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JUSTICE NEWS

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Jury Convicts University of Kansas Researcher for Hiding Ties to Chinese Government

A former University of Kansas (KU) professor was today convicted by a federal jury on three counts of wire fraud and one count of false statements after he deliberately concealed that he was also employed by a government-affiliated university in the People's Republic of China (PRC), while working on U.S. government funded research at KU.

Feng Tao, aka Franklin Tao, 50, of Lawrence, Kansas, worked as a full-time professor at KU. According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, in 2018, Tao accepted a position with Fuzhou University in China that designated him as a Changjiang Scholar Distinguished Professor. The position's guidelines required him to be a full-time employee of Fuzhou University.

The Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) required faculty to file annual reports to notify of any outside employment that did or could impact duties as a conflict of interest. Tao didn't seek permission from KU before entering the agreement with Fuzhou University, didn't notify KU about the employment, and lied to conceal the employment. In December 2018, the defendant moved to China to work full-time at Fuzhou University, while falsely telling KU administrators that he was in Europe.

As a KU faculty member, Tao conducted research under contracts between the KU and two U.S. government agencies, the Department of Energy (DOE) and the National Science Foundation (NSF). Tao caused KU to submit to DOE and NSF hundreds of thousands of dollars in reimbursement requests for expenditures associated with the grants. Tao repeatedly certified electronic documents indicating he read and understood the federal government and KU's policies and that he had made all necessary disclosures.

Tao faces up to 20 years in federal prison and a fine up to \$250,000 for wire fraud, and up to 10 years and a fine up to \$250,000 on each of the program fraud counts.

The FBI investigated the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Chris Oakley for the District of Kansas and Trial Attorney Adam Barry of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Controls Section (CES) are prosecuting the case, with valuable assistance provided by Deputy Chief Benjamin Hawk of CES.

Topic(s):

Counterintelligence
National Security

Component(s):

[Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#)
[National Security Division \(NSD\)](#)
[USAO - Kansas](#)

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