

Suicide of U-M researcher: Stop the persecution of Chinese scientists!

IYSSE at University of Michigan
7 April 2026

The tragic death of Danhao Wang, a brilliant Chinese postdoctoral researcher at the University of Michigan (U-M), is the direct and fatal consequence of a vicious xenophobic campaign of harassment and intimidation orchestrated by the federal government and enabled by the university administration. The suicide of this young scientist, following his interrogation by FBI agents, must be understood as a homicide in a moral and political sense—the foreseeable result of state terror and institutional complicity.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at U-M and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) demand that all those responsible for this tragedy be held accountable, from the federal agents and Trump administration officials who directed the persecution of Wang and other Chinese researchers, to the U-M Board of Regents and interim president Domenico Grasso.

To organize this fight, the IYSSE and the SEP call on the entire U-M community of students, faculty and campus workers to come to the defense of Chinese students and researchers, denounce the witch-hunt against Chinese researchers based on fabricated charges, and establish a committee of students, faculty and staff to conduct a serious investigation and build an independent movement of the working class to defend democratic rights.

Danhao Wang took his own life on the night of March 19, jumping from an upper floor within the G.G. Brown Laboratory building just one day after being subjected to hostile interrogation by federal agents. For more than two weeks, a conspiracy of silence reigned over Ann Arbor, Michigan and the nation. The U-M administration did not even inform the student body and faculty of this tragedy. An internal email not naming Wang was sent to faculty and staff of the Electrical Engineering and Computer Science Department on March 20, but no official communications were sent to the broader university community. The *Michigan Daily* student newspaper published nothing on the event. On April 2, the *World Socialist Web Site* was the first to report the identity of Wang in English-language media.

Now this cover-up has collapsed. The tragedy has become an international incident, forcing the local corporate media to finally break their silence. With the *Detroit News* featuring the

story on its April 6 front page, the university and the political establishment can no longer hide this crime.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chinese Consulate in Chicago have issued statements and lodged diplomatic protests. They correctly state that Wang's death is the result of unprovoked harassment and political intimidation by US law enforcement under the guise of "national security." They are demanding a full explanation and an investigation, which the US government and the U-M administration are seeking to avoid.

The tragedy of this loss is underscored by the statements of those who knew his work. In an email to College of Engineering students, faculty and staff, U-M Dean of Engineering Karen Thole called Wang a "promising and brilliant young mind," whose landmark research on semiconductor materials had been published in the prestigious journal *Nature*. Dean Thole wrote:

His loss is felt deeply not only by those who knew him here at the University, but also everyone who understands his potential to have contributed to breakthroughs in science that would have positively impacted people around the world.

Danhao Wang is a casualty of a nationwide dragnet targeting Chinese scholars on unscientific and fabricated charges of terrorism, espionage, and smuggling. This is a politically motivated witch-hunt designed to terrorize a targeted demographic. The charges against previous U-M researchers Yunqing Jian, Chengxuan Han, Xu Bai, Fengfan Zhang, and Zhiyong Zhang, and Indiana University researcher Youhuang Xiang, were utterly without merit, as those responsible well knew.

The targeted researchers were held in federal custody for months on end. Chengxuan Han was interrogated for hours by Customs and Border Protection officers who refused to read her Miranda rights and denied her request for a lawyer. Han and Jian were coerced into plea deals, sentenced to "time served" and deported. Bai, Zhang, and Zhang did not accept plea deals

and had their cases dismissed soon before trial, self-deporting immediately back to China. Xiang was sentenced on April 7 to “time served” and is scheduled to be deported to China on April 9. In every case the charges of smuggling harmless plasmids and shipping common model organisms collapsed under scientific and legal scrutiny, yet the damage was done: careers ruined, lives disrupted, and immigrant researchers expelled.

The campaign has been driven from the top by fascist political operatives of the Trump administration. Former Attorney General Pam Bondi and FBI Director Kash Patel have publicly advanced the narrative of widespread Chinese “sabotage” and “espionage” in US universities. Patel, in particular, sought to stoke anti-Chinese hysteria with inflammatory social media posts and statements framing routine scientific exchange as a national security threat. He falsely claimed that the nonliving plasmid DNA in Xiang’s case was the pathogenic bacteria *E. coli*.

This is a political operation against immigrants and Chinese scholars, an assault on democratic rights, an effort to whip up national chauvinism and racism. It is part of the erection of a presidential dictatorship and the preparation for war against China, a nuclear power.

The hands of the U-M administration are stained with blood. The role of interim president Domenico Grasso is particularly despicable. A week after the death of Danhao Wang, Grasso, who had suppressed the news of his death, boasted before a hearing of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce of U-M’s support for the witch-hunt against Chinese researchers.

In a display of subservience to the national security state, he detailed the university’s “team player” collaboration with federal intelligence agencies to “safeguard our research” from alleged foreign adversaries. The chair of this committee, far-right Michigan congressman Tim Walberg, praised Grasso’s cooperation. To protect its institutional funding, the U-M administration and the Board of Regents willingly handed over their own students and researchers to Kash Patel’s FBI.

The Democratic Party is completely complicit. The whipping up of xenophobic hysteria is a bipartisan effort. On the U-M campus, the silence of the Democratic Party-aligned regents and administrators denotes consent. They fully support the anti-China framework because it aligns with the strategic imperatives of American imperialism.

This is part of a sweeping attack on the democratic rights of all immigrants and the working class as a whole. The same political forces criminalizing Chinese scientists are mobilizing armed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents at airports and healthcare facilities across Michigan and the country. Trump’s drive to dictatorship, facilitated by the complicity of the Democrats, requires the victimization of scapegoats.

Repression at home is the domestic side of criminal and

genocidal war abroad, as in the US-Israeli war against Iran.

The defense of democratic rights and the opposition to imperialist war cannot be entrusted to the university administration, the courts, or any faction of the capitalist political establishment. The only social force capable of stopping this descent into barbarism is the international working class, mobilized independently and in opposition to all the institutions of the ruling financial oligarchy.

The IYSSE and the SEP are taking the lead in this fight. We call for the immediate formation of a committee of U-M students, faculty, campus workers and researchers to conduct a full, independent investigation and mobilize workers and students at U-M and beyond.

We raise the following demands:

- A full independent investigation: The U-M administration and federal authorities must immediately release all documents, communications and footage regarding the harassment and interrogation of Danhao Wang.

- Hold the perpetrators accountable: The Republican and Democratic officials spearheading the anti-Chinese witch-hunt must be driven from office and prosecuted; the federal agents involved in the hostile interrogation, along with the U-M officials who facilitated the environment of terror, including President Grasso, must be identified, fired and held accountable.

- End the witch-hunt: All investigations, surveillance and harassment of Chinese scholars based on fabricated “national security threats” must cease immediately.

- Restore the victims’ rights: Drop all charges against those researchers who have been victimized and deported and offer the restoration of their resident rights and their university positions.

- ICE off campus and out of our communities: An immediate end to the terrorizing of immigrants and citizens alike at airports, hospitals and universities. Abolish ICE and the Border Patrol.

- Stop the drive to World War III: End the provocations against China and the war against Iran.

Join the IYSSE to help lead this fight.



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