China Initiative: Origins and Consequences

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• On 12/02/2021, “The US crackdown on Chinese economic espionage is a mess. We have the data to show it.” [https://bit.ly/3depCFs](https://bit.ly/3depCFs)

• On the same day, “We built a database to understand the China Initiative. Then the government changed its records.” [https://bit.ly/31ozuKv](https://bit.ly/31ozuKv)
Data Base

• 77 known cases since “China Initiative” was launched in November 2018

• Based on
  – DOJ online report
  – Court records
  – Interviews
  – Verified and validated
Findings

- No official definition of “China Initiative” or how a case may be categorized as a “China Initiative” case or not
- Focus moved away from economic espionage and hacking to “research integrity”
- Significant # research integrity cases dropped or dismissed
- Only about 1/4 of people and institutions charged have been convicted
- Many have little or no obvious connection to national security or the theft of trade secrets
- Nearly 90% of the defendants charged are of Chinese heritage
- New activity has slowed since 2020, prosecutions and new cases continue
- DOJ does not list all cases believed to be part of the “China Initiative” on its webpage and has deleted others linked to the project.
Why The Second Report?

• Two days after MIT Technology Review requested comment from the DOJ on the first report, the department made significant unannounced and unexplained changes to its own list of cases, adding some and deleting 39 defendants previously connected to the China Initiative from its website.

• This included several instances where the government had announced prosecutions with great fanfare, only for the cases to fail —including one that was dismissed by a judge after a mistrial.
Professor Anming Hu

• Among those deleted from DOJ online report
• First academic to go to trial in June 2021
• Hung jury => Mistrial => Acquittal
• Trial Revealed
  – FBI agent misconduct
  – University of Tennessee Knoxville complicit
Broader Implications

• Other academics being prosecuted and under investigations
• Chilling effects on open science and international collaboration
• Future U.S. STEM workforce and leadership in science and technology
• Effectiveness of massive taxpayers dollars and federal resources