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Undisclosed China Ties Lead to Prison Term for Former OSU Professor

Following a guilty plea in November on one count of making false statements on NIH applications, a former Ohio State University (OSU) rheumatology professor will serve a prison term of 37 months and repay OSU \$413,000 and NIH “more than” \$3.4 million, the Department of Justice (DOJ) recently announced. Song Guo Zheng was arrested a year ago in Alaska “as he prepared to board another charter flight in order to flee to China. He was carrying three large bags, one small suitcase and a briefcase containing two laptops, three cell phones, several USB drives, several silver bars, expired Chinese passports for his family, deeds for property in China and other items,” according to DOJ.

Zheng did not disclose to OSU nor NIH that he had been participating since 2013 in China’s Thousand Talents Program, used “to recruit individuals with knowledge or access to foreign technology intellectual property.” He received \$4.1 million from NIH “to develop China’s expertise in the areas of rheumatology and immunology,” the government said. Zheng worked at the University of Southern California and Pennsylvania State University before joining OSU in 2019. “Zheng’s failure to disclose his foreign funding and support damages the trust and undermines the credibility the American people place in U.S. research, while abusing the openness and transparency that is a core value of U.S. academia,” said Special Agent in Charge Chris Hoffman for the FBI’s Cincinnati Field Office. “This sentence should serve as a deterrent and underscores the FBI’s commitment to work with our partners to investigate individual’s whose actions throw a cloud over the cutting-edge work being done at U.S. universities.”

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