

February 8, 2022

Ross Gittel  
Office of the President  
Bryant University  
1150 Douglas Pike  
Smithfield, RI 02917

Dear President Gittel:

I write to urge you to terminate your existing academic and research partnerships with universities located in the People's Republic of China (PRC) that have been overtly tasked by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to support Beijing's military-industrial complex.

In a speech last year in Beijing, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping said that the PRC would "exhaust all means" to recruit intelligent and innovative professionals from around the world to support the technological development of the CCP's military, known as the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Such efforts, which include the PRC's Thousand Talents Program and its Double First-Class University Plan, are unambiguously geared towards advancing military-civil fusion (MCF), a national strategy of the CCP aimed at acquiring and developing the world's cutting-edge technology, including through theft, to achieve economic and military dominance.

In recent months, the PRC's increasingly aggressive tactics have also ensnared several notable U.S. academics and jeopardized the standing of their university patrons. This includes once-acclaimed Harvard University professor Charles Lieber, who in December 2021 was convicted in federal court on charges stemming from his illicit relationship with the PRC government. Lieber's case, and other similar convictions, raise important questions about how the United States assesses risk to its national security within its broader research enterprise. The PRC is fully integrating Chinese private industry and the PRC's civilian universities into their MCF strategy. To that end, nearly 70 Chinese civilian universities have been officially designated as part of the PRC's defense enterprise by the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND), the civilian agency responsible for funding commercial and academic research in support of the PLA's requirements. That list of 70 PLA-linked civilian universities includes at least one of your current academic partners in the PRC.

For decades, Beijing has openly exploited the expertise of Chinese students and scholars studying or conducting research in the United States to accelerate the PRC's economic and military development. For example, according to one study conducted between 2007 and 2017, the PLA reportedly sent more than 2,500 of its own scientists abroad to study and work at foreign universities. Some of these scientists travelled abroad under civilian cover so as to

obfuscate their military affiliations. After completing their studies, these scientists returned to the PRC to support the country's military-industrial complex, including its nuclear weapons program and cyber-espionage platforms.

Increasingly, Beijing has also come to rely on its civilian students and researchers to enable such nefarious work. This includes formal sponsorship of promising Chinese scholars in science, technology, engineering, and math to study at American and other foreign universities, after which time they are expected to return to the PRC to provide the technological know-how and talent needed to support its defense industry.

Information available in open sources indicates that Bryant University currently maintains an academic partnership, as well as jointly operates a Confucius Institute, with the China University of Geosciences (Wuhan). According to public records, this Chinese university actively supports Beijing's military-industrial complex. Like many other Chinese universities supporting Beijing's military modernization, the China University of Geosciences (Wuhan) obtained its Chinese security clearance in 2009, enabling it to participate in classified Chinese defense projects on behalf of the PLA and Beijing's intelligence services. These projects have included, among other things, defense research and training on geology. For instance, the university hosts the defense-focused Chinese Ministry of Education's Key Laboratory on Geological Exploration and Evaluation. The laboratory was established in 2018 and trains students and PLA officials in "military geology," which involves the application of geology to warfare and the peacetime practices of the military.

I remain deeply concerned by the PLA's aggressive campaign to infiltrate America's research enterprise. I respectfully urge you to terminate the above outlined partnership agreement, and to take steps to thoroughly vet your other academic partners in the PRC for similar risks involving the misappropriation of academic research. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator