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# naturejobs

## Turning the tables

Imagine that China dominated the research world, with the best labs, the most funding and the highest publication record. With little chance for advancement at home, young scientists from the United States and Europe would pour into the country. Because China's research growth has been so rapid, it can't produce enough home-grown scientists. So it welcomes the Westerners — after a fashion.

Western graduate students and postdocs coming into China are expected to teach in Chinese, and if they can't communicate with their Chinese students and colleagues, they lose their funding, their job and their visa.

Westerners would consider such a scenario unacceptable, and with good reason. But that's the situation for many Chinese graduate students and postdocs working and studying in the Western world. The story of Xuemei Han, a Yale graduate student who almost got sent back to China because she was considered "not in good academic standing", despite passing her preliminary exams, is a case in point (see *Nature* **438**, 278–279; 2005). Hundreds of Chinese students rallied to her cause because,

even if they had been successful in the United States, they felt that their presence in the country was tenuous, owing to many circumstances beyond their control. Han eventually managed to secure her grant, found another adviser and kept her visa.

Ideally, Han's predicament will do more than illustrate inequity and will result in better conditions for the foreign scientists much of the Western world depends on. It should rally principal investigators to find ways to make foreign graduate students and postdocs more secure. Solutions could range from more support in language lessons to assurances that visas won't be cancelled if they switch advisers or universities. After all, Western scientists would ask for the same treatment if the tables were turned.



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