

In the aftermath of 'The China Initiative' a survey finds a third of Chinese scientists feel unwelcome in U.S.

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A small team of biostatisticians and engineers from Princeton, Harvard, and MIT, has found via survey, that Chinese scientists working in the

U.S. no longer feel welcome in the country.

In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the group describes how they analyzed surveys taken by 1,304 Chinese academics working in the U.S. and what they discovered.

Back in 2018, the Trump administration set up what has come to be known as the Chinese Initiative—a program designed to seek out Chinese spies working in the U.S. One of its main goals was to look for spies working in academia, which when found, would reduce supposed [technology transfer](#) from the U.S. to China.

As part of the initiative, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) began arresting suspected academic spies and attempting to prosecute them. Most such efforts failed due to lack of evidence. The China Initiative was canceled when President Biden won the 2020 election. But as the researchers with this new effort have found, the initiative has had lingering effects.

During the initiative, Chinese, and even Chinese American scientists working in the U.S. fell under suspicion regardless of their activities or work. This resulted in fear of groundless prosecution, which led many Chinese scientists to leave the U.S., or to at least consider doing so.

It also led to greatly reduced communications between scientists in the U.S. collaborating with colleagues in China—a trend that has continued even after the cancelation of the initiative. In this new effort, the research team wanted to discover how Chinese and Chinese American scientists are feeling about working and/or living in the U.S.

To that end they first conducted an analysis of 200 million [scientific papers](#) looking for trends in Chinese scientific endeavors. They found that Chinese scientists in the U.S. are continuing to return to China in

large numbers.

The research team then created and sent out a [survey](#) aimed at learning more about how Chinese and Chinese American scientists are feeling about working and living in the U.S. They received 1,304 replies and after studying them, found that over a third of the respondents reported feeling unwelcome in the U.S. and 72% reported feeling unsafe. Also, 86% of them reported finding it more difficult to recruit top-tier [international students](#) compared to five years prior.

More information: Yu Xie et al, Caught in the crossfire: Fears of Chinese–American scientists, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2023). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2216248120](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2216248120)

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