

June 18, 2025

Director Dr. Jay Bhattacharya National Institutes of Health 9000 Rockville Pike Bethesda, MD 20892

Interim Director Mr. Brian Stone National Science Foundation 2415 Eisenhower Avenue Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Director Bhattacharya and Interim Director Stone:

We are deeply alarmed about recent reports and related criminal charges involving Chinese nationals with direct ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) allegedly smuggling dangerous biological materials into the United States for use at University of Michigan (UM) laboratories. On June 2, 2025, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) charged Yunqing Jian and Zunyong Liu, both citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC), with conspiracy, smuggling goods into the United States, making false statements, and visa fraud. Just five days later, on June 8, 2025, authorities arrested Chengxuan Han for smuggling biological materials into the U.S. and making false statements to border officials, exposing a troubling pattern of apparent criminal activity within a single week. The Select Committee on the Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party previously revealed that a PRC national ran an illegal biolab in California filled with thousands of unlabeled pathogen samples and containing a freezer labeled "Ebola," a CDC-designated Select Agent—highlighting a broader pattern of concerning PRC biological activities.

The Committees found that Jian and Liu conducted research under the supervision of, or in concert with, UM professors funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF). It is our position that Chinese researchers tied to the PRC defense research and industrial base have no business participating in U.S. taxpayer-funded research with clear national security implications—especially those related to dangerous biological materials.

According to public reports, Jian and Liu attempted to smuggle a fungus identified as a potential agroterrorism agent.⁴ This toxic fungus, *Fusarium graminearum*, causes "head blight," a disease that affects wheat, barley, maize, and rice, resulting in billions of dollars in worldwide agricultural losses annually.⁵ The toxins it produces can cause vomiting, liver damage, and reproductive harm in both humans and livestock.⁶ According to the DOJ, a WeChat conversation

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shows Liu instructing Jian on how to smuggle the fungus.⁷ Liu later admitted to investigators that he planned to conduct research experiments in the same UM laboratory as Jian.⁸

Jian worked as a postdoctoral fellow in UM's Molecular Plant-Microbe Interaction Laboratory, led by Professors Libo Shan and Ping He.⁹ She joined the lab in August 2022 after completing two years of postdoctoral research at Zhejiang University¹⁰—a university coadministered by China's State Administration for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND), which supports China's military-civil fusion and defense modernization goals.¹¹

According to an October 2023 publication, Jian was affiliated with the State Key Laboratory of Rice Biology and the Key Laboratory of Molecular Biology of Crop Pathogens and Insects at Zhejiang University. She received PRC government funding for a postdoctoral position at Zhejiang University from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2024, a period that overlapped with her postdoctoral appointments at Texas A&M and UM. The CCP recognized Jian as an Outstanding Graduate Student for both her scientific achievements and Party membership.

Zunyong Liu—the alleged partner and co-conspirator of Jian—co-authored publications with Shan and He¹⁵ and was listed as a postdoctoral fellow in their lab at UM as of April 2024, ¹⁶ three months before his blocked entry by U.S. Customs and Border Protection for attempting to smuggle an undeclared biological material. ¹⁷ Liu's most recent co-authored publications with Shan appeared in November and December 2024, where he listed UM as his institutional affiliation. ¹⁸ Similar to Jian, records show Liu was also affiliated with the State Key Laboratory of Rice Biology and the Key Laboratory of Molecular Biology of Crop Pathogens and Insects at Zhejiang University. ¹⁹ Liu is now listed as a "Hundred Talents Program" researcher on Zhejiang University's website. ²⁰ The Hundred Talents Program is a Chinese government-sponsored talent recruitment initiative that, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, "focuses on attracting a younger talent pool" of individuals who "demonstrate internationally-recognized expertise." ²¹ Liu has benefited from several streams of PRC funding, including 973 Program support in 2015, ²² a China Postdoctoral Science Foundation grant in 2017, ²³ and Zhejiang government funding in 2025 to continue his *Fusarium* research. ²⁴

According to NIH and NSF records, Professors Shan and He have received over \$9.6 million in U.S. government funding since 2010,²⁵ including multiple active grants from both agencies.²⁶ Several of these federally-funded projects have supported publications co-authored by Jian and Liu.²⁷ Additionally, according to a 2019 publication that cited NSF and NIH as funding sources, both Professors Shan and He appear to have maintained dual affiliations with China Agricultural University, while simultaneously holding positions at Texas A&M University.²⁸

These concerning patterns of CCP-affiliated researchers at UM extend beyond the Jian and Liu case. On June 8, 2025, authorities arrested Chengxuan Han for smuggling biological materials into the U.S. and making false statements to border officials.²⁹ According to the FBI complaint, Han sent four packages containing concealed roundworm specimens from China to

recipients at UM.³⁰ Han serves as Party Secretary of the Second Graduate Student Party Branch in Biological Sciences at Huazhong University of Science and Technology (HUST) and was named a university-level "Red Model" in 2020—an award the CCP grants to exemplary Party-aligned students.³¹ Like Zhejiang University, HUST is co-administered by SASTIND and maintains ties to China's defense industrial base,³² including direct recruitment pipelines for components of the People's Liberation Army.³³

These incidents highlight potential cases of non-compliance and other gaps within the U.S. research security enterprise—despite years of federal action, including: Executive Branch leadership through National Security Presidential Memorandum 33;³⁴ congressional directives mandating disclosures requirements;³⁵ a prohibition on malign foreign talent programs;³⁶ the creation of risk assessment tools;³⁷ and agency-level efforts such as updated due diligence protocols,³⁸ training modules,³⁹ and working groups of their own.⁴⁰ The delay by the Biden Administration in issuing timely implementation guidance of these research security measures may have contributed to these gaps and failings.

Given these recent criminal charges within a week of one another, the Committees respectfully urge NIH and NSF to initiate a full review of any grants awarded to the University of Michigan related to these incidents. The review should assess national security vulnerabilities of the type of research, potential violations of grant terms and conditions, disclosure failures, and whether their affiliations with Chinese institutions facilitated the recruitment of foreign students at the expense of opportunities for American students. Pending the outcome of the review, we encourage your agencies to consider all possible remedies and disciplinary actions.

We request that you produce documents and information sufficient to respond to the following questions applicable to your respective agencies no later than <u>July 2, 2025</u>:

- 1. Please conduct a full review of all grants awarded to the UM's Molecular Plant-Microbe Interaction Laboratory, including Professors He and Shan, to determine whether any restrictions or prohibitions—pursuant to grant terms and conditions, agency policy and regulations, or federal statutes—have been violated. Provide a detailed report to the Committees on the findings within 30 days.
- 2. Did NIH and/or NSF conduct due diligence risk analysis on Professors Shan and He for these awards?
- 3. Do NIH and NSF share due diligence reports on prospective grant awardees with each other or other federal science agencies?
- 4. Did any intellectual property derive from your agency's awards to Professors Shan and He?
- 5. Do NIH and NSF conduct compliance, monitoring, and additional due diligence preaward, post-award, and during the period of performance?
- 6. Do NIH and NSF have the necessary language support capabilities when conducting due diligence? Much of the information that would reveal ties, affiliations, grants, contracts, awards, etc., is published in Mandarin.

- 7. Identify all NIH and NSF awards to Professors Shan and He and provide proposal and program review documents to the Committees.
- 8. Provide an overview of the purpose of the NIH and NSF funded research to Professors Shan and He, and the justification for how it serves the interest of the United States.
- 9. Could any of the awards to Shan and He be used to develop bioweapons capabilities?
- 10. What steps are being taken to ensure fundamental research is not being utilized to create bioweapons?
- 11. Did any NSF or NIH funding pay for any travel expenses or accommodations, including stipends, for Yunqing Jian and Zunyong Liu? If yes, to where?
- 12. Did Professors Shan and He travel to China during the period of performance of their grants while Yunqing Jian and Zunyong Liu worked with them, respectively?
- 13. Did NIH or NSF know that Professors Shan and He had dual affiliations in the past or investigate whether they still had dual affiliations for more recent grants?
- 14. How are dual appointments investigated—particularly if they are with a non-U.S. institution such as China?
- 15. What are the consequences of incomplete or incorrect disclosures?
- 16. Does your agency coordinate with other federal agencies regarding identified foreign relationships?
- 17. What steps are you taking to ensure we are protecting our research ecosystem from China's targeting of foreign expertise, technology, and know-how to support their technology, economic, and military goals?
- 18. Did any of the alleged actions of the three apprehended individuals violate the policies outlined in the May 2024 *United States Government Policy for Oversight of Dual Use Research of Concern and Pathogens with Enhanced Pandemic Potential*?⁴¹

House Resolution 5 delegates to the Select Committee broad authority to investigate and submit policy recommendations on countering the economic, technological, security, and ideological threats of the Chinese Communist Party to the United States and allies and partners of the United States. Under House Rule X, the Committee on Education and Workforce (Committee) has legislative and oversight jurisdiction over "education or labor generally." Under House Rule X, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology has legislative and oversight authority of scientific research, development, and demonstration projects as well as special oversight authority over all laws, programs, and Government activities relating to nonmilitary research and development. Upon receipt of this letter, please maintain and preserve all hard copy and electronic documents, including electronic communications, related to the subject matter of this letter.

We appreciate your prompt attention to these concerns and, for administrative clarity and to avoid delay, welcome individual responses from each agency. Please confirm receipt immediately and provide a full response no later than <u>July 2, 2025</u>.

Sincerely,

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Chairman

Select Committee on the CCP

Tin Walberg

John Moderson

Tim Walberg

Chairman

Committee on Education and Workforce

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Mike Haridopolos Member of Congress

Mike Horidopolas

subsites/select committee on the ccp. house. gov/files/evo-media-document/scc-reedley-report-11.15.pdf.

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¹ Press Release, U.S. Dep't of Just., Chinese Nationals Charged with Conspiracy and Smuggling of Dangerous Biological Pathogen into U.S. (May 30, 2024), https://www.justice.gov/usao-edmi/pr/chinese-nationals-charged-conspiracy-and-smuggling-dangerous-biological-pathogen-us; Criminal Complaint at 1, United States v. Jian, No. 2:25-mj-30353 (E.D. Mich. June 2, 2025), https://justthenews.com/sites/default/files/2025-06/Jian%20Liu%20complaint.pdf; Press Release, Univ. of Mich., University Statement on Chinese Research Fellow (June 3, 2025), https://publicaffairs.vpcomm.umich.edu/key-issues/university-statement-on-chinese-research-fellow/.

² U.S. Dep't of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office for the E.D. of Mich., Alien from Wuhan, China, Charged with Making False Statements and Smuggling Biological Materials into the U.S. for Her Work at a University of Michigan Laboratory (June 9, 2025), https://www.justice.gov/usao-edmi/pr/alien-wuhan-china-charged-making-false-statements-and-smuggling-biological-materials.

³ A prior Select Committee investigation revealed that a PRC national who was a senior official at multiple state-owned entities ran an illegal biolab in California filled with thousands of samples of potential pathogens, including malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV, and contained a freezer labeled "Ebola" containing unlabeled, sealed silver bags consistent with lab storage of high-risk biological materials. Ebola is a Select Agent with a lethality rate between 25-90%. *See* Investigation into the Reedley Biolab: Findings, H. Select Comm. on the Chinese Communist Party (Nov. 15, 2023), https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/sites/evo-

⁴ Press Release, U.S. Dep't of Just., Chinese Nationals Charged with Conspiracy and Smuggling of Dangerous Biological Pathogen into U.S. (May 30, 2024), https://www.justice.gov/usao-edmi/pr/chinese-nationals-charged-conspiracy-and-smuggling-dangerous-biological-pathogen-us.

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⁶ *Id*.

⁷ Peter D'Abrosca, Suspected Chinese Bioterrorists Smuggled Dangerous Agent into US in Boots, Officials Say, Fox News (June 4, 2025), https://www.foxnews.com/us/suspected-chinese-bioterrorists-smuggled-killer-agent-into-us-boots-officials-say.

⁸ Press Release, U.S. Dep't of Just., Chinese Nationals Charged with Conspiracy and Smuggling of Dangerous Biological Pathogen into U.S. (May 30, 2024), https://www.justice.gov/usao-edmi/pr/chinese-nationals-charged-conspiracy-and-smuggling-dangerous-biological-pathogen-us.

⁹ Molecular Plant-Microbe Interaction Working Groups, Current Lab Members, Univ. of Mich., https://web.archive.org/web/20250605195126/https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mpmi/people-2/current/. ¹⁰ *Id*.

¹¹ Zhejiang University, Australian Strategic Policy Institute (Nov. 18, 2019), https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/universities/zhejiang-university/.

¹² Kewei Sun et al., HapX-Mediated H2B Deub1 and SreA-Mediated H2A.Z Deposition Coordinate in Fungal Iron Resistance, 51 Nucleic Acids Res. 10238 (2023), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37650633/.

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¹⁴ Zhejiang Univ., Outstanding Graduate Student Recommendation Form [优秀研究生推荐表], http://www.cab.zju.edu.cn/_upload/article/files/66/dc/8438bb80418390416560b17a8118/33c6bd4a-d925-444e-96f8-aa694da00d87.xlsx (last visited June 5, 2025).

¹⁵ For example, *see* Zunyong Liu et al., Phytocytokine signalling reopens stomata in plant immunity and water loss, Nature (May 2022), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35508659/; Zunyong Liu, Yunqing Jian & Libo Shan, Disarm resistance: Fungal effectors target WAK alternative splicing variant for virulence, Cell Rep (Jan. 2023), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36640313/; Yongliang Zhang et al., The PTI-suppressing Avr2 effector from Fusarium oxysporum suppresses mono-ubiquitination and plasma membrane dissociation of BIK1, Mol. Plant Pathol. (Oct. 2023), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37391937/; Zunyong Liu, Shuguo Hou & Ping He, Detection of Ligand-Induced Receptor Kinase and Signaling Component Phosphorylation with Mn2+-Phos-Tag SDS-PAGE, Plant Peptide Hormones and Growth Factors (Nov. 2023), https://link.springer.com/protocol/10.1007/978-1-0716-

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- ¹⁶ Liu appears in an archived version of the lab's member list from April 2024 but is no longer listed by September 2024. *See* Molecular Plant-Microbe Interaction Working Groups, Current Lab Members, Univ. of Mich., https://web.archive.org/web/20240415090629/https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mpmi/people-2/current/ (archived Apr. 15, 2024); Molecular Plant-Microbe Interaction Working Groups, Current Lab Members, Univ. of Mich., https://web.archive.org/web/20240910052249/https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mpmi/people-2/current/ (archived Sep. 10, 2024).
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- ²⁰ Zhejiang Univ., Professors College of Agriculture and Biotechnology, http://www.cab.zju.edu.cn/swjs/7217/list1.htm (https://archive.md/4nSDV).
- ²¹ Fed. Bureau of Investigation, Counterintelligence Strategic Partnership Intelligence Note: Chinese Talent Programs, SPIN: 15-007 (Sept. 2015), https://info.publicintelligence.net/FBI-ChineseTalentPrograms.pdf.
- ²² Prof. Ma Zhonghua's Group Makes Important Progress in Fusarium Pathogenesis Research on Wheat, Zhejiang Univ. (July 14, 2015), http://www.cab.zju.edu.cn/chinese/2015/0714/c11148a514003/page.htm (https://archive.vn/dU3ra).
- ²³ List of Recipients of the 62nd Batch of China Postdoctoral Science Foundation Surface Support (Military System Recipients Omitted) [中国博士后科学基金第 62 批面上资助获资助人员名单(军队系统获资助人员名单略)], Peking Univ. Postdoctoral Mgmt. Office [北京大学博士后管理办公室] (Dec. 2022), https://web.archive.org/web/20250605203820/https://postdocs.pku.edu.cn/docs/2022-

12/9a8df9b8f81a40d4866ac2c851237234.pdf.

- ²⁴ 2025 Zhejiang Provincial Natural Science Foundation Funding List [2025 年度浙江省自然科学基金资助项目清单], Zhejiang Provincial Department of Science and Technology [浙江省科学技术厅] (Jan. 12, 2025), https://kjt.zj.gov.cn/module/download/downfile.jsp?classid=0&filename=65733347c01047e986d9e87af895b892.do cx.
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https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1369526624001146.

²⁸ Zunyong Liu et al., The Receptor Kinases BAK1/SERK4 Regulate Ca2+ Channel-Mediated Cellular Homeostasis for Cell Death Containment, *Curr. Biol.* (2019),

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0960982219311789.

- ²⁹ U.S. Dep't of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office for the E.D. of Mich., Alien from Wuhan, China, Charged with Making False Statements and Smuggling Biological Materials into the U.S. for Her Work at a University of Michigan Laboratory (June 9, 2025), https://www.justice.gov/usao-edmi/pr/alien-wuhan-china-charged-making-false-statements-and-smuggling-biological-materials.

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- ³⁵ Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-328, 136 Stat. 4459 (Dec. 29, 2022), https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ328/PLAW-117publ328.pdf; William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 223, 134 Stat. 3460 (Jan. 1, 2021), https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ283/PLAW-116publ283.pdf; Disclosure of Funding Sources in Applications for Federal Research and Development Awards, 42 U.S.C. § 6605 (Supp. V 2022), https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title42-section6605.

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³⁶ CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, Pub. L. No. 117-167, div. B, tit. VI, subtit. D (Aug. 9, 2022) (enacting provisions such as § 10631 et seq.), https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4346/text.

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³⁹ NAT'L SCI. FOUND., NSF 2022 Research Security Training for the United States Research Community Awardees Announced (Dec. 9, 2022), https://new.nsf.gov/news/nsf-2022-research-security-training-united-states.

⁴⁰ NAT'L INSTITUTES OF HEALTH, *ACD Working Group for Foreign Influences on Research Integrity* (2018), https://acd.od.nih.gov/documents/presentations/12132018ForeignInfluences report.pdf.

⁴¹ NAT'L INSTITUTES OF HEALTH, *U.S. Government Releases Policy for Oversight of Dual Use Research of Concern and Pathogens with Enhanced Pandemic Potential* (May 7, 2024), https://osp.od.nih.gov/us-government-releases-policy-for-oversight-of-dual-use-research-of-concern-and-pathogens-with-enhanced-pandemic-potential/.

⁴² H. Res. 5, § 4(a), 119th Cong. (2025).

⁴³ RULES OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 119th Cong. at 9 (Jan. 16, 2025), https://rules.house.gov/sites/evosubsites/rules.house.gov/files/documents/houserules119thupdated.pdf.