

# GIM INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWS PROFESSOR DEREN LI

## Taking Geomatics to a Higher Level



Wuhan University is opening its doors. Professor Deren Li, one of the leading figures at China's number one educational institute for geomatics, wants to learn from other countries while also offering his expertise to the rest of the world. He is a natural networker who has spent decades strengthening co-operation to take geomatics in general – and photogrammetry and remote sensing in particular – to a higher level. GIM International spoke with this icon of both Chinese and global geomatics about the advancement of the industry.

***Wuhan University has much more influence on geomatics worldwide than many people recognise. Do you agree?***

We train many young people: every year we have around 600 undergraduates and 400 master students together with 200 PhD students. After leaving Wuhan University, they go on to work all over the world. Many of the best students go to Japan, in co-operation with professor Shunji Murai from Tokyo University, or to Australia where I work with professor John Trinder from the University of New South Wales in Melbourne. In previous years I sent a lot of them to Europe as well, especially after I myself graduated from Stuttgart University in Germany in 1985. I made new contacts in the United States through attending the ASPRS conference in Baltimore in 1989, which led to student exchanges in America from then on too – not just in surveying and mapping but also in GIS, photogrammetry and remote sensing. Nowadays, most students prefer the US, with many of them staying there after they graduate and starting small companies. So in that sense it's true that Wuhan University has a lot of influence worldwide.

***How do you feel about the fact that a lot of those students going abroad will help foreign geoinformation sectors grow?***

I feel very positive about it. It will grow into a strong network that is not just limited to China but is also worldwide. The famous Karl Krauss once said to me in 1996 during an ISPRS Congress in Vienna, "Don't worry about your students working all over the globe. It will establish the reputation of Wuhan University as one of the leading universities in the world."

***Universities all over the world are seeing fewer students enrolling for geomatics programmes. It seems China is an exception to the rule. Why do you think that geomatics attracts so many young people here?***

Firstly, China has been industrialising very rapidly over the last 30 years. There's a need for people in land management to support the industrialisation and its consequences. China has put a lot of effort into constructing new highways and high-speed trains. Geoinformation plays a big role in similar infrastructural projects all over the country. Secondly, because China has 1.3 billion citizens, the government needs a lot of geomatics professionals to support land use and urban planning. The overall demand is very high, and young people know that.

***Does Wuhan University also attract international students?***

Yes – every year, for instance, we have an international group of around 10 students here on a scholarship from the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) in Vienna, Austria. And we are training students from other parts of the world such as Korea, Mongolia and many African countries. All in all, there are always around 20 foreign students in the geomatics department. In the future we want to set up an International School of Geoinformation with foreign professors teaching here as well, to attract even more students from abroad.

[Read the full version of the interview here.](https://www.gim-international.com/content/article/taking-geomatics-to-a-higher-level)