Campus police report sheds new light on suicide of University of Michigan researcher Danhao Wang

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On the morning of March 18, 2026, two Homeland Security officers knocked on the door of a rented house in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Danhao Wang, a 31-year-old postdoctoral research scientist in electrical and computer engineering at the University of Michigan (U-Mich), came outside. It was bitterly cold, and one of the officers offered to reschedule the interview. Wang wanted to talk. The three drove separately to a coffee shop and spoke for about half an hour.

Thirty-six hours later, Wang was dead, having jumped from an upper level in the George G. Brown building on campus. What the coroner recorded as "suicide by blunt force trauma" was the product of a political campaign by federal agencies and university administrations to intimidate, criminalize and expel Chinese researchers.

The U-Mich campus police released its report on Wang's death to the *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press* in compliance with Freedom of Information Act submissions. The university administration had withheld the report, saying it would release it only after the investigation had been completed. The *News* and *Free Press* published articles on the report on September 17.

The report confirms that the agency which oversaw the interrogation was the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In July, the *South China Morning Post* had reported that one of the two officers was from Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the other from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), two sub-agencies of DHS.

What was said to Wang is not in the record. The report redacts the officers' names and titles and omits the substance of the interview.

The morning after the interview, Wang visited John Minock, an Ann Arbor criminal defense attorney who had represented Chinese researchers at the university accused of smuggling biological samples. They spoke from 9 to 11:30 a.m. Wang was "extraordinarily anxious," Minock later told the *South China Morning Post*. He said he "tried his best to assure Wang that everything would be fine."

Around 10:30 that night, Wang's landlord saw him leave through the back door, apparently crying. At roughly 10:50, Wang arrived at the George G. Brown Memorial Laboratories, where he worked. He stepped into the hallway with a friend, who later told police that Wang looked "weird," and that he "did not look like himself." Wang said he had been questioned by DHS and that his lawyer had told him "this is nothing serious."

The friend began to ask about a research paper. "That's when Wang ran and jumped over the glass railing on the third floor onto the second floor," he told police. Wang was pronounced dead in the early hours of March 20. A toxicology finding of fentanyl at 1 nanogram per milliliter is a low, therapeutic-range level consistent with hospital pain management during resuscitation, not illicit use or overdose, according to the police report. Police found Minock's business card in Wang's pocket and used it to contact the lawyer the next morning. "I was shocked," Minock said.

Working in Professor Zetian Mi's laboratory since 2022, Wang stood at the forefront of research into ferroelectric nitride semiconductors. His April 2025 paper in *Nature* mapped their switching mechanisms for the first time. He had secured a faculty position at the University of Science and Technology of China in Hefei, his alma mater, and planned to return in May to marry his fiancée. His ashes only reached his mother, his sole immediate family, nearly four months after his death.

Wang's death came amid the prosecution of five Chinese researchers at U-Mich—Yunqing Jian, Chengxuan Han, Xu Bai, Fengfan Zhang, and Zhiyong Zhang—and Youhuang Xiang at Indiana University. The careers of all six were destroyed over the shipment of harmless laboratory materials. The University of Michigan and Indiana University terminated the researchers' employment and revoked their visa sponsorships, exposing them to indefinite administrative detention by the Trump administration's immigration police. Jian, Han, and Xiang were coerced into plea bargains and deported; Bai, Zhang, and Zhang had charges dropped after months of detention.

This political persecution of Chinese scholars is the policy of the Trump administration, with the collaboration of the Democratic Party and the university administrations. It continues and intensifies the China Initiative, a Justice

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Department witch-hunt launched in 2018 that targeted Chinese-American scientists and researchers through fabricated espionage charges. The purpose of the campaign is to whip up xenophobia as part of the drive toward war against China.

U-Mich withheld Wang's name for two weeks, until the *World Socialist Web Site* first identified him on April 2. One week after Wang's death, on March 26, U-M President Domenico Grasso testified before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce at a hearing titled "US Universities Under Siege: Foreign Espionage, Stolen Innovation, & the National Security Threat."

Grasso opened by boasting of his top-secret clearance, telling the committee: "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." He stressed that the university had terminated the visas of the five Chinese researchers, declaring: "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." He closed by assuring the committee that "safety and security is a *team* effort, and at Michigan, we know how important it is to be a *team player*" [Grasso's emphasis].

At this hearing, Representative Haley Stevens, a Michigan Democrat, promoted the United States Research Protection Act, passed in the House but pending in committee in the Senate. This legislation would extend federal scrutiny to what was previously considered entirely routine academic exchanges, including shared data analysis and even the co-authorship of scientific papers with foreign nationals.

On September 15, at the "Pro-Human Assembly" on AI in Washington, Steve Bannon—an organizer of Trump's January 6, 2021 coup attempt, who once called for government scientists' heads to be put "on pikes"—declared: "We should take all Chinese nationals and get them out of the labs and get them back to mainland China." It could be done by "executive action," he said, adding, "We can shut it down in 72 hours."

Bannon spoke from a platform shared with Senator Bernie Sanders, who thanked the organizers for "bringing people of different political perspectives together." Sanders remained silent as Bannon called for mass expulsions. Sanders' "progressive" nationalism converges with the fascist right on the drive toward war against China. AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten also spoke.

Two days later, the same economic nationalism and anti-China chauvinism was on display at the UAW's Community Action Program conference in Lansing. UAW President Shawn Fain and Democratic Socialists of America-backed Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed attacked Trump for welcoming Chinese-owned plants onto American soil, attacking him from the right.

El-Sayed identified himself with General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis, declaring: "If I'm the Big Three right now, I'm pissed off as hell at Donald Trump." He promised an American electric vehicle that would "beat the hell out of whatever China is putting out." Fain denounced Chinese-owned production as "a slap in the face to America" and attacked China's "slave labor."

The researchers who design semiconductors and the workers who manufacture them are bound in a single global chain of production. Wang's theoretical breakthroughs are realized only through the labor of the industrial working class in the fabrication plants of TSMC, Samsung, Intel and SMIC. Defending GM, Ford and Stellantis against Chinese manufacturers serves the profits of the Big Three, not the interests of American autoworkers, and Chinese workers gain nothing from the ambitions of their own capitalist ruling class. Economic nationalism serves only to divide the international working class along national lines, pitting workers against one another to the benefit of corporate interests.

The persecution and scapegoating of Chinese researchers goes hand in hand with the victimization of immigrants. These attacks are the spearhead of the drive to destroy the democratic rights of the working class as a whole and establish dictatorial rule.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the University of Michigan is demanding a full investigation into the suicide of Wang. The IYSSE is calling for:

? An independent committee of campus workers, researchers and students to investigate Wang's death;

? The public identification of the officers who interrogated him, and the unredacted disclosure of every communication between the University of Michigan and the federal agencies;

? An end to the witch-hunts, the dropping of all charges against targeted researchers, and the cessation of surveillance and harassment of Chinese scholars;

? The mobilization of workers and students to stop the militarization of the campuses and the drive toward war with China.

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