



Alexander Yuk Ching Ma

- 67 years old at time of arrest
- Born in Hong Kong
- Moved to Honolulu, HI, in 1968
- Attended the University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- Naturalized United States citizen
- Joined the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1982



CDSE

Center for Development
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CASE STUDY

Espionage

WHAT HAPPENED

Alexander Ma worked for the CIA from 1982 until 1989. His relative (identified as co-conspirator #1 or CC #1 in court documents), who is deceased, also worked for the CIA from 1967 until 1983. As CIA officers, both men held Top Secret security clearances that granted them access to sensitive and classified CIA information.

In March 2001, over a decade after he resigned from the CIA, Ma was contacted by intelligence officers from the Shanghai State Security Bureau (SSSB). Ma arranged a meeting between CC #1 and the SSSB. He convinced CC #1 to agree, and both Ma and CC #1 met with SSSB intelligence officers in a Hong Kong hotel room for three days. During the meetings, CC #1 provided the SSSB with a large volume of classified U.S. national defense information in return for \$50,000 in cash. Ma and CC #1 also agreed to continue to assist the SSSB.

In March 2003, while living in Hawaii, Ma applied for a job as a contract linguist in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Honolulu Field Office. The FBI, aware of Ma's ties to People's Republic of China (PRC) intelligence, hired Ma as part of a ruse to monitor and investigate his activities and contacts with the SSSB. Ma worked part time at an off-site location for the FBI from August 2004 until October 2012.

In February 2006, Ma was tasked by the SSSB with asking CC #1 to identify four individuals of interest to the SSSB from photographs. Ma convinced CC #1 to provide the identities of at least two of the individuals, whose identities were and remain classified U.S. national defense information.

Ma confessed that he knowingly and willfully conspired with CC #1 and SSSB intelligence officers to communicate and transmit information that he knew would be used to injure the United States or to advantage the PRC.

Ma pleaded guilty to conspiring to gather and deliver national defense information to the PRC and was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison, followed by 5 years of supervised release.

INDICATORS

Access Attributes - Ma worked for the CIA in the East-Asia and Pacific Region. Ma held U.S. security clearances at the Top Secret/Secure Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) level and had access to a broad range of highly sensitive classified material.

Technical Activity - Ma used his assigned FBI computer to "burn" digital photographic images of documents related to guided missile and weapons system technology research onto a CD-ROM disc. He also brought a digital camera into the secure FBI workspace and photographed translation documents.

Foreign Considerations – Ma conducted a series of meetings with at least five Ministry of State Security (MSS) intelligence officials in a Hong Kong hotel room. In February 2006, Ma travelled to Tokyo, Japan. When he returned, he had \$20,000 and a new set of golf clubs.

IMPACT

"Despite his sworn oath to protect U.S. classified secrets from illegal disclosure, Alexander Ma chose to betray his oath for money while aiding the People's Republic of China," said United States Attorney Clare E. Connors. "Bringing Alexander Ma to justice, even after the passage of many years, affirms our commitment to holding accountable those who violate our nation's trust and security."

"This sentence demonstrates the dedication of the United States to protect itself from this type of betrayal and violation of trust," said FBI Honolulu Special Agent in Charge Steven Merrill. "Let it be a message to anyone else thinking of doing the same. No matter how long it takes, or how much time passes, you will be brought to justice."

ADDITIONAL INFO

- As a CIA officer, Ma held a Top Secret security clearance and had access to Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI). This included the identities of covert CIA officers, the identities of clandestine human sources, details of sensitive intelligence collection operations and methods, details of CIA clandestine training, cryptographic information related to CIA communications, and details of clandestine tradecraft the CIA employs to avoid detection by hostile foreign intelligence services.
- The PRC intelligence services encompass both the civilian and military components of Chinese intelligence programs. The MSS handles civilian intelligence collection and is responsible for counterintelligence and foreign intelligence, as well as political security. The MSS consists of a central ministry, provincial state security bureaus, and municipal state security bureaus. The SSSB is a provincial state security bureau charged with collecting intelligence within the geographic region surrounding Shanghai.
- Ma arranged for his wife to fly to Shanghai, PRC. One purpose of this trip was for Ma's wife to meet with his MSS contacts and deliver a laptop computer to them. Afterwards, one of Ma's MSS handlers sent him an email message thanking him for sending his wife and delivering "the present."
- Ma was first approached by the MSS when he was living in China. The MSS officer who approached him was direct and open about his affiliation with the Chinese government; and the reason the MSS approached him was to get to CC #1, whose membership in an anti-communist organization was viewed as a threat by the Chinese government.

Questions to consider:

- Ma's espionage began over 10 years after his CIA employment ended. He applied to be a Special Agent with the FBI but was deemed unqualified. What protections does your organization have that might create an alert in this situation?
- How can organizations protect against the risk posed by former employees and contractors who once had access to classified information?

Resources for further exploration:

- [Potential Risk Indicators: Foreign Considerations](https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaid/insider/potential_risk_indicators_foreign_considerations.pdf)
(https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaid/insider/potential_risk_indicators_foreign_considerations.pdf)
- [Insider Threat Job Aid: Employment Application Risks and Mitigation for Insiders with National Security Eligibility](https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaid/insider/INT_Employment_JobAid.pdf)
(https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaid/insider/INT_Employment_JobAid.pdf)
- [Understanding Espionage and National Security Crimes Job Aid](https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaid/ci/ci-jobaidseries-understandingespionage.pdf)
(<https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaid/ci/ci-jobaidseries-understandingespionage.pdf>)

Supporting Through Reporting!

Contact the appropriate POC to report any observed potential risk indicators:

Name: _____ Agency/Department: _____
Title: Supervisor/Security Officer/ITP Senior Official/ITP Manager