

NSFC's 2012 Annual Meeting for Foreign Affairs Held in Beijing

NSFC's 2012 annual meeting for foreign affairs was successfully held in Beijing on Feb. 24th, 2012. The theme of the meeting was to further implement the NSFC's open and cooperative strategy, identify the emphasis of NSFC's international cooperation work in 2012, and discuss NSFC's foreign affair administration and the modification of "Guideline of the Fund for the International (Regional) Conference in China". Prof. Shen Wenqing, Vice President of NSFC, representatives from all bureaus and scientific departments, staff members from the Bureau of International Cooperation, a total of 45, attended the meeting.

In the opening address, Prof. Shen Wenqing put forward his clear emphasis on five important activities of international cooperation in 2012. Firstly, continue to conduct country policy research for international cooperation. The country policy research should be more prospective and instructive based on our country's foreign policy, science funding's development plan and the demand from the science community through familiarity with other countries' international strategy and priority. Secondly, scientifically select the funding areas for international joint research programs which should be selected and determined according to the priority fields and country policy research concerned. Thirdly, optimize the network of bilateral cooperative agreements. Fourthly, modify the guidelines of two funds for international (regional) conference and exchange. Lastly, Bureau of International Cooperation should continue to cooperate with all scientific departments in the management of the international joint research programs.

Prof. Chang Qing, Director-General of the Bureau of International Cooperation, reported on the international activities and funding in 2011 and the work emphasis for 2012. In 2011, the open and cooperative strategy of NSFC was realized a good start. It is also successfully completed in terms of the promotion of strategic cooperation, deepening of substantive cooperation, strengthening of interdepartmental cooperation, reinforcing country policy research, intensifying the management of international exchange activities and improving the staff's ability for international collaboration.

In the year 2011, 1169 international (regional) joint research and exchange projects were funded, with a total funding of 478 million RMB. The substantive international (regional) cooperation continued to be strengthened, making up 82% of the total annual funding, among which funding for international (regional) major joint research programs reached 255 million RMB and funding for international (regional) joint research programs under the framework agreement reached 141 million RMB. The development of jointly funded programs under framework agreements signified the increase of the reputation of China's basic research in the international science community and the science funding in China. In 2011, NSFC conducted joint funding programs with more than twenty foreign and overseas science funding agencies, including bilateral and multilateral cooperation. NSFC's cooperation covered Asia, Europe and America and the science funding agencies of nearly all developed countries, in addition to a number of international scientific research institutions. All eight science departments of NSFC fully participated in the designing of schemes, selection of research fields, evaluation and management of joint funding programs. The joint funding mechanism was further improved and perfected, and interdepartmental cooperation was increasingly matured.

Prof. Chang Qing pointed out in his report that in 2012, the Bureau of International Cooperation will accord with the 12th Five Year Plan of NSFC and the discipline development strategy, continue cooperation with scientific departments, promote strategic cooperation, deepen substantive cooperation, insistently carry out country policy research, strictly intensify the management of international visits, reinforce the ability building of staff for international cooperation and promote the development of Sino-German Center for Research Promotion for

making full efforts to the realization of the open and cooperative strategy.

Representatives from all scientific departments of NSFC delivered their reports on the international cooperation activities and funding in 2011, the challenges they were faced with and the problems to be solved. The reports were informative in content, covering exchange on management and funding, the characteristic analysis of program types, discipline fields and cooperation types, etc. At the same time, the reports put forward many positive advices on project management, priority field selection, international cooperation mechanism, the ability building of the management members and the form and content of the annual meeting for foreign affairs, etc. In the reports and discussion, all representatives stated that it was very timely to further standardize the funding for the international (regional) conferences in China and very necessary to further clearly define the program orientation, funding intensity and evaluation forms.

The Bureau of International Cooperation reported on the background and progress of the modification of “Guideline of the Fund for International (Regional) Conference in China” and the problems to be discussed, focused on the key points such as the orientation of the fund, categories, qualification for the applicants, approval process, funding arrangement and project management, etc. At the same time, several existing problems and considerations were raised for discussion at the meeting.

All department representatives were involved in a heated discussion, centering on modification of the guideline for the fund and offering reasonable opinions and good advices from different angles on the orientation and management of this fund.

Lastly, Director-General Chang Qing stated in his concluding remarks that this meeting promoted the negotiation and communication on international cooperation and foreign affairs among different bureaus and departments. For the modification on the fund, though every department differs from each other in the actual situation of implementation, the discussion and communication broadened our thoughts and laid the foundation for the fund management that both comply with regulations and are satisfactory to all. In the coming year, Bureau of International Cooperation wishes to get continuous support and collaboration from all departments and bureaus for better implementing the international cooperation of NSFC.

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NSFC Vice President Wang Jie Meets with IIASA Guests



On April 9th, 2012, Prof. Wang Jie, Vice President of NSFC met with Dr. Arkady Kryazhimskiy, Program leader of “Advanced System Analysis”, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). Dr. Arkady Kryazhimskiy is a full member (academician) of Russian Academy of Sciences as well as a Co-PI of “Study on Optimization of Resource Productivity for Sustainable Economic Growth”, an NSFC-IIASA joint research project. Chinese Co-PI is Prof. Zhu Bing from Tsinghua University. NSFC and IIASA delegation had extensive and in-depth discussions on how to better carry out future cooperation. IIASA visitors also included Dr. Alexandre Tarasiev and Dr. Cao Guiying.

ISF President Visited NSFC



Prof. Shen Wenqing Vice President of NSFC, met with the delegation led by Prof. Benny Geiger, President of ISF.

A delegation of 2 members, led by Prof. Benny Geiger, President of Israel Science Foundation (ISF) visited National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) during February 27 - 28, 2012. The main purpose of ISF delegation for this visit is to deepen cooperation and discuss the establishment of collaborative research program jointly funded by the two parties based on the good cooperation in the past. NSFC Vice Presidents Prof. Sun Jiaguang, Prof. Shen Yan and Prof. Shen Wenqing met with the delegation, respectively. NSFC Departments of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Chemical Sciences, Life Sciences and Health Sciences had extensive and in-depth discussion in terms of collaborative priority field. Bureau of International Cooperation and ISF delegation held talks on the implementation details of collaborative research program. The used satisfaction with the outcome of the talks. NSFC-ISF collaborative program is planned to be initiated this year.



Prof. Shen Yan Vice President of NSFC, met with the delegation of ISF.

New Record of Applications to NSFC

From March 1 to 20, NSFC went through its intense concentrated application submission period. As of 16:00 pm of March 20th, the number of applications to NSFC in 2012 has exceeded 170,000, reaching a historical new high.

In 2011, the Ministry of Finance allocated 14 billion RMB to the National Natural Science Fund, which indicating that NSFC had entered into a new era. In that year, the number of applications to NSFC kept growing and more than 150,000 applications were received, with an increase of 28.24% than previous year. NSFC funded more than 30,000 projects in 2011, but more than 100,000 applications ended in vain.

The sharp increase of applications has brought great pressure to the evaluation. To maintain the quality of evaluation and an effective utility of review resources, NSFC continues to encourage research institutions to shift their focus from the quantity to the quality of applications.

"We always hope the number of applications does not increase too fast, because a sharp increase will bring much pressure to evaluation and management. Applications for National Natural Science Fund increase year by year. It does not only intensify the lack in personnel resource, but also leads to a decrease of management and evaluation quality," NSFC President Chen Yiyu said to the reporter of the China Science Daily.

At the Working Meeting for the Management of National Natural Science Fund last year, NSFC staff repeatedly required research institutions to put the quality of applications at the first place.

More funded projects are going to universities and research institutes as the National Natural Science Fund keeps growing in recent years. The enthusiasm of universities and research institutes for the National Natural Science Fund also rises. In fact, the National Natural Science Fund has become a main funding source for many universities and institutes. Research institutions have made various policies to encourage their researchers to apply for the fund. On the one hand, it has contributed to the rapid improvement of the quality of basic research in many research institutions; on the other hand, it has brought much pressure to researchers and teachers.

"Our applications increase about 10% this year. It is a mild increase relatively." Mr. Zhang Jiefeng of the Department of Science and Technology of Shenzhen University said to the reporter of the China Science Daily," Because the enhancement of the management of on-going projects, we are encouraging teachers concerned to focus on their on-going projects."

With a great number of funded projects, Chongqing Medical University carried out its policy to "place quality over quantity", and to put limitations on the application number from its subordinate colleges. Similarly many universities and institutes with large number of applications have slowed down their application growth.

However, now that the National Natural Science Fund has experienced a rapid increase, research institutions with large number of applications and emerging applicants also have sufficient reasons to demand an increase of applications.

NSFC estimates that the number of applications for National Natural Science Fund will continue to increase in the following years.

NSFC has made well-recognized achievements in its 25 years history, but facing the growing number of applications, NSFC President Chen Yiyu frankly admitted that the unprecedented increase of the fund has brought much pressure to the management of the funding and NSFC is challenged by a sharp increase of evaluation and management workload caused by application growth.

Therefore, NSFC is actively making use of new technologies, promote digital application steadily, and gradually realize paperless application and evaluation. Meanwhile, NSFC accelerates the development of the digital assistance system for the selection of peer reviewers, hoping that with the help of computer system, program directors can save much time and effort, so as to improve work efficiency and guarantee evaluation

quality.

NSFC is also considering to slow down the growth of applications by limiting the number of projects a researcher can apply for and conduct. For example, NSFC is assessing whether to decrease the maximum number from 3 projects to 2 projects under the condition that the funding for individual project has been increased.

"Emphasizing on quality makes much more sense than on quantity", said Prof. Chen Yiyu, "so far, it seems that our repeated communication with research institutions on this issue has achieved good results. Institutions with large number of applications have shown a good control of application quality in particular. The number of applications for the newly-established fund, which is named with the Fund for Excellent Young Scientist, is around 3,000. The number is much smaller than we expected."

Facing the challenge of a growing number of applications, in order to guarantee and improve the quality of evaluation, NSFC will make a firm resolve to take new measures.

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The 16th Meeting of China-Korea Joint Committee for Basic Scientific Research Held in Dalian



The 16th Meeting of China-Korea Joint Committee for Basic Scientific Research was successfully held in Dalian, Liaoning Province, China on May 29th, 2012, with 26 participants in total from both countries. The Korean delegation is composed of Prof. Gulwoo Lee, head of the delegation and Secretary General of NRF, Prof. Young In PARK from Korea University and Co-Chairman of the Joint Committee from Korea side, other Korean committee members as well as representatives from NRF including Dr. Inho KIM, Director of the Center for

International Affairs (CIA). The members of the Chinese delegation headed by Prof. Shen Yan, Vice President of NSFC, includes Prof. Lin Guoqiang, Director General of NSFC's Department of Chemical Sciences and Co-Chairman of the Joint Committee from Chinese side, other Chinese committee members, as well as Prof. Chang Qing, Director- General of Bureau of International Cooperation and other NSFC staff.

Through serious evaluation, the Joint Committee have selected 32 bilateral cooperative projects to fund for FY 2012, including 22 joint research projects and 10 joint seminars. The committee members also made in-depth discussions on the issues such as the topics for the Northeastern Asian Symposium and how to strengthen future cooperation.

After the meeting, Prof. Ou Jinping, President of Dalian University of Technology met with the committee members. The delegates also visited the State Key Laboratory of Coastal and Offshore Engineering and the State Key Laboratory of Fine Chemicals.

NSFC Vice President Meets with EU Guests

On March 30th, 2012, Prof. Sun Jianguang, Vice President of National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) met with an EU delegation headed by Dr. Rudolf Strohmeier, Deputy Director General for Research and Innovation in the European Commission. Both sides communicated on the latest development and cooperation, the FP7 and “Horizon 2020” program, and discussed the NSFC-EU joint research program in biomaterial starting in July and the future direction for cooperation.



The EU delegation also includes Dr. Philippe Vialatte, Head of Science, Technology & Environment Section of the Delegation of EU; Mr. Frank Greco, Head of Information Society & Media Section of the Delegation of the European Union to China; Ms. Jessica Mitchell, Science and Technology Attaché of the Delegation of the European Union to China and Mrs. Zhong Wen, Project Officer of the Delegation of the European Union to China, etc. NSFC attendees also include Mr. Han Yu, Director-General of the Bureau of Policy; Prof. Qin Yuwen, Executive Deputy Director-General of the Department of Information Sciences; Mr. Lu Rongkai, Deputy Director-General of the Bureau of International Cooperation; and Ms. Li Wencong and Mr. Xu Jin from Bureau of International Cooperation.

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·Information Update·

NSFC and ISF Ready to Launch New Program

The MOU signed between the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) and the Israel Science Foundation (ISF) on Oct. 22, 2007 has led to Chinese and Israeli scientists' fruitful cooperation and exchange activities jointly funded by both funding agencies.

The consensus reached recently by NSFC and ISF at the two meetings held respectively in February and May, 2012 will take the collaboration into a new stage. Both parties will jointly launch a new cooperation program to encourage their scientists to actively carry out substantial cooperation in research activities. They will provide funding equivalent to \$ 100,000 per year to each granted Chinese and Israeli PI respectively with 3-year duration.

The applicants from both sides should meet respectively the eligibility set by NSFC and ISF. They are also required to submit an identical English proposal. NSFC and ISF will review the proposals respectively and negotiate for a joint decision on the projects to be funded.

The time period for submission of proposals for FY2012 will be from September 1st to November 1st. The funding priority areas are physics, chemistry and agriculture.

NSFC Vice President Attends the 14th China-US JCM on S&T Cooperation

The 14th China-US Joint Commission Meeting on Science and Technology Cooperation was held in Beijing on May 1, 2012. President Hu Jintao sent congratulation letter to the opening of the JCM and State Councilor Liu Yandong attended the meeting. The Chinese Science and Technology Minister Wan Gang and the Director of White House Office of Science and Technology Policy of the United States (OSTP), Jonh Holdren, co-chaired the meeting. NSFC Vice President Professor Shen Wenqing attended the JCM and delivered a speech on NSFC's recent development of its collaboration of science and technology with US partners.



The two sides reviewed the new developments since the 13th JCM in areas of agriculture, energy, nuclear safety, basic research and education, measurement science and technology, biodiversity and computational toxicology, and exchanged ideas on topics of data sharing, merit review, S&T innovation capacity building.

Over 100 participants from China and US attended the meeting. Delegates from China include representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Agriculture, State Forestry Administration, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China Earthquake Administration, China Meteorological Administration, State Bureau of Surveying and Mapping, China National Nuclear Safety Administration, National Institute of Metrology of China, China Center for Disease Control and Prevention, etc. Delegates from the United States include representatives from the OSTP, the State Department, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the National Science Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the Department of Health and Human Services.

NSFC Delegation in Science Integrity Visits Singapore and Thailand

At the invitation of the National Research Foundation of Singapore (NRF) and the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT), an NSFC 5-person delegation in science integrity, led by its Vice President Prof. He Minghong, visited Singapore and Thailand during June 10-19, 2012.

During the visits, Prof. He met respectively with Dr. Francis Yeoh, CEO of NRF, Prof. Low TeckSeng, Managing Director of Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR), Ms. Kanchana Pankhoingam, Deputy Secretary General of NRCT, and Prof. Sawasd Tantaratana, Director General of Thailand Research Fund (TRF). He had fruitful discussions with them on how to further strengthen scientific integrity, improve supervision, and better manage and supervise the use of research fund. All the parties agreed to further intensify exchanges and cooperation in related fields.

The delegation also visited the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technology University (NTU), Chulalongkorn University and King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. The delegates received warm hospitality from the universities and had extensive and in-depth exchanges and discussions with the hosts.

The delegation members also include Mr. Gao Tiyu, Director General, Bureau of Discipline Inspection, Auditing and Supervision, Ms. Xu Yudi, Deputy Director General, Bureau of Finance and other NSFC staff.



NSFC delegation in science integrity led by Vice President Prof. He Minghong visited the NRCT.



NSFC delegation in science integrity led by Vice President Prof. He Minghong visited the NRF.

NSFC Vice President Sun Jiaguang Visits EU Headquarters and Germany



NSFC delegation headed by Vice President Prof. Sun Jiaguang met with DFG Vice President Ferdi Schüth.

At the invitation of the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation of the Commission of EU (DG-RTD) and the German Science Foundation, an NSFC delegation headed by its Vice President Prof. Sun Jiaguang visited EU headquarters and Germany from June 12 to 21, 2012.

During the visit to EU headquarters in

Brussels, the delegation met with Ms. Anneli Pauli, Deputy Director-General of DG-RTD, Mr. Zoran Stančić, Deputy Director-General of the Directorate-General of Information Society and Media, Prof. Donald B. Dingwell, Secretary General of European Research Council and officials from Directorate-General of Education and Culture. The delegation attended ten meetings in total and extensively exchanged views on a broad range of issues with EU staff members. Both sides reached consensus on further strengthening the cooperation and personnel exchanges in basic research, establishing long-term and stable cooperation mechanism, and initiating joint research programs. Minister-Counselor Zhang Zhiqin and Second Secretary Chen Jingquan from the Service of Science and Technology of the Chinese Mission to EU accompanied the delegation during the whole visit.

In Germany, the delegation met with DFG Vice President Ferdi Schüth. The two sides exchanged the latest development of NSFC and DFG and reviewed the bilateral cooperation. The delegation introduced NSFC's cooperation with Germany and the "Major Research Plan" program to DFG staff members and answered their questions. Prof. Zhan Qimin from the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, Prof. Sun Fanglin from Tongji University and Prof. Zhong Minlin from Tsinghua University, who were invited to visit DFG along with the delegation, exchanged views with DFG program directors on the development and prospect of Sino-German cooperation in their respect research fields. The Delegation also visited the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics in Dresden and the University of Bonn.

The delegation members also include Prof. Chang Qing, Director-General of the Bureau of International Cooperation, Prof. Meng Xianping, Director-General of the Bureau of Planning, Prof. Han Yu, Director-General of the Bureau of Policy and other NSFC staff.

NSFC President Chen Yiyu Visits Israel and Egypt

At the invitation of Israel Science Foundation (ISF) and Egypt Ministry of Scientific Research, a six-member NSFC delegation headed by President Chen Yiyu visited Israel and Egypt from July 25th to August 3rd, 2012.

During the visit to Israel, President Chen met with ISF President Benny Geiger. Both sides exchanged views on basic research in the two countries and recent development of respective foundation. Directors of ISF departments briefed the delegation on ISF's funding and Israel's strength in scientific research. Prof. Ruth Armon, President of Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Prof. HanochGutfreund, Chair of ISF Executive Committee, Mr. Moshe Vigdor, Director General of the Council for Higher Education and the Planning and Budgeting Committee, attended the meeting. The delegation also visited Hebrew University, Haifa University and Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research Institute.

During the visit to Egypt, President Chen met with Prof. MagedSherbiny, Assistant Minister of Egypt Ministry of Scientific Research and President of Academy of Scientific Research Technology (ASRT). Both sides reviewed the cooperation between NSFC and ASRT

and discussed the possibilities of establishing cooperation mechanism between NSFC and Egypt Science and Development Fund (STDF). The two sides agreed to further deepen the understanding and strengthen exchanges between the scientific communities of the two countries and promote substantial cooperation in relevant areas. President Chen also met with Prof. Mohamed Abdel Motaleb, Vice Minister of Egypt Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation so as to learn about the status of water resources management in the country, especially the impact of the Aswan Dam on downstream ecological environment and agriculture. The Egyptian host expressed the hope to beef up the cooperation in the areas like farmland and water conservancy management and desalination of sea water. President Chen also visited the Center for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE) and met with Dr. Nadia NakramEbeid, Executive Director of the Center. The two sides held extensive



NSFC delegation headed by President Chen Yiyu visited the Israel Science Foundation (ISF).



NSFC delegation headed by President Chen Yiyu met with Prof. Maged Sherbiny, Assistant Minister of Egypt Ministry of Scientific Research and President of Academy of Scientific Research Technology (ASRT).

discussions on Africa water resources management. Dr. Ebeid wished China could participate in the research in this area. Apart from the meetings, NSFC delegation also took this opportunity to make a trip to Aswan High Dam and had a meeting with the Dam Authority and learned details about the dam design, construction and the functioning of its water conservancy facilities.

The delegation members also include Prof. Changqing, Director-General, Bureau of International Cooperation, Prof. Han Zhiyong, Prof. Yu Zhenliang, Prof. LengShuying and Mr. Zhao Chuang.

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NSFC and CAS Sign Cooperative Agreement



NSFC and CAS signed a cooperative framework agreement on strategic research of disciplinary development and held the launching ceremony of the book series China's Discipline Development Strategy in the Next Ten Years at Chinese Academy of Sciences on April 5th. NSFC President Chen Yiyu, Member of CAS, and CAS President Bai Chunli,

Member of CAS & Executive Chairman of CAS Science Department Presidium, attended the ceremony and delivered speeches. NSFC Vice President Sun Jianguang, Member of CAE, and CAS Vice President Li Jinghai, Member of CAS, signed the agreement on behalf of NSFC and CAS, respectively. Zhu Daoben, Director of Science Department Counseling Working Committee & Member of CAS, chaired the ceremony. NSFC Vice President Shen Wenqing, Member of CAS, and Prof. Gao Ruiping, Deputy Secretary-General of NSFC attended the ceremony.

At the ceremony, Lin Peng, Managing Director of Science Press, delivered a speech introducing the China's Discipline Development Strategy in the Next Ten Years series. Officials and some Members of CAS from CAS science departments and NSFC also attended the meeting.

NSFC and CAE Sign Cooperative Agreement

The signing ceremony of the cooperative framework agreement on “Strategic Research of China’s Engineering Scientific and Technological Development” co-conducted by NSFC and CAE (Chinese Academy of Engineering) was held in NSFC. NSFC President Chen Yiyu and CAE President Zhou Ji attended and addressed the ceremony.

President Chen expressed that NSFC gives its great attention on CAE’s views and advice on NSFC’s operation. The strategic research on China’s engineering science and technology, which will be jointly implemented, not only aims to further perfect the cooperative mechanism, promote collaborative innovation and contribute to the establishment of the national think tank, but also sustain the decision-making process by the strategic research so as to better serve the scientific development for endlessly raising NSFC’s management capability and building the nation’s innovative capacity.

President Zhou pointed out that CAE has consistently been highly attentive on cooperation with NSFC. With their respective complementary features and advantages, CAE and NSFC will jointly conduct strategic, visionary and comprehensive research centering on the major engineering scientific and technological issues in the national economic and social developments with the wisdom from China’s scientific and technological community for promoting the innovative developments of engineering science and technology, which implies significance for the implementation of the Scientific Outlook on Development and promoting China’s engineering science and technology for the economic and social development of the country.

NSFC and CAE will use this opportunity through excellent partnership and collaborative innovation to further perfect the cooperative mechanism, study and analyze the features of engineering scientific and technological development centering on some major research directions in the coming ten to fifteen years, design development strategies for disciplines and fields in engineering science, propose leading major projects and key major common technologies that call for development, determine the phased development goals, major fields, main problems and key technology’s line map of all the important directions and list the major state-supported R&D projects, as well as to put forward new thoughts on engineering science and technology for stimulating the country’s economic and social development.

The signing ceremony was hosted by NSFC Vice President Wang Jie. NSFC Vice President Sun Jiaguang and CAE’s Executive Vice President Pan Yunhe signed the agreement on behalf of respective organizations.

Address at the Global Summit on Merit Review

Shen Wenqing,

Mr. Chairman, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning,

It is a great honor for me to be invited to attend this Global Summit on Merit Review. As the topic for this summit, merit review or peer review constitutes the core mechanism for science funding and functions as the life line of the quality of research projects funded.

We are delighted to see that, after a series of regional meetings, 6 principles for scientific merit review are proposed and will be established by a common declaration at this summit upon the consensus reached among representatives of science and engineering funding agencies from around 50 countries or regions.

On behalf of the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC), I would like to take this opportunity to express our agreement with the 6 proposed principles. It is our understanding that either independent funding or joint funding in research fields of common interest among different science funding agencies entails a set of criteria for scientific merit review.

As one of the main governmental channels for funding basic research and fostering research talents, NSFC benefits from China's rapid economic and social development and witnesses dramatic increases in its annual budget and ever-expanding funding scope.

In 2011, NSFC was granted a fiscal appropriation of 14 billion RMB, or approximately 2.2 billion U.S. dollars, and received more than 150,000 research proposals, of which over 30,000 were finally approved for funding.

Upon its establishment in 1986, NSFC established a set of review guidelines featuring dependence on experts, promotion of democracy, selection of the best, and abidance by fairness and rationality, and based on these review guidelines, relevant regulations on project management were developed. The Regulations on Management of National Natural Science Fund issued by the State Council came into force on April 1st, 2007, reconfirming peer review as the core operating procedure of science funding through national legislation, and proposing concrete rules on mail review, panel review, review criteria, confidential standards, conflicts of interest, etc.

So what I am clarifying is that such principles as expert assessment, impartiality, appropriateness, and confidentiality proposed at this summit are all embodied in NSFC's review of research proposals.

Merit review can be regarded as the main embodiment of the organized skepticism, part of the ethos of science propounded by Robert King Merton. However, as a creative intellectual activity, scientific research requires far different organization ways from that for the production of tangible products.

Rigorous and sound review procedures are of great importance, but the shared beliefs among scientists in what comprises "good science" and "good scientists" play a more significant role during the review process. So it's our understanding that, during the review process, the merit review criteria, as the core part of merit review, play a key role in determining whether the selection of projects and financial investments are in line with the mission of a funding agency.

For instance, it's required by NSFC that peer reviewers should take 4 criteria into account in rating the research proposals, i.e., scientific merit, creativity, social impacts, and methodological feasibility. Therefore, we'd like to suggest hereby that another principle, i.e., clarity of review criteria, be added as the 7th principle that clarifies which aspects should be taken into consideration by funding agencies in establishing the merit review

* 14 May 2012, Washington D.C., USA

** Vice President of the National Natural Science Foundation of China

criteria.

For example, how to balance the scientific merits and social relevance of a research proposal? How to coordinate the publications of key research findings and the nurturing of young talents? How to encourage the scientists to relate their personal research interest to the national economic and social goals during applying for research grants or rating research proposals as a peer reviewer? Just name a few.

Limited as the meeting time is, the joint endorsement of the Statement of Principles for Scientific Merit Review among main science funding agencies around the world itself will mark a noteworthy achievement of this summit. Besides, it is also a precious chance for us to exchange views on other key topics.

In fact, it is necessary for science funding agencies to meet regularly and hold dialogues on funding strategies and policies as well as international cooperation, so as to broaden mutual horizon and strengthen bilateral or multilateral collaboration.

Considering the continuity of the topics, I'd like to suggest that "Best practices in peer review by each science funding agency" be the topic of next Global Research Council Meeting.

Based on the macro principles for merit review achieved at this summit, and through communication and exchange of each funding agency's practice in merit review, we expect a deeper understanding of the complicated and subtle interrelationship between science and society, as well as the chances and challenges confronting merit review within the context of globalization, so as to tackle the global challenges more efficiently by means of international cooperation.

Thank you!

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NSFC Vice President Shen Yan Visits Australia



An NSFC delegation led by its Vice President Prof. Shen Yan visited Australia at the invitation of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) during June 3-8, 2012.

NHMRC CEO Prof. Anderson Warwick met with the delegation and introduced NHMRC's general profile. He also expressed NHMRC's willingness to establish a formal collaborative relationship with NSFC. The two sides discussed about possible collaborative mechanism, priority areas and the timeline for the work in the future.

During its stay in Australia, the delegation also visited the Australia Research Council (ARC), the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the University of Queensland.

Members of the delegation also include Prof. Feng Feng, Deputy Director General of the Department of Health Sciences, Prof. Zou Liyao, Deputy Director General of the Bureau of International Cooperation and other NSFC staff.