



U. S. Department of Justice

*Lawrence Keefe
United States Attorney
Northern District of Florida*

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For more information, contact:
U.S. Attorney's Office
Northern District of Florida
(850) 216-3829
USAFLN.Press.Office@usdoj.gov
Follow us on Twitter @NDFLnews

FORMER UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA RESEARCHER INDICTED FOR SCHEME TO DEFRAUD NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH AND UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA – A former University of Florida (UF) professor and researcher and resident of China has been indicted for fraudulently obtaining \$1.75 million in federal grant money from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by concealing support he received from the Chinese government and a company that he founded in China to profit from that research.

Lin Yang, 43, who resided in Tampa, Florida, at the time of the offenses, is charged with six counts of wire fraud and four counts of making false statements to an agency of the United States. The indictment, returned by a federal grand jury on Dec. 15, 2020, was unsealed today.

“Transparency about foreign funding sources allows federal agencies to allocate finite resources fairly. Transparency about foreign government affiliations, like business affiliations, allows the research community and the American people to assess any impact on the integrity of the research,” said Assistant Attorney General John C. Demers for the Justice Department’s National Security Division. “According to the indictment, the defendant intentionally deceived both his employer and the federal government in order to obtain more than a million dollars in research funding. Rather than being open about his ties to the People’s Republic of China, the defendant chose to conceal them, in the process advancing both the Chinese government’s strategic goals and his own financial interests. The department will continue to protect the foundations of America’s research enterprise—integrity and transparency.”

“The taxpayer dollars that funded Yang’s research were intended to benefit the health and well-being of U.S. citizens. But our indictment alleges that Yang engaged in acts of deliberate deception so that he could also further the research goals of the Chinese Communist government and advance his own business interests,” said U.S. Attorney Lawrence Keefe for the Northern District of Florida. “We are committed to working closely with the FBI, the Department of

Health and Human Services, and our research institutions to identify, investigate and prosecute anyone who undermines the integrity of our nation's research efforts by concealing potential conflicts of interest and commitment.”

“American taxpayers ought to know whether their money is being used to fund research and development for the benefit of foreign governments and foreign companies,” said Assistant Director Alan E. Kohler Jr. of the FBI's Counterintelligence Division. “The FBI will always investigate those who break the law by taking federal money while hiding their foreign business and government ties. In doing so, we're ensuring transparency and protecting the hard-earned dollars of the American public.”

“The United States can benefit greatly from hosting foreign researchers in our academic institutions, but this case illustrates how that collaborative environment can also be exploited,” said Special Agent in Charge Rachel L. Rojas of the FBI Jacksonville Division. “The Chinese Communist government simply does not play by the same rules of academic integrity that we do. The FBI is committed to holding its proxies accountable, and to helping educational institutions protect cutting-edge research and technologies from foreign adversaries who are determined to defeat the U.S. at any cost.”

“Taxpayers fund medical research in the hope that promising scientific breakthroughs will result in much-needed treatments and cures for patients. Such funding should be based on a transparent understanding of potential conflicts of interest and commitment,” said Special Agent in Charge Omar Pérez Aybar of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (HHS-OIG). “Working with our law enforcement partners, we will assiduously investigate rogue researchers who conceal their foreign support.”

According to the indictment, Yang obtained a \$1.75 million grant from NIH to develop and disseminate an imaging informatics tool for muscles known as “MuscleMiner.” Between September 2014 and July 2019, Yang served as the principal investigator for the NIH grant at UF. As the principal investigator, Yang was responsible for conducting and administering the grant in compliance with applicable federal law and institutional policies. Among other things, Yang was required to disclose his foreign research support and financial conflicts of interest, including his ownership of, or interest in, a foreign company.

During that same period, in 2016, Yang established a business in China known as “Deep Informatics.” The indictment further alleges that Yang promoted his business in China by relating that its products were the result of years of research supported by millions of dollars of U.S. government funding. Simultaneously, Yang applied for and was accepted into the People's Republic of China's Thousand Talents Program (TTP) in connection with Northwestern Polytechnical University, located in Xi'an, China. The TTP was a talent plan established by the Chinese government to encourage the transfer of original ideas, technology, and intellectual property from foreign institutions, such as American universities.

In order to maintain his employment with UF and continue receiving NIH grant money, the indictment alleges that Yang intentionally concealed his conflicts of interest and other support in connection with his Chinese business and his participation in a Chinese government talent plan

and affiliation with a Chinese research university. On multiple occasions, Yang submitted disclosures to NIH containing false statements and material omissions concerning his affiliations and research endeavors with a foreign government and company. Additionally, in January 2019, UF's College of Engineering required all faculty to provide, in writing, updated disclosures concerning activities with foreign entities in China and two other countries. The indictment alleges that Yang provided UF with a written response that falsely stated he had no affiliation with any business, entity, or university in China.

Yang traveled to China in August of 2019 and has yet to return to the United States.

Each count of wire fraud carries a maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. Each count of making false statements to an agency of the United States is punishable by a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

The FBI Jacksonville Division and HHS-OIG investigated the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen M. Kunz for the Northern District of Florida is prosecuting the case with assistance from the National Security Division's Counterintelligence & Export Section.

The charges contained in the indictment are only allegations. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Florida is one of 94 offices that serve as the nation's principal litigators under the direction of the Attorney General. To access public court documents online, please visit the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida](#) website. For more information about the U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Florida, visit <http://www.justice.gov/usao/fln/index.html>.

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