

US: NYU researchers took bribes from Chinese group

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Three New York University researchers from China divulged results from a U.S.-funded study to Chinese competitors in exchange for tuition, rent and other expenses, federal prosecutors said Monday.

Zhu Yudong, a U.S.-educated NYU professor, and Yang Xing, a lab engineer, were released on bail after appearing in court in Manhattan to face commercial bribery and other charges. They left court without speaking to reporters. The third defendant, postdoctoral fellow Li Ye, was at large.

A criminal complaint alleges the three provided nonpublic information about magnetic resonance imaging to a medical company in China, United Imaging Healthcare, and a research institute supported by the Chinese government.

Authorities described the 44-year-old Zhu as "an accomplished researcher and innovator in the field of MRI technology" who was hired as associate professor of radiology at NYU Langone Medical Center in 2008. In 2010, he received a multimillion-dollar grant from the National Institutes of Health for his MRI research. He later recruited Yang and Li to work for him.

The complaint accuses Zhu of arranging for United Imaging to pay for Yang and Li's expenses. It says all three failed to disclose to NYU that they were still affiliated with both the company and the Shenzhen Institute of Advanced Technology.

The Shenzhen institute is a branch of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. It states its mission as promoting innovation and development through "self-owned intellectual property," U.S. authorities said.

The men face up to five years in prison if convicted of the bribery count. Zhu faces up to 20 years on a separate charge of falsifying records in connection with his federal grant.

Earlier this year, NYU launched an internal review that uncovered the conflict of interest, authorities said. Last month, security cameras captured Yang taking photos of equipment in one research area, and emails showed that Zhu and Yang corresponded with United Imaging about "MRI equipment prototypes, experiments and project updates," the complaint said.

When confronted by NYU administrators, Li told them that he was paid thousands of dollars this year by the Chinese institute for work on its MRI project and that Zhu "performs the same work on research for that project as he does for the university," the complaint says.

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