

**Abstract**

Our survey reveals that Chinese-origin faculty in Canadian universities used to work in the frontiers of collaborating with China, leveraging their cultural and linguistic competencies, as well as personal networks. Now, they are caught in geopolitical conflicts and even become victims of implicit or explicit racial profiling, as a result of policies that link research collaboration with China to national security concerns.

Racial Profiling amidst Geopolitical Tension: Chinese Faculty in Canada

Qiang Zha and Xiaojie Li

The growing rivalry between the United States and China has now resulted in linking research and university collaboration to national security concerns. As such, the United States has taken serious steps to safeguard its research and intellectual property from potential espionage by China. The best known example of such efforts is the China Initiative. Canada has followed the United States and launched similar initiatives or strategies. In July 2021, the government of Canada introduced National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships, initially requiring obligatory national security risk assessment on funding requests from university researchers in science and engineering with the aim to “protect Canadian intellectual property from falling into the hands of authoritarian governments.” In early 2023, the government started screening funding requests in all areas from Canadian universities that were planning to collaborate with China, as well as a few other “hostile states,” in sensitive research areas. There have been concerns, expressed principally by academics of Chinese descent in Canadian universities, that such mandatory national security assessment for research funding could lead to “racial profiling of Chinese researchers as foreign agents,” and thus impact their career development.

Against such a backdrop, we conducted a survey in order to comprehensively and empirically capture the perceptions of academics of Chinese descent in Canadian universities regarding research engagement with scholars and students in China, about the consequences of restricting such collaboration, and, more importantly, any racial profiling effect towards their career development.

This survey reveals some concerning results, which could have significant policy implications for Canadian universities and research funding agencies.

Chinese Scholars and Collaborations with China perceived as important

Chinese-origin (83.7 percent) and non-Chinese (78.6 percent) faculty highly appreciated Chinese scholars, concurring that Chinese scholars made significant contributions to research and teaching programs in their respective fields. The top benefits stemming from Canada’s collaboration with Chinese researchers feature diverse perspectives, fresh ideas, and cultural exchange, followed by new research techniques, strong work ethic, data otherwise not available in Canada, sites for future research data collection, increased publications through coauthorships, etc. Given such a wide spectrum of benefits, the

surveyed faculty, both of Chinese-origin and non-Chinese, expressed a positive attitude towards research collaboration with China. Furthermore, 70.1 percent of the Chinese-origin faculty and 63.7 percent of the non-Chinese faculty believed that both countries had benefited equally from research collaboration.

As such, 95.8 percent of faculty of Chinese descent and 92.5 percent of the non-Chinese stated that they interacted with peers from China at least once a year. Moreover, 69.4 percent of Chinese-origin faculty and 58.1 percent of non-Chinese faculty expressed willingness to continue working with Chinese scholars, despite the challenging geopolitical situation. Apparently, Canada–China research collaboration means more to Chinese-origin faculty: 66 percent of them emphasized that collaborating with scholars in China was important to their scholarly research, while 40.6 percent of the non-Chinese faculty shared this perspective.

Restricting Collaboration with China Has Adverse Impact on Chinese-origin Faculty

A majority of the Chinese-origin faculty (63.5 percent) conducted research collaboratively with scholars in China over the three years prior to the survey, whereas a significantly lower proportion (31.7 percent) of the non-Chinese faculty participated in such collaboration. Therefore, Chinese faculty demonstrated a more negative attitude towards the National Security Guidelines, compared with their non-Chinese peers. Among non-Chinese faculty, 44.4 percent expressed full support for the Guidelines, and 42.6 percent believed that the scrutiny effort of this nature could be justified. However, only 20.0 percent and 18.2 percent of the Chinese faculty held the similar perspectives respectively. In addition, 41.8 percent of the Chinese faculty believed that the Guidelines were excessive and overblown, while only 22.2 percent of the non-Chinese faculty shared this opinion.

Among the faculty who collaborated with China over the previous three years, a considerable portion had to adapt and make changes under the circumstances. For Chinese-origin faculty, 21 percent adjusted the focus or approach of their current research projects, 19.3 percent limited communication with collaborators in China, 10.9 percent decided not to work with collaborators in China in future projects, 8.4 percent decided not to involve China in future projects, and 7.6 percent changed funding sources. Non-Chinese faculty made similar changes, with the exception that a significantly smaller proportion limited communication with collaborators in China (4.3 percent), and none changed funding sources. Presumably, Chinese-origin faculty used to communicate more frequently with peers in China, and obtain project funds from sources likely related to China. More importantly, a notable percentage of both Chinese-origin (11.3 percent) and non-Chinese faculty (15.1 percent) prematurely or unexpectedly ended or suspended research collaboration with scholars in China over the past three years.

Chinese-origin Faculty Feeling Targeted and Racially Profiled

Since China is implicitly targeted in the research risk assessment exercise, this survey result shows that a noticeable portion of the Chinese faculty felt racially profiled by the Canadian government (19.2 percent), their home institutions (15.5 percent), and their colleagues (18.7 percent). These figures are significantly higher than the respective percentages expressed by non-Chinese faculty, which stood at 4.8 percent, 8.3 percent, and 7 percent. Additionally, 31.9 percent of the Chinese faculty reported having experienced challenges for their professional development as a result of their race, nationality or country of origin, and 19.6 percent having encountered difficulty securing funding for a research project for the same reasons. In comparison, 17.5 percent and 8.8 percent of non-Chinese faculty experienced similar professional development and research funding challenges due to such factors.

Moreover, among the faculty familiar with the research risk assessment exercise, 40 percent of the Chinese-origin faculty reported feeling fear and/or anxiety that they were being surveilled by the Canadian government, whereas only 11.1 percent of the non-Chinese faculty shared such fear or anxiety. At the institutional level, 20 percent of the Chinese-origin faculty and 1.9 percent of the non-Chinese faculty expressed considerable fear and/or anxiety of being surveilled by their institutions. Arguably, such racial profiling sentiment is likely to become a pushing factor for global migration. Among those faculty who were not Canadian citizens, 30.6 percent of Chinese-origin faculty said they

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were considering leaving Canada due to geopolitical tension and racial profiling experience, while only 4.2 percent of the non-Chinese faculty expressed the same intention. Notably, among such Chinese-origin faculty, a larger portion (35 percent) in sciences and engineering areas stated they would consider relocation.

Concluding Thoughts

Like the United States, Canada increasingly links research collaboration with China to national security agenda. This survey empirically detects a Canadian pattern parallel to that shown in a 2021 survey of the US scientists of Chinese descent: an absolute majority endorsed the value of Chinese academics and collaboration with China (over 80 percent in Canada versus over 90 percent in the United States), a vast majority reported negative impact of restricting collaboration with China (nearly 80 percent in Canada versus over 90 percent in the United States), and a significant portion experienced challenges for professional development as a result of their Chinese origin (slightly over 30 percent in Canada versus close to 40 percent in the United States). Such factors would have implicit or explicit implications for talent mobility: a noticeable proportion indicated having an intention or plan for relocation (about 30 percent of surveyed non-citizens in Canada versus over 40 percent in the United States). ▲

Qiang Zha is an associate professor at the Faculty of Education, York University, Canada. E-mail: qzha@edu.yorku.ca.

Xiaojie Li is a recent PhD graduate from the University of Arizona. E-mail: xiaojieli@arizona.edu.

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