



STANFORD
UNIVERSITY

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

September 8, 2021

Dear Mr. Garland,

We, faculty members at Stanford University, are writing this open letter to express our concerns about the U.S. Department of Justice's *China Initiative*. We acknowledge the importance to the United States of protecting both intellectual property and information that is essential to our national and economic security. We understand that concerns about Chinese government sanctioned activities including intellectual property theft and economic espionage are important to address. We believe, however, that the China Initiative has deviated significantly from its claimed mission: it is harming the United States' research and technology competitiveness and it is fueling biases that, in turn, raise concerns about racial profiling. As the President's Science Advisor, Dr. Eric Lander, [stated](#) on August 10, 2021: "We have to assiduously avoid basing policies or processes on prejudice – including those that could fuel anti-Asian sentiments or xenophobia." We believe that the China Initiative is one such policy. We therefore would like to suggest that you terminate the China Initiative and replace it with an appropriate response that avoids the flaws of this initiative.

More specifically, we believe the China Initiative suffers from the following fundamental flaws:

First, the China Initiative disproportionately targets researchers of Chinese origin. Publicly available information indicates that investigations are often triggered not by any evidence of wrongdoing, but just because of a researcher's connections with China. (For example, see recent article and the research by Prof. Jenny Lee quoted therein. ref: [Has the Hunt for Chinese Spies Become a Witch Hunt?](#), Karin Fischer, Chronicle of Higher Education, August 11, 2021). In many cases the federal response seems disproportionate and inappropriate. In some cases, federal agents associated with the China Initiative have prosecuted researchers without solid evidence. Moreover, racial profiling – even when undertaken in pursuit of justice – is both inconsistent with U.S. law and with the principles underlying our society. Moreover, these actions do not just affect the prosecuted faculty but affect the many more university researchers who are targeted, investigated, and feel threatened by inquiries initiated without prior evidence of significant wrongdoing. Universities and research institutions are often pressured to investigate researchers who are singled out only because of their personal or professional connections with China. (For example, see the description by Prof. Randy Katz, the Vice Chancellor for Research of the University of California Berkeley during a recent Congressional Roundtable available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G24w7d2_owo)

Second, in most of the China Initiative cases involving academics, the alleged crime has nothing to do with scientific espionage or intellectual property theft. Most prosecutions are for misconduct such as failure to disclose foreign appointments or funding. While such problems should be addressed, they should not be confused with national security concerns. Due to the openness of scientific research in academia, it is not surprising that the China Initiative has not led to more espionage-related prosecutions. It is misleading to the public that such prosecutions on unrelated crimes are presented as efforts combating national security threats.

Third, the China Initiative is harming the U.S. science and technology enterprise and the future of the U.S. STEM workforce. Since World War II, the U.S. has benefited from an influx of many of the most talented scientists from around the world, including a large number from China. They have played a significant role in our success as a society. For example, a 2018 study by the American Society for Engineering Education reports that 28.4% of engineering faculty (and 31.5% of Assistant Professors) in the U.S. are Asian. In recent years, the China Initiative (and some other actions of the federal government) have created an increasingly hostile atmosphere for Chinese Americans, visitors, and immigrants of Chinese origin, which has already discouraged many scholars from coming to or staying in the U.S. This seriously hampers our efforts to recruit the best Chinese students and postdoctoral scholars.

The difference between the open fundamental research carried out at universities and more applied and proprietary industrial or military research in the commercial sector must be recognized. Many of our most challenging global problems, including climate change & sustainability and current & future pandemics, require international engagement. Without an open and inclusive environment that attracts the best talents in all areas, the United States cannot retain its world leading position in science and technology. In some China Initiative cases, normal academic activities that we all do, such as serving as referees and writing recommendation letters, are adduced as evidence of “extensive dealings with the PRC” (ref: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/20452311-gang-chen-federal-affidavit>). Such actions are based on a significant misunderstanding of how scientific research works. They are detrimental to international collaboration. Instead of protecting the national security of the U.S., we believe such actions harm the U.S.’s ability to innovate.

We strongly urge you to terminate the China Initiative and develop an alternative response to the challenges posed by our relations with the People’s Republic of China, one that avoids racial profiling and discouraging beneficial and important collaborations and influx of talented personnel.

Sincerely yours,

Concerned faculty members (signatory names listed on next pages)

First name(s)	Last name	Title	Department
Maneesh	Agrawala	Professor	Computer Science
Cecile	Alduy	Professor	French and Italian
Russ	Altman	Professor	Bioengineering, Genetics, Medicine
Zhenan	Bao	K. K. Lee Professor	Chemical Engineering
Clark	Barrett	Professor (Research)	Computer Science
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Paul	Berg	Professor emeritus	Biochemistry
Dominique	Bergmann	Professor	Biology
Ami	Bhatt	Associate Professor	Medicine & Genetics
Arthur	Bienenstock	Professor emeritus, Associate Director	Photon Science at SLAC, Wallenberg Research Link
Roger	Blandford	Professor	Physics, Particle Physics and Astrophysics at SLAC
Steven	Block	S.W. Ascherman Professor of Sciences	Applied Physics and Biology
Jeannette	Bohg	Assistant Professor	Computer Science
Craig	Bowman	Professor	Mechanical Engineering
Steven	Boxer	Camille Dreyfus Professor of Chemistry	Chemistry
Stephen	Boyd	Professor	Electrical Engineering
Mark	Brongersma	Professor	Materials Science and Engineering
Axel	Brunger	Professor	Molecular and Cellular Physiology
Emma	Brunskill	Associate Professor	Computer Science
Philip	Bucksbaum	Professor	Physics and Applied Physics
William	Burnett	Adjunct Professor	Mechanical Engineering
Wei	Cai	Professor	Mechanical Engineering
Matteo	Cargnello	Assistant Professor	Chemical Engineering
Gordon H.	Chang	Professor	History
Howard	Chang	Virginia & D.K. Ludwig Professor of Cancer Research	Dermatology and Genetics
Xiaoke	Chen	Associate Professor	Biology
Lu	Chen	Professor	Neurosurgery and Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

Jennifer	Choo-Tomimoto	Associate Director	Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, China Program
Gilbert	Chu	Professor	Medicine and Biochemistry
Steven	Chu	William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor, and Professor of Molecular & Cellular Physiology	Physics, School of Medicine
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Ralph	Cohen	Professor emeritus	Mathematics
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Yi	Cui	Professor, Director	Materials Science and Engineering, Precourt Institute for Energy
Hongjie	Dai	Professor	Chemistry
Jun	Ding	Associate Professor	Neurosurgery
Jose	Dinnyeny	Associate Professor	Biology
Rodolfo	Dirzo	Professor	Biology
Shaul	Druckmann	Assistant Professor	Neurobiology
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Shanhui	Fan	Professor	Electrical Engineering
Joyce	Farrell	Senior Research Engineer and Lecturer	Electrical Engineering
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Ben	Feldman	Assistant Professor	Physics
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