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Professor Gang Chen Speaks Out: Spy, Anger, and Disillusion

“我们在残害我们自己”：华裔教授陈刚案背后的愤怒与幻灭

'In the End, You're Treated Like a Spy,' Says M.I.T. Scientist

ELLEN BARRY
2022年1月25日



TONY LUONG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

On January 25, 2022, New York Times published multiple versions of a report in simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, and English based on a 3.5-hour interview with MIT Professor

Gang Chen. The English title reads, "[In the End, You're Treated Like a Spy,' Says M.I.T. Scientist.](#)" The Chinese title can be translated as "['We Are Killing Ourselves': The Anger and Disillusion Behind the Case of Chinese American Professor Gang Chen.](#)"

According to Dr. Chen, "You work hard, you have good output, you build a reputation," "The government gets what they want, right? But in the end, you're treated like a spy. That just breaks your heart. It breaks your confidence." He is not sure he will ever feel safe applying for U.S. government funds for research again. Dr. Chen described his experience over the last year as traumatic and deeply disillusioning. He refused to accept a plea agreement by the government, fearing that there would be lingering questions about his innocence, or that he would be asked to speak to prosecutors that would incriminate his colleagues. "I would never incriminate anybody," he said. "And seeing how terribly [prosecutors] can stretch the facts, I have zero confidence in them. Absolute zero."

Dr. Chen also said. "I think the country must wake up. We are killing ourselves. We are committing a real suicidal act, right?" He was inundated with congratulations from colleagues, but he was somber. "It's hard to tell [my colleagues] directly that there is nothing to congratulate [me for]," he said. "It's just a sad history, sad for the country."

Dr. Chen also said that speaking out about the China Initiative felt like an obligation. In an editorial in the Boston Globe, Dr. Chen called for Congress and the Justice Department to review his case and hold accountable those involved in the prosecution. For now, Dr. Chen has no interest in research grants from the U.S. government. "I am angry, I am afraid," he said. "My love is science. I did not want politics, right? I saw that, and I got away from it. I do my devotion to science. I help people, I support. But I learned that you can't get away. Politics impacts everybody. So if there are things that are not right, we all need to speak out."

A side-by-side dual-language version of the report is available at: <https://nyti.ms/3FYFaJi>. Read more about the case of Professor Chen at: https://bit.ly/APAJ_GangChen

Upcoming Webinar: Reflecting on Professor Gang Chen's Case and Looking Ahead to the Future of the China Initiative



Time: January 30th (Sunday) 11am-12:30pm EST

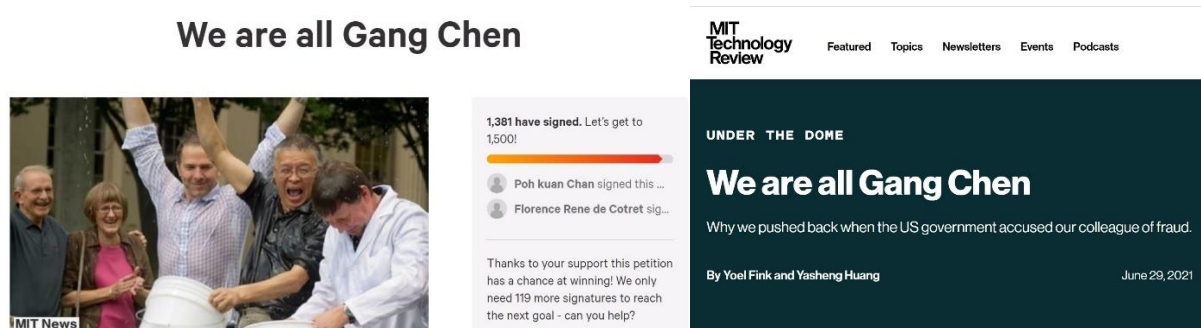
On January 30, 2022, Asian American Scholar Forum (AASF), Advancing Justice| AAJC, APA Justice, and the Brennan Center for Justice will co-host a webinar titled "**Reflecting on Professor Gang Chen's Case and Looking Ahead to the Future of the China Initiative.**" The goal of this webinar is to examine the attempted prosecution of Prof. Chen in

order to challenge the injustices resulting from the Justice Department's "China Initiative." We hope to educate lawyers, journalists, policy makers, academic leaders, and community members about the harmful impacts of the "China Initiative," so that they can better contribute to the effort to bring the initiative to an end.

Professor Yasheng Huang, President of AASF, will open the webinar. Congressman Ted Lieu will give a keynote address. Mike German, Fellow at the Brennan Center for Justice, will moderate the event. Featured speakers are MIT Professor Gang Chen, his defense attorney Robert Fisher, and Seton Hall University Professor Maggie Lewis. Read more and register for the webinar at: <https://bit.ly/3AAIVER>.

Note: The Asian American Academy of Science and Engineering has joined as a co-host subsequent to this newsletter announcement.

"We Are All Gang Chen" - A Moment of Awakening



We are all Gang Chen

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1,381 have signed. Let's get to 1,500!

Poh kuan Chan signed this ...

Florence Rene de Cotret sig...

Thanks to your support this petition has a chance at winning! We only need 119 more signatures to reach the next goal - can you help?

UNDER THE DOME

We are all Gang Chen

Why we pushed back when the US government accused our colleague of fraud.

By Yoel Fink and Yasheng Huang | June 29, 2021

On January 21, 2021, a day after the indictment of Professor Gang Chen, about [100 MIT faculty members](#) wrote to MIT President Rafael Reif to share their "dismay and pain over [Professor Chen's] recent arrest." Zeyu Chris Peng and Lei Xu, Presidents of the MIT Chinese Students and Scholars Association also [expressed their concerns](#) about Dr. Chen's arrest to MIT leadership.

On February 1, 2021, MIT Professor Yasheng Huang gave a report of on-the-ground reactions to the charges against Professor Chen in the APA Justice monthly meeting. According to Professor Huang, Professor Chen's case had galvanized all of MIT and possibly all of academia to take action. Chinese American faculty members across the country gathered not just for Professor Chen's case but also to seek next-step actions. The government overreach and racial profiling evident in Professor Chen's case constitute an attack on academia as a whole, and have had powerful effects across academic disciplines. These issues have led to the overt criminalization of normal academic conduct. Since long before Professor Chen's case, the disclosure requirements to apply for government funding for research were ambiguous (e.g., JASON report). The unclear requirements left room for law enforcement agencies to criminalize inconsistencies. The government must specify what is and is not permitted in academic relationships that span the US and China. It is simply wrong to use a legal mechanism to

realize a political objective. The very type of academic activity that Professor Chen was incriminated for had been encouraged under previous administrations. There must also be a conversation when there is a policy change. Read more about Professor Huang's report at: <https://bit.ly/3aKdgDs>

Professor Chen's arrest was a moment of awakening for many scientists who, under normal circumstances, may not have paid much attention to law enforcement agents or Department of Justice prosecutors. Professor Chen's case revealed that even if an individual has done nothing wrong, they can still be scapegoated by the government as collateral damaged. In response to the injustice against Professor Chen, Professors Huang and Yoel Fink started the "[We Are All Gang Chen](#)" movement at MIT. Professor Jeff Synder at Northwestern University started a "[We Are All Gang Chen](#)" campaign at change.org that collected almost 1,400 signatures. Professor Chris Dames at UC Berkeley led a group of over 75 lab alumni and close colleagues of Professor Chen in writing [an open letter](#) in defense of Professor Chen.

End The "China Initiative" Now and Start Ending Racial Profiling



[VIA EMAIL]

January 5th, 2021

President-elect Joe Biden

Dear President-elect Biden,

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, write to express our deep concern with the federal government's racial, ethnic, and national origin profiling and discriminatory investigations and prosecutions of Asian Americans and Asian immigrants, harming the lives of not just individuals, their families, and communities, but eroding the health of our democracy. We respectfully request that your administration end the Justice Department's "China Initiative," and take further steps necessary to combat the pervasive racial bias and targeting of Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists, researchers, and students.



APA Justice started the year 2021 with [a joint letter to then President elect Joe Biden](#) on January 5, 2021. Together with Asian American Advancing Justice, the Brennan Center for Justice, and a coalition of community organizations, advocacy groups, science associations, and individuals, we called for the incoming Biden-Harris administration to end the Justice Department's (DOJ's) "China Initiative" and take further steps to combat the pervasive racial bias and targeting of Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists, researchers, and students by the federal government.

The letter includes a set of recommendations, including putting an immediate end to the "China Initiative" and commencing a complete review of all prosecutions and investigations closed prior to prosecution under the initiative. It also urges the incoming administration take measures throughout the federal government's law enforcement, intelligence, and scientific research funding agencies to combat patterns of racial bias against Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists and federal employees.

By April 2021, almost 30,000 individuals had signed [a petition to President Biden](#) calling for an end to the "China Initiative." In September 2021, 177 [Stanford University](#) faculty members wrote to the Attorney General also calling for the initiative to end. The Stanford faculty were joined by colleagues from UC Berkeley, Temple University, Princeton University, University of Michigan, and Southern Illinois University. Working with the organizers of the Stanford letter, APA Justice started [a nationwide campaign](#) in October. By year's end, a total of over 2,600 faculty, scholars, and administrators from almost 230 institutions from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico had [signed on](#) to the call for the end of the "China Initiative." The signatories include Nobel laureates and prominent academic leaders of our nation.

On February 1, 2021, APA Justice joined an alliance of prominent scientific and civil rights leaders and organizations nationwide representing thousands of individuals, spearheaded by Maryland State Senator Susan Lee and Terry Lierman, Co-Chair of the Institute of Human Virology at the University of Maryland. This alliance wrote [a letter requesting a Congressional oversight hearing](#) to address the profiling of scientists and scholars of Chinese or Asian descent. At the time, Congress had held numerous hearings focused on the threat of espionage, but it had not addressed the civil rights violations of Chinese Americans who had been wrongly targeted by the government, despite long-term damage this injustice caused to American research enterprise and minority communities. On June 30, 2021, Rep. Jamie Raskin, Chair of the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and Rep. Judy Chu, Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, held a roundtable entitled "[Researching while Chinese American: Ethnic Profiling, Chinese American Scientists and a New American Brain Drain.](#)" To date, the video has received more than 14,000 views.

Since its launch by DOJ under the Trump administration three years ago, the "China Initiative" has lacked transparency and accountability. As awareness and understanding of the "China Initiative" grew during the year through court testimonies and documents, media coverage, empirical studies, congressional proceedings, public webinars and videos, ad hoc stories, and education and advocacy efforts, terms such as "unraveling," "crumbling," "faltering," "out of control," and "mess" have been used to describe the "China Initiative" in [media and other reports](#). The year ended with two investigative reports by MIT Technology Review. The first report is titled [The US crackdown on Chinese economic espionage is a mess. We have the data](#)

[to show it](#), and the second [We built a database to understand the China Initiative. Then the government changed its records.](#)

Despite all the efforts APA Justice has been involved, 2021 did not see the end of the “China Initiative” and racial profiling. However, we enter 2022 with strengthened resolve. We remain confident that in working closely with our friends and allies, we will bring about the end of the "China Initiative." The “China Initiative” is ineffective in achieving its stated goals to combat economic espionage and trade secret theft, counter-productive against open science and US leadership in science and technology, discriminatory against Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists and students, and un-American in its lack of transparency, accountability, oversight, and integrity.

Professor Gang Chen is the [ninth academic case dismissed or acquitted](#) under the "China Initiative." We are reasonably confident that this is the beginning of the end of the "China Initiative" as we know it. However, as Professor Chen pointed out, this is not a moment to celebrate, but a time to redouble our efforts and resolve to combat systemic racial profiling and to address fundamental justice and fairness issues.

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