

The Forbidden COVID-19 Chronicles February 15 2021
How China Has Collected DNA From American Citizens
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According to a fact sheet from the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC), China is and has been collecting healthcare data and DNA from Americans for a very long time.¹ One of the means for collecting this data has been through investing in American biotech companies and partnering with hospitals and universities.

In 2010, Chinese genetics company BGI received a \$1.5 billion loan from the Chinese government-run China Development Bank for the purpose of expansion. The company entered the U.S. market and started getting access to user data when it purchased California sequence-machine maker Complete Genomics for \$118 million in 2013. BGI, along with other Chinese companies, has formed partnerships with American hospitals, university research centers, and research institutes.²

According to the NCSC fact sheet, the partnerships are welcomed by American institutions because they enable expanded research opportunities, "...while Chinese firms gain access to more genetic data on more diverse sets of people, which they can use for new medical products and services."³ According to a 2019 report, at least 15 Chinese firms are licensed to perform genetic tests or sequencing in the U.S.⁴

The COVID-19 debacle has presented a great opportunity to accelerate these efforts. BGI Group has aggressively promoted COVID-19 tests, and by August 2020 had sold 35 million rapid COVID-19 tests to 180 countries and built laboratories in 18 of them.⁵

In March 2020, when Washington State had only a few COVID-19 cases, BGI proposed in a letter to the state that it would build and operate COVID-19 testing labs and provide technical expertise, high throughput sequencers, and even to "make additional donations," whatever that means. According to Bill Evanina, a former top counterintelligence official and veteran of the FBI and CIA, BGI is connected both to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and to its military. He told CBS news that he had warned the public that the Chinese could collect, store, and exploit data collected from COVID-19 tests.⁶

What does the Chinese government do with this information? According to FBI Supervisory Special Agent Edward You, the Chinese are building a huge genomic database and are particularly interested in the U.S. population due to its ethnic diversity. The assumption is that the data base will be used to develop artificial intelligence and new personalized medicines. The downside is that this could make the U.S. even more dependent on China for drugs and treatments. And some of the ways in which the CCP uses artificial intelligence is frightening.

According to Sophie Richardson, director of the China program for Human Rights Watch, one of the ways in which the Chinese use artificial intelligence is to monitor the Uyghurs, a minority Muslim population. The Chinese use facial recognition software, surveillance cameras, WF-FI sniffers and other technology to constantly monitor the region in which these people live. They are forbidden to use their language, and to practice their religion. And they are subject to forced collection of DNA which is used to target other family members and to further develop their facial recognition software. Approximately one million Uyghurs have been arrested and jailed in camps.⁷

In July 2020 the U.S. Department of Commerce sanctioned two subsidiaries of BGI for participating in Uyghur repression, and for collecting genetic information from the Uyghurs without consent.⁸

BGI's proposal to build labs in Washington State, and five other states, was turned down after federal officials warned against the partnerships. But the tests and sequencing equipment are in use in the U.S. According to Evanina, the Chinese fetch the data electronically and give a copy back to the lab that houses the sequencing machines.

This is not surprising, according to both You and Evanina, because China is the world's leader in cyber hacking. In December 2020 John Ratcliffe, director of national intelligence, called China the number one national security threat to the U.S. due to their theft of data and technology.⁹ Evanina says that 80% of American adults have had all of their personally identifiable information stolen by the CCP.

Indeed, China has been caught stealing the healthcare data of Americans before. In February 2015, Chinese hackers managed to penetrate the servers for health insurer Anthem and obtained personal data on over 78 million people.¹⁰ According to Evanina, a major concern about this is that there are no private companies in China. Chinese laws actually require that companies like BGI must share their data with the government if asked to do so by the CCP. This means that all of the DNA data gathered on Americans by BGI through their tests is, by extension, also the property of the Chinese government.¹¹

This is very disconcerting. I don't know any thinking person who would feel comfortable knowing that personal DNA obtained through a COVID-19 test was in the possession of the CCP or any foreign government. And there is nothing that can be done about it. A demand from the U.S. to return the data without retaining copies is not likely to be made, and if made it is not likely to result in any response from the CCP.

This is another reason to refuse testing for COVID-19 if at all possible, and to be very cautious when providing health information to a provider or consenting to tests of any type. You can no longer assume that your data is safe from foreign governments including the CCP.

¹ China's Collection of Genomic and Other Healthcare Data From America: Risks to Privacy and U.S. Economic and National Security. Feb 2021
https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/NCSC_China_Genomics_Fact_Sheet_2021.pdf

² Cathy He. China is Collecting Americans' DNA, Posing Major Security Risks: US Counterintelligence Agency. *Epoch Times* Feb 3 2021

³ China's Collection of Genomic and Other Healthcare Data From America: Risks to Privacy and U.S. Economic and National Security. Feb 2021
https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/NCSC_China_Genomics_Fact_Sheet_2021.pdf

⁴ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. China's Biotechnology Development: The Role of U.S. and Other Foreign Engagement <https://www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-biotechnology-development-role-us-and-other-foreign-engagement>

⁵ Cathy He. China is Collecting Americans' DNA, Posing Major Security Risks: US Counterintelligence Agency. *Epoch Times* Feb 3 2021

⁶ Jon Wertheim. China's Push to Control Americans' Health Care Future. *60 Minutes* Jan 31 2021
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/biodata-dna-china-collection-60-minutes-2021-01-31/>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs. Member of Sophisticated China-Based Hacking Group Indicted for Series of Computer Intrusions, Including 2015 Data Breach of Health Insurer Anthem Inc. Affecting Over 78 Million People. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/member-sophisticated-china-based-hacking-group-indicted-series-computer-intrusions-including>

¹¹ Jon Wertheim. China's Push to Control Americans' Health Care Future. *60 Minutes* Jan 31 2021
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/biodata-dna-china-collection-60-minutes-2021-01-31/>