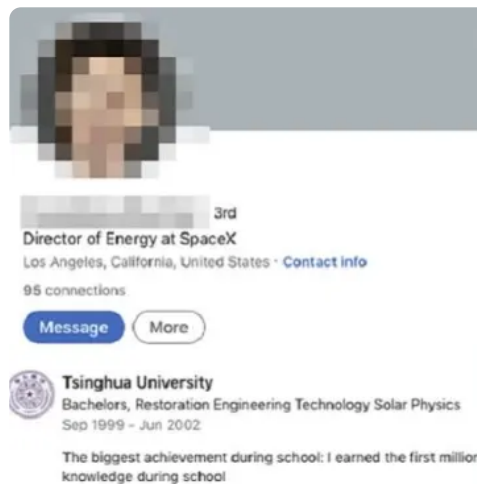




NEXTSHARK

Why the 1,022 fake SpaceX employees from China could be part of an elaborate scam



Where they studied	
1,022	Tsinghua University
999	The Wharton School
365	University of Pennsylvania
282	Stanford University
238	University of Southern California

Ryan General

Thu, September 8, 2022 at 6:16 PM · 3 min read

A rumor claiming that US spacecraft company SpaceX employs over 1,000 Tsinghua University graduates that spread on Chinese social media in July actually revealed an elaborate online scam.

The figure, as it turned out, came from [search results](#) on the professional networking platform LinkedIn.

A screenshot of the keyword search on the website at the time showed that the company had a total of 9,780 employees, 1,022 of whom (10.44%) were Tsinghua graduates, the most from any university.

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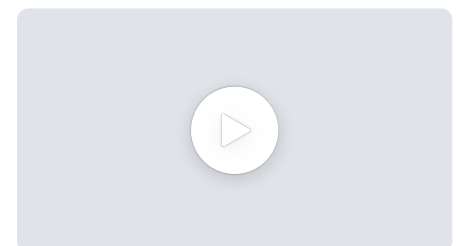
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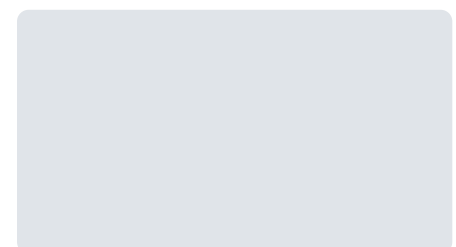
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Permanent in NYC

As the story [widely circulated](#) on Chinese social media platforms, many took pride in the number of Chinese experts and professionals working in the company. Others lamented the effects of the so-called brain drain on China's economy and development.

However, it did not take long for [internet sleuths](#) to notice many irregularities in the LinkedIn accounts of the Tsinghua University graduates.

The accounts had a lot of similarities in their educational and professional backgrounds, as well as near-identical personal descriptions.

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Toronto-based tech content creator [Jeff Li](#) was among the first to suspect that the accounts were fake.

"They all graduated from Tsinghua and went on to the University of Southern California or similar well-known universities," Li was [quoted as saying](#). "Besides that, they all worked at a certain company in Shanghai. Obviously, I suspect these are fake, generated data."

As soon as the fraudulent LinkedIn accounts were exposed, [many speculated](#) that they had been used in an elaborate online scheme called the "Pig Butchering Scam."

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"The fraud is named for the way scammers feed their victims with promises of romance and riches before cutting them off and taking all their money," the [Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#) explained in April.

As days went by, keyword searches for SpaceX employees yielded fewer and fewer results for Tsinghua University

Video: SpaceX aims for Falcon 9 rocket launch Tuesday from Kennedy Space Center

WFTV

Citizens Beware: Online Scams Spreading Like Wildfire

TheStreet.com



the number of Tsinghua University graduates [has decreased](#) to less than 300.



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Volunteer group Global Anti-Scam Org (GASO), which monitors Pig Butchering and other similar scams, [noted that targets](#) are “patiently groomed over weeks to become interested in investing in cryptocurrency, forex, gold, etc.” The fraudsters then use a “series of psychological techniques and ruses” to trick or bully victims into “remitting increasingly large amounts of money.”

“Scammers started moving to LinkedIn maybe after dating sites tried to crack down on them, [like] Coffee Meets Bagel, Tinder,” GASO representative Grace Yuen told MIT Technology Review. “You might be already married and you are not on the dating sites, but you probably have a LinkedIn account that you check occasionally.”

Based on GASO’s statistics, the majority of the victims are of [Chinese ancestry](#) and are “highly educated and accomplished individuals.”

Since the group launched its website last year, over 1,200 victims of such scams have reached out to them, reporting a total loss of over \$256 million.

As the culprits behind the scams remain elusive to authorities, GASO has started collaborating with the FBI and the U.S. Secret Service to help with the investigation.

Victims are encouraged to [reach out to GASO](#) and file a complaint with the FBI’s Internet [Crime Complaint Center](#).

Featured Image via [二姐夫科技视角](#)