

Chinese Scientists Leave United States Amid Geopolitical Tensions

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July 13, 2023

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Chinese scientists living in the United States have contributed to research efforts that fuel the development of advanced technology and science for decades. But a growing number of them may now look elsewhere for work as geopolitical ties deteriorate and Chinese researchers come under more scrutiny and Beijing ramps up its recruitment efforts and keep Talent. According to the study, between 2010 and 2021, the number of Chinese scientists leaving the United States increased steadily new research released last month. If this trend continues, experts warn that brain drain could deal a serious blow to US research efforts in the long run.

“It's absolutely devastating,” said David Bier, associate director of immigration studies at the Cato Institute. “So many of the researchers the United States depends on [the] “The advanced technology students are Chinese or foreign students, and this phenomenon will certainly have a negative impact on US companies and research in the future.”

From semiconductor chips to artificial intelligence, technology has been at the forefront of competition between the US and China, with both Washington and Beijing trying to strangle each other in their sectors. Even in key areas such as combating climate change, there has rarely been cooperation.

From 2010 to 2021, the number of scientists of Chinese descent who left the United States for another country increased from 900 to 2,621, with scientists leaving at an accelerated pace between 2018 and 2021, it said Research published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS). Almost half of this group moved to China and Hong Kong in 2010, the study said, and a growing percentage of Chinese scientists have relocated to China over the years.

While that number accounts for only a small fraction of Chinese scientists in the United States, the increase reflects growing concern and general concern among researchers at a tense geopolitical climate. After surveying 1,304 Chinese-American researchers, the report found that 89 percent of respondents wanted to contribute to US leadership in science and technology. However, 72 percent also said they felt unsafe as researchers in the United States, while 61 percent had previously considered seeking opportunities outside the country.

“Scientists of Chinese descent in the United States now face higher incentives to leave the United States and lower incentives to apply for federal grants,” the report said. There is “a general feeling of anxiety and uneasiness that is causing them to consider leaving the United States and/or no longer applying for federal grants.”

There are two incentives to leave the country. Beijing has poured resources into research and development programs and has been trying to do so for a long time recruit Scientists, even our own, from all over the world. For one of his initiatives, the Plan of a thousand talents Beijing used at least 600 recruitment stations around the world to attract new talent. “China has been trying to lure scientists back for a long time,” said Eric Fish, author of China’s millennials.

However, this recent outflow of Chinese scientists accelerated in 2018, the same year that then-US President Donald Trump unveiled the China Initiative, a controversial program to combat intellectual property theft — and sparked renewed interest among researchers of Chinese descent and the Cooperation with Chinese shudders from institutions. He also published one in 2020 proclamation Denial of visas for graduate students and researchers at Chinese universities affiliated with the military.

Though the Biden administration has scrapped the China initiative, experts warn its shadow still hovers over Chinese scientists. More than a third of the respondents to the PNAS survey came forward feel unwelcome in the United States, while nearly two-thirds expressed concerns about research collaboration with China.

“There’s this chilling effect that we still see where there’s stigma about working with China,” said Jenny Lee, a professor at the University of Arizona’s Center for the Study of Higher Education.

The challenges are emblematic of how the collapse in US-China relations has plunged universities into a geopolitical firestorm, particularly as some states’ lawmakers are pressuring them to sever ties with their Chinese counterparts. On the U.S. side, interest in Mandarin language studies and study abroad has declined sharply over the years, largely due to deteriorating relations, increasing Beijing oppression and the coronavirus pandemic.

Although today there is about 300,000 Chinese Undergraduates in America only 350 Americans studied in China in their senior year. Should interest wane further, experts warn of spillover effects that could affect Washington’s understanding of Beijing.

“We’re losing a generation of people who know China,” said Daniel Murphy, former director of the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University. “I worry that the United States is approaching this issue in a way that overly focuses on the risks of the academic relationship

without properly considering the benefits. And I think we're seeing that across a whole range of areas and it's bipartisan.”

As growing numbers of Chinese scholars leave the United States, new students appear to face higher entry barriers as student visa denials and backlogs hit record highs. According to a blog post by Cato Institute in 2022, student visa denials peaked at about 35 percent — the highest rate in two decades.

Data on student visa refusals is not available by nationality, but Bier, the Cato Institute expert who wrote the article, said there is a high degree of correlation between refusal rates for B visas, or tourist visas, and student visas. “Having looked at B visa refusals in China, it is quite clear that the overall rate of visa refusals in China has increased significantly in recent years and is now at the highest level in decades,” he said.

While some Chinese academics are looking abroad, these challenges are prompting a growing number of international students to seek academic opportunities elsewhere. Countries like Canada, Australia, Japan and the UK are opening their doors to highly skilled workers and researchers. To attract more talent, the UK has issued Global Talent and High Potential Individual visas, allowing researchers from top universities to work there for 2-3 years and 1-5 years respectively.

Universities are affected “by geopolitical tensions, by political agendas, and so it certainly hinders the ability of US universities to attract the best and brightest,” Said Lee.