U.S. Visa Vetting Policy Threatens Academic Exchanges

Clear Voice

By QI Liming & HU Dingkun

Travelers wait in long lines at the George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Texas on March 27, 2026. (PHOTO: VCG)

About 20 Chinese scholars with valid and legal visas, were unreasonably questioned by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport recently and denied entry. Given the ongoing malicious questioning and harassment of Chinese scholars at this airport, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China and the Chinese embassy and consulates in the U.S. have cautioned their citizens traveling to the U.S. to have a heightened sense of safety awareness and avoid entering the country through this airport.

Since 2025, the U.S. has significantly tightened its immigration policies. Immigration enforcement agencies such as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and CBP have vigorously cracked down on illegal immigrants domestically, leading to an increase in deportation, and strengthened border checks. Foreign nationals have become the primary targets of enforcement. It is not uncommon for international scholars to encounter discriminatory law enforcement practices in the U.S., including unreasonable questioning, denial of entry, visa revocation, and even detention, due to their nationality, political remarks, or social media content.

In February 2025, a Russian-American researcher from Harvard University was denied visa and detained upon entry into the U.S. on the grounds of "carrying prohibited items," resulting in the interruption of his related research. It was not until April this year that the U.S. court ruled that the visa revocation was illegal.

In March 2025, Philippe Baptiste, French minister responsible for Higher Education and Research, stated that a French space scientist, who was to attend an academic conference in the U.S., was denied entry because his mobile phone contained text messages criticizing the U.S. government's scientific policies. Meanwhile, in January this year, a Chinese scientist working at Meta had his visa revoked when returning to the U.S.

The U.S. is home to numerous academic organizations and is one of the most important host countries for international academic conferences. However, the discriminatory immigration enforcement policies in the country are causing widespread concern among the academic community. The situation has become so serious that it is affecting the participation of foreign scholars in these conferences, resulting in a significant reduction in the scale of some conferences and a substantial decline in the effectiveness of academic exchanges.

In June 2025, the International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis (ISTH) conference was held in Washington, D.C., U.S. The proportion of participants from outside the U.S. dropped from 75 percent in previous years to 55 percent. The number of participants from Canada alone decreased by 55 percent compared to two years ago.

Thomas Reiser, executive director of ISTH, said that some European countries and Canada have issued travel warnings for their citizens visiting the U.S., and some international scientific organizations have advised researchers not to go to the U.S. These are the main reasons for the decline. "We are considering whether the U.S. is still a suitable location for hosting such international conferences," said Reiser.

Scholars and academic organizations from multiple countries are now boycotting academic conferences held in the U.S., opposing and protesting against the discriminatory immigration enforcement policies of the country. In January this year, the Société Mathématique de France announced that it would not participate in the 2026 International Congress of Mathematicians (2026 ICM) being held in Philadelphia. The main reason was that visas and internal security in the U.S. could not be guaranteed.

In March, due to concerns over the U.S. visa policies and the possibility that foreign mathematicians might be harassed, or even violently treated by immigration enforcement agencies, over 2,000 mathematicians, including two Fields Medal winners, jointly signed a protest letter, boycotting the 2026 ICM planned to be held in the U.S., demanding that the International Mathematical Union move the conference out of the U.S.

In fact, since 2025, several academic organizations, such as the International Association for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (IACBT) and the International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA), have cancelled their plans to hold conferences in the U.S. or have shown "foresight" by moving academic conferences to other countries.

Skift Meetings, the authoritative media in the conference and event industry, has reported that as scientific groups cancel or change their meeting venues, the status of the U.S. as a host country for academic exchanges declines.

There is no doubt that discriminatory immigration enforcement in the U.S. is seriously undermining international academic exchanges, and the "emigration" of some academic conferences will also weaken the country's status as a major global scientific center. The U.S. government needs to strengthen the supervision of immigration law enforcement agencies and personnel. What they should be offering international scholars is not uncertainty and fear, but safety and respect.

Opinion

Sino-German Auto Cooperation Needs Further Advancement

By LU Zijian

"Traditionally, we have a very strong relationship between China and Germany when it comes to the automotive industry," Hildegard Müller, president of the German Association of the Automotive Industry, told *Science and Technology Daily* in an interview during the recent 2026 Beijing International Automotive Exhibition (Beijing Auto Show).

This was not Müller's first auto show in China. In the past two years, she came to China several times to attend multiple major events like the Beijing Auto Show, Auto Shanghai, and the World New Energy Vehicle Congress in Hainan province in south China.

At these events, she could see "how working together — how cooperation — leads to success, how strengths can be developed together, how we can improve together, how we can meet customer needs, and how an economy can also develop together."

She said that is why the exchange between German and Chinese original equipment manufacturers and suppliers at the Beijing Auto Show was so important. "Because it strengthens products and benefits consumers."

Just days before the Beijing Auto Show started, the German Chamber of Commerce in China published an excerpt from its upcoming *Innovation Report 2026*, detailing three results of the automotive industry section.

According to the report, over the past two years, the share of the surveyed German companies from the automotive industry in China with R&D activities in China that serve both the Chinese and global markets nearly tripled, rising from 12 percent to 33 percent.

Of these companies, 81 percent said localizing their R&D in China has accelerated their development speed compared with Germany; 79 percent also said localized R&D in China has lowered their R&D costs versus costs in Germany.

Müller said German auto makers like BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Volkswagen have certain components that are used globally, as well as other components that are tailored specifically for their customers. "You can truly understand customers and markets only if you're on the ground."

That is why investment and development are carried out here in China — not simply because production might be cheaper or for other factors, but because it allows the companies to respond very specifically to customer needs, Müller said.

For many years, the Chinese and German automotive industries have conducted various forms of cooperation, including corporate partnerships and joint ventures, which provide a solid foundation for developing these initiatives together.

"It is therefore very important to build on these strengths collectively. And to do so, we also need policies and a political framework that continue to make this possible," Müller said.

The German automotive industry is investing heavily in China, aiming to respond very specifically to the needs of Chinese consumers. In doing so, it is also driving economic growth and creating jobs in China, Müller said.

"We also invite the Chinese automotive industry to come to Germany or Europe, including establishing production bases, and to become part of the production network in the same way that the German automotive industry is currently doing in China," she said.

Time to Industrialize Chip-scale Atomic Clocks

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A leak just 10 times larger would double power consumption and cripple performance.

Initial attempts using standard welding furnaces failed to achieve the necessary vacuum. "Each unit is expensive, and we could only make one or two a week, most ending up as scrap," said Liu, pointing to a pile of failed units. After six months of inconsistent results, the team abandoned off-the-shelf tools and co-developed a custom vacuum welder with a motion mechanism. This meant conquering three major challenges: precision alignment under extreme heat, controlling solder splash, and optimizing heating curves.

The R&D team worked in harsh conditions — a vacant factory in Daxing, Beijing, with summer temperatures over 40°C and winter cold so severe it numbed their hands. A single weld required 20+ hours of continuous monitoring, with teams working in shifts to adjust parameters. In July 2020, after four years of effort, the reliable vacuum seal was finally achieved, turning an experimental possibility into an engineering reality ready for production.

Building a production line

Despite a working product, manual production was unsustainable. Ten technicians using tweezers under microscopes could produce only 200-300 units per year, far short of the thousands needed for national projects. "A major advantage of CSACs is mass production," said Liang Xiaopeng, chairman of Huaxin. "We had to build a line."

With no domestic reference to follow, the team designed everything from scratch. The smallest physical part is just 0.2 mm (two hair-widths), requiring micron-level precision systems. Many automation equipment vendors were unable to help due to the difficulty of the task. Moreover, to automate the manual process, materials and workflows had to be completely redesigned.

To overcome these challenges, Huaxin collaborated with the Institute of Physics at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, leveraging their semiconductor equipment and micronano processing capabilities. Through iterative testing, they locked in optimal process parameters.

By continuously refining equipment and processes, the team pushed the production yield above 98 percent. In the summer of 2023, China's first CSAC production line, with an annual capacity of 30,000 units, went into operation in Tianjin's Binhai High-Tech Zone.

"This component has driven an entire industry," said Liang. The availability of domestic CSACs has enabled more precise node-based seismic exploration and is expanding into commercial satellites and smart grids.

The next goal is to expand capacity to 100,000 or even one million units annually, while collaborating with top research institutes to develop even more advanced products. The quiet "tick" of this tiny clock marks not just the passage of time, but the heartbeat of Chinese innovation — a decisive shift from "Made in China" to "Created in China."

Sci-tech Labs Promote Global Development Initiative

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The foundation also added a prefabricated modular classroom to serve as a sci-tech lab for each of the two programs in Malaysia and Togo. With a shorter construction cycle and reduced resource waste, this type of prefabricated modular classroom employs high-efficiency and eco-friendly materials to lower both building energy consumption and the carbon footprint of transportation. Renewable resource facilities like photovoltaic panels further decrease carbon emissions and reliance on traditional energy.

"Our approach to this project is not only to ensure its successful completion on the ground, but also to make it a sustainable process that truly empowers local people with the skills to help themselves," Li said.

The foundation invited the headmaster of Phiawath Secondary School to visit Shenzhen and the school signed a friendly cooperation agreement with Shenzhen Hongling Middle School.

The donors in this project also share the philosophy that public welfare assistance is not merely a one-off donation of items. When teachers and students at SJKC Nan Kai in Kuala Lumpur, encountered problems while using the robots, the donor offered technical support.

It is worth noting that all donations came from enterprises, and most of them are in Shenzhen. The city has a large cluster of tech enterprises and abundant tech products, which can provide strong support for improving people's livelihoods. "I've summarized this model of donation as 'sourced from the public and used for the benefit of the public,'" Li said.

Although there are challenges while implementing the sci-tech lab project, Li is proud to be able to mobilize private-sector resources to promote people-to-people bonds within the framework of GDI through small but meaningful projects that benefit people.

The projects in Laos and Papua New Guinea have been included in the Achievements Pool of the Global Development Project Pool maintained by China International Development Cooperation Agency, while the projects in Malaysia and Togo have been included in the Incubation Pool.

Li said the next step is to launch initiatives in Thailand and the United Arab Emirates, continuing to promote the development of science and technology education within the GDI framework.

Hi-Tech

AOE: An Open Space Orbital Data Ecosystem

By LI Linxu

With the accelerated deployment of Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite constellations and the rise in space debris, space traffic management has become a pressing reality.

"Without independent orbital data, it's like driving with someone else's map — you could face a 'network blackout' at any moment," said Kang Ruiqing, chairman of CreatUnion, highlighting the industry's predicament.

Drawing on its 22 years of expertise, CreatUnion is engaged in research and development of the AOE (ADS Orbital Elements) ecosystem. AOE leverages an observation network comprising 30 ground stations and 108 space-based satellites. By integrating international orbital data, it effectively fills the gap in China's commercial space object data.

"AOE is an all-process independent orbital dataset covering core functions such as orbital visualization and monitoring," Kang said.

By building a full-link technical framework, AOE ensures total orbital coverage during data acquisition. Its optimized algorithms improve accuracy in tracking space debris. Furthermore, it provides exclusive photometric data.

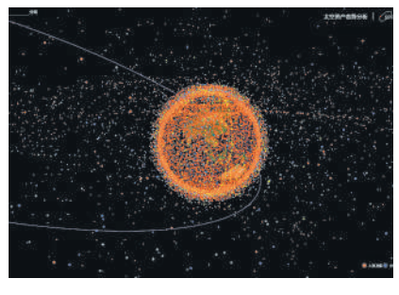
To consolidate its market position, CreatUnion has developed a dedicated AOE chip and applied for more than 130 patents to protect its core IP.

In the commercial sector, AOE offers multiple download options. Users can access data simply by logging onto the SpaceMapper. The system has secured several data service contracts for two consecutive years.

Leveraging AOE, the company has recently launched the Global University Satellite Alliance Constellation initiative. The initiative aims to launch 300 satellites over the next six years, making them accessible to 100 universities. Several universities have already signed agreements to co-build joint laboratories.

"We will advance three key initiatives in the future," Kang stated. "We will optimize the precision and update efficiency of AOE, drive the integration of AOE with cutting-edge technologies such as AI and laser communication, and expand industry-academia-research collaboration to build an ecosystem of talent, technology, and data."

"Our goal is to make space safer and flight more reliable," Kang said. With AOE at its core, the company will build a comprehensive orbit data ecosystem, cultivate the commercial space field, and offer the world an alternative choice for space data.



A simulation of space environment based on the orbital data of CreatUnion. (COURTESY PHOTO)