

China

Messages to China from the West

This collection of articles is unprecedented: a *Nature* supplement that was written for researchers in China and originally published, at the end of last year, in the Chinese language.

The primary motivation for this supplement is our recognition of several positive trends. China is developing fast as a major economic force in the Asian Pacific and in the world at large. This is partly thanks to the natural entrepreneurship of the Chinese people, but also due to their dedicated pursuit of new technologies. Equally important, China has over many years sustained its efforts to turn itself into a world-class scientific power. No one who visits China can fail to be impressed with the results.

But there is a worrying aspect to these trends. Despite such continuous development, and despite major expenditure on science by the Chinese government, China is not yet fulfilling its scientific potential, for reasons that are discussed in these pages. This results not only in a low scientific profile on the world stage, but also in lost opportunities to make the most of what the rest of the world can offer, both scientifically and technologically. This also leads to missed opportunities for China to improve its economy and the quality of life for its citizens.

This supplement is a small but, we hope, significant attempt to rectify this major anomaly in international research. Authors from diverse fields here provide constructive advice and proposals for Chinese scientific and technological development. It is appropriate that they are senior researchers embedded in Western scientific culture. But it was also essential that they have an intimate familiarity with China's research landscape and its opportunities.

In this collection there are forward-looking contributions covering several disciplines, from biomedical research to agriculture. There is also advice that is relevant to all disciplines, about the characteristics required if a culture and system is to become universally recognized as scientifically world-class. Two common themes in these articles are the need for greater engagement by China with researchers in other countries, and the need to take measures that will encourage the very best of Chinese researchers in the West to return to their homeland.

I believe that the distinguished contributors to this supplement, all of them of Chinese descent, successfully bridge Chinese and Western cultures in a fashion that can stimulate scientists and policy-makers in China.

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Above all, I must thank the authors themselves, who avidly seized this opportunity to provide their views about a country whose scientific future they demonstrably care about so much.

Philip Campbell
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