

Chinese American talk show actor Xi Huang (Joe Wong) once said in an interview: “China is like my mother, and the United States is like my wife. Now they don’t get along. To make it even worse: they both have nuclear weapons!” Chinese scholars are now in this same awkward position as this hopeless husband, and things are even far worse than this. The mother accuses him of leaving home while the wife blames him for “mommy issues”. This is beyond awkwardness, this is bizarre; it makes me angry and confused.

When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers. The scientists and researchers of Chinese origin are greatly affected by the unfriendly atmosphere created by the confrontation between the Chinese and American governments. I feel that racial prejudice and unjust political investigations have affected the normal life and work of Chinese scholars. In the past few years, I have often gotten questions from Chinese students and young researchers about whether they should still choose to come to the United States for their study or research. They were puzzled and anxious. They were questioning the foundation of our science community and the belief in the notion of “Science without boundary”. This year, for example, I lost two brilliant incoming graduate students and one postdoc, who were intimidated and discouraged by such unfriendly atmosphere that has spread among the communities and have decided to give up the opportunity to come to US. “My parents are greatly concerned with my safety and future career in USA.” one of them said.

Our international students and young researchers are the most vulnerable and innocent entities. Unfortunately, most of them are struggling with their careers and have little protections against unfair treatment. This makes the already difficult academic environment nearly unbearable. I know that things change. Human societies have walked all the way through the ups and downs of wars, epidemics, ignorance, peace, self-destructions, love, and progress. There is darkness and light. The Renewed U.S. Commitment to International Education is an important change in the federal immigration policy for our international students. And we hope more policies and conversations to come. These are indeed difficult times, and we from all corners of the world are facing a lot of common problems. As scientists, we must hold the line and stay reasonable, rational, and united.