

Research Integrity & Undue Foreign Influence

Former Scientist Indicted for Stealing US Military Technology

On July 7, 2021, a Western District of New York court unsealed an indictment against Ji Wang, a former scientist at Corning, Inc., alleging that Wang stole trade secrets, committed economic espionage, and attempted to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. Wang allegedly solicited millions of dollars in funding from Chinese entities for a laser fiber company to utilize (without authorization) technology developed by Corning as part of an agreement it had with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (“DARPA”).

Specifically, DARPA contracted with Corning to develop high-powered laser fibers for the U.S. military. Wang served as a lead scientist for the project. The government alleges that in July 2016, Wang downloaded confidential information from Corning to a flash drive, intending to use that information to establish a laser fiber business in China called QuantumWave. Wang allegedly traveled to China, at times with proprietary and export-controlled information from the DARPA project in hand, and attempted to raise funds for QuantumWave from Chinese investors, including representatives from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and various city governments. When Wang failed to secure the desired funding in China, he held discussions with U.S. investors, during which he allegedly revealed that his proposed laser fiber technology was the same as that developed for DARPA.

Wang’s indictment is the latest in a string of enforcement actions targeting U.S. intellectual property theft to benefit Chinese entities. For example, in April 2021, a former Coca-Cola Company engineer was convicted of selling his employer’s trade secrets to China, and in January 2021, the U.S. International Trade Commission agreed to investigate whether a company based in Wuhan, China is infringing two patents owned by a U.S. biotech company. These efforts parallel those of the National Institutes of Health (“NIH”), other U.S. government research funding agencies, and the Department of Justice. They are investigating scientists at U.S. research institutions based on allegations that the researchers failed to disclose financial conflicts of interest, had overlapping research funded by foreign governments or other foreign enterprises, or set up inappropriate shadow labs or stole intellectual property to benefit those foreign governments or enterprises.

For more information about these developments, please contact a member of our Foreign Influence and Compliance team:

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