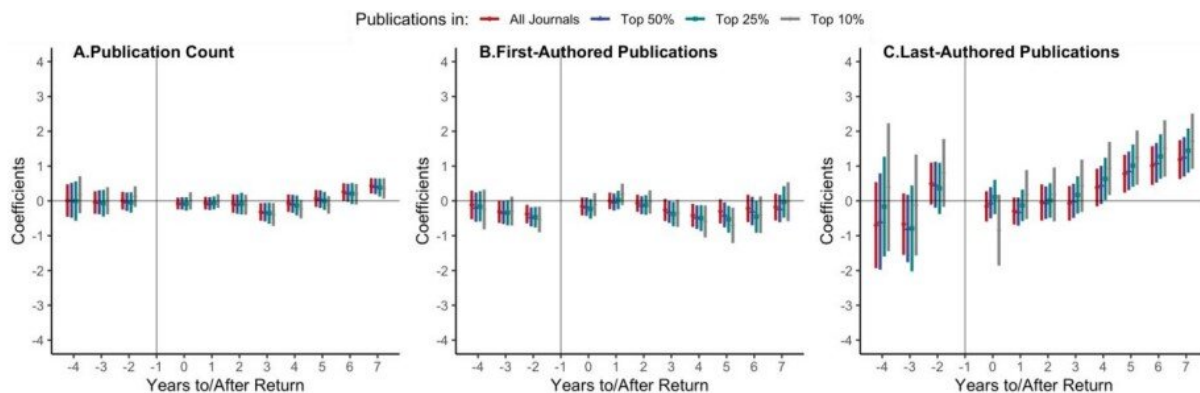


# China's Young Thousand Talents program found to be largely successful

January 6 2023, by Bob Yirka



Publication trajectories of YTT scientists and their overseas counterparts, full sample. The y-axis reports the DID coefficients estimated from Poisson regressions comparing the knowledge productivity of returnee scientists with that of their overseas counterparts. The publication data are lagged by two years to take into consideration the necessary time lag between knowledge production and publication in print. Panel A examines annual article count without differentiating authorship position in publication. Panels B and C examine first- and last-authored publications. The bars represent the 95% confidence intervals of the estimates. The sample includes a) 339 returnee scientists who attended colleges in China, received their PhDs overseas, accepted the YTT offers and spent at least five years of their professional careers in China, and b) 419 overseas counterparts who shared similar education backgrounds (i.e. having attended colleges in China, received PhDs overseas, graduated in the same doctoral institutions, in the fields, and around the same eras as the YTT returnees) but have stayed in overseas academia rather than returning to China. Credit: *Science* (2023). DOI: 10.1126/science.abq1218

A trio of researchers from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Tsinghua University and the University of Hong Kong has found that a program launched by the Chinese government in 2010 to recruit and nurture Chinese scientists has been mostly successful. In their paper, published in the journal *Science*, Dongbo Shi, Weichen Liu and Yanbo Wang describe studying the career paths of Chinese scientists who went through China's Young Thousand Talents (YTT) program and comparing their publishing achievements with other Chinese scientists who remained abroad.

In 2010, officials in China realized that [college education](#) was lagging in their country and prospective scientists were going abroad to study in places like Europe and the United States, particularly those working toward a Ph.D. Worried that the situation might result in [brain drain](#) if these students chose to remain overseas, education officials created the YTT program—its goal was to recruit talent, nurture those accepted into the program and to support them upon completion of the program (getting their Ph.D.) with positions in research establishments in China. The program also gave funds to programs for YTT graduates. In this new effort, the researchers wondered if the program has met its goals.

The work involved tracking the careers of 300 scholars from four cohorts who had completed the program and then measuring their success in their given fields by counting the number of papers they published. They then compared those numbers with Chinese students who had taken the traditional path, traveling overseas to attend college and remaining overseas.

They found that YTT scientists were generally rated as higher-caliber research scientists based on the number of papers for which they were credited, compared to those scientists who remained overseas. But they also found that in aggregate, the group fell somewhat short of designation as top-category scientists as measured by listings as the last

author on papers. They conclude that their overall success was mostly attributable to the large grants given by program officials to fund research efforts.

**More information:** Dongbo Shi et al, Has China's Young Thousand Talents program been successful in recruiting and nurturing top-caliber scientists?, *Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.1126/science.abq1218](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abq1218)

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