

# Singaporean consultant pleads guilty to acting as agent for China, targeting Americans for intelligence recruitment

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A Singaporean man pleaded guilty in Washington on Friday to acting as an unregistered agent of the Chinese government by identifying potential recruitment targets for Beijing’s intelligence services while working in Washington as an academic researcher and foreign policy consultant on China.

Dickson Jun Wei Yeo, 39, a doctoral degree candidate at the National University of Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, pleaded guilty as charged in a one-count June 11 criminal information before U.S. District Judge Tanya S. Chutkan.

In plea papers, Yeo admitted trying to cultivate relationships with Americans — including U.S. government and military officials with high-level security clearances — since 2015 while serving in academic posts at Singapore’s top university and at George Washington University in D.C. According to court documents, Yeo identified those with “nonpublic information” of value to Chinese intelligence.

“Yes, your honor, I am guilty,” Yeo said during a hearing after striking a plea deal with U.S. prosecutors that includes deportation after prison. The charge carries a maximum 10-year term, although as a first offender, Yeo would likely receive far less time at sentencing Oct. 9. He remains in custody after being arrested in November upon return to a U.S. airport from overseas, court filings said.

The case comes as the Justice Department has prioritized countering Chinese national security threats since 2018, including the alleged widespread theft of industry and government secrets. Yeo’s case shows how Beijing can exploit non-Chinese nationals, the Internet and the openness of American society to directly target financially vulnerable officials in the federal government’s backyard, acting U.S. attorney Michael R. Sherwin of the District said in announcing the plea with the Justice Department’s national security division.

According to court filings, Yeo initially began targeting other Asian countries, before focusing on the United States under orders from several contacts in Chinese intelligence services. Four contacts approached him after he gave a presentation in Beijing in 2015 on the political situation in Southeast Asia, court filings said.

Although Yeo refused to sign a contract with the People’s Liberation Army, he worked with operatives to pay American targets to write reports for “clients in Asia” without revealing their work was going to the Chinese government, he said in a sworn statement of offense. At the operatives’ direction, he admitted, he set up and posted job listings in 2018 for a

Yeo received more than 400 résumés — 90 percent from U.S. military and government personnel with security clearances — and he forward some to his handlers, he told U.S. investigators, according to court documents.

Yeo also mined a professional networking website — unnamed in court filings but confirmed as LinkedIn, a person familiar with the case said — to find individuals with promising résumés and job descriptions for recruitment.

FBI Washington field office head Timothy R. Slater reminded U.S. citizens, “especially those holding security clearances, to be cautious when being approached by individuals on social media sites with implausible career opportunities.”

Spokesmen for the Chinese Embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment. A GWU spokeswoman confirmed that Yeo was a visiting scholar for six months in 2019 but had no employment or student relationship, nor did he receive any kind of funding from the university.

Yeo used his time as a GWU fellow from January to July 2019 to network with individuals with lobbying firms and defense contractors at events and think tank talks, according to the statement of offense.

Under the direction of Chinese intelligence, he said, he was instructed to spot targets in sensitive positions who were dissatisfied with their work or having financial difficulties.

Just as Yeo was recruited by intelligence contacts who claimed to represent China-based think tanks and offered money in exchange for political reports and information, his contacts tasked him to approach his American targets for “scuttlebutt” about international political, economic and diplomatic matters.

Yeo admitted paying \$1,000 or \$2,000 to one such State Department employee to write about a sitting U.S. Cabinet member in 2018 or 2019.

Yeo also recruited an American civilian with a high-level security clearance who worked on the U.S. Air Force’s F-35B fighter program to write a report and discuss the implications of Japanese purchases, according to his plea. Yeo contacted him through LinkedIn, according to court records and the person familiar with the case, and the civilian confided to having money problems.

Yeo paid at least \$2,000 to a U.S. Army officer posted at the Pentagon who said he was traumatized by his military tours in Afghanistan to write a report about how the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan would impact China, according to plea papers. Yeo did not disclose that the work would be given to the Beijing government, filings said.

Yeo traveled frequently to China to meet with operatives, his offense statement said, and he was told by one of them that authorities wanted to conceal his identity after he complained that he was regularly pulled out of the customs line and taken to a separate office for admission.

Yeo returned to the United States in November, planning to ask the Army officer to provide classified information and to reveal he was working for the Chinese government, the plea statement said. Instead, he was stopped on arrival by law enforcement, questioned and eventually arrested.

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