US detains and deports Chinese scientists at Seattle-Tacoma Airport

Stephen St. Clair
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The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a safety alert to its citizens on April 16, warning them of "malicious" interrogation and harassment by United States border authorities. The advisory explicitly urged Chinese nationals to avoid traveling through Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

The immediate trigger for this extraordinary diplomatic warning is the recent detention and deportation of approximately 20 Chinese scholars at the Seattle airport. According to the Chinese ministry, these scientists, who were traveling to the US to attend an academic conference, were subjected to "unreasonable questioning" and denied entry by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), despite holding valid US visas. The precise number of scholars, the date of deportation, and the location and subject of the academic conference they were planning to attend have not been reported.

The advisory issued by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs states:

> In light of the repeated incidents at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport involving malicious inspections and harassment targeting Chinese scholars, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chinese embassies and consulates in the United States remind Chinese citizens planning to travel to the US in the near future to strengthen their awareness of security precautions, avoid entering the country through this airport, and learn the US entry regulations in detail in advance so as to make full preparations. If questioned or inspected by US law enforcement personnel, they should respond calmly and rationally.

This mass deportation is part of a US government witch-hunt against visiting Chinese scientists that has already included the jailing and deportation of at least six researchers, five at the University of Michigan (U-M) and one at Indiana University, and led to the suicide of a U-M scientist. The Trump administration, in collaboration with the Democratic Party, is seeking to whip up anti-Chinese sentiment in preparation for war with China.

Over the past year, the Department of Justice has coordinated with U-M to jail and deport plant biologists Yunqing Jian, Chengxuan Han, Xu Bai, Fengfan Zhang, and Zhiyong Zhang. They were arrested, prosecuted, and deported on unscientific, trumped-up charges of "smuggling" common nonhazardous research materials.

At Indiana University, Youhuang Xiang was similarly targeted by federal agents in coordination with the university administration, jailed for over four months, and sentenced to time served. His research supervisor, distinguished plant biologist Professor Roger Innes, called the prosecution "100 percent politically motivated." While Xiang was sentenced on April 7, he has not yet been deported and is being held in an ICE detention center near Kokomo, Indiana. This two-week delay follows a five-week delay between Xiang's plea agreement and sentencing, ordered by Chief Judge James R. Sweeney II, a Trump appointee and member of the far-right Federalist Society.

This campaign has claimed a life. Dr. Danhao Wang, a brilliant 30-year-old postdoctoral researcher at U-M, took his own life on the night of March 19, falling from an upper floor in the atrium of his place of work on the Ann Arbor campus, just hours after he was subjected to interrogation by federal investigators. The Chinese government has called upon US authorities to investigate the suicide of Wang.

After two weeks of silence from the university, the *World Socialist Web Site* was the first to report the identity of Wang on April 2. The university refuses to comment on its investigation and has issued no statement to the broader U-M community on the death of Wang. Articles by the WSWS calling for an independent investigation led by U-M researchers, students, staff and faculty have been subjected to political censorship on the University of Michigan r/uofm subreddit. While the story has been covered by some national and international media, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have yet to write about the suicide of Danhao Wang.

U-M President Domenico Grasso boasted of the university's collaboration with this witch-hunt. A week after the death of Wang, at a March 26 hearing of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, titled, "US Universities Under Siege: Foreign Espionage, Stolen Innovation, & the National Security Threat," Grasso testified before right-wing chairman Tim Walberg. He told 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.

Both Republican and Democratic administrations have weaponized immigration, customs and the national security apparatus to disrupt scientific ties with China and terrorize immigrant researchers on campus and at ports of entry. Michigan Democratic Representative Haley Stevens sponsored a bill that would amend the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act to vastly expand the definition of partnership with "malign foreign talent programs," exposing researchers to federal scrutiny for routine academic exchanges, shared research data, and even co-authorship of papers.

The scientific research of Danhao Wang is critical to developing the next generation of microprocessors made from a new class of advanced materials known as wurtzite ferroelectric nitrides. His landmark 2025 paper in the journal *Nature* solved a physical contradiction that had long stumped the scientific community.

Ferroelectric materials are heavily studied because they can maintain an electrical polarization, a collective ordering in the material's lattice structure in which positive and negative charges throughout are offset in a preferred direction, a direction that can be reversed when the material is placed in an electric field. A ferroelectric crystal can thus be engineered to be divided into "domains," regions in which the polarization points one way, separated from neighboring regions in which it points another. Where two domains meet with their positive ends facing each other, an intense sheet of positive charge accumulates at the boundary that should, in principle, tear the crystal lattice apart.

Wang and his colleagues showed how this seeming contradiction is resolved. The intense positive charge at the interface pulls mobile electrons out of the surrounding crystal and draws them to the boundary. These electrons do double duty: they neutralize the overwhelming repulsion, stabilizing the structure, and they collect into a two-dimensional sheet, a superhighway for electricity. This channel, theoretically carrying at least 30 times the charge-carrier density of a standard gallium nitride transistor, can be dynamically tuned, moved, and switched on or off.

Gallium nitride is the indispensable material for the Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radars on US Navy warships, the Marine Corps' AN/TPS-80 systems, and the Patriot and THAAD missile defense networks. Wang's discovery provided the theoretical architecture for a massive leap in this technology. Furthermore, because ferroelectric nitrides can integrate memory and logic processing within the same material, Wang's research could serve as the physical substrate for neuromorphic "edge AI" computing, enabling AI processing on local devices rather than the cloud.

The US defense apparatus is desperate to monopolize these capabilities. China currently controls roughly 98 percent of the global production of raw gallium, and has already begun using export restrictions in retaliation against the US tech blockade. The Pentagon, acting through agencies like the Army Research Office (which partially funded Wang's work), is frantic to engineer its way out of this strategic vulnerability.

The ultra-efficient microelectronics made possible by Wang's theoretical breakthroughs must be physically manufactured, etched and assembled. This process rests entirely on the exploitation of a massive, globally interconnected industrial working class. The workers in the massive semiconductor fabrication plants across the globe—at TSMC in Taiwan, at Samsung and SK Hynix in South Korea, at Intel and GlobalFoundries in the United States, and at SMIC in China—are the ones who turn the theoretical breakthroughs into material reality.

The global semiconductor and high-tech industries rely on a multilayered international labor process: theorists and lab researchers in universities; skilled technicians and assemblers in fabrication plants; logistics workers in ports and airports; and service and maintenance personnel who keep production running.

The political assault on Chinese scientists is an attack on the democratic rights of all immigrants and working people. Deportations, visa revocations and workplace raids are signals that any worker can be treated as disposable when corporate and military imperatives demand it.

The only social force capable of defending scientists, halting the xenophobic witch-hunt, and preventing a global conflagration is the international working class. The workers who build the world's microelectronics must unite with the scientists who design them.

We call on semiconductor workers, technologists and students to build rank-and-file committees independent of the corporate-controlled trade union bureaucracy, to establish lines of communication across national borders. The capitalist military-industrial complex must be dismantled and the giant tech monopolies must be expropriated and placed under the democratic control of the working class. The discoveries of materials science must be liberated from the grip of imperialism. Only the socialist transformation of society can ensure that the genius of researchers like Danhao Wang serves the flourishing of humanity, rather than its destruction.