

IMMIGRATION

While You Weren't Looking, Trump Banned Some Chinese Grad Students

1882 is calling to get its law back.

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(Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)

Two Fridays ago, our only president took a break from bungling [American race relations](#) and [public health](#) to mess up American universities' ability to recruit foreign nationals. [The executive order of May 29](#) says that the State Department won't issue J or F visas to graduate students and postgraduate researchers who are from the People's Republic of China and have ties to the PRC's attempts to steal foreign technologies. So in essence, it's trying to get rid of people who might be Chinese spies.

Now, I am not familiar with the details of how the CIA and State work together, but I have a sneaking suspicion that they have already thought of looking for spies. In fact, the American Immigration Council says in [its write-up of the order](#) that consular officers put visa applications into "administrative processing" (State's fancy name for limbo) when they

So this is less about effective ways of looking for spies and more about continuing Trump's bizarre attempts to gin up conflict with China, which previously included [losing a trade war](#) and [gratuitously racist remarks](#) about the coronavirus. In fact, [CNBC said this week](#) that some experts think there's already a cold war between the U.S. and China, because this is the worst timeline.

Having achieved that, Trump has undoubtedly moved on to his eight daily hours of conservative talk shows and ragetweeting. But the order was effective three days after it was signed, and unfortunately for the American colleges and universities who will be bound by it, nobody has yet bothered to explain how it works. It's unclear, for example, whether the ban applies only to students who are directly tied to the Chinese military, or anybody who is associated with any institution that gets Chinese military funding. The State Department [told the LA Times](#) that universities cannot expect anything so helpful as a list of banned institutions anytime soon.

But the real crippling impact will be felt down the line. China sends the most students to the United States of any foreign country, [according to the Institute for International Education](#), and [Inside Higher Ed says](#) that Chinese nationals got 13.5% of all PhDs in science and engineering fields in 2018. Losing those students could have an actual financial impact on universities (directly or via reduced research funding), and it could also hurt the advancement of, you know, science. That would be even more likely if Chinese students decided that given all the [recent anti-Asian racism](#), it would be a lot easier to just study in Europe or Japan or Canada instead. In fact, at least some GOP senators seem to actively want that; [Sens. Tom "Send in the Troops!" Cotton and Marsha Blackburn recently proposed a law](#) that would ban all Chinese grad students in STEM fields.

[It's like 1882 all over again.](#)

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