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DOJ Charges Three, Including Harvard Chair, With Concealing Support From China

Charles Lieber, chairman of Harvard University's Department of Chemistry and Cell Biology, was one of three Boston-area individuals charged Jan. 28 for what Department of Justice (DOJ) and FBI officials said were repeated "lies" about the fact that they were "either directly or indirectly working for the Chinese government, at our country's expense." Lieber, who DOJ said had been the recipient of \$15 million in NIH and Department of Defense funding, was charged with one count of making a false statement. He is alleged to have had a contract with China's Thousand Talents Plan or Program from 2012 to 2017, which at some point paid him \$50,000 per month, provided reimbursement of living expenses of \$158,000, and "awarded him more than \$1.5 million to establish a research lab" at Wuhan University of Technology (WUT). "The complaint alleges that in 2018 and 2019, Lieber lied about his involvement in the Thousand Talents Plan and affiliation with WUT. On or about, April 24, 2018, during an interview with investigators, Lieber stated that he was never asked to participate in the Thousand Talents Program, but he 'wasn't sure' how China categorized him," according to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts.

To date DOJ has not publicly implicated Harvard in a False Claims Act case, but the agency said "Lieber caused Harvard to falsely tell NIH that Lieber...had no formal association with WUT" and that he "is not and has never been a participant" in the Thousand Talents Plan. Published reports said Harvard had placed Lieber on administrative leave. Also indicted but not arrested because she is in China is Yanqing Ye, a Chinese national and a student at Boston University from 2017 to 2019, who was charged with one count each of visa fraud, making false statements, acting as an agent of a foreign government and conspiracy. She is allegedly a lieutenant in the People's Liberation Army and completed "numerous assignments from PLA officers such as conducting research, assessing U.S. military websites and sending U.S. documents and information to China."

The third individual, Zaosong Zheng, was arrested in December and has been held since Dec. 30 after he was discovered at Logan International Airport "attempting to smuggle 21 vials of biological research to China. On Jan. 21, 2020, Zheng was indicted on one count of smuggling goods from the United States and one count of making false, fictitious or fraudulent statements," DOJ said. Joseph Bonavolonta, FBI Boston Division special agent in charge, said Zaosong had been in the United States "on a visa sponsored by Harvard University." During this time, he also was "paid a stipend by the Chinese Scholarship Council while also working at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center conducting cancer research until we arrested him last month." According to Bonavolonta, the FBI "is now investigating China-related cases in all 50 states, including right here in the Boston Division."

[Link to DOJ announcement](#)

[Link to FBI remarks](#)

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