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An American geologist named Xue Feng with dual Chinese and American citizenship is appealing his indictment on espionage charges. Staff members from the US Embassy in China have been denied access to the proceedings, according to AP.

The Texas resident, who obtained in Ph.D at the University of Chicago, disappeared in China 3 years ago. In his first months of captivity, he was tortured with cigarettes, being forced to sit for extended periods and to hold a chair up behind his back with handcuffs.

He was in China doing market research for international firm IHS on the Chinese oil and gas industry, and obtained a database of 30,000 oil wells. The same company has assembled data on energy reserves all around the world, which Chinese companies have used to exploit resources in Africa and Australia.

Earlier this year, four Rio Tinto employees were also detained on espionage charges for researching Chinese steel production capacity.

The incident highlights the dangers of doing market research in China, and running afoul of vague espionage rules.

For more information on Xue Feng's life, see the Wall Street Journal Article here:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704584804575644470575141314.html>