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ASBMB: Racial profiling hurts science

The Department of Justice's efforts under the China Initiative have resulted in instances of unjust racial profiling of Asians and Asian American scientists. As a nation, we must signal to the world that the U.S. is not hostile to international collaboration and that we embrace diversity in all of our endeavors. To maintain American research prominence and leadership, we must continue to attract high-skilled foreign talent from around the world and especially from China. But recent efforts by the DOJ and multiple federal funding science agencies have put a target on Chinese and Chinese American researchers and scientists, causing a [chilling effect on international scientific collaboration](#).

In the last few decades, students from China have emerged as one of the most important sources of high-level international STEM talent in the U.S. [Chinese nationals have earned](#) by the far the most U.S. science and engineering doctorates of any non-U.S. nationality since 2000. The vast majority of Chinese Ph.D. graduates from U.S. institutions, [about 80 percent every year](#), have chosen to stay and work in this country after receiving their diplomas. These students prevent a [drastic shortage of STEM talent](#) and contribute to the productivity and innovation of the American research enterprise.

The [DOJ's China Initiative](#) has been operating for two years; during that time the agency has brought a handful of cases involving academic scientists. Notably, none of those researchers have been charged with economic espionage; instead, they have been charged with administrative relate errors, such as making false statement or filing false tax returns. The [majority of the defendants](#) are of Chinese descent or nationality, which is especially concerning because defendants of Chinese ethnicity have been [unjustly accused of economic espionage at twice the rate](#) of non-Chinese defendants. This pattern of racial profiling and persecution of Asian and Chinese scientists has resulted in a [chilling effect on bilateral research partnerships](#).

While the DOJ targets Chinese and Asian American scientists, federal funding agencies are providing the scientific community inadequate guidance. [According to the Government Accountability Office](#), the National Institutes of Health, [the largest funder of basic scientific research](#), does not address non-financial conflicts of interest, such as foreign affiliations in its policy. Without sound agency-wide policies and definitions on non-financial interests, grant-receiving institutions are not able to sufficiently separate bad actors from scientists who have made administrative errors.

The scientific community cannot support the racial profiling of Asian and Asian American scientists. This practice is severely damaging to the American research enterprise and erodes the U.S.'s role as the global leader in science and technology. American science is international at its core, and we must do everything within our power to ensure the enterprise is diverse and collaborative.