

Dear Association of American Universities (AAU) and the University of Michigan Leaders,

The Asian and Asian American research community at the University of Michigan strongly condemns FBI Director Christopher Wray's remarks to the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on Tuesday, February 13, 2018. Responding to Senator Marco Rubio's question on "Chinese students, particularly those in the advanced programs in sciences and mathematics" (starting at 1:15:31 in the video of the hearing <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/hearings/open-hearing-worldwide-threats-hearing-1>), Mr. Wray stated: "... I would just say that the use of non-traditional collectors especially in the academic settings, whether it is professor, scientist, student, we see in almost every field office the FBI has around the country ... across basically every discipline. And I think the level of naiveté on the part of the academic sector about this creates its own issue. They are exploiting the very open research and development environment that we have that we all revere. But they are taking advantage of it. That one of the things we are doing is to view China's threat is not just a whole government threat but a whole society threat on their end and I think it is going to take the whole society response by us...."

Mr. Wray's targeting of Chinese professors, scientists, and students, based solely on national origin and ethnicity, amounts to blatant discrimination. That an FBI Director, who pledges to uphold the law, would choose instead to arouse hysteria is especially alarming. In the last two decades alone, Chinese scientists, such as Dr. Wen Ho Lee, Dr. Xiaoxing Xi, and Ms. Sherry Chen, have been prosecuted for espionage based primarily on racially motivated suspicion. All were American citizens whose scientific work contributed to the welfare of their country and their neighbors. All were later exonerated, but not before their careers and lives were decimated.

Mr. Wray's comments repeat the nativist lie that a "whole society," not just a "whole government," should be seen as a threat to the United States. Asian Americans have suffered from these suspicions throughout American history. From 1882-1943, the Chinese Exclusion Act denied citizenship to Chinese workers already in the U.S. and prohibited new Chinese immigrants from entering. Japanese Americans, including native born American citizens, were deprived of their homes and property and herded into internment camps during World War II. Instead of being granted due process, as any other American citizen would be, these men and women were presumed dangerous without hearings or evidence, simply because of their race.

Asian and Asian American faculty, staff, and students are not naïve about the potential of espionage. But unlike Mr. Wray, we recognize that condemning an entire race based on fear will prevent the recognition of real threats from specific individuals, whether of Chinese or non-Chinese origin. Developing law enforcement cases based on knowledge and evidence is the best way to defend our country. Wasting money, time, and reputation on reckless prosecutions – or on unfounded accusations against an "open research and development environment" – only leaves the U.S. in danger of losing its scientific pre-eminence as well as its safety and freedoms.

Despite the stereotype of being 'perpetual foreigners', Chinese immigrants, many of whom first arrived as students, have contributed immeasurably to the richness and success of the United States. Eight Chinese or Chinese Americans have won Nobel prizes in the sciences while working in the U.S. In every field from the arts to the sciences, business to entertainment, politics to sports, Asian and Asian Americans are law-abiding and hard-working citizens. We contribute to U.S. society and work to realize the American dream, just as our neighbors do.

In this difficult time, we ask Association of American Universities (AAU) and University of Michigan community to stand with us to condemn FBI Director Christopher Wray's racial and discriminatory remarks. We sincerely hope that AAU and University of Michigan can have a public statement to address FBI Director's statement. Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Association of Chinese Professors (ACP) and Indigo: The Asian and Asian-American Faculty Alliance of the College of Literature, Science and the Arts (LSA) at the University of Michigan