Under pressure from far-right congressmen, Eastern Michigan University ends US-Chinese research partnerships

Stephen St. Clair
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Eastern Michigan University (EMU), located in Ypsilanti, has announced the severing of its engineering teaching partnerships with two Chinese universities, Beibu Gulf University and Guangxi University. EMU's decision on May 28 coincided with Secretary of State Marco Rubio's threats to "aggressively revoke visas for Chinese students linked to the Chinese Communist Party."

Setting the stage for escalating assaults on democratic rights of international students and immigrants, Rubio stated, "The Department of Homeland Security is targeting Chinese students studying in critical fields, in physical sciences and engineering. We will also revise visa criteria to enhance scrutiny of all future visa applications from the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong."

In February, far-right Michigan Congressmen John Moolenaar, chair of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, and Tim Walberg, chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee, sent letters to EMU calling on them to end joint partnerships with Chinese universities.

Paving the way for frameups and deportations of students and academics, with no evidence, the letter stated:

> …The [People's Republic of China] systematically exploits the open research environment in the United States—actively engaging in theft, espionage, and other hostile actions against U.S. universities perpetrated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).
>
> ...The university's PRC collaborations jeopardize the integrity of U.S. research, risk the exploitation of sensitive technologies, and undermine taxpayer investments intended to strengthen America's technological and defense capabilities. **You must immediately terminate these collaborations** to prevent further PRC exploitation of U.S. research capabilities and taxpayer investments. (Emphasis added)

In March 2024 Walberg went on a fascist rant urging the total destruction of Gaza in the manner of "Nagasaki and Hiroshima," the Japanese cities the United States destroyed with atomic bombs in 1945 at the end of the Second World War. "We shouldn't be spending a dime on humanitarian aid... It should be like Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Get it over quick," he said.

Moolenaar and Walberg's campaign against university partnerships between the US and China is a calculated attack on the international scientific community and academic freedom. Its explicit goal is to drive out international scientists and systematically dismantle the deeply integrated research ties built between the US and Chinese scientific communities. More significantly, this campaign is aimed at creating an anti-Chinese hysteria as the ideological preparation for war with China, a nuclear-armed power.

In a recent war-mongering speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned that countries must not try to balance between the two superpowers, but must align with the US against China for a "potentially imminent" war.

Universities are now being realigned at an accelerating pace according to the ruling class drive for

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war. This underlies Secretary of State Rubio's May 28 threats to revoke visas of potentially 270,000 Chinese students, and the June 2 arrest of Yunqing Jian, demonized by FBI director Kash Patel, accused of "agroterrorism" for plant pathogen research at the University of Michigan. The pathogen in this case is not even on the "Select Agents and Toxins" list, which designates agents posing a severe threat if misused.

The wider campaign against international scientific research began with efforts of House leadership to coerce universities to cut ties with China. This, coupled with daily detentions and deportations of immigrants and threats to their families is aimed against the rights of the entire working class.

EMU's capitulation was the result of a February letter by Moolenaar and Walberg targeting three Michigan universities—Oakland University, the University of Detroit Mercy, and EMU—as an intimidation tactic and test for wider application.

EMU President James Smith offered a feeble defense, asserting the partnerships involved "no research or technology transfer," before capitulating. The other universities similarly buckled, claiming their programs were solely educational.

In response to previous letters, the Georgia Institute of Technology and the University of California, Berkeley announced in late 2024 the terminations of their joint partnerships. The University of Michigan followed in January 2025.

On May 15, two weeks prior to EMU's announcement to cut ties with Chinese universities, Moolenaar and Walberg, together with Roger Williams (R-TX), Chairman of the House Committee on Small Business and Brian Babin (R-TX), Chairman of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, vastly expanded their McCarthyite campaign. The scope has widened to entire state university systems: a letter sent to the University of California system and SUNY in New York warns of "the risk of Chinese infiltration and programs undermining national security."

Elite universities like Duke and Harvard face similar attacks. In May, Duke was pressured to terminate its Duke Kunshan University campus, and Harvard received an aggressive letter regarding alleged ties to the Chinese military and other sanctioned entities.

The methods of the McCarthyite witch hunts of the 1950's are being employed: links to China treated as evidence of complicity in criminal activity; vague and unsubstantiated accusations revolving around "potential risks" and "undue influence"; public smear campaigns via congressional hearings and reports; and ideological litmus tests demanding unwavering loyalty to the "national interest."

The tangible effect is a stark decline in US-China research cooperation. Between 2010 and 2021, 19,955 scientists of Chinese descent left the US, a trend accelerating after the DOJ's "China Initiative" began in 2018. National Institutes of Health (NIH) investigations found a 1.9 percent decline in publication rate and a 7.1 percent decline in citation rate for US scientists collaborating with China, compared to those collaborating with other countries.

Student exchanges have plummeted: Chinese students in the US have dropped from nearly 400,000 in 2019-20 to around 270,000 today, while US students in China fell from nearly 15,000 (2012-13) to under 800 today.

A 2025 study analyzing millions of publications from 2008-2020 found that over 45 percent of China-based international production of high-impact scientific research involved US-based scientists, and 30 percent of US-based research involved China-based scientists. This closely integrated international scientific community is under unrelenting assault.

The struggle against national chauvinism is a matter of life and death. It demands the independent political mobilization of the international working class to reject the poison of nationalism and recognize their common enemy in the capitalist system. The defense of science and academic freedom is inseparable from the broader fight against imperialist war and for socialism.

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