

# The Chinese Communist Party on Campus: Opportunities & Risks

The United States welcomes international students, researchers, and scholars to participate in America's outstanding academic environment. The vast majority are valuable contributors to campus life, embracing international academic values and posing no threat to American research integrity or security. However, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) entices or compels some individuals to engage in coercive, deceptive, or illegal activity. The United States must protect its interests against these efforts that threaten academic freedom, misuse access to world-class institutions, and seize research to enhance the PRC military.

- Educational and research exchanges are valuable and long-standing. The U.S. welcomed more students from China in 2019 (370,000) than from any other country—a number that has quadrupled over the last decade.
- The strength of America's global leadership in science and technology (S&T) rests on core principles of research, including openness, transparency, reciprocity, and merit-based competition.
- Unfortunately, the PRC ignores international norms and exploits the openness of the United States and other nations for its own benefit, harming the integrity and security of the international research enterprise.

## Encouraging Chinese Students to Learn Overseas... but Controlling Their Actions

When the Chinese government first allowed its citizens to attend western universities in the late 1970s, the CCP created the **Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA)** to monitor Chinese students and mobilize them against views that dissent from the CCP's stance. That directive has not changed. The PRC's ongoing and increasing efforts to suppress open inquiry on foreign campuses are troubling.

- CSSAs are collectively overseen by the CCP's **United Front** Work Department, a sprawling worldwide network of party loyalists whose purpose is to influence local elites and community leaders.
- Many of the 150 CSSA chapters on U.S. campuses limit membership to Chinese citizens, a violation of the principle that student organizations not discriminate based on nationality.
- PRC diplomatic posts often provide funding and guidance to individual CSSA chapters, such as directing members to disrupt lectures or events that question CCP ideology or views.
- Academic excellence requires the free flow of ideas, and Chinese students are valued contributors. However, CSSA chapters actively inhibit debate and interactions with non-Chinese peers.
- In 2018, the congressional U.S.-China Commission stated that CSSAs "frequently attempt to conceal" their ties to the CCP, and "are active in carrying out overseas Chinese work consistent with Beijing's United Front strategy."

## Spreading Chinese Culture Abroad... while Restricting Academic Freedom

The PRC has established and helped fund hundreds of **Confucius Institutes (CIs)** on campuses worldwide since 2004. CIs are frequently staffed by a combination of Chinese scholars, U.S. citizen faculty, and CCP-selected Chinese instructors who teach the CCP's interpretation of Mandarin and Chinese culture. Most agreements to establish CIs feature opaque nondisclosure clauses; do not explicitly protect academic freedom; and require strict use of a narrow, CCP-approved curriculum.

- In 2014, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) recommended closing CIs unless universities secure unilateral control of curriculum, CI agreements are made public, and academic freedom can be assured.

- The National Association of Scholars has tracked 53 CIs in the United States that have closed or are in the process of closing as of August 2020, with a total of 67 CIs remaining in operation. Many international universities are following suit, having recognized CIs as propaganda apparatuses.
- To protect national security, the [2019 National Defense Authorization Act prohibits universities](#) that host CIs from receiving U.S. Defense Department funding for Chinese language study.
- Since 2019, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has urged U.S. colleges and universities to reexamine ties, stating that [CIs pose threats to national security and academic freedom](#).
- In 2020, the U.S. State Department designated the Confucius Institute U.S. Center (CIUS) as a foreign mission of the PRC, [recognizing it as an entity that advances Beijing’s global propaganda and malign influence campaign](#).

### Diverting Intellectual Property to Support China’s Rise... and Hurting U.S. Institutions

The PRC is engaged in a concerted effort to divert key technology and research to China and its military—often at the expense of U.S. universities, taxpayers, and the Federal government. **Foreign technology acquisition** is a major component of the PRC’s strategy to quickly advance its scientific, economic, and military development goals.

- The PRC’s national strategy of **Military-Civil Fusion (MCF)** [directs collaboration with foreign universities](#) to acquire cutting edge research and technology to advance its efforts to achieve a world-class military by the year 2049.
- International collaboration and foreign contributions are key to the success of the U.S. research enterprise. However, the [PRC does not abide by core principles of academic research](#), including openness, transparency, reciprocity, and meritocracy—resulting in some researchers circumventing the regulations and legal requirements of the United States. These actions pose grave risks to U.S. research integrity and security.
- In 2019, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute published “The China Defense Universities Tracker” to help international universities and governments more effectively manage the risks of collaboration with China’s universities by revealing their military and security links.
- In 2019 and 2020, the Association of American Universities (AAU) and the Association of American and Public Land Grant Universities (APLU) published best practices for universities to address growing concerns of undue foreign interference that threatens research security.

### Recruiting Chinese and Foreign Academics... with Big Strings Attached

The PRC’s **talent recruitment** and **knowledge acquisition** programs target some Chinese, U.S., and foreign students, scholars, and researchers in key science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields to exploit the world’s open research environment. Acceptance of PRC funding can result in contractual obligations to comply with PRC directives to engage in illicit activities, such as theft of intellectual property and transfer of technology to China. Many countries, including the U.S., rely on global talent. However, PRC programs compromise the world’s scientific enterprise.

- The PRC’s talent recruitment programs seek to enhance China’s research and development enterprise by recruiting recognized experts in their fields—both [PRC citizens](#) educated outside of China and [foreign nationals](#) with technical knowledge needed by the PRC to implement its MCF strategy.
- The PRC’s **China Scholarship Council** funds approximately 30,000 Chinese scholars, professors, and other researchers to study or research in the United States, [exploiting the open and transparent nature of the global research enterprise to bolster its own military capabilities](#). However, these academic scholarship recipients are required to report on their overseas research to PRC diplomats.
- The PRC’s **Thousand Talents** program [targets PRC citizens who were educated outside of China](#) and became successful academics or technical professionals abroad. In addition, the program [targets international researchers and scientific experts](#) who are experts in their fields. Recruits are offered lucrative salaries, research funding, and other incentives in exchange for openly or illicitly enhancing China’s research and development (R&D) enterprise.

## THE CCP ON CAMPUS: OPPORTUNITIES & RISKS

- Talent recruits must sign legally binding contracts that often compel recipients to conceal their PRC relationships and funding, facilitate the illicit movement of intellectual capital to duplicate “**shadow labs**” in China, recruit other talent, publish in China-based science journals, engage in activities abroad that would violate export control regulations, and influence U.S. organizations. These activities undermine international research norms.
- PRC talent contracts divert intellectual capital away from the U.S., skew funding decisions, decrease opportunities for U.S. students, enable China to unfairly benefit from U.S. government-funded scientific research and investment, and damage America’s economic and national security.
- Recent developments in talent recruitment and coercion:
  - *A 2019 bipartisan Senate report recommends that all government agencies enhance scrutiny of researchers linked to the PRC’s talent recruitment programs.*
  - *In January 2020, the FBI arrested the chair of Harvard University’s Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology, Charles Lieber, for lying about his ties to the Thousand Talents program. Lieber, a U.S. citizen, secretly accepted an exorbitant salary and helped establish a research lab in China without the knowledge or consent of Harvard or the U.S. Department of Defense.*
  - *In May 2020, the FBI arrested a former Cleveland Clinic researcher, Qing Wang, for failing to disclose his ties to the PRC. As a citizen of the United States, Wang was arrested on fraud charges related to US \$3.6 million in federal grants from the National Institutes of Health without disclosing that he was serving at same time as dean of the College of Life Sciences and Technology at the Huazhong University of Science and Technology.*
  - *In May 2020, the White House announced the “Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Nonimmigrants of Certain Students and Researchers from the People’s Republic of China.” This action suspends U.S. entry of any PRC national on a student (F) or scholar (J) visa—except for those seeking to pursue undergraduate study or in an excepted field of study—who either receives funding from, or who is currently is employed by, studies at, or conducts research at or on behalf of, or has been employed by, studied at, or conducted research at, or on behalf of, an entity in the PRC that implements or supports the PRC’s MCF strategy.*
  - *In June 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice charged four PRC citizens—three visiting researchers and a Ph.D. student—with visa fraud for lying about their status as members of the PRC’s military forces while in the United States conducting research. At least one was funded by the China Scholarship Council.*