

In This Issue #235

- A Year After the Non-Spying "Spy Balloon" Incident
- From "Spy Balloon" to "Spy Pigeon"
- "Another Chinese Partnership Bites the Dust" in Florida
- Chinese Students are Paying the Price for US Intelligence Concerns
- News and Activities for the Communities

A Year After the Non-Spying "Spy Balloon" Incident



According to *AsAmNews* on February 4, 2024, the “Chinese Spy Balloon” became one of the most prominent stories of 2023. What was less discussed, however, were later revelations that the balloon was not spying for the Chinese government. A year after the spy balloon incident, Asian American groups say it has only heightened xenophobia, prejudices, and fear around the AAPI community.

When the Chinese balloon crossed into US aerospace, American officials immediately claimed that it was conducting espionage. The resulting controversy immediately raised hostilities towards China, with Secretary of State **Anthony Blinken** even canceling a diplomatic trip to the nation. Chinese officials, however, vehemently denied accusations of spying, maintaining that the balloon was research equipment that veered off course.

The balloon was ultimately shot down a year ago on February 4. In the days after its wreckage was recovered, US officials released a statement that the balloon was “clearly for intelligence surveillance.”

But after months of analysis, officials quietly walked back those claims.

In September, a spokesperson from the Pentagon announced that the balloon did not collect information while transiting over the US. This was echoed by high-ranking officials like the chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, **Mark Milley**.

“The intelligence community, their assessment – and it’s a high-confidence assessment – [is] that there was no intelligence collection by that balloon,” said Milley.

But the damage was done to the Asian American communities. The “Chinese spy balloon” label reminded **Cynthia Choi**, co-director for Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), of initial reactions to the COVID-19 virus, which some politicians referred to as the “Wuhan virus” and “China virus.” Both stoked Sinophobia against Asian communities, setting the stage for future discrimination.

On September 21, 2023, CAA and Stop AAPI Hate launched the [Stop the Blame Campaign](#), which aims to hold elected officials accountable for racist rhetoric. **Andy Wong**, CAA Managing Director of Advocacy, described the campaign at the [October 2023 APA Justice monthly meeting](#).

The Sinophobia engendered by the “spy balloon” controversy also had tangible consequences. **Jeremy Wu**, co-organizer of APA Justice, tracks discriminatory legislation currently targeting Asian Americans across the nation. The most notable of those are the [33 alien land bills and laws](#), preventing Chinese Americans from owning property in a state, which have recently been introduced across the country.

Though the “spy balloon” controversy did not cause these laws, Wu says it had an “accumulating, stigmatizing effect” that set the stage for them to happen.

“Although the ‘spy balloon’ was not spying, the incident has been intentionally and unintentionally used as a national security risk to justify the new alien land laws,” Wu wrote to *AsAmNews*. “While not discounting that there are real national security risks, the ‘spy balloon’ plays into xenophobia and racism.”

But Wu also situates the “spy balloon” as a “footnote” in historic and ongoing anti-Asian racism. One example is the **Wen Ho Lee** case in 1999, where a Taiwanese American scientist Wen Ho Lee was falsely charged for espionage, sparking a similar media firestorm around Chinese spying.

But the history of this racism is unknown to many. Today, Wu observes, there is less knowledge of the case among young Asian Americans. Similarly, few Americans are aware that the “spy balloon” did not conduct espionage. More education, he says, is necessary to combat this lack of awareness.

“The Asian American communities are courageous and resilient in their fight and advocacy from generation to generation,” writes Wu. “Education through books, stories, schools, museums, monuments, and other means is essential to carry this struggle on and maintain hope for meaningful change.”

Read the AsAmNews report: <https://bit.ly/3HPjHGd>

From "Spy Balloon" to "Spy Pigeon"

The New York Times

Pigeon Was Cleared of Being a Chinese Spy, but Served 8 Months Anyway

Birds, be careful: Loitering at an Indian port with a microchip on your leg can make people nervous and get you locked up.



The pigeon is released in Mumbai. Anshuman Nayyar/IndoAsian Times/OP

No one should under-estimate national security risks. However, when taken to the extreme, sensational rhetoric and conspiracy theories may go from the sublime to the ridiculous.

According to multiple media reports including the [New York Times](#), [AP News](#), [Washington Post](#), [CNN](#), [CBS News](#), and [Sky News](#), consider the alarming suspicion of foreign espionage, cursive messages in ancient Chinese, a sensitive microchip — and a suspect that could not be stopped at the border. Guards with the Central Industrial Security Force in India saw this one loitering alone in May 2023 — “it was just sitting there, and it all looked suspicious to them — chip, and ring on the feet.” The guards informed the police.

The suspect was a pigeon. It was arrested and locked up in a hospital. After “deep and proper inquiry and investigations,” the pigeon was determined to be an open-water racing bird from Taiwan. It was cleared of all spying charges. However, the pigeon remained in incarceration. “The police never came to check the pigeon,” said the manager of the hospital.

After eight months, Indian officials released the pigeon after intervention from animal rights organization PETA. PETA India celebrated what it called the end of a “wrongful imprisonment.”

It is not the first time Indian authorities wrongfully locked up a pigeon for alleged spying. Some racing pigeons from Taiwan have reportedly made it as far as the United States and Canada although none has been known to be charged for espionage so far.

There was no immediate report on the pigeon's reaction to the wrongful allegation or its release from the 8-month imprisonment.

"Another Chinese Partnership Bites the Dust" in Florida



Florida International's closures in China include a Spanish program and a campus for hospitality and tourism, not usually areas of concern for foreign influence and espionage in higher ed.

Photo illustration by Justin Morrison/Inside Higher Ed | Cillij/Wikimedia Commons

According to *Inside Higher Ed* on February 2, 2024, Florida International University (FIU) is ending numerous successful partnerships in China to conform to a state law regulating colleges' relationships with "countries of concern."

The decision affects a dual-degree Spanish language program that FIU runs jointly with Qingdao University, as well as engineering exchange programs with seven Chinese institutions. But perhaps most surprisingly, FIU is terminating its largest and most successful international initiative: a dual-degree hospitality program run jointly by the university's Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management and the Tianjin University of Commerce.

Maydel Santana, FIU's associate vice president for media relations, wrote in an email that the programs had been slated for termination since last spring. She cited two factors: the board's decision last year to revise [regulations for certain programs](#) and a Florida law ramping up oversight of university partnerships and exchanges with seven countries of concern, which was [signed in 2021 \(HB7017\)](#) and expanded last year to cover joint ventures as well as hiring.

To comply with the new law, FIU also [paused recruitment of researchers](#) from the listed countries in December, following on the heels of several other public universities in the state.

The program closures are part of a broader [chilling of Chinese-American educational partnerships](#), as concerns over academic freedom in China multiply and bilateral political relations [grow increasingly tense](#).

William Brustein, a longtime international education administrator, compared the current environment around Chinese partnerships to the McCarthy era, wherein political victories in a newly crystallizing cold war are worth more than educational opportunities or economic gains.

At the Florida Board of Governors meeting last June, members said they targeted FIU because of its outside international involvement compared to other state colleges.

After all, “‘International’ is in its name,” said **Kyle Long**, founder and director of Global American Higher Education, a coalition of researchers studying American institutions abroad.

Long said the criticism of these partnerships over fear of foreign influence shows a “fundamental misunderstanding of higher ed philanthropy” and reveals an ambitious political agenda that, once again, takes aim at Florida’s public higher ed institutions.

The closure of FIU’s Marriott Tianjin China hospitality program, in particular, has raised eyebrows because of both the program’s seemingly benign nature and its long-running success. The hospitality program was established in 2006 and is one of the world’s oldest Sino-American university partnerships, housed in a custom-built \$100 million campus—fully funded by the Chinese government—in Tianjin, a northern port city just south of Beijing.

FIU Tianjin’s creation was a product of the budding, financially fruitful partnership between American and Chinese higher education entities that flowered in the mid-2000s; the program’s abrupt termination is the most recent sign of that partnership’s souring under growing political pressures.

“It’s pretty ridiculous. This is a hospitality program. What are they going to steal, a napkin? A new way of putting down cutlery?” Brustein said. “Yes, there are legitimate concerns around academic freedom at some programs in China, but it really depends on the subject matter. These bureaucrats are using a sledgehammer rather than a scalpel.”

Read the *Inside Higher Ed* report: <https://bit.ly/4865YWe>

Chinese Students are Paying the Price for US Intelligence Concerns



According to *The Hill* on February 5, 2024, Chinese students seeking to study in America are feeling the heat over U.S. concerns about intelligence and Beijing’s influence over higher education, in some cases leading to them being denied entry to the country.

Despite Chinese students in many cases facing longer wait times for visas than those from other countries, approval is often not the last step.

“The lengthy questioning of Chinese students with properly issued visas and the sending of some of those students back to China undermines confidence in the United States and results in some able Chinese students going to third countries. I also object to the questioning of Americans with properly issued visas by Chinese immigration authorities,” said **Stephen Orlins**, president of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations.

Sophia Gregg, a Virginia-based immigrants’ rights attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, said border patrol agents have wide discretion on who can come in to the country, even when valid visas are issued.

One big concern the U.S. has currently is that many Chinese students are coming to the country to study science or technology, two sectors of particular interest, said **Swallow Yan**, president of the U.S. Education Without Borders. But he said students are coming to the U.S. for those subjects because Chinese “parents and students really consider America the No. 1 country for education for science or technology for professional opportunities.”

House members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) last week announced they are working to stop the return of the “China Initiative,” which was supposed to target espionage, from former President **Donald Trump**’s tenure. They argue the program, which Republicans are attempting to revive, did little to stop spies but did target people of Chinese descent.

“While it is crucial that we protect our national security and intellectual property, codified discrimination is not the answer. At a time when anti-Asian hate and violence is still rampant across the country, we must do everything we can to prevent programs like this — founded in racism and xenophobia — from happening again,” said Sen. **Mazie Hirono** (D-Hawaii), CAPAC executive board member.

Read *The Hill* report: <https://bit.ly/42uD5BZ>

News and Activities for the Communities

1. APA Justice Community Calendar

Upcoming Events:

- 2024/02/07 Chinese Americans in the Heartland
- 2024/02/08 USCET: Asian American Trailblazers in Film
- 2024/02/10 New Year's Day of the Year of the Dragon
- 2024/02/13-15 Senior Executives Association Senior Executive Leadership Summit
- 2024/02/13 Committee of 100: The Career Ceiling Challenges in Journalism

Visit <https://bit.ly/45KGyga> for event details.

2. USHCA: Chinese Americans in The Heartland

Co-organizers for this event...



WHAT: Chinese Americans in the Heartland: Migration, Work and Community
WHEN: February 7, 2024, 6:00 - 7:30 pm Central Time
WHERE: Online Webinar
HOSTS: US Heartland China Association and Chinese-American Museum of Chicago
SPEAKER:

- [Huping Ling](#): Professor of history and past department chair at Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri, where she founded the Asian studies program. Author of a new book on "[Chinese Americans in the Heartland: Migration, Work and Community](#)"

DESCRIPTION: Chinese-Americans play an important role in the U.S.-China relationship. Understanding who we are as a country is a crucial first step to the U.S. building a better Way Forward with China. Literally and metaphorically, the infrastructure of our Heartland region is built on the backs of Chinese-Americans – a sociological history that has been largely ignored.

REGISTRATION: <https://bit.ly/4bsxhw1>

3. USCET: Asian American Trailblazers in Film

ASIAN WOMEN TRAILBLAZERS

ASIAN AMERICAN TRAILBLAZERS IN FILM

Panelist
Felicia Lowe

Panelist
Robin Lung

Moderator
Shirley Sun

February 8, 2024 at 8pm Eastern, 5pm Pacific
February 9, at 9am Beijing Time

Via Zoom Webinar, RSVP below

WHAT: Asian American Trailblazers in Film
WHEN: February 8, 2024, 8:00 pm Eastern Time
WHERE: Online Webinar
HOSTS: US-China Education Trust
MODERATOR: Shirley Sun, film director, producer, writer, art curator, and cultural interchange activist
PANELISTS:

- Felicia Lowe, an award-winning independent media producer, director, and writer
- Robin Lung, fourth generation Chinese American filmmaker

DESCRIPTION: Film trailblazers Shirley Sun, Felicia Lowe, and Robin Lung will discuss firsthand their accomplishments in the film industry, their own journeys, and the unsung experiences and stories of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) in film over the decades.

REGISTRATION: <https://bit.ly/3HPVpvC>

4. WHI: Community Engagement Event



WHAT: Community Engagement Event

WHEN: February 28, 2024, 10:00 am - 1:00 pm Pacific Time

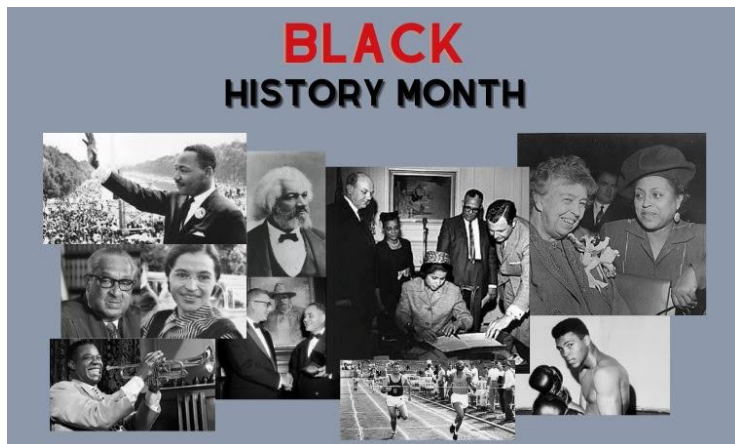
WHERE: In-person event, Clark County, Nevada (exact location to be announced)

HOST: White House Initiative on AA and NHPI

DESCRIPTION: Participants will learn more about WHIAANHPI's priorities and work, receive updates from Biden-Harris Administration officials on various federal programs and resources that are available to them, and participate in a community-driven listening session with members of the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. The event will conclude with an optional networking session as an additional opportunity for relationship building and connection.

REGISTRATION: <https://bit.ly/42LxKX7>

5. February is Black History Month



According to [Wikipedia](#), Black educators and Black United Students at Kent State University first proposed Black History Month in February 1969. The first celebration of Black History Month took place at Kent State a year later, from January 2 to February 28, 1970. Six years later, Black History Month was being celebrated all across the country in educational institutions, centers of Black culture, and community centers, both great and small, when President Gerald Ford recognized Black History Month in 1976, during the celebration of the United States Bicentennial. He urged Americans to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history".

Copyright © 2024 APA Justice, All rights reserved.

You are receiving this email because you opted in or have expressed interest.

Our mailing address is:

APA Justice
P.O. Box 1242
McLean, VA 22101

[Add us to your address book](#)

We do not share, sell, rent or trade any of your information with third parties unless you provide explicit consent. [Read our Privacy Policy here.](#)