

US-China Scientific Collaboration is Important and Must Continue



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Despite the ongoing technology war between America and China, there has been a long-time scientific collaboration between the two superpowers that has been productive and mutually advantageous for many years. This is now encountering increasing obstacles and doubts as some American politicians doubt the value, and even see risks, of the Science and Technology Agreement (STA), the first bilateral agreement signed after the two countries reestablished relations in 1979, by Deng Xiaoping and US President Jimmy Carter. There is concern that China is taking advantage of the collaboration to improve its technological and military capabilities, and that it is engaging in intellectual property theft.

I believe that such worries are largely unfounded, and that terminating or weakening the STA would be harmful to both sides' scientific interests, though with little proof that academic collaboration has compromised America's security or competitiveness. The STA covers research that is published in peer-reviewed journals, which are open to anyone, regardless of nationality. In addition, America has other mechanisms to protect sensitive areas of research, such as an executive order by President Joe Biden that limits the sharing of American expertise in certain fields.

China has achieved remarkable progress in some fields, such as batteries, telecommunications and nanoscience, which can complement America's strengths. China also has a large and diverse population, which can offer valuable data for research in areas such as health, education and social sciences.

By collaborating with Chinese scientists, American researchers can gain insights and opportunities that they would otherwise miss.

Some US politicians have raised concerns over China's methods in conducting ethical research. If this is a major point of contention, America can further influence China's approach in such matters. Under the influence of the US, China has already adopted Institutional Review Boards, which oversee research that involves human subjects. As innovation in artificial intelligence and other frontier areas poses new ethical challenges, America can use its collaboration with China to guide its approach towards more responsible practices if it feels this is necessary.

The history of scientific collaboration among rival great powers during the cold war demonstrates that such an approach can bring mutual benefits and advance humanity's progress. For instance, joint research by American and Soviet scientists led to the detection of gravitational waves, the eradication of smallpox and high energy density physics that resulted in over 400 joint scientific publications and presentations. Research between US and Chinese scientists has even been more fruitful in areas such as cancer trials, mapping the Milky Way, quantum technology, biology, medicine and physics. The US-China partnership brings strength in numbers to global science projects which is essential if we are going to face joint challenges such as climate change.

Rather than adopting a new model of scientific isolationism, America should remember that collaboration in the lab tends to benefit everyone, including itself. It is clear that cooperation between these two powers is necessary as it helps to foster mutual trust and understanding between them, which are crucial for maintaining world peace.

Therefore America needs to continue its scientific collaboration with China and it should renew the STA without major changes. Quitting or watering down the STA would not only harm America's scientific interests, but also damage its relations with China and its reputation as a leader of global science.