over the past eight years, the initiative has grown steadily. The team has published more than 50 Tibetan-language picture books and produced over 200 free audiobooks for young listeners. To support these projects, Tashi Tsering has assembled a small team of translators and editors and regularly collaborates with authors from Tibetan communities in regions such as Qinghai. The collection also includes several original works inspired by traditional Tibetan culture.

Their books are increasingly reaching readers beyond Tibetan areas, with some purchased by educational institutions in major cities including Beijing and Shanghai.

Despite its cultural impact, the venture has faced significant financial challenges. For the past eight years, the bookstore has operated at a loss.

"My wife Tsomo has been my steadfast supporter," said Tashi

Tsering. "She runs a cafe in Lhasa that helps sustain the bookstore." The couple also uses online platforms to promote their books and reading programs, hoping to reach more families.

Team members said the impact of the reading sessions is evident in the children who attend.

Tenzin Drolkar, who helps lead the storytelling activities, said she has witnessed children gradually become more confident through weekly reading sessions.

"In my experience, some children feel shy or anxious when they first hear a story," she said. "After a few sessions, they become more cheerful, expressive and start enjoying reading."

Encouraging families to cultivate early reading habits, however, remains a challenge. According to Tenzin Drolkar, some Tibetan parents — particularly those born in the 1990s and 2000s — are less confident using written Tibetan, making it harder for them to read stories to their children at home.

"In my experience, some children benefit from guidance at home

when developing an interest in their mother tongue," she said. "Without it, they can sometimes be slower to engage with reading."

Parents attending the bookstore's activities said the programs help strengthen children's connection with their cultural roots.

"I feel some children today have fewer opportunities to learn about traditional culture, customs and language. Activities like this help deepen their connection to their heritage," said Tsering Drolma, who recently brought her younger sister to one of the events.

Former participants have also felt the long-term benefits. Monlam Yutso, who attended Nornor reading sessions as a child, said the early exposure helped her develop strong language skills.

"Now I'm studying in middle school," she said. "Even with a heavier academic workload, my foundation in reading and writing allows me to study with greater confidence."

"While Lhasa has made progress in providing inclusive preschools, resources such as locally developed picture books and early reading programs could still be strengthened," added Tashi Tsering.

The bookstore hopes to address these gaps by developing new materials tailored to Tibetan children, including interactive "point-reading" audiobooks and educational toys such as Tibetan alphabet blocks. Each year, the bookstore also hosts cultural activities to help children experience traditional festivals such as Losar, the Tibetan New Year.

Through stories, games and traditional costumes, the team hopes young readers will not only learn language skills but also develop a lasting connection to their cultural heritage.

Zheng Jinran contributed to this story.