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**Latitudes: China has become a global research powerhouse. But its scientific standing may be inflated.**

1 message

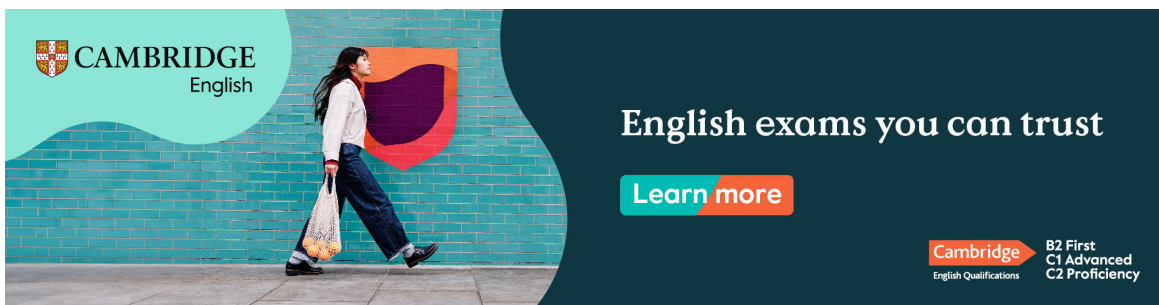
**Karin Fischer** <newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com>

Wed, May 29, 2024 at 11:00 AM

Reply-To: newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com

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# Latitudes

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## Self-citations exaggerate Chinese research prowess, scholars charge

A new paper argues that China's research pre-eminence has been overstated

because of a propensity among Chinese academics to cite one another's work.

The paper, "[Paper Tiger? Chinese Science and Home Science in Citations](#)," argues that China's global standing has been inflated because it exhibits more "home bias" than other countries. In 18 of 20 broad scientific fields, Chinese scholars were more likely than researchers from other countries to cite home-country colleagues. That tendency has increased over the past two decades as China has invested in research and education, while the home bias of other countries has remained stable..

"Home bias has exaggerated the rise of China in science," write the three coauthors, who are from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as well as colleges in China and Germany.

Some 57 percent of Chinese citations are of other Chinese researchers. The United States ranks second, with 37 percent.

China and the United States both have a large scientific work force, the researchers note, but they found that the number of Chinese citations was disproportionate to the country's size. When the researchers used their "de-biased" metric, they found that China fell from second to the United States in citations to fourth, behind the U.S., Britain, and Germany.

China's scientific advancement has raised concerns about America's global research competitiveness. Another recent study found that China [outpaced](#) other countries in its number of scholarly publications, in both open-data and more-selective indexes.

The "stark" home bias in Chinese citations raises questions about the quality of research in China, the authors conclude. Recalculating references "might be seen as especially informative if one believes that home citations are especially prone to reflect political or strategic considerations, rather than the acknowledgement of scientists

cumulatively building on the ideas contained in the articles they choose to cite.”

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The graphic features a dark blue background with several large, light blue puzzle pieces. A woman in a red top and yellow pants sits on one piece, working on a laptop. A paper airplane flies across the scene. Two other people, a man in a yellow jacket and a woman in a purple top, are shown placing puzzle pieces together. Dotted lines connect the puzzle pieces, suggesting a path or process. The logos for Dever Justice LLC and Ithaka S+R are prominently displayed at the bottom.

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## Bill would revive probe of academic ties with China

The U.S. House Judiciary Committee has advanced legislation that would

restart the China Initiative, the federal investigation of academic and economic espionage.

Lawmakers voted 15 to 8 for the [measure](#), sending it to the full House for approval.

Started under President Donald J. Trump, the Biden administration [canceled the inquiry](#) in February 2022.

Congressional Republicans argue that college campuses are vulnerable to Chinese influence and have tried several times to revive the investigation, including [adding it to a spending bill](#) last fall.

The bill would re-establish and rename the China Initiative as the “CCP Initiative,” for Chinese Communist Party. It would set up a program within the U.S. Department of Justice to curb spying by the Chinese government on American colleges and intellectual property and to identify and prosecute people who engage in such espionage. The program would also be tasked with educating college officials about “potential threats to academic freedom and open discourse from influence efforts on campus.”

The new initiative would shut down after six years.

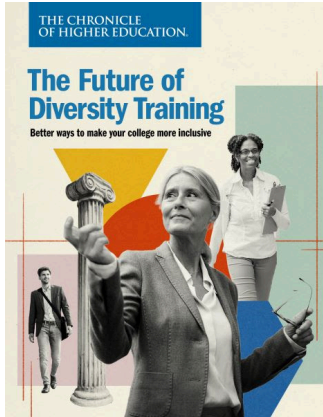
The original investigation resulted in few successful prosecutions. Still, it had a chilling effect on international academic collaboration, discouraging some researchers from working on joint projects with Chinese colleagues for fear they would come under suspicion.

The Asian American Scholar Forum, a group that advocates for researchers of Asian descent, [criticized](#) the committee’s vote. “With this most recent attempt to reinstate the China Initiative, we are reminded yet again of discriminatory investigations that create a living hell for researchers and their families,” said Gisela Perez Kusakawa, the organization’s executive director. “There is absolutely no reason

for us to take a step back and reinstate a policy that has deeply harmed so many.”

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## **Lawmaker needles Northwestern’s president about Qatar campus**

The Qatar Foundation, which has attracted top foreign universities to set up campuses in the Persian Gulf country, denied it is trying to “buy influence” in American higher education.

The allegations were made when three college leaders, including Michael Schill, president of Northwestern University, testified at a [U.S. congressional hearing](#) last week on campus protests.

Rep. Burgess Owens, Republican of Utah, sharply questioned Schill about Northwestern’s ties to Qatar. The university has operated an outpost of its well-regarded journalism program in the Middle Eastern emirate since 2008.

Owens displayed a giant mock check for \$600 million made out to Northwestern from “Qatar-related sources” and asked Schill whether the university should be partnering with countries that may have links to Hamas. “Obviously, you don’t have a problem with that,” Owens told Schill.

Schill replied that he was “offended” that the congressman had tried to characterize his views.

While Schill sought to sidestep some of Burgess’ questions, the Qatar Foundation released a written statement on Friday refuting that it was trying to meddle with American colleges. “Qatar Foundation is not in the business of buying, or attempting to buy, influence in U.S. higher-education institutions,” Francisco Marmolejo, the foundation’s president of higher education, said in the statement.

Of the \$70 million the Qatar Foundation pays annually to Northwestern, 90 percent stays in Qatar for the operation of the branch campus, Marmolejo said. The other 10 percent goes to the university’s main campus to cover administrative costs.

Northwestern is one of six American colleges with outposts in Qatar. In the wake of the Israel-Hamas war, the partnerships have become more of a political lightning rod. In February, regents at Texas A&M University voted to [close its Qatar campus](#), which specializes in engineering education.

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## **Around the globe**

**An international student who had overstayed** his visa is one of two

Jordanian men who allegedly tried to drive onto a [U.S. military base](#) illegally.

**A bill that would have allowed** some [undocumented students](#) to attend public colleges in Alabama failed to pass during the legislative session. Alabama is one of a handful of states that has an [enrollment ban](#) for undocumented immigrants.

**Rishi Sunak, the British prime minister**, has backed away from a [proposal](#) to bar or limit the ability of international students to temporarily work in the U.K. after graduation.

**Some Nigerian students in Britain have been told** to leave the country after they did not have enough money to cover tuition costs because of their [home currency devaluation](#).

**Lawmakers in the Netherlands voted** to cap the number of international students in [English-language courses](#).

**Joint research projects funded** as part of the European Union's primary science program could be in [jeopardy](#) as more European universities cut ties with Israel.

**Colleges in Bulgaria stayed closed** for one day last week to protest [budget cuts](#).

**Government officials in Argentina said** national public universities will get a 270 percent [funding increase](#) to cover operating costs.

**International students are applying** to more colleges in a greater number of countries, according to a [survey](#) of recruitment agents by INTO University Partnerships.

**NAFSA: Association of International Educators will** offer the [first professional certificate](#) in global education.

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## Catch up with Latitudes at NAFSA

The annual NAFSA conference kicked off this week in New Orleans by highlighting a former international student, Luis von Ahn, a cofounder and the chief executive of Duolingo, the popular language-learning app, during its opening session. International talent enriches the United States, von Ahn said, adding that he advocates for a smoother student-visa process. “Bringing in smart people from around the world is good for the U.S.”

If you’re at NAFSA, please say hello. I am speaking on Thursday, May 30, at noon Central time, at the NAFSA pavilion in the expo hall. I’ll be talking about the big changes and big challenges ahead for international education. But I’m especially excited to hear the perspectives of those who work across the field, so bring your questions and comments.

For very prompt newsletter readers, I will also be part of two sessions this afternoon (Wednesday, May 29):

- On anti-racism and international education at 1 p.m. CT
- On strategies for international-student success at 2:30 p.m. CT

And if you have recommendations for panels, talks, or other events during the conference, I’m still taking suggestions at

[karin.fischer@chronicle.com](mailto:karin.fischer@chronicle.com). Enjoy New Orleans!

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