

Anti-Chinese witch-hunt continues

Indiana University postdoctoral fellow Youhuang Xiang sentenced to time served and ordered deported

Stephen St. Clair
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On April 7, Youhuang Xiang, a 32-year-old postdoctoral fellow at Indiana University (IU), was sentenced to time served and ordered immediately deported to China. After over four months of detention, Xiang was coerced into pleading guilty to trumped-up federal charges of smuggling innocuous *E. coli* plasmid DNA into the United States.

Xiang, who holds a PhD from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, arrived at Indiana University's Department of Biology in June 2023 on a J-1 visa. In November 2025, he was detained by US Customs and Border Protection at Chicago O'Hare International Airport upon returning from a research trip. The basis for his arrest was a package he had received at his Bloomington, Indiana home months earlier from a colleague in China. The package included plasmid DNA of *E. coli*.

Under ordinary circumstances, a lapse in biological materials transfer is handled by the US Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, which typically destroys the material and issues a warning or a fine, depending on the severity. In the cases of Xiang and five Chinese researchers at the University of Michigan (U-M), the Department of Justice transformed this administrative matter into felony charges of conspiracy, smuggling, and lying to federal authorities, carrying a potential sentence of 25 years in prison.

The US government, abetted by a compliant corporate press and IU administration, spun a hysterical narrative that Xiang had smuggled the pathogenic bacteria *E. coli*. The reality, obvious to any undergraduate biology student, was entirely different. Plasmid DNA are small, circular DNA molecules used by researchers to replicate and study genes. They possess no infectious qualities and cannot cause sickness.

Faced with the threat of a lengthy prison term, Xiang was coerced into a plea agreement in March in which prosecutors recommended a sentence of "time served." Nevertheless, Chief Judge James R. Sweeney II delayed sentencing for over four weeks to probe Xiang's modest finances.

Driven by the imperatives of US imperialism's escalating military and economic confrontation with China, the Trump administration is collaborating with universities to frame scientists as agents of espionage and terrorism.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has documented this state-sponsored terror campaign:

?Yunqing Jian: Jian, a 33-year-old U-M postdoctoral researcher, was arrested in June 2025 and charged with smuggling *Fusarium graminearum*, a common plant fungus. She was held in a county jail for more than five months before being coerced into a plea deal in November, sentenced to time served, and deported to China. At the sentencing hearing, the US attorney admitted, "I don't have evidence that she had evil intent," contradicting the entire "national security" basis of the case.

?Chengxuan Han: Han, a 28-year-old visiting doctoral student, was arrested following an unconstitutional interrogation at which she was not read her Miranda rights, was denied counsel, and was given an incompetent translator. She faced severe federal charges for sending packages containing nonhazardous *C. elegans* roundworms to U-M researchers. After being jailed for three months, the threat of decades in prison forced her into pleading no contest in September 2025, leading to a sentence of time served and swift deportation.

?Xu Bai, Fengfan Zhang, and Zhiyong Zhang: These three U-M researchers were fired by the university in October after refusing to participate in an internal investigation related to Han's shipment of *C. elegans* roundworms to their lab. The three were arrested and jailed for three months. In a humiliating defeat for the Justice Department and the University of Michigan, the government abruptly requested the dismissal of all charges against the trio on February 4, days before the case was set to go to trial.

The IU-Bloomington chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), led by Xiang's supervisor, Professor Roger Innes, issued a statement noting the

“mischaracterization of a common and routine method of obtaining research samples” and condemning IU’s complicity with federal agents. The statement declared, “When false allegations are raised, it is the responsibility of the university administration to defend the reputation of those wrongly accused.” The AAUP at U-M has issued no statement on any of the five victimized U-M researchers in the 10 months since Jian’s arrest.

This relentless psychological and legal terror has now claimed a life. On the night of March 19, Danhao Wang, a 30-year-old assistant research scientist in the U-M Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS) Department, jumped to his death from an upper story in the George G. Brown Memorial Laboratories building on the university’s North Campus. He was pronounced dead the following day in what authorities are calling a “possible act of self-harm.” Wang was a brilliant, world-class scholar with over 110 co-authored publications. He played a critical role in developing breakthrough innovations for advancing the next generation of electronic and optoelectronic devices.

According to statements from the Chinese Foreign Ministry and the Chinese Consulate in Chicago, Dr. Wang had been subjected to severe and “hostile questioning” by US federal agents regarding his research shortly before his death.

When the arrests of Jian, Han, Bai, F. Zhang, and Z. Zhang were announced, U-M did not defend its scholars or the integrity of their research. It made no effort to explain the innocuous, standard nature of the biological materials involved. Instead, the administration immediately revoked their research positions, issued statements promising full cooperation with federal law enforcement, and actively aided federal agencies in ruining the lives of these young scientists.

This complicity was further exposed following the tragic suicide of Danhao Wang. For two weeks, the U-M administration suppressed news of the suicide. The university has since refused to comment beyond stating that an investigation is underway.

On March 26, one week after the suicide of Wang, U-M Interim President Domenico Grasso testified at a hearing of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce titled “US Universities Under Siege: Foreign Espionage, Stolen Innovation, and the National Security Threat.” He told the committee, chaired by far-right Michigan Republican Tim Walberg:

As an engineer and an army veteran, who currently holds a top secret security clearance, I’m deeply committed to protecting our nation’s security. ... This commitment is illustrated by our decision to end a relationship with a university in China that is seen as a potential threat to America’s interests. We made this decision after discussion with this committee and the

House Select Committee on the CCP (Chinese Communist Party).

He boasted of terminating the visas of accused Chinese researchers, telling the committee:

In isolated but serious incidents, a small number of university students and researchers from China have been arrested for unlawful activities. ... Once alerted, we acted swiftly and decisively—working with federal law enforcement, promptly terminating student and work visas, and severing all ties with those individuals.

When U-M and IU canceled the Chinese researchers’ visas, all six were immediately subject to detention by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Because time spent in an administrative ICE facility would not count toward any potential “time served” sentence, these scientists were forced to accept federal detention without bail.

The University of Michigan cannot be trusted to investigate its own complicity in the death of Danhao Wang. An administration that boasts of its alignment with the national security state and actively facilitates the deportation of its own researchers will produce nothing but a whitewash designed to protect its lucrative government funding.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at U-M are calling for an independent investigation into the death of Danhao Wang. This investigation must be completely independent of the corporate-controlled U-M Board of Regents and the university administration. It must be organized, led, and overseen by a committee consisting of representatives of the researchers, students, faculty and campus workers.

We call as well for the dropping of all charges against Youhuang Xiang and the exoneration and offer of repatriation to the five victimized U-M researchers.



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