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### ***Nature*: FBI Asks Scientists for Trust in Taking Anti-Asian Bias Seriously**



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NEWS | 07 June 2024

## FBI asks scientists for trust in taking anti-Asian bias seriously

At public forum, US investigators seek to repair damage from China Initiative with researchers of Asian descent.

According to *Nature* on June 7, 2024, US investigators seek to repair damage from China Initiative with researchers of Asian descent at a public forum held at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

In the rare meeting between the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the academic community, members of the FBI sought to reassure researchers of Asian descent that their concerns over discrimination are being heard.

“We want you to feel comfortable. That’s why we’re here,” said **Douglas Williams**, special agent in charge of the FBI’s Houston field office, which, among other things, investigates hate crimes based on ethnicity. “More importantly, we want you to trust us, so that when something does happen in this community, which I believe it does, that you feel comfortable calling us and that we can investigate it.”

The two-hour session, sponsored by APA Justice, Rice University's Baker Institute and Office of Innovation, and the Texas Multicultural Advocacy Coalition, was organized in response to growing concerns among students and professors of Asian descent in the United States. One reason for the concerns is the China Initiative, a program launched in 2018 by the US Department of Justice (DOJ) under **Donald Trump's** administration. The initiative resulted in the arrest of a number of scientists of Chinese descent and swept into criminal court. Most were eventually acquitted or had their cases dropped. The DOJ discontinued the initiative in 2022, acknowledging that cases against the researchers triggered a perception of racial bias.

However, scrutiny of Chinese-born scholars by the US government appears to have persisted. In April, the Chinese embassy in the United States reported that since July 2021, at least 70 foreign students with valid documentation had been turned away at US airports and forced to return to China. At the forum, **David Donatti**, a senior staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Texas, highlighted that these students, including fifth-year PhD candidates who were close to defending their dissertations, were interrogated and deported without explanation. Many of them now face five-year bans on re-entering the country.

**Gisella Perez Kusakawa**, executive director of the Asian American Scholar Forum, said that ending the China Initiative was a crucial step towards de-escalating tensions and decriminalizing Asian scholars, but only a single step. "There is still significant progress that needs to be made to ensure that the US is a welcoming environment that can attract and retain the best and brightest talents," she said.

FBI representatives said that while their charge includes protecting the United States from foreign threats, including technological espionage, it also includes protecting the civil rights of all individuals in the country. That includes protecting Chinese citizens working in the United States, said **Kelly Choi**, supervisory special agent at the FBI's Houston Field Office.

Although the FBI investigates crime, it is not in charge of screening people coming into the United States. That responsibility falls under the purview of US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), an arm of the Department of Homeland Security (the FBI is part of the DOJ). **Steven Pei**, APA Justice Co-Organizer and an electrical engineer at the University of Houston, in Texas, who moderated the forum, told *Nature* that although the CBP had been invited to the panel, it had declined. The CBP did not respond to *Nature's* request for comment before this story published.

When contacted by *Nature*, **Qin Yan**, president of the Asian Faculty Association at Yale University, who helped to organize the forum, called for direct dialogue with CBP representatives to address border issues. He also expressed worries about other efforts to tamp down foreign influence, such as a Florida law that limits universities' ability to recruit students and faculty members from China and other countries of concern. "We are still a long way from repairing the damage caused by the China Initiative. The chilling effects will last a very long time," he added.

Read the *Nature* report: <https://go.nature.com/3XgcAzs>

## The FBI Forum Video Now Online



left to right: Jill Murphy, Steven Pei, Neal Lane

A video of the June 6 forum on "A Dialogue Between Academic and Asian American Communities and The FBI" is now available for public viewing at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csqLJo869ZY> (1:55:23)

Time mark and speakers:

3:27 **Sergio Lira**, Vice President, Texas Multicultural Advocacy Coalition (TMAC) and President, Houston Council, League of United Latin American Citizen (LULAC)

4:28 **Paul Cherukuri**, Chief Innovation Officer, Vice President for Innovation, Rice University

10:52 **Jill Murphy**, Deputy Assistant Director for Counterintelligence, FBI Headquarters

14:08 **Steven Pei**, Texas Multicultural Advocacy Coalition and APA Justice Task Force

17:44 Panel Discussion

- **Kelly Choi**, Supervisory Special Agent, FBI Houston Field Office
- **David Donatti**, Senior staff attorney, Legal department, American Civil Liberties Union of Texas
- **Alamdar S. Hamdani**, U.S. Attorney for Southern District of Texas
- **Gisela P. Kusakawa**, Executive Director, Asian American Scholar Forum
- **Jill Murphy**, Deputy Assistant Director for Counterintelligence, FBI Headquarters
- **Georgette "GiGi" Pickering**, Assistant Special Agent in Charge, FBI Houston Field Office
- **Gordon Quan**, Managing Partner & Co-Founder, Quan Law Group, PLLC. Former Houston City Mayor Pro-Tem
- **Douglas A. Williams, Jr**, Special Agent in Charge, FBI Houston Field Office

1:48:10 **Neal F. Lane**, Senior Fellow in Science and Technology Policy, Baker Institute for Public Policy. Former OSTP Director, The White House

1:54:57 Forum adjourned

Watch the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csqLJo869ZY> (1:55:23)

## A Summary of The FBI Forum by NAA United



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*Empowering Asian Americans & Promoting Better Relations with China and Asian Pacific countries*

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### **A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ACADEMIC, ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES AND THE FBI**

National Asian American (NAA) United, a non-profit organization that serves to educate Asian Pacific Americans on public affairs, posted a blog covering the forum to bridge the gap between the FBI and Asian American academics concerning research security policies. The blog is reproduced in its entirety with the permission of NAA United:

#### **Houston Event Fosters Dialogue on Research Security and Civil Liberties**

A collaborative effort by the Texas Multicultural Advocacy Coalition, Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, and the APA Justice Task Force convened a forum on June 6, 2024. Held at Rice University's O'Connor Building, the event (also accessible virtually) brought together academics, Asian-American leaders, and the FBI to discuss a critical topic: balancing research security with civil liberties.

**The event aimed to bridge the gap between the FBI and Asian-American academics regarding research security policies.**

- Concerns were raised about the impact of past initiatives, particularly the China Initiative, on Asian-American researchers.
- The FBI emphasized its commitment to safeguarding national security while protecting civil liberties.
- Recommendations included creating more transparent, data-driven, and inclusive policies.
- Continuous dialogue and collaboration were highlighted as essential for all stakeholders.

## Examples of Overreach:

- The China Initiative was cited for unfairly targeting Asian-American scholars.
- Attendees shared experiences of foreign researchers facing difficulties at U.S. ports of entry.
- Historical examples, like the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, served as a reminder of the importance of avoiding discriminatory policies.
- Recent legislation, such as Texas' Senate Bill 147 (restricting property purchases by certain nationalities), was discussed as an example of overreach.
- Concerns regarding invasive electronic device searches at the border by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) were also addressed.

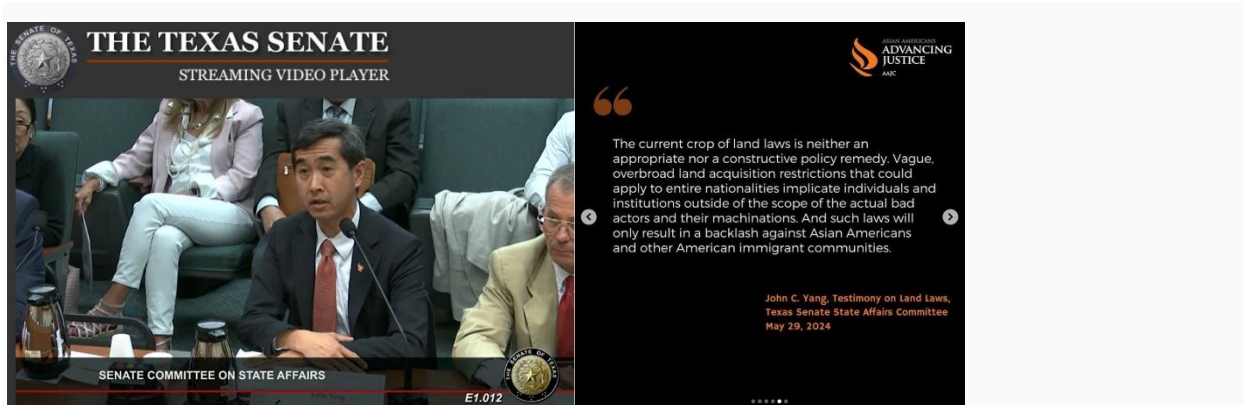
## Building Trust: Recommendations and Solutions

- **Transparency and Clarity:** Policies should be clear and easy to understand to ensure compliance and build trust.
- **Improved Communication and Training:** Regular dialogues and open communication channels are essential.
- **Involving Experts:** Scientific and community expertise should be incorporated into policy making.
- **Protecting Civil Liberties and Academic Freedom:** These fundamental rights must be safeguarded in research policies.
- **Enhanced Inter-Agency Coordination:** Standardization of practices across federal agencies is crucial.
- **Mechanisms for Redress:** Clear avenues for individuals to seek redress if they feel unfairly targeted.
- **Public Leadership and Advocacy:** Leaders should publicly oppose discriminatory policies.

The event served as a reminder of the U.S.'s long history of benefiting from top international scholars. It emphasized the importance of maintaining this momentum through open communication and collaborative efforts.

Read the NAA United blog: <https://bit.ly/3x8F6s9>

## Texas Senate Committee Hearing on Alien Land Bills



On May 29, 2024, The Texas Senate Committee on State Affairs held a public hearing including a session on alien land bills.

**John Yang**, President and Executive Director, Asian Americans Advancing Justice |AAJC, delivered testimony about discriminatory land laws at the hearing.

John Yang was quoted in an Instagram post about his testimony:

"Advancing Justice | AAJC is deeply concerned by the resurgence of land laws. Though they are ostensibly designed to protect U.S. agricultural land, real property, and critical infrastructure from malign foreign influence, in reality, they not only fail to address legitimate threats in a targeted and proportional manner, but also raise serious concerns regarding the balance of national security equities with civil rights, federal pre-emption, and other issues related to building and maintaining a robust local economy.

"It is also important to note that some land laws include overly punitive criminal and civil penalties. This language similarly fails to address national security concerns and instead contributes to an overall environment of fear for the Asian immigrant and Asian American communities which have already endured the China Initiative and a spike in anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is critical that this country recognizes its problematic treatment of Asian Americans and immigrants as perpetual foreigners and national security threats based on race, ethnicity, and national origin ... civil rights organizations have stepped up to fight this type of discrimination. Florida, which enacted its own land law in May 2023, currently faces two separate lawsuits from the American Civil Liberties Union and Advancing Justice | AAJC.

"The current crop of land laws is neither an appropriate nor a constructive policy remedy. Vague, overbroad land acquisition restrictions that could apply to entire nationalities implicate individuals and institutions outside of the scope of the actual bad actors and their machinations. And such laws will only result in a backlash against Asian Americans and other



American immigrant communities."

Watch the Texas Senate Committee hearing: <https://bit.ly/4bRDdHA> (13:32:49). Watch John Yang's testimony: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDDeTCAbA64> (5:38) .Read the Instagram post at <https://bit.ly/45hi3YG>

## News and Activities for the Communities

### 1. APA Justice Community Calendar

APA Justice Public Events

Today June 2024 Print Week Month Agenda

APA Justice Public Events

Today Sunday, June 9 Print Week Month Agenda

Thursday, June 20

2024 Social Equity Leadership Conference

7:00pm U.S.-China Relations: Untangling Campaign Rhetoric & Understanding Policy – Teachers Workshop

Friday, June 21

2024 Social Equity Leadership Conference

Saturday, June 22

2024 Social Equity Leadership Conference

Thursday, June 27

UCA: 2024 Chinese American Convention

Friday, June 28

UCA: 2024 Chinese American Convention

Saturday, June 29

UCA: 2024 Chinese American Convention

Sunday, June 30

UCA: 2024 Chinese American Convention

Events shown in time zone: Eastern Time - Detroit

#### Upcoming Events:

2024/06/20 U.S.-China Relations: Untangling Campaign Rhetoric & Understanding Policy – Teachers Workshop  
2024/06/20-22 Social Equity Leadership Conference  
2024/06/27-30 UCA: 2024 Chinese American Convention

Visit <https://bit.ly/45KGyga> for event details.

### 2. President's Advisory Commission on AANHPI Public Meetings



the PRESIDENT'S ADVISORY COMMISSION  
**PUBLIC MEETING**

**OFFICIAL NOTICE**

JUNE 6, 2024

Announcement of the President's Advisory  
Commission on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians,  
and Pacific Islanders Meeting and Solicitation for  
Oral and Written Comments

**WHAT:** President's Advisory Commission Public Meeting

**WHEN:**

- July 1, 2024, 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Eastern Time
- July 2, 2024, 2:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. ET.

**WHERE:**

- July 1, livestreaming
- July 2, in-person listening session in Saint Paul, Minnesota

**HOST:** The President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI)

**COMMENTS:** The Commission seeks responses to several questions contained within this Federal Register Notice. Written comments are welcomed throughout the development of the Commission's recommendations and may be emailed to [AANHPICommission@hhs.gov](mailto:AANHPICommission@hhs.gov) at any time. Individuals may also submit a request to provide oral public comments at the Commission's July 2, 2024 listening session in Minnesota responding to those questions. For details and directions, [please click here](#).

**REGISTRATION:** Registration is required

- July 1: <https://bit.ly/3RjiJHm>
- July 2: <https://bit.ly/3KAUzUX>



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