

# Canadian security agencies prevail on universities to scuttle joint research with Chinese academics

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For the past four months, Canada’s political establishment and corporate media have been consumed with a vicious anti-China campaign, centered on lurid and unsubstantiated allegations from the intelligence agencies that Beijing interfered in Canada’s 2021 and 2019 federal elections.

In addition to casting China as a nefarious, hostile power, this campaign has served to destabilize the trade union-backed Justin Trudeau-led federal Liberal government, so as to push it still further right. The government has adopted an anti-China “Indo-Pacific Strategy” developed in close consultation with the White House and routinely deploys Royal Canadian Navy warships alongside US vessels on provocative “freedom of navigation” missions in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Yet the ruling class is flailing it for being insufficiently aggressive against Beijing.

This reactionary, war-mongering campaign, is infecting all areas of public life. This includes the universities.

In recent months the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and government have intensified their efforts to compel the country’s universities to cease scientific cooperation with Chinese academics.

On May 3, Ontario’s University of Waterloo announced it was shutting down its “Joint Innovation Lab” founded in 2018 with a \$6.5 million donation from Chinese telecommunications firm Huawei. The laboratory had been working on 26 scientific research projects, staffed by 128 graduate students and post-doctoral researchers.

The following day, the Universities of Toronto, Calgary, and Saskatchewan as well as McGill and Carleton Universities declared that they too were ceasing any research cooperation with Huawei, citing “national security” concerns that “Canadian” research “could” end up in the hands of the Chinese military. No proof has ever been offered for such hysterical nationalist claims.

The project “Novel Smartphone Application for Eye Disease Diagnosis and Therapy for Young Children” was determined by CSIS to be a “security risk.” The director of the Joint Innovation Lab, computer scientist Tamer Oszu, commented to the *Waterloo Record*: “It’s hard to comprehend what national security risk there might be in a topic that studies computer assistance in diagnosing eye diseases in children.”

The hysterical anti-China press campaign paints just the opposite

picture. As in the case of the unproven allegations about Chinese election interference, vague allegations from CSIS—which has repeatedly lied to the courts about its activities—are being presented as incontrovertible and demonstrating a present and growing threat. The *Toronto Star* announced the severing of the Waterloo/Huawei relationship, citing only the fear of “potential ties to the militaries or security apparatuses of foreign powers.”

Margaret McCuaig-Johnston, the former chair of the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council which stewards more than \$1 billion per year in research grants, could do little better, saying only that “these risks”—left entirely to the morbid imagination to enlarge upon—“are particularly related to Huawei’s very close relationship with the Chinese military through its many employees who are military staff, as well as through collaborations with military scientists and engineers.”

McCuaig-Johnston could not point to a single concrete instance of so-called “Canadian research” falling into the malign hands of the Chinese military, because there are no such documented instances. The state campaign against international scientific research is therefore simultaneously unscientific in its methods. Rather than shutting down “China,” it is shutting down projects initiated by Canadian graduate students and faculty.

“These were research projects that faculty members wanted to do and the funding from the joint lab facilitated the research. There’s not a single project where Huawei came to us and said ‘We want you to find someone to do this work for us,’” Oszu told the *Record*.

Vague “concerns” have been raised, and warnings made by CSIS about so-called “dual-use” technologies, including quantum computing, photonics, aeronautical and AI research. However, in no instance has a specific allegation of either copyright theft or “technology transfer” to the Chinese military been documented.

These draconian measures will halt collaborative research between Chinese and Canadian scientists in a host of engineering fields, including photonics, robotics, artificial intelligence, communications technology and aerospace—for starters. They are a bellicose attack on academic independence from state censorship, and on science itself.

The very notion that there exists such a thing as “Canadian science” is frankly absurd. Scientific research is by its very nature the result of the cumulative efforts of millions of scientists around

the world, past and present. But that fundamentally social nature of science, and therefore also its necessarily international character, given the globalized means of production, is coming into direct conflict with the campaign of imperialism to re-divide the world.

In addition to smears and fear mongering, the CSIS campaign is characterized by an utterly Orwellian level of doublespeak in which official statements mean their exact opposite. Manal Bahubeshi, vice-president of research and partnerships at NSERC, could state without shame to the *Globe and Mail*, “Our interest is really in supporting an open and collaborative research environment and supporting national and international partnerships,” while in fact working to end such partnerships.

While scare-mongering about the potential for the Chinese military to benefit from jointly conducted research, neither CSIS nor its stooges such as McCuaig-Johnston have anything to say about Canadian spying operations directed against China or against the Canadian working class. Similarly, they are silent on the extent to which Canada’s universities are being integrated into military research.

The Trudeau government banned Huawei and ZTE components from deployment in Canada’s 5G cell phone networks in 2022 on the pretext that “Beijing could use the company’s products for spying.” Yet the Canadian state reserves the right to listen to private phone calls and private emails, and vet the social media posts of the entire world. It is a member of the “Five Eyes” spying network, including the US, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, which, as Edward Snowden demonstrated, spies essentially on the entire population of the planet—from leftist opponents of imperialism to Beijing and the heads of reputed allied government like Germany.

All of the bogus and cynical appeals to “national security” cover up the real, economic and profit interests of Canadian capitalism and imperialism in the business of developing new technologies in a period of capitalist crisis and war.

The state’s campaign to block collaboration with Chinese universities has developed over the past five years, closely following the implementation of similar measures in the United States. An early media supporter was the *Globe and Mail*. On May 26, 2018, an article entitled “How Canadian money and research are helping China become a global superpower” pointed to how the Canadian state is intervening to try to cut Chinese players out of rapidly growing high-tech economic sectors and thereby strengthening the hands of their North American competitors. Jim Hinton, a Waterloo patent lawyer, stated that Canada is “...missing out on that middle piece—the commercialization of innovation. That’s where the money is. We need to retain at least some ownership of what we’re subsidizing so that we can grow technology companies that own IP behind the technology...”

In 2021, the federal government introduced a requirement for academics to undergo national security reviews if they were receiving funding from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. In February 2023, the government expanded this measure to all federal research funding bodies and pledged to stop all funding for projects involving academics with ties to Chinese military or state security institutions, which as defined by

Ottawa includes many if not most Chinese research universities.

In January 2023, the *Globe* published two articles detailing the results of “research provided to the *Globe and Mail* by US Strategic Intelligence company Strider Technologies” into joint Chinese-Canadian scientific research projects that it alleged could benefit the Chinese military. The article effectively demanded an end to such research, again citing McCuaig-Johnston, who declared, “The People’s Liberation Army is not our friend and we should not be partnering with them.”

Left out of the article was the fact that banning such collaborative research with China would reap fat profits for the financial backers of Strider Technologies, the provider of the “research” for the “article,” which was not run as a paid advertisement, though it should have been. Strider Technologies is backed financially by Koch Industries, through its “Disruptive Technologies” investment vehicle. Additional financial backers include: Valor Equity Partners, led by a former Tesla director; and “One 9 dot ca,” a venture capital investment firm led by former Canadian Armed Forces JTF2 sniper Glenn Cowan, which declares, nauseatingly, that it is “funding and scaling business using precision military tactics.” Microsoft is also a backer. Koch Industries has invested more than \$500 million in Mavenir, which is attempting to compete with Huawei in the development of 5G telecommunications platforms.

But the demonization of Chinese scientists and investors is not merely a matter of immediate business considerations. The anti-China campaign is a central component of Canadian imperialism’s preparations, alongside its US ally, to prepare for and wage war against Beijing. Its goals are to whip up an hysterical climate within the middle class to create a constituency for war, and legitimize vast spending increases on the military and intelligence services. These budgetary increases include a comprehensive modernization of the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), a bilateral US-Canada continental “defence” network aimed at creating the basis for North America’s twin imperialist powers to wage a “winnable” nuclear war with China.

The absurd, lying campaign of Canadian imperialism against its geopolitical and economic competitors exposes for all to see the utterly reactionary nature of capitalist social relations, and the fetters placed upon all future human development by the private ownership of property and the nation state system. A socialist world revolution—of North American and Chinese workers alike—is required to put scientific research and human civilization back on the path of progressive development opened up by the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution.



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