Dear Mr. Garland,

We, 192 faculty members at Yale University, are sending this open letter to express our concerns about the U.S. Department of Justice’s China Initiative. We adopt the September 8, 2021 letter signed by 177 Stanford faculty with their permission because we completely concur with their assessment. We acknowledge the importance to the United States of protecting intellectual property and information that is essential to the U.S. 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. And it is harming the United States’ research and technology competitiveness and 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 the ostensible pursuit of justice – is inconsistent with both U.S. law and the principles underlying our society. Furthermore, 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 clearly 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 when 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 of Asian origin. Unfortunately, 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. This hostility is also noted by the broader research community, draining the community’s faith in the continued competitiveness and openness of the research model here.

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 and sustainability, and the current and future pandemics, require international engagement. Without an open and inclusive environment that attracts the best talent 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 the US relations with the People’s Republic of China, one that avoids racial profiling and discouraging beneficial and important collaborations and the influx of talented personnel.

Sincerely yours,

Concerned Yale faculty members (signatory names listed in alphabetical order on next page)
Julia Adams, Margaret H. Marshall Professor, Sociology
Sybil Alexandrov, Senior Lector II, Spanish and Portuguese
Jingjing Ao, Lector, East Asian Languages and Literatures
Andrea Barbieri, Assistant Professor, Pathology
Sarbani Basu, Professor of Astronomy and Chair, Astronomy
Rachel Beekman, Assistant Professor, Neurology
Lucas Bender, Assistant Professor, East Asian Languages and Literatures
David Berg, Clinical Professor, Psychiatry
Clemens Bergwitz, Assistant Professor, Medicine
Joerg Bewersdorf, Professor, Cell Biology / Biomedical Engineering / Physics
Hal Blumenfeld, Professor, Neurology / Neuroscience and Neurosurgery
Jonathan Bogan, Associate Professor, Internal Medicine / Cell Biology
Kristen Brennand, Professor, Psychiatry / Genetics
David Breslow, Assistant Professor, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology
Christopher Burd, Professor, Cell Biology
Yang Cai, Associate Professor, Computer Science
Michael Caplan, C.N.H. Long Professor and Chair, Cellular and Molecular Physiology
John Carlson, Higgins Professor, Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology
Carmen Carrion, Assistant Professor, Neurology
Sreeganga Chandra, Associate Professor, Neuroscience / Neurology
Sandy Chang, Associate Dean of STEM education, Yale College, Laboratory Medicine
Charles Dela Cruz, Associate Professor, Internal Medicine
Lieping Chen, Professor, Immunobiology
Sidi Chen, Associate Professor, Genetics
Meng Cheng, Assistant Professor, Physics
Xiaoyang Cheng, Research Scientist, Neurology
Nicholas Christakis, Sterling Professor of Social and Natural Science, Sociology / Data Science / Evolutionary Biology / Medicine / Biomedical Engineering

Jean-Ju Chung, Associate Professor, Cellular and Molecular Physiology

Damon Clark, Associate Professor, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology

Margaret Clark, John M. Musser Professor, Head, Trumbull College / Dean of Academic Affairs, Psychology

Lawrence Cohen, Professor, Physiology

Daniel Colón-Ramos, McConnell Duberg Professor, Neuroscience and Cell Biology

Gianfilippo Coppola, Research Scientist, Pathology

Pietro De Camilli, John Klingenstein Professor of Neuroscience / Professor of Cell Biology / Neuroscience

Jeffrey Dewey, Assistant Professor of Neurology

Daniel DiMaio, Waldemar Von Zedtwitz Professor, Genetics

Thierry Emonet, Professor, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology

David Engerman, Professor, History / Jackson Institute for Global Affairs

Emily Erikson, Associate Professor & Director, Sociology / School of Management (by courtesy) / Fox Fellows

David Evans, Professor, Earth and Planetary Sciences

Rong Fan, Professor, Biomedical Engineering / Department of Pathology

Pue Farooque, Associate Professor, Neurology

Shawn Ferguson, Associate Professor, Cell Biology

Emily Forrest, Research Scientist, Genetics

Ziad Ganin, Assistant Professor, Chemistry

Wendy Gilbert, Associate Professor, Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry

Antonio Giraldez, Professor, Genetics

Steven Girvin, Eugene Higgins Professor, Physics

Alessandro Gomez, Professor, Mechanical Engineering and Materials Science
Fred Gorelick, Professor, Internal Medicine / Cell Biology

Valentina Greco, Professor, Genetics

Joel Greenwood, Director of Neurotechnology / Neuroscience

Jaime Grutzendler, Professor, Neurology / Neuroscience

Junjie Guo, Assistant Professor, Neuroscience

Peijun Guo, Assistant Professor, Chemical and Environmental Engineering

Shangqin Guo, Associate Professor, Cell Biology

Ya Ha, Associate Professor, Pharmacology

David Hafler, Edgerly Professor of Neurology / Professor of Immunobiology / Chair, Department of Neurology

Stephanie Halene, Associate Professor, Internal Medicine

Ira Hall, Professor, Genetics

Marc Hammarlund, Associate Professor, Genetics / Neuroscience

Yu He, Assistant Professor, Applied Physics / Physics (by courtesy)

Karsten Heeger, Professor and Chair, Physics

Seth Herzon, Milton Harris ’29 PhD Professor, Chemistry

Mark Hochstrasser, Professor, Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry

Patrick Holland, Whitehead Professor, Chemistry

Valerie Horsley, Assoc. Professor, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology

Jonathon Howard, Eugene Higgins Professor, Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry

Shu Hu, Assistant Professor, Chemical and Environmental Engineering

Yingqun Huang, Professor, Obstetrics / Gynecology / Reproductive Sciences

Michael Hunter, Associate Professor, East Asian Languages and Literatures

David Hwang, Associate Professor, Neurology

Matthew Jacobson, Professor, American Studies / History

Yong-Hui Jiang, Professor, Genetics
Grace Kao, IBM Professor, Sociology

Erdem Karatekin, Associate Professor, Cellular and Molecular Physiology

Samuel Katz, Associate Professor, Pathology

Jaehong Kim, Professor, Chemical and Environmental Engineering

Jennifer Kim, Assistant Professor, Neurology

Theodore Kim, Associate Professor, Computer Science

Megan King, Associate Professor, Cell Biology

Diane Krause, Professor, Laboratory Medicine

Smita Krishnaswamy, Associate Professor, Genetics / Computer Science

Priti Kumar, Associate Professor, Internal Medicine

Themis Kyriakides, Professor, Pathology / Biomedical Engineering

Monkol Lek, Assistant Professor, Genetics

Bluma Lesch, Assistant Professor, Genetics

Andre Levchenko, Professor, Biomedical Engineering

Peining Li, Associate Professor, Genetics

Liang Liang, Assistant Professor, Neuroscience

Ninghui Liang, Senior Lector II, East Asian Languages and Literatures

Chenxiang Lin, Associate Professor, Cell Biology / Biomedical Engineering

Haifan Lin, Eugene Higgins Professor, Yale Stem Cell Center

Fan Liu, Senior lector, East Asian Languages and Literatures

Jun Liu, Professor, Microbial Pathogenesis

Yansheng Liu, Assistant Professor, Pharmacology

Ivan Loseu, Professor, Mathematics

Jun Lu, Associate Professor, Genetics

Tina Lu, Professor, East Asian Languages and Literatures

Mary Lui, Professor, American Studies and History
Patrick Lusk, Associate Professor, Cell Biology
Arya Mani, Professor, Internal Medicine
Reina Maruyama, Professor, Physics
Daniel Mattingly, Assistant Professor, Political Science
Thomas Melia, Associate Professor, Cell Biology
Wei Mi, Assistant Professor, Pharmacology
Yair Minsky, Professor, Mathematics
Simon Mochrie, Professor, Physics / Applied Physics
David Moore, Assistant Professor, Physics
Walther Mothes, Professor, Microbial Pathogenesis
Timothy Newhouse, Associate Professor, Chemistry
Don Nguyen, Associate Professor, Pathology
Stefania Nicoli, Associate Professor, Genetics / Cardiology
Michael Nitabach, Professor, Physiology
James Noonan, Professor, Genetics
Michael O'Donnell, Assistant Professor, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology
Hee Oh, Robinson Professor, Mathematics
Gary Okihiro, Visiting Professor, American Studies and Ethnicity, Race and Migration
Zenggang Pan, Associate Professor, Pathology
Rachel Perry, Assistant Professor, Cellular and Molecular Physiology / Medicine (Endocrinology)
Maria Pinango, Associate Professor, Linguistics
Jordan Pober, Professor and Vice-Chair, Immunobiology
Thomas Pogge, Professor, Philosophy
Manju Prasad, Professor, Pathology
Sally Promey, Professor, American Studies / Religious Studies
Anna Marie Pyle, Sterling Professor, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology / Chemistry

Steven Reilly, Assistant Professor, Genetics

Karin Reinisch, David W. Wallace Professor, Cell Biology

Valerie Reinke, Professor and Vice Chair, Genetics

Lawrence Rizzolo, Professor Emeritus, Surgery

Stephen Roach, Senior Fellow, Jackson Institute for Global Affairs

John Roemer, Elizabeth S. and A. Varick Stout Professor, Political Science / Economics

John Rose, Professor Emeritus, Pathology

James Rothman, Nobel Laureate and Sterling Professor, Cell Biology

Holly Rushmeier, John C. Malone Professor, Computer Science

Laurie Santos, Professor, Psychology

Wilhelm Schlag, Professor, Mathematics

Ramamurti Shankar, J. W. Gibbs Professor, Physics

Zhong Shao, Professor, Computer Science

Hongying Shen, Assistant Professor, Cellular and Molecular Physiology

Jianhua Shen, Senior Lector, East Asian Languages and Literatures

Frederick Sigworth, Professor, Cellular and Molecular Physiology

Mark Solomon, Professor, Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry

Daniel Spielman, Professor, Computer Science

Dara Strolovitch, Professor, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies / American Studies / Political Science

Wei Su, Senior Lector, East Asian Languages and Literatures

Xiaolei Su, Assistant professor, Cell Biology

Kaelyn Sumigray, Assistant Professor, Genetics

Zhaoxia Sun, Associate Professor, Genetics

Richard Sutton, Professor, Medicine
Hong Tang, Professor, Electrical Engineering
Carson Thoreen, Associate Professor, Cellular and Molecular Physiology
Sule Tinaz, Assistant Professor, Neurology
Rebecca Toseland, Senior Lecturer, Economics
Meg Urry, Israel Munson Professor, Physics
Paul Van Tassel, Professor, Chemical and Environmental Engineering
Agnes Vignery, Lecturer, Cell Biology
Julia von Blume, Associate Professor, Cell Biology
Günter P. Wagner, Alison Richard Professor Emeritus, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
Zenta Walther, Associate Professor, Pathology
Hailiang Wang, Associate Professor, Chemistry
Haiwen Wang, Senior Lecturer, East Asian Languages and Literatures
Jianhui Wang, Research Scientist, Technical Director of Pathology COVID lab / Pathology
Min Wang, Senior Research Scientist, Neuroscience
Siyuan Wang, Assistant Professor, Genetics / Cell Biology
David P. Watts, Professor, Anthropology
Li Wen, Professor, Internal Medicine
Arne Westad, Professor, History
Elisabeth Jean Wood, Crosby Professor, Political Science
Dan Wu, Gladys Phillips Crofoot Professor, Pharmacology
Min Wu, Associate Professor, Cell Biology
Jonathan Wyrtzen, Associate Professor, Sociology
Fengnian Xia, Associate Professor, Electrical Engineering
Andrew Xiao, Associate Professor, Genetics / Yale Stem Cell Center
Peisong Xu, Senior Lecturer II, East Asian Languages and Literatures
Mika Yamaguchi, Senior Lecturer, East Asian Languages and Literatures
Jing Yan, Assistant Professor, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology
Qin Yan, Associate Professor, Pathology
Xiaoyong Yang, Professor, Comparative Medicine
Shaul Yogev, Assistant Professor, Neuroscience
David Zenisek, Professor, Cellular and Molecular Physiology
Kai Zhang, Assistant Professor, Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry
Yongli Zhang, Associate Professor, Cell Biology / Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry
Lin Zhong, Professor, Computer Science
Mingjiang Zhong, Assistant Professor, Chemical and Environmental Engineering / Chemistry
Weimin Zhong, Associate Professor, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology
Huibin Zhou, Henry Ford II Professor, Statistics and Data Science
Jenny Zhou, Research Scientist, Pathology
Jiangbing Zhou, Associate Professor, Neurosurgery
William Zhou, Senior Lector I, East Asian Languages and Literatures
Tianyu Zhu, Assistant Professor, Chemistry
Yong Zhu, Associate Professor, Epidemiology and Public Health