

Investing in American China Expertise: Lessons from the CSCPRC

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Whether American policymakers consider the People’s Republic of China (PRC) a “pacing challenge,” or the “most consequential bilateral relationship of the 21st century,” it is clear that China will remain a critical component of the American foreign policy agenda in the near term and beyond.¹ To effectively craft American policy toward China, the United States must ensure access to the best information about China and a pipeline of top talent with the requisite expertise to interpret it.

Despite the need for this expertise, as of December 2024, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing reported under 1,000 American students studying in China, down from more than 11,000 in 2019.² Many programs that brought Americans to China, including study abroad programs, language programs, and short-term study trips were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic and either failed to restart or shifted to alternative locations. Within the broader downturn in bilateral relations, academic understanding of China has been hit hard: the combination of geopolitical, national security, and operational challenges have significantly limited opportunities for American students and scholars to gain first-hand experience in China.

Academic exchange can provide a crucial way for Americans to learn the Chinese language, understand the governance system, and become familiar with the culture. There has been concern in policy circles that the traditional methods of China analysis — the academic study of China, field research, and scholarly exchange — have been rendered ineffective by the political constraints of today’s China and intensifying U.S.-China competition. China’s constrained domestic sphere has limited meaningful academic exchange, with concerns about espionage layered on top of repression and censorship restricting the free and open exchange of ideas. Meanwhile, the United States faces complex national security challenges posed by an increasingly assertive China on the world stage. The dilemmas confronting academic exchange are real, but an approach that can mitigate risks while preserving the benefits of engagement would still contribute meaningfully to U.S. interests.

To manage the challenges associated with academic exchange, the example of the Committee for Scholarly Communication with the PRC (CSCPRC), the non-governmental organization that helped restart U.S.-China academic ties after decades of isolation in the 1970’s, can provide a

¹ <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2846904/china-remains-pacing-challenge-for-us-pentagon-press-secretary-says/>; <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/is-the-us-china-relationship-the-most-consequential-relationship-for-america-in-the-world/>

² <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-discussion-with-nyu-shanghai-students/>; <https://opendoorsdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/China.pdf>

useful model. In the early days of U.S.-PRC détente, the Nixon administration prioritized academic exchange, deeply tied to U.S. government priorities, as a way for America to accelerate its understanding of China's capabilities. Today, to ensure the United States retains a pipeline of top expertise on China, U.S. policymakers should likewise invest in opportunities for study in China and encourage robust access, while taking steps to protect the safety of students and scholars.

The situation today: the downturn in U.S.-China relations and its impact on US-China academic exchange

Since 2018, geopolitical tensions and strategic competition between the United States and China have significantly affected academic relations between the two countries. Increased political tightening under Xi Jinping has placed new constraints on Chinese academic institutions and research within China is becoming increasingly difficult.³ Under such constraints, some American researchers are reluctant to return to China.⁴ On the U.S. side, policymakers have identified U.S.-China academic integration as a mechanism for potential espionage, intellectual property theft, and influence operations — particularly in the arenas of critical technology, but concerns have expanded beyond those fields.⁵

Against the backdrop of these complex concerns, some policymakers have spoken out against U.S.-China academic connectivity writ large, arguing that the benefits of U.S.-China academic integration have *only* flowed toward China, allowing the PRC to exploit the openness of the U.S. system.⁶ There is some merit to these arguments, particularly as they pertain to sensitive technologies and resources. Yet, this fails to recognize that academic integration can, and has, benefitted U.S. interests as well.

Despite the challenges, many experts agree that on-the-ground field research and time in-country remain an unparalleled way to understand China.⁷ Especially while Chinese academia, media, and

³<https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/what-will-newly-increased-party-control-mean-chinas-universities>;
https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/s_d1DpeXjukjmy0V2osRgA

⁴ <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/will-i-return-china>

⁵ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/preliminary-study-prc-political-influence-and-interference-activities-american-higher>; Academics and scholars of Chinese descent have increasingly faced discrimination, leading many to conclude that the United States is no longer a welcoming home for international researchers
<https://www.committee100.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/C100-Lee-Li-White-Paper-FINAL-FINAL-10.28.pdf>

⁶ P. 6 <https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2024-09-24%20Research%20Security%20Report%20Final.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/04/getting-source-importance-field-research>;
<https://madeinchinajournal.com/2024/10/04/rebooting-qualitative-research-in-china-reflections-on-doing-fieldwork-in-the-post-covid-era/>; <https://bigdatachina.csis.org/doing-fieldwork-in-china/>;
<https://madeinchinajournal.com/2023/06/26/doing-fieldwork-in-china-during-and-beyond-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-study/>

official data face acute censorship, online and remote collection methods will inherently paint an incomplete picture.⁸ Studying abroad in Taiwan can help students learn the Chinese language, but will fail to expose them to PRC systems, approaches, or citizens, which remains a key vehicle for understanding the political and social framework of modern China. Of course, the bilateral relationship has changed significantly since 2020, and sending students and scholars to China without safeguards to address the new realities of China and of U.S.-China competition would undoubtedly undermine the success of these initiatives. Yet, without intervention, the low numbers of Americans with direct experience in China may lead to a generational gap in much needed China expertise.

Under the Biden administration, some voices within the U.S. government expressed support for a new approach to U.S.-China academic relations that, even within a competitive framework, would carve out an important place for academic and scholarly exchange. In April 2024, then-U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasized the importance of next-generation experts who understand each other as “the best way to make sure that we’re managing this relationship between our countries responsibly, effectively, and hopefully for the good of the people not only in our countries but around the world.” Former U.S. Ambassador Nicholas Burns routinely emphasized the U.S. strategic imperative for American students to study in China.⁹ On the other side of the aisle, Mike Gallagher and Matt Pottinger also have argued that the U.S. government needs to recruit Americans with deep expertise in Asia to help the United States compete with China.¹⁰ If there is agreement from both ends of the political spectrum that investing in American expertise on China is in the interest of American competitiveness, what steps should the United States undertake to achieve that goal? The model of the CSCPRC can offer valuable lessons towards these ends.

Past as Prologue: Tense U.S.-China Academic Relations and the Role of the CSCPRC

In the early 1970s, the United States and the People’s Republic of China began a slow process of normalizing the bilateral relationship after decades of separation. For 30 years, communication between the two countries had essentially frozen. The U.S. academic community and government recognized that limited information allowed for potentially harmful gaps in the United States’ understanding of China’s capabilities.¹¹ The CSCPRC was established in 1966 through a combined initiative from the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). The broad coalition of scholars and scientists who formed the CSCPRC were well-positioned and inclined to re-establish academic exchange channels when it would become possible.

⁸ <https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/2023/04/18/china-challenges-open-source-osint-social-media/>

⁹ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ambassador-nicholas-burns-us-china-relationship>

¹⁰ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/no-substitute-victory-pottinger-gallagher>

¹¹ Millwood, Peter J. *Improbable Diplomats*. 2nd ed., McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020.

The CSCPRC was founded on the premise that academic exchange was an essential tool of diplomacy. Indeed, amid the height of the Cold War and nuclear arms race, the United States also invested in academic exchange with its fiercest rival, the Soviet Union. Organizations like the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) worked closely with the governments of the United States and Soviet Union to allow students and scholars to study in each other's countries.¹² As a former diplomat, Yale Richmond explains, the United States had targeted national security objectives for these programs, including to: "end Soviet isolation and inward orientation by giving the Soviet Union a broader view of the world and of itself" and "improve U.S. understanding of the Soviet Union through access to its institutions and people."¹³ Within the framework of a highly competitive relationship between the U.S. and U.S.S.R., marked by espionage and diplomatic competition across the globe, these programs were seen as effective means to meet national security goals, train top U.S. Soviet specialists, and influence elite thinking in the Soviet Union.¹⁴ The CSCPRC's founding documents point directly to the precedent of U.S.-Soviet academic exchange (alongside loftier goals of transnational pursuit of knowledge) as their reference point.

The CSCPRC was one of three private organizations tapped by the Nixon administration following the 1971 Ping Pong diplomacy trip to manage carefully orchestrated interactions between Chinese and U.S. citizens, dubbed "facilitated exchanges." The three private organizations, each made responsible for a key aspect of U.S.-China integration, were:

- the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, to oversee a range of early public diplomacy visits including sports, acrobatics, and performing arts;
- the National Council for United States-China Trade (which later became the U.S.-China Business Council), to organize trade and business delegations; and
- the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC), to manage key academic and scientific exchanges between the two countries.

To execute these programs, each organization received federal funding, worked alongside U.S. government officials, and negotiated with Chinese counterparts. As bilateral connectivity deepened, the CSCPRC offered research fellowships to China, opened a Beijing office (the first of its kind), and published the regular "China Exchange Newsletter" to share developments in academic exchange.

¹² International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) was founded in 1968 by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) to represent the US scholarly community in its exchanges with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It was created out of the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants which from 1959-1968 arranged early academic exchange with Soviet counterparts.

¹³ Yale Richmond (2010) *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: How the West Won*, American Communist History, 9:1, 61-75, DOI: 10.1080/14743891003665077

¹⁴ This period was marked by espionage in both directions, but the conclusion was the benefits created a corps of Americans with Soviet knowledge that comprised a national asset. More on this is outlined in *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* by Yale Richmond.

Of these three non-governmental organizations, the others have survived, but the CSCPRC no longer exists. Former CSCPRC director Mary Brown Bullock summarized: “By the mid-1990s, the landscape of U.S.-China scholarly relations had become a sophisticated, pluralistic collection of university, government agency, and foundation programs with China. The CSCPRC had assisted at the birth of most of these programs that now no longer needed an intermediary organization. Its success had also mitigated against the ongoing need for national coordination.”¹⁵ Amid this period of optimism, and acute financial pressures, the CSCPRC closed its Washington offices in 1996. However, U.S.-China academic integration would prove more fragile than was apparent at the time.

Managing U.S.-China Academic Ties: Approaches for Today?

At its peak, the CSCPRC offered an effective model for fostering academic exchange between the United States and China amid tense bilateral relations. There are inherent differences in the context of U.S.-China relations in the 1970s and today, yet both periods were marked by skepticism and necessary interactions between the two nations. Lessons from the CSCPRC’s successes could illuminate a path forward for today’s bilateral relationship. As policymakers consider how to support American study of China, they should emphasize the following three principles drawn from the CSCPRC model:

1. Create Opportunities to Study and Research in China

If the United States wants to support American students and scholars returning to China, policymakers should first ensure that sufficient opportunities are available. Some have argued that U.S. students and scholars are no longer interested in studying in China. It is true that even before the pandemic, enrollments for study abroad programs in China were falling but according to data from the Modern Language Association, as of Fall 2021 there were 46,492 undergraduate students enrolled in Chinese language classes across the United States.¹⁶ It is unclear how many of these students would seek opportunities to study in China if the option was offered.

What is clear, however, is that there are fewer opportunities to study in China than there were in 2019. Of the roughly 1,000 students now studying in China, many are enrolled in highly selective graduate-level programs like Schwarzman Scholars, Yenching Academy, or the Johns Hopkins-Nanjing Center. A much smaller number pursue undergraduate-level opportunities in China like NYU-Shanghai or short-term intensive language programs like Princeton in Beijing or CET Academic Programs. These private programs offer a rare pathway for Americans to study in China,

¹⁵ Bullock, *Bridging Minds Across the Pacific*, 2005, pp. 61-62.

¹⁶ <https://asia.nikkei.com/Location/Rest-of-the-World/North-America/American-students-lose-interest-in-China-studies>; https://apps.mla.org/cgi-shl/docstudio/docs.pl?flsurvey_results

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but are inherently limited in scope and scale. For example, the Schwarzman Scholars program accepts roughly 3-5% of its annual applicant pool, and only 40% of each cohort is made up of Americans. If the United States is serious about increasing opportunities for Americans, more pathways need to be made available.

Before 2020, there was a wider range of options for Americans seeking to study in China, including programs offered by the U.S. government. These programs served as pipelines for U.S. talent on China, particularly for those interested in careers in government service. From 2020 until 2023, many of these programs remained suspended. As of the time of writing, some have begun to restart.

Name of Program	Description	Status
Fulbright Student and Scholar Exchange -- China and Hong Kong	A program of the U.S. Department of State, implemented by the Institute of International Education (IIE). Offers international educational and cultural exchange programs for students, recent graduates, scholars, and more.	Suspended as July 14, 2020, as part of Executive Order 13936. ¹⁷
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship	A program of the U.S. Department of State, implemented by the Institute of International Education (IIE). Enables undergraduate students of limited financial means to study or intern abroad.	Students eligible to study in China as of Summer 2024. Suspended 2020 – 2023 due to COVID and China's Level 3 Travel Advisory designation.
Critical Language Scholarship (CLS)	A program of the U.S. Department of State, implemented by the American Councils for International Education. Provides opportunities for American undergraduate and graduate students to study languages and cultures essential to America's engagement with the world.	Students eligible to study in China as of Summer 2024. Mainland China program suspended 2020 – 2023. In-person program in Taiwan remained active.

¹⁷ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/07/17/2020-15646/the-presidents-executive-order-on-hong-kong-normalization>

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National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y)	A program of the U.S. Department of State, implemented by the American Councils for International Education. Awards and administers merit-based scholarship programs for high school students to participate in summer and academic year language immersion programs.	Students eligible to study in China as of Summer 2024. Mainland China program suspended 2020 – 2023. In-person program in Taiwan remained active.
Boren Scholarships and Fellowships	An initiative of the National Security Education Program (NSEP). Provide funding opportunities for U.S. undergraduate and graduate students to study less commonly taught languages in world regions critical to U.S. interests, with a requirement to work in the U.S. government.	Students eligible to study in China as of Summer 2024. Mainland China program suspended 2020 – 2023. In-person program in Taiwan remained active.

In the absence of U.S. opportunities, some American students are joining Chinese government-sponsored trips. At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco in November 2023, as part of a broader thawing of U.S.-China relations, Chinese leader Xi Jinping announced China's ambitious goal of bringing 50,000 Americans to China on exchange and study programs over the next five years.¹⁸ China has worked quickly to carry out this vision: programs ranging from one week visits to fully-funded degree programs are being marketed toward American youth.¹⁹ In a September 2024 speech, China's Ambassador to the U.S., Xie Feng, stated that in less than one year, 10,000 American teenagers have already been invited to China.²⁰ Although these programs provide an opportunity for Americans to return, they are also clearly a tool of state influence. As a *China Daily* article from August 2024 makes explicit, the goal of these programs is soft power.²¹ Reports show that these programs, organized and administered within the Chinese system, are subject to domestic political goals and censorship approaches.²² Further, some American students are unclear if participating in these programs would impact their ability to gain a U.S. security clearance in the future.²³

¹⁸ <https://english.news.cn/20231116/a6aad82a604e4b23af0586684be41f0a/c.html>

¹⁹ http://losangeles.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/visa/chinavisa/202407/t20240711_11451842.htm

²⁰ http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/dshd/202410/t20241001_11501937.htm

²¹ <https://yes.ceaie.edu.cn/col5/65>

²² <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-07-08/xi-s-outreach-to-young-americans-stumbles-with-scripted-moments>

²³ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/24/education-security-clearance-foreign-language-area-studies-isolationism-parochialism/>

In the 1970s, the U.S. government actively funded research fellowships and opportunities for study in China. The CSCPRC offered an early pathway for graduate students and scholars to conduct in-country research when access was otherwise limited. They recruited scholars from across the United States, provided essential funding, and arranged placements at Chinese host institutions. Between 1978 and 1996, the CSCPRC supported over 700 researchers, seeding the field with a cohort of American experts with on-the-ground research and fieldwork experience for the first time since the 1950s.²⁴

Policymakers today can mirror the approach of the 1970s and invest in programs that make it possible for Americans to study and conduct research in China. Interested students and scholars would have the benefit of choice between U.S. or Chinese government funded programs. Furthermore, U.S. policymakers can ensure that U.S.-funded programs comply with American values and priorities.

2. Advocate for Robust and Substantive Access for Americans

Access to China is necessary but not sufficient for meaningful engagement. If access were to increase, U.S. policymakers must still ensure that access is both substantive and robust. This includes advocating for participation from a wide range of stakeholders, including new students of Chinese language, graduate students conducting research, and established scholars in the field. As described above, the PRC is eager to invite young students to China, but similar overtures have not been made toward established scholars or researchers, particularly those whose focus on topics that China considers sensitive. There will be persistent constraints on academic research on account of China's tightening domestic political landscape, but the U.S. can advocate for greater opportunities to deepen academic understanding and allow for substantive work and research to take place.

In the 1970s, the CSCPRC was able to advocate for better access and conditions for a broad range of specialists. From 1972 to 1978, the CSCPRC sponsored the exchange of 68 delegations between the two countries on topics ranging from earthquake prevention to paleo-archeology. In negotiations, the PRC routinely prioritized delegations focused on applied science and technology and de-prioritized access for Sinologists and social scientists, which were seen with suspicion by China but highly valued by the United States. In response, the CSCPRC came up with a creative solution: each delegation, including the more readily welcomed scientific delegations, was assigned a "scholar escort" who would serve as a translator — providing a reliable and regularized way for China experts to access the country.

Later, in the early 1980s, when Chinese academics were able to conduct fieldwork unimpeded in the United States and U.S. researchers were not given reciprocal access, the CSCPRC negotiated

²⁴Bullock, *Bridging Minds Across the Pacific*, 2005, pp. 58.

for the designation of Zouping County as an “open” county where foreign scholars could freely conduct research. As political scientist Jean Oi describes, the impact was significant: “Zouping allowed us to go inside the system, see how things are done, talk to the people doing them, and see how all that changes over time and what the impact of those change are — things we could never do from the outside... Zouping allowed us to see how the government *actually* works.”²⁵ This access significantly improved American research on China. To this day, data collected from Zouping County continues to inform critical research on Chinese governance, political economy, and CCP rule.²⁶

These measures indicated a long-standing priority for the United States: encouraging access to China both for those welcomed by China and those who are not. The opportunity for field research in China was hard won in the 1970s and 1980s but secured a future for American academic study of China that was based on credible research, robust data collection, and nuanced interpretation. Today, the United States can advocate for increased access through official and unofficial means. Some approaches could include establishing safeguards for scholars conducting field research, renewed designations of “open” counties or cities for social science research, clarification on how Chinese laws and regulations may impact academic research, standardized U.S. scholar escorts for youth visits, a dedicated U.S.-sponsored program for experts to conduct short-term research in China, or pathways for visiting scholars to secure appointments at a wide-range of institutions.

3. Prioritize Safety for Students and Scholars

Today, students, scholars, parents, and administrators are particularly concerned about safety of travel to China. This element of the relationship is distinctive to this moment in bilateral relations — safety concerns about China today differ significantly from those of the 1970s, and the example of the CSCPRC may have little guidance to offer in this arena. For much of 2023 and 2024, the State Department maintained a “Level 3” travel advisory that cautioned Americans to “reconsider travel” to Mainland China. The State Department downgraded its travel advisory to “Level 2” in November 2024, but some lawmakers have called to reinstate the higher designation.²⁷ High profile cases, have raised public consciousness of the risks of detentions, exit bans, and other coercive measures toward foreign citizens in China. As of November 2024, Dui Hua, an independent U.S. humanitarian organization, estimated that there are around 200 Americans undergoing coercive measures in China.²⁸

These numbers are high, and the cases are very serious. It is important to note that most of these cases do not involve students. Many of the individuals involved have long-standing business or

²⁵ <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/new-book-and-april-5-conference-expand-academic-legacy-michel-oksenberg>

²⁶ *Zouping Revisited: Adaptive Governance in a Chinese County*. United States, Stanford University Press, 2018.

²⁷ <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/china-watcher/gop-bristles-at-china-travel-advisory/>;

²⁸ <https://duihua.org/dui-hua-welcomes-the-release-of-mark-swidan-and-kai-li/>

professional ties in China, previously held PRC passports, or have family members who fled China. There are legitimate, but different, risks to students and scholars in China: Scholars have been subject to other types of repressive behaviors including visa denials, being “taken to tea” and efforts to limit access to sources or data.²⁹ Students and scholars should seriously weigh their risk profile before embarking on a trip to China and decide whether travel is advisable. Greater disclosure regarding risk profiles, and cases of those who have been involved in coercive measures in China could inform students, scholars, parents, and administrators as they weigh this decision.

Students and scholars who decide to travel to China should be provided with a standardized pre-departure briefing with information about the security situation in China, relevant laws and regulations, technology protocols, and awareness training.³⁰ The U.S. should advocate strongly for the safety of American students and scholars who are conducting routine research and study. PRC policymakers, as they seek to encourage Americans to return, should proactively address security concerns and demonstrate that academic exchange is safe, secure, and valued in today’s China.

4. Safeguard American principles in student and scholar exchange

It is easy to lay out the ideal principles for academic exchange with China, but much harder to ensure that these principles are put into practice. There may be political incentives that draw the two sides together to work on improving conditions for academic study: following the Biden-Xi meeting in November 2023, there was a new willingness to resume exchange and people-to-people ties. Trump plans to meet with Xi, and people-to-people connectivity may remain an area of cooperation. However, even if the political incentives align, the implementation challenges are myriad and often do not sit with one agency, organization, or even nation to solve. How can American policymakers ensure that academic exchange is being carried out in a principled way, and what would be the recourse if these principles are not upheld?

In the 1970s, the CSCPRC was able to serve as the intermediary between U.S. government priorities, Chinese stakeholders, and the U.S. academic community. Leadership in the Nixon White House, including National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, recognized that a non-governmental organization would be afforded more flexibility than a government agency in this goal.³¹ According to an internal memorandum from John Holdridge of the National Security Council staff to Kissinger in August 1972, the CSCPRC and the National Committee were formally identified

²⁹ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/china-quarterly/article/repressive-experiences-among-china-scholars-new-evidence-from-survey-data/C1CB08324457ED90199C274CDC153127>

³⁰ A standardized pre-departure briefing for students, should include situational awareness training, information on local laws and regulations, and technology best practices. For scholars, pre-departure briefings should include information about national security law, data laws, relevant to scholarship. They should also be made aware of federal regulations relevant to research and/or data security.

³¹ Ibid.

by Kissinger, they were then “acknowledged” by the Chinese, granting special status and elevated access.³² In this way, U.S. government could pursue cooperation and competition simultaneously: they could use semi-unofficial channels to build connectivity with the PRC, while leaving the official channels to work through more contentious topics.

The CSCPRC’s quasi-governmental status allowed it to be taken seriously by PRC counterparts, and CSCPRC used this status to push for American interests.³³ In 1979, the first year of a newly launched CSCPRC fellowship program to bring graduate researchers and junior faculty to China, two social scientists selected through a competitive application were denied visas. The CSCPRC raised this issue at the highest levels of the Ministry of Education and U.S. State Department. The initial inclination of the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing was to accept the rejection and select alternates, but the CSCPRC advocated strongly on behalf of the social scientists and ultimately the PRC reversed the decision.³⁴

Today, consideration should be given to similarly establishing or empowering a non-governmental organization to work between Beijing and Washington to problem-solve issues in the bilateral academic relationship. As in the 1970s, a national platform to collect, amplify, and generate solutions to these issues could center U.S. priorities in U.S.-China academic, and provide recourse if issues do occur. An empowered non-governmental organization could also assist in scoping the nature and contours of the challenge. Issues related to academic exchange vary widely across disciplines and are changing rapidly. An annual “State of the Field” survey, distributed to academics seeking to conduct research in China, or a “State of Students” survey, distributed to students and study abroad providers, could help collect accurate data on the challenges, obstacles, and opportunities for exchange. This information would help policymakers develop a clearer picture of the situation and implement targeted solutions.

Conclusion: Knowledge is Power in “Great Power Competition”

As the United States and China face an uncertain future, a comprehensive understanding of each other is a strategic resource that should not be overlooked. It is clear that as long as the U.S.-China relationship faces geopolitical tensions, academic relations will face challenges as well.

³² Holdridge to Kissinger August 28, 1972 in “*Foreign Relations, 1969–1976, Volume XVII*,” edited by Steven E. Phillips and general editor Edward C. Keefer, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 2006. Page 1053.

³³ Bullock, *Bridging Minds Across the Pacific*, 2005, pp. 58; Bullock humbly claims the organization only wielded “symbolic” leverage, but the track record of successful advocacy demonstrates that this symbolic leverage was leverage all the same.

³⁴ CSCPRC Papers at NAS. Jan 15 1979 Fredrick Wakeman to Dr. John Reinhardt. The attitude was such that CSCPRC President wrote to Staff Director Mary Bullock saying that if they intend to restrict access to social scientists: “I intend to propose exactly the opposite, vis., that the exchange program next include a delegation put together by our Assembly of Behavioral and Social Sciences.” Philip Handler to Mary Bullock Jan 26 1979

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Policymakers should take measures to ensure that academic exchange can continue in light of these constraints.

Balancing the need for sound information about China with the risks associated with academic exchange is a significant challenge that requires a nuanced policy solution. In response to today's bilateral relationship, the appropriate response is neither to glamorize a seemingly simpler era in U.S.-China relations nor to reinvent the wheel. The legacy of the CSCPRC can help policymakers identify what has worked in the past, while centering the realities of today. To invest in strengthening U.S. expertise on China, U.S. policymakers should maintain the following principles:

- Increase opportunities for Americans to study and research in China
- Ensure that access to China is robust and substantive
- Protect the safety of U.S. students and scholars

To pursue these principles, the U.S. should consider creating or empowering a non-governmental organization to coordinate U.S.-China academic exchange. The CSCPRC established pathways for exchange amid one of the most difficult periods in the bilateral relationship, when mutual distrust was at a high and the two countries had not had formal relations in decades. The U.S. again faces a complicated moment in its relationship with China. The example of the CSCPRC reminds us that under adverse circumstances, academic exchange can still contribute meaningfully to our understanding of China. If the United States could balance the risks and benefits of academic exchange then, it can be done again today.

In a 1975 congressional hearing on U.S.-China relations, a congressman asked the staff director of the CSCPRC about the value of academic exchange point blank:

How do you all respond to the general concern that Americans have that we are sending over our technology, our computers, our machinery and our expertise...all the real benefit of exchanges [are] flowing toward the Chinese? ... Why has [academic exchange] been so valuable to us?³⁵

Anne Keatley, staff director of the CSCPRC, responded:

Ms. KEATLEY. In terms of making important assessments and decisions both in the short term by our government and also in the long term. Historically many of the wrong

³⁵"United States-China Relations: The Process of Normalization of Relations." Hearing before the Special Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 94th Congress, 1st Session, 8 Dec. 1975.

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decisions that were made in our relationships with a number of countries in East Asia have been based on inaccurate information and misperceptions.

Mr. HAMILTON. Do you think we have corrected some of those now as a result of these exchanges?

Ms. KEATLEY. I think we have, yes.

Mr. HAMILTON. What have we corrected?

Ms. KEATLY. Let me say that the China specialists are an important force in bilateral relations. Most China specialists visiting China have found that the work they have been doing in the last 20 years has been fairly accurate. Visits to China have confirmed many of their assumptions and this confirmation is valuable.³⁶

Keatley outlined the key justification for academic exchange, both then and now: better information, from the source, vetted against conditions on the ground, leads to better policy and better decision-making.

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³⁶"*United States-China Relations: The Process of Normalization of Relations*." Hearing before the Special Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 94th Congress, 1st Session, 8 Dec. 1975. pp. 98.

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