

China

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China's new-found position at the summit of the Nature Index in 2023 represented a major – if not unexpected – turning point. A year after overtaking the United States for contributions to natural-science journals tracked by the database, there seems to be no indication that China's trajectory in scientific performance is plateauing. The gap between China and the United States in natural sciences has already grown, representing a Share of almost 5,000 in the 12 months from August 2022 to July 2023. China is also now ahead in the Nature Index overall, even when including newly added data from health-sciences journals (a subject in which the United States still has a substantial lead). The key question is where Chinese research will go next. The country's growing assortment of large-scale science facilities demonstrates its ambition and hints at a desire for worldwide impact and recognition. In the fast-evolving world of academic publishing, China now has the potential to shape the direction of travel, with the future of open science partially dependent on how the country believes new research is best disseminated. And through its increasing willingness to collaborate with developing nations, there are signs that China might mould a scientific ecosystem that moves the centre of gravity away from the West. There are concerns that some of these developments might lead to parallel systems, with international research collaboration – already dented – becoming fragmented. But this does not need to be the case. Challenging established norms has the potential to benefit research across the globe. And provided collaborative networks are kept open, China's contribution to high-quality research will help to push the frontiers of discovery in a multitude of areas.

Simon Baker
Chief editor, Nature Index

**Nature Index's signature metric Share, used in this supplement, is a fractional count for an article allocated to an institution, city or country/region, that accounts for the proportion of authors on the article whose institutional affiliation is with that institution or location. Adjusted Share accounts for the small annual variation in the total number of articles in Nature Index journals. We point out that the Nature Index provides just one indicator of research performance, and many other factors must be taken into account when assessing the quality of research or institutions.*



On the cover: Workers at the Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory.
Credit: Qiu Xinsheng/VCG via Getty

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