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ORIGINALS

Chinese UM grads charged with spying on Camp Grayling military training — 100 miles from proposed CCP Gotion location

'We are media,' one of the students told the sergeant major when confronted.
'We're Chinese.'

BY VICTOR SKINNER
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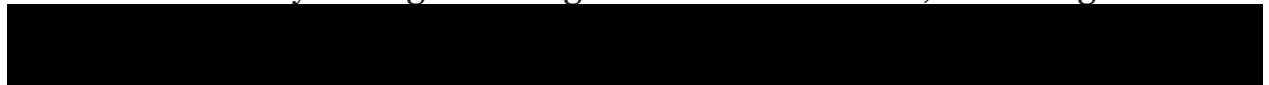
Gotion High-tech Chairman Zhen Li talks with Chinese dictator Xi Jinping



Last week, former U.S. Ambassador Joseph Cella warned about dangers the Chinese Communist Party-linked Gotion battery plant pose to national security, particularly the Camp Grayling National Guard base used to train Taiwanese soldiers.

On Wednesday, federal prosecutors charged five University of Michigan graduates from China with spying on the military base as it conducted Northern Strike, one of the largest National Guard exercises in the nation that also involved the Taiwanese military, [The Detroit News](#) reports.

“Camp Grayling is the hub of the National All-Domain Warfighting Center, which trains our troops and those of our allies, including Taiwan, in strategic and tactical battle operations,” Cella told the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability during a hearing on the CCP last week, according to the



FBI Special Agent Caroline Julee Colpoys wrote in a criminal complaint filed Wednesday that five Chinese nationals were found with cameras at Camp Grayling during Northern Strike on Aug. 13, 2023, when they were caught by a Utah National Guard sergeant major taking photos just feet from military vehicles, tents and communications equipment.

“This case shows once again that CCP espionage can happen anywhere in America and we must be vigilant,” Rep. John Moolenaar said in a statement. Moolenaar added that he suspects the Chinese Communist Party is behind the alleged criminal activity.

“The CCP obviously has an interest in Camp Grayling and this is further evidence it would be a mistake for Michigan leaders to allow Gotion to build in our state. State funding for Gotion’s plan to bring Chinese nationals to Mecosta County is an open invitation for further spying on Camp Grayling. For national security reasons, Governor Whitmer and the legislature must revoke state funding for Gotion immediately.”

The incident occurred around 12:30 a.m. near a boat launch on Bear Lake, where caution tape and no trespassing signs separated the public from tents, antennae, satellite dishes, vehicles and generators as about 7,000 soldiers conducted live firing exercises, according to The News.

“We are media,” one of the students told the sergeant major when confronted. “We’re Chinese.”

The students, who were participating in a joint program with Shanghai Jiao Tong University, fled the area, but local law enforcement later tracked them to a Super 8 motel, where they reserved a room more than a week before the incident.

The criminal complaint identifies the Chinese nationals as Zhekai Xu, Renxiang Guan, Haoming Zhu, Jingzhe Tao, and Yi Liang, though their ages and hometowns were not included. They left the U.S. following their graduation in May.

The students face charges including conspiracy, lying to federal investigators, and destroying records during a federal investigation.

“They are not believed to be in custody,” according to The News. “Their whereabouts were unknown Wednesday and there was no immediate comment from the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Detroit or a U-M spokesman.” Months after the incident, U.S. Customs and Border Protection searched Guan and his luggage at Detroit Metropolitan Airport ahead of a flight to Shanghai and found electronics, cellphones, laptop computers and a camera. While he told investigators he was stargazing with his classmates, and did not interact

with military or law enforcement officials, a review of his hard drive revealed two photos of military vehicles taken on Aug. 12, according to The News. FBI agents interviewed the other students three months later when they returned to Chicago O'Hare International Airport on a flight from Iceland, and all four confirmed they were confronted at Camp Grayling.

While the students insisted the trip north was focused on viewing the Perseid meteor shower at the time, they offered conflicting explanations about the photos they took, what they saw at Camp Grayling, who arranged the trip, and other details.

The criminal complaint comes amid heated debate over a Gotion EV battery component plant coming to Big Rapids, a secret agreement with the Whitmer administration to support the project with \$715 million in taxpayer funds, and the company's close ties to the Chinese Communist Party.

Camp Grayling is about 100 miles from the proposed Gotion location.

Gotion is a "wholly-owned subsidiary" of China-based Gotion-High Tech, which requires its employees to swear an allegiance to the CCP. Gotion is also "partially [subsidized through government funding applied by the People's Republic of China](#)," according to a Foreign Agents Registration Act statement amended in July.

Republicans including Michigan Congressman John Moolenaar, chairman of the House Select Committee on China, U.S. Senate candidate Mike Rogers, former President Donald Trump and many state politicians have sided with locals in opposition to the Gotion plant, which is sited about 88 miles south of Camp Grayling.

They've repeatedly highlighted Gotion's ties to the CCP and Volkswagen, slave labor in the supply chain, environmental impacts, and the proximity to Camp Grayling and a cybersecurity center in Big Rapids.

The Gotion plant is now tied up in litigation following a recall of Green Charter Township officials who supported the deal, and the election of new township leaders who oppose.

That litigation spawned a [complaint filed this week](#) that details "engagements by Gotion Vice President of North American Operations, Chuck Thelen, with several now recalled Green Charter Township elected officials ... that may violate both federal and state statutes prohibiting the offering or acceptance of a bribe or gratuity."

“I witnessed malign influence through a subnational incursion and influence operation by a PRC [People’s Republic of China]-based and CCP-tied lithium-ion battery manufacturer, Gotion, in rural Green Charter Township, Michigan” Cella testified last week.

“US national security and intelligence agencies convened a group of bipartisan state and local elected officials, and business executives across the country to warn them of China’s political warfare,” he said. “Despite these warnings, all supporting the Gotion project brazenly defied them... And that’s just one of many examples across the United States of how China threatens our national security and sovereignty.”

Other examples involved two University of Michigan students from China who were caught photographing military and naval infrastructure at the Naval Air Station Key West during winter break in 2020, and a Chinese national at the University of Minnesota who pleaded guilty to two federal crimes in July for taking drone shots of naval shipyards, according to The News.