

THE RISE AND FALL OF SINO-AMERICAN POST-SECONDARY PARTNERSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the rise and fall of a golden age of engagement between American and Chinese institutions of higher education. We assess the political context, examine institutional and demographic variables associated with successful initial joint efforts, and explore why current relationships are unraveling. The authors do not assume alignment in the interests promoting initial cooperation between the United States and China but a convergence of mutual interests. The paper discusses operational realities underpinning support for engagement (a need for coordination in organizational infrastructure, faculty support and what are referred to as “administrative nuts and bolts”) associated with meaningful and long-term agreements. We present evidence of a dramatic decline in Sino-U.S. cooperative endeavors in post-secondary education and suggest that a new paradigmatic shift is underway and consider what this might mean for future engagement efforts. Finally, the paper poses recommendations to American institutional leaders for next steps to continue engagement with China.

Keywords: U.S.-China relations, institutional partnerships, engaging China

This essay explores the present state of engagement between U.S. and Chinese institutions of higher education. This present state represents a shift from what had existed from China’s opening in 1978 until approximately 2017. More specifically, we endeavor to identify the factors (historical, political, and organizational) associated with effective and successful U.S.-China postsecondary relationships prior to 2017 and why such factors may not be germane in this new environment.

Engagement takes many forms. It may involve developing partnership degree programs with a Chinese university, collaborative research, or a study abroad program for American students embedded at a Chinese institution. At its most comprehensive, it may be the development of U.S. campuses in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) — for example, Duke University’s campus in Kunshan or New York University in Shanghai. Yet, while branch and partnership campuses certainly fall under the umbrella of engagement, they are relatively few; only a handful of U.S. institutions have the resources and inclination to invest in building campuses abroad, nor are most offered multimillion-dollar subsidies and concessions to do so by the Chinese.

In our discussion of factors associated with engagement, we acknowledge vastly different operational realities framing engagement between, for example, smaller private liberal arts colleges, private research universities, and land-grant institutions. Such operational differences should not come as a surprise given different missions, funding sources, governance structures, faculty roles, and leadership, as well as the sophistication of experience of those engaged in joint endeavors. All vary widely in different organizational environments.

We are therefore cautious in our generalizations, taking care to ensure they are pertinent to many types of partnerships in different kinds of colleges and universities. Nor are we unaware of the challenges to U.S.-PRC cooperation posed by the ebb and flow of geopolitical and geo-economic tensions, such as the galloping trade imbalances, management of the fragile balance of power in East Asia, and competition in scientific research and intellectual property rights. But perhaps most salient to our discussion is academic freedom, and whether the concept as it is known and practiced in Western institutions can be genuinely accommodated in the PRC. Those differences notwithstanding, we argue that the global issues pressing world leaders today — responding to the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, energy policy, nuclear proliferation, refugees, and food security — demand international solutions that positive U.S.-China relations can go a long way toward mitigating if not resolving.

Our position is that the decline in U.S.-China engagement will not bode well for the future of either nation. We support closer engagement and, to that end, identify cultural and institutional factors associated with the maintenance of successful partnerships in this new now. We begin with the context for engagement.

THE CHANGING CONTEXT FOR ENGAGEMENT

Back in the 1980s, in an era characterized largely by an embrace of globalization, internationalization of curricula and cross-cultural learning were touted by many educators as being critical to the nation's economic and strategic security. Focusing on the Asia-Pacific region was identified as being especially relevant in view of that region's rapidly growing importance to global trade and investment, not to mention supply chains. China's rise was only in its infancy back then, but its leaders got the message more clearly than many others: the importance of sending large numbers of students, scholars, and scientists abroad; inviting people to China who specialized in fields useful to the country's economic growth; and dramatically reinventing the educational system to promote science and technology. Soon enough, China not merely benefited from foreign involvement in its economy; it developed its own formidable cadre of experts while managing trade and investment to protect its markets and insure against dependence.

Meantime, U.S. educators only partly met the challenges of internationalization with China. Though language learning increased, President Obama's dream of 100,000 American students studying in China never materialized as it was explicitly left to institutions and corporations to fund. The number of Americans studying in China was inconsequential compared to the number of Chinese studying in the United States. Still, China's overall image in the United States and the West was positive, helped by major changes in Beijing's foreign affairs: its resolution of disputes with neighboring countries, its joining of regional organizations, its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and establishment of numerous official and nongovernmental groups to promote cooperation on specific issues such as the environment and commerce. All this evidence of China's "opening to the world" (as its leaders put it) gave hope that the more China matured economically, the more would it liberalize its politics and open still further, including in education.

University leaders and individual scholars on both sides agreed that rapid acceleration of the U.S.-China educational relationship would lead to enhanced research productivity, student and faculty mobility, tuition revenues, greater cross-cultural understanding, and mutual appreciation of an increasingly international world. U.S. officials saw academic engagement with the PRC as fitting into broader geopolitical objectives associated with globalization and trade liberalization. Presidents of both parties believed that a marketized Chinese economy, integrated in the world economy, would moderate China's regional ambitions and refocus regime priorities on domestic social needs.

INITIAL SUCCESS IN INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE PRC

In the early 2000s, Chinese students, scholars, and teachers enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities climbed over 60,000. Graduate students alone accounted for approximately 18 percent of all foreign graduate students in the United States.¹ It is estimated that 40 percent of doctoral granting institutions offered a Chinese undergraduate language program or degree programs with the PRC. Joint MBA partnerships alone were widespread. Of course, engagement varied widely, ranging from universities that funded facilities, programs, faculty, and campuses abroad to those that considered a visit by several deans and a handful by transfer students to be emblematic of "active" engagement.

American colleges and universities initially approached Chinese partners for a variety of reasons. Smaller to mid-sized private colleges and universities (and a few public institutions as well), entered the Chinese market primarily for tuition revenues, and secondarily to enhance student and faculty exchange or reap other benefits associated with international exchange. Consortium arrangements and programs offered by independent providers and brokers became common with this group to enhance these arrangements. Religiously affiliated institutions and orders, some of whom have had a presence in Asia for centuries, and whose objectives are less propelled by economics than by cultural and religious dictates, were also active.

Larger public and private universities may have initially been drawn to the PRC through individual faculty engaged in collaborative research. Studies have shown that it is private flagships in particular that have benefited from Chinese international tuition revenue.² While the lure of tuition dollars is not unimportant, larger public universities are often more constrained in entrepreneurial endeavors involving higher tuition. This sector was primarily motivated by enhancing research competitiveness, recruiting faculty and students to high demand areas (where there was capacity), or cooperation on applied scientific endeavors. Providing access for study abroad or cross-cultural exchange in a nation with the world's fastest growing economy was of interest for those who could afford robust international programs. Of course, elite American institutions always attracted top scholars and students from the PRC (and other nations) simply by being one of a tiny handful of truly world-class universities.

We note that it remained harder, however, to establish relationships and attract Chinese students to lesser ranked institutions or those located in less cosmopolitan cities or regions. Lastly, the for-profit sector began to enter the PRC. This trend was pronounced in nursing and related health care areas, where high demand existed domestically and Chinese students could access funds to pay higher tuition, become credentialed, and obtain jobs in the United States.

The above caveats notwithstanding, the following leadership strategies, coupled with compatible policies and decision-making processes, were associated with successful internationalization efforts, including partnerships and joint endeavors.

Sustained Leadership and an Internal Advocate

The active support of a president or provost (coupled with the actions of an internal advocate or lead administrator) was necessary for success. Leadership in this context included the ability to verbally communicate why international engagement was important, what success in this realm entailed, and how international initiatives aligned with the broader mission of the institution or system. Leaders also had to have a willingness to hold others accountable — or incentivize or otherwise persuade those who may have been skeptical of globalization efforts.

Active leadership support coupled with the efforts of an internal advocate was important, particularly during the initial phases of establishing partnerships and exchanges, because of competition for resources — for hard dollars as well as the time and effort of faculty and staff. After all, international engagement required the redirection of internal resources, disruption of established routines, and possibly an increase in workload for some.

Based on our experience, three observations are germane to the role and effectiveness of the internal advocate or lead administrator for international efforts. First, credibility and the ability to locate resources were essential. Second, the advocate had to initiate a process to develop a system-wide or campus plan where expectations and goals were clearly set forth with metrics established to assess progress. Third, where plans were not concrete or universally accepted, key leaders and constituencies had to be afforded the opportunity to engage in planning and implementation discussions that raised essential concerns.

The Need for Alignment in Organizational Infrastructure

Effective partnerships, joint programs, and other international efforts demanded more than a plan, a process to gain support, or an office assigned the responsibility to effectuate programs. They needed the support of individuals who addressed infrastructure — i.e., program capacity, legal and immigration matters, student preparedness, housing, transportation, ESL, outreach, and other issues that envelop internationalization on campus. What this meant, practically speaking, was that people and the policies supporting internationalization had to be in alignment.

We note that those initial international efforts that somehow bypassed legal, financial, or risk management offices resulted in those offices undermining, opposing, or simply being unable to support international endeavors. Success was often a result of the willingness of a chief financial officer to ensure that a significant portion of funds generated from international enrollments were in fact returned to those programs, units, or schools responsible for maintaining and growing such relationships. In places where international success with the PRC was achieved, the question, “Are there reasonable prospects for sustainability (and a business plan for such),” was asked and adequately answered.

Faculty Support

One constant in our experience is that absent faculty engagement and support, international efforts fail. While it may be university leaders who dine at fancy banquets, agreeing to overall terms and intent, it is the full-time faculty who have sustained contact and interaction with foreign students and faculty.

In more mature institutions, where shared governance and curricular oversight by faculty are taken seriously, it soon became evident it was not feasible to engage academically without their support. We note as well the important support of deans and chairs, particularly in the initial phases of establishing partnerships. They provided resources — release time to faculty, resources for assistance in language training, funds to travel — without which new academic initiatives could not be implemented. However, it is the faculty who invariably ask: How do partnerships benefit their colleagues and students? Are partner institutions delivering what was promised? Do short-term and long-term results measure up? Is engagement with the PRC worth the resources (broadly defined) assigned to internationalization?

The Nuts and Bolts

Without attention to the nuts and bolts of joint endeavors and partnerships, such efforts fail to become institutionalized and disintegrate upon the departure of the president, chancellor, or provost who may have been initially supportive of a relationship with the PRC. Nuts and bolts include matters such as the roles and responsibilities, including financial and ethical commitments, of the consultants or brokers who served in crucial roles both in the United States and China. For example, were consulting contacts clearly written, monitored, and enforceable? Had they been translated — did they say the same thing in English and Chinese? — and were they reviewed with student affairs, security, financial and legal offices? Were websites updated and available in English and Chinese to prospective students (and parents in China)? Were those responsible for dormitories, student housing, and relating living accommodations in the loop and supportive and did they understand the scope of their responsibilities? Although seemingly trivial, attention to these kinds of matters often determined initial failure or success of international efforts with Chinese partner schools.

Communicating with Partners

Ongoing personal interaction is necessary for maintaining partnerships: Visits and continual communication signal serious intent. Those responsible for sustaining relationships with the PRC understood the importance of personal interaction and knew that partnerships rarely sustained themselves without ceremonial and cultural activities, personal relationships developed and nurtured by spending time socializing with foreign counterparts, and diligent assessment of progress. We found that those who were ambivalent or opposed to such efforts (and who, invariably, also claimed to be responsible stewards of dollars and guardians of the “mission” of the school or system), were prone to undervalue or deride such engagement activities. Their skepticism was constant, and strategies to address these internal dynamics had to be taken.

The Xi Jinping Era

Under Xi Jinping since 2012, China has fully embraced globalization while firmly rejecting political liberalization and, under Xi Jinping, implementing repression of internal enemies reminiscent of the 1960s. China's economy has become deeply enmeshed in the global economy, just as U.S. leaders had hoped, but that development has greatly increased China's political and military influence, in some cases to the detriment of U.S. interests. China's image, especially in the U.S., has transformed from competitor to rival, and now to strategic threat. The White House's 2020 strategy paper on China, for example, paints a picture of a completely duplicitous government whose economic, social, and military policies threaten U.S. interests.³

As has happened during both China's pre-Communist and early Communist past,⁴ and is now on display in the 2020 White House strategy paper and in comments by senior U.S. officials, high American expectations of China have been replaced by official hostility. Mutual trust has vanished. Instead, on the U.S. side we have conspiratorial theories about the Chinese origins of the COVID-19 virus and demands for an international investigation. U.S. citizens of Chinese and Asian ethnicity are being assaulted.⁵ The Chinese have responded with conspiratorial theories of their own, strongly worded criticisms of Trump administration officials, expulsion of U.S. journalists, and mocking of American-style democracy.⁶

Public opinion about the other in both countries is trending in a negative direction. Nearly two-thirds of Americans now have a negative view of China, with little difference between Democrats and Republicans. That was not the case in the Obama years.⁷ Chinese views of the United States are still positive in early 2020, but not by much, and the trend is downward as tensions grow with the United States.⁸ As the head of USC's US-China Institute puts it, “perceptions in China have swung very much in the direction of thinking that the United States is absolutely committed to holding China down and that China's rise has caused the United States to worry and to do everything it can to hold China back.”⁹ Those perceptions are precisely in line with official Chinese commentaries.

Today, U.S.-China relations are at a very low point, perhaps the lowest in 50 years. Few specialists on either side speak anymore of engagement and compromise, even though plenty of cooperative opportunities exist — not least in combatting COVID-19. Those who still favor engagement are on the defensive, trying to protect the gains of previous decades in education and other areas. Instead, most of the conversation among specialists concerns rivalry: competing military objectives in East Asia,

such as the territorial disputes in the South China Sea; economic and technological decoupling; information wars; and projecting influence in developing countries. And the rivalry is not just theoretical.

The protesters in Hong Kong risk being jailed for subversion under a new national security law, North Korea's nuclear weapons and long-range missiles remain a source of contention, and the cultural genocide being carried out by the Chinese authorities in Xinjiang Province against Uighur and other Muslims is one of several human rights issues. The Trump administration has added fuel to the fire by withdrawing U.S. aid from the World Health Organization (WHO), removing the Peace Corps from China, forcing Chinese media offices in the U.S. to reduce their size, and threatening to pull out of the Phase One trade deal with China. Reportedly, senior advisers to Trump who had typically favored engaging China now agree with the nationalist view on taking a confrontational stance.¹⁰ Conservative members of Congress, the right-wing media, and some liberals have joined in that view, urging punishment of China for everything from human rights violations and suppression of Hong Kong pro-democracy demonstrators to espionage, cyberwarfare, and even biological warfare with the coronavirus.

A DECLINE IN ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT WITH CHINA

The current wave of mutual mistrust is reflected in the 2020 White House strategy paper on China, which makes it seem as though obstacles to exchanges with China are all on the Chinese side:

The Administration is raising awareness of and actively combating Beijing's co-optation and coercion of its own citizens and others in United States academic institutions, beyond traditional espionage and influence efforts. We are working with universities are endeavoring to protect the rights of Chinese students on American campuses, provide information to counter CCP propaganda and disinformation, and ensure an understanding of ethical codes of conduct in an American academic environment. Chinese students represent the largest cohort of foreign students in the United States today. The United States values the contributions of Chinese students and researchers. As of 2019, the number of Chinese students and researchers in the United States has reached an all-time high, while the number of student visa denials to Chinese applicants has steadily declined. The United States strongly supports the principles of open academic discourse and welcomes international students and researchers conducting legitimate academic pursuits; we are improving processes to screen out the small minority of Chinese applicants who attempt to enter the United States under false pretenses or with malign intent.

The White House paper does not mention the concerted U.S. government attack on exchange programs with China, including efforts to withhold defense department funds to shutter Confucius Institutes and "Confucius Classrooms," and limit visa applications. These Chinese-funded Institutes, which once numbered 109 in the U.S. and now are fewer than 70, were established mainly on university campuses to promote Chinese language and culture in K-12 schools in nearby communities. The so-called Confucius Classrooms in those schools received Chinese language teachers and textbooks free of charge.

The most recently documented trends in U.S.-China educational exchanges show the negative impact of deteriorating bilateral relations. During academic year (AY) 2017-2018, China was only the seventh most popular destination for U.S. students going abroad, with about 11,600 participants. This represents a 2.5 percent decline compared with the previous AY.¹¹ (Because of COVID-19, in early 2020 all study abroad opportunities have been virtually curtailed worldwide.)

For Chinese students, the U.S. is the number-one destination. During AY 2017-2018, Chinese students in the U.S. numbered 369,548. This figure, representing about one in three international students at U.S. schools, included about 148,000 undergraduates and 133,000 graduate students. (For comparison, in second place were about 202,000 students from India.) There were also about 48,000 Chinese scholars in the U.S., about 35 percent of all foreign scholars here and an increase over the previous AY of nearly four percent.

Among all Chinese students in the U.S. during AY 2018-2019, about 70,000, or 19 percent, enrolled in the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program, which enables them to work in industry on their student visas after graduation for a defined period. That program typically attracts students in the STEM fields. (Chinese students comprise 29 percent of all international students in OPT.) The Chinese students' economic impact is considerable: nearly \$15 billion in 2018, which includes all spending by students, whether in OPT or not.¹² However, the OPT program may be cut by the Trump administration. The political and educational leadership in Ohio is leading the charge to continue OPT.¹³

Over the last decade or so, total Chinese student enrollment has increased, but by a smaller percentage each year — by 0.05 percent in AY 2018-2019 compared with 10.8 percent in AY 2014-2015 and 6.8 percent in AY 2016-2017.¹⁴

U.S. high school enrollment in Chinese language programs at one time seemed to be increasing in popularity. These programs — 1,144 in 2017 — ranked fifth of 16 major language programs in both public and private schools.¹⁵ There has long been awareness in US educational circles of the importance of expanding Chinese-language programs in the K-16 system. The theoretical goal set by the Asia Society in 2005 was five percent of high school students studying Chinese by 2015, or a decade from the study. The major roadblock to reaching that goal was said to be lack of sufficient teachers, requiring that some would have to come from China under a special J-1 visa program.¹⁶ They did; but now that program, too, is imperiled.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had little effect on the Chinese student population in the U.S., since most had to stay at their universities. (Most U.S. students in China were evacuated.) But the pandemic has restricted travel to the U.S.: In early spring of 2020, 59 percent of the more than 3,000 international students who were unable to come to the U.S. because of the virus were from China.¹⁷ But this is only a snapshot in time and institutions surveyed. The virus has also severely limited U.S. universities' ability to recruit additional students from China.

Visa problems are also reducing the number of Chinese students able to study in the U.S. Nearly 14 percent of students on government scholarships could not make the trip in 2019 due to visa issues, compared with 3.2 percent in 2018. Chinese students are still said to prefer the U.S. as their first-choice study destination, but that number has dropped by 54 percent since 2017.¹⁸ Trump administration officials have stopped issuing visas to Chinese graduate students who might have a connection with the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and in at least one case have made an arrest on the basis of a falsified visa application.

Confucius Institutes (CIs) embedded in U.S. universities have taken the biggest hit because of shifting political sentiment on China. According to one report, there were 103 CIs in 2017, but only 73 as of June 2020, if the seven "Confucius Classrooms" in K-12 public school districts are excluded.¹⁹ Our own work suggests there were at one time 109 CIs in the U.S., now reduced to around 55, some being put in abeyance.

ACCUSATIONS AND REALITIES

In the new circumstances of U.S.-China hostility, academic engagement has come under fire on a variety of grounds: enabling Chinese espionage, stifling academic freedom, spreading propaganda, stealing intellectual property, and undermining American values. Conservative (and some liberal) members and committees of Congress,²⁰ U.S. intelligence agencies, the State Department, think tanks, journalists, and US educational, anti-immigrant, and human rights organizations have all weighed in to warn of the dangers of association with official Chinese entities. This attack is not accidental: It reflects a bipartisan consensus on toughening China policy that is growing with each clash of ideas and interests.²¹

Most of the accusations, particularly as they concern Confucius Institutes, are false or misleading, reflecting ideological passion rather than investigation of actual circumstances. Virtually all the accusations are based on isolated Chinese statements (such as that of Li Changchun, a former head of propaganda for the Chinese Communist Party);²² singular incidents (such as a theft); or a complex and opaque relationship (such as between Hanban and China's education ministry). These are magnified to suggest a threat; Li Changchun's remarks are quoted in almost every critique. Such a *presumption* represents a dramatic change in perceptions of China, which in years past had been accepted as an economic partner despite its communist system. Today, a rising communist China is ipso facto suspect and considered dangerous, leading Beijing to argue that the Americans are inciting a new Cold War.

Several considerations mitigate warnings of the dangers of engaging China through education. First, the warnings fail to consider the views of American communities, schools, research facilities, and other entities that have benefited from exchanges with China. Benefits include a net tuition revenue gain, enhanced research capacity particularly at research institutions, and diversity in student populations. With regard to Confucius Institutes, there is no concrete evidence presented anywhere that CIs engage in the curtailment of academic freedom or any evidence they are involved in espionage. CIs offer free language training and study abroad experiences to students, both in the colleges where they are located and in local secondary schools. Many of these students and community members traveling to the PRC would otherwise not have the chance to engage internationally. In our experience with a number of CIs, where they have closed it has not been, by and large, because of internal calls to cease activities but due to external political and legislative pressures from the U.S. side. The views of campus leaders, students, and most faculty are overwhelmingly positive. Further, initial government reports on CI's relied on secondhand innuendo and political bias. Objective and verified evidence to substantiate claims against CI's has not been presented by anyone anywhere.

Second, the supposed danger of collaborative projects is not only greatly exaggerated but, as some educators have said, invites unfair bigotry directed at visiting Chinese scholars, scientists, and faculty of Chinese ethnicity.²³ With respect to CIs, for example, one US Senate bill (S.939 of June 2020) which would greatly restrict federal money to universities that house them, is premised

on a number of false accusations about Chinese Communist Party control of Chinese language teachers and CI directors' programming.²⁴

Third, contrary to the State Department's and FBI's apparent assumption that Chinese scholars are hostile to the United States, at least one study has found just the opposite, at least for scholars of international relations.²⁵ Fourth, the argument sometimes made for reciprocity — namely, that U.S. institutions should have the same access to Chinese groups that Hanban has to U.S. audiences—neglects the benefits to Americans even in the absence of reciprocity. Fifth, we must ask: If China were not now considered a strategic challenge, would there be such an uproar over academic engagement? There was very little before 2017. Sixth, while it is true that Confucius Institutes are one element of China's soft power designed to convey a positive image of China, that is true of every country's public diplomacy. (The Fulbright program and Peace Corps, the British Council, Alliance Francaise, and Goethe Institute all represent dimensions of soft power and public diplomacy for their respective countries.) Whether or not soft-power programs represent actual threats is worthy of examination. After all, U.S. aid agencies, corporations, and news media have sometimes been accused of the same kinds of interference that Chinese programs are accused of today. Finally, we must wonder why programs and activities in the U.S. that are funded by other authoritarian foreign governments — for example, by Turkey and Saudi Arabia — do not receive the same scrutiny as does China.

IS THERE A PARADIGMATIC SHIFT IN INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRC?

We are witnessing an important sociopolitical transition away from internationalization and globalization, even though, if the recent pandemic illustrates anything it is, as a human species, we are more interconnected and vulnerable to global events (and microbes) than ever. The engine pushing anti-globalization sentiments is fueled by, in our estimation, illiberal nationalism, rising income inequality, a loss of faith in international structures, treaties and governmental arrangements (which many have come to believe benefit only the rich and powerful), widespread anti-immigration sentiment, resistance to U.S. leadership by rivals, and great disappointment among allies in U.S. disengagement as a world leader under the Trump administration. Some analysts see resemblances to international affairs before World War I and the demise of faith in international agreements, in conjunction with ethnic nationalism and extremism of all varieties, should give more than a shudder to anyone with a sense of history.

How will a paradigmatic shift or sociopolitical transition, affect post-secondary education in the U.S. and engagement with the PRC? We offer several observations.

First, federal and state budgets will be overburdened as governments try to spend their way out of deep unemployment, business and personal debt, and health care expenses. Government at all levels will face social protests for failure to respond adequately to these needs. This in turn has impacted colleges and universities, particularly in the public sector, which receive sizable revenues from federal, state, and local governments and now face budget reductions. Nor are the private schools immune, certainly not the less elite colleges and universities that rely on tuition dollars for very large portions of their budgets. Auxiliary revenues associated with on campus living or sports may be absent in the months to come. Even universities opening this fall (as opposed to being on-line) may find students, with exceptions at elite institutions, balking at current tuition prices. Others may take a gap year or stay closer to home. Schools, especially liberal arts colleges in more remote regions, may be hard hit, although it is too early to assess these observations. To date, fall enrollments are holding steady or decreasing, more dramatically at the smaller private schools.

Second, the scenario above may end up being the perfect storm for international offices and initiatives. Foreign populations, especially students and visiting scholars, will be hard put to stay if they need scholarships and work. Study abroad may become more a luxury than ever. Chinese students may no longer be as welcome as they once were and are more likely to encounter rising discrimination. Foreign language and cultural learning will be less of a job asset than before. The desirable skill set is likely to be more technical. Institutions of higher learning, laboratories, and research facilities that host foreign-born teachers, researchers and the like will be under intense scrutiny from government agencies. All these changes will be compounded if people are reluctant to travel, either to attend school or engage personally with partners. Either way there has been a profoundly chilling effect around engagement with the PRC and intense competition for institutional resources that may migrate away from international initiatives that now are no longer revenue generating.

Third, subtle changes affecting leaders and leadership in post-secondary education may result in a diminution of support for international endeavors, particularly with the PRC. As colleges and universities struggle to adjust to post covid circumstances, leading in these environments will entail painful adjustments. The pandemic will hasten the retirement of the baby boom generation now leading institutions — a generation that has by and large been very supportive of internationalization. Addressing pandemic-related matters may force new leaders to turn inward to solve more immediate campus concerns. Hiring freezes, now ubiquitous, may remain in place for some time. Relationships with faculty unions will be more attenuated as furloughs and layoffs

seem to be in the offing, and heightened sensitivities to campus safety, race, and violence will make decision making a more delicate affair. Searches for leaders will become more difficult as a myriad of constituencies will clamor for transparency and involvement, resulting in would-be candidates not taking a chance applying for jobs. Climate change advocates, with support among undergraduate bodies, may inquire about carbon footprints, another reason for the curtailment of international travel. Finally, the Chinese brand has suffered immeasurably, and leaders will be more and more reluctant to voice support for joint endeavors with the PRC given the level of bipartisan political opposition to such activities. Increased scrutiny of research security plays into the hands of congressional hawks who seem intent on passing legislative acts that make it precarious to continue relationships with the Chinese.

Sadly, the issues discussed above will undermine factors that led to success in international cooperative endeavors in the first place. Further, given our experience, partnership and joint endeavors will be much harder to reestablish than dismantle.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACADEMIC LEADERS

We offer several recommendations for college leaders to continue to engage internationally and especially in China. First, colleges and universities continue to frame their missions as global, and students continue to want to be involved in developing solutions to global issues, such as arresting climate change, alleviating poverty, ending domestic violence, and strengthening human rights. Institutions must therefore internationalize the curriculum to address these global issues such that opportunities are not dependent solely on cross-border mobility, but also through other means of engagement. Internationalization strategy needs to be multi-dimensional and resilient.

Academic leaders will have to review plans for internationalization that focus on a narrowing of priorities. More attention will have to be focused on developing criteria for success and measurable outcomes. Staffing may have to be reduced in some cases as schools adjust to a new normal that may go on for quite some time. In all cases institutions will have to ensure they are taking measures to address research security matters.

International offices will have to engage in more rigorous evaluation and assessment of international activities and initiatives and make a strong case (in a time of competition for resources) why engagement is essential. The elite public and private sectors will have an easier time but even here, we believe there will be an increased level of scrutiny on activities with the PRC, making engagement more difficult.

Attention should be focused on the long term, where institutions want to be vis à vis internationalization in the years to come. Now is not the time to abandon engagement with the PRC but to consider how to respond effectively to those in opposition to such engagement and to ensure processes promoting such endeavors and outcomes are defensible and efficient.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, memories are short, but the underlying premises of international engagement may have to be adjusted to prepare for a successful future.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Institute for International Education, www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Places-of-Origin/Academic-Level-and-Place-of-Origin/2004-05. In that academic year, Chinese graduate students in the United States numbered about 49,200; the world total was about 264,000.
- 2 See for example for example, John Bound et al., "A Passage to America: University Funding and International Students," National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2016, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w22981>.
- 3 "United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China," [www.whitehouse.gov/U.S.-Strategic-Approach-to-The-Peoples-Republic-of-China-Report-5.20.20\(1\).pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/U.S.-Strategic-Approach-to-The-Peoples-Republic-of-China-Report-5.20.20(1).pdf).
- 4 See the classic study by Harold R. Isaacs, *Images of Asia: American Views of China and India* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958).
- 5 Concerning official accusations of China's responsibility for the spread of the virus in the United States, see the comment of Peter Navarro, one of Trump's main economic advisers, on ABC News, May 17, 2020: "The Chinese, behind the shield of the World Health Organization for two months, hid the virus from the world, and then sent hundreds of thousands of Chinese on aircraft to Milan, New York and around the world to seed that. They could have kept it in Wuhan, instead, it became a pandemic. So that's why I say the Chinese did that to Americans and they are responsible now." <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-adviser-continues-focus-china-amid-criticism-coronavirus/story?id=70723322>. Assaults on Asian Americans are discussed in Tracy Jan, "Asian American Doctors and Nurses are Fighting Racism and the Coronavirus," *Washington Post*, May 19, 2020.
- 6 See, for example, Anna Fifield, "China Wasn't Wild About Mike Pompeo Before the Virus; It's Really Gunning for Him Now," *Washington Post*, April 30, 2020.
- 7 A Pew Research poll in March 2020 found that 66 percent of Americans — including 62 percent of Democrats and 72 percent of Republicans — have a negative view of China, and 62 percent regard its "power and influence" as a "major threat." In 2017, when Trump took office, positive views of China predominated, and were about equally shared by Democrats and Republicans at 44 percent and 47 percent respectively. Kat Devlin, Laura Silver, and Christine Huang, "U.S. View of China Increasingly Negative Amid Coronavirus Outbreak," Pew Research Center, April 21, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/04/21/u-s-views-of-china-increasingly-negative-amid-coronavirus-outbreak/>.

- ⁸ Chinese opinion of the United States, as reported by the Eurasia Group Foundation (Mark Hannah and Caroline Gray, Global View of American Democracy: Implications for Coronavirus and Beyond, <https://egfound.org/stories/independent-america/modeling-democracy/>), has likewise moved swiftly negative, though about 39 percent of Chinese still hold positive views while about 28 percent hold negative views.
- ⁹ Clayton Dube, interviewed April 29, 2020, www.uscannenbergmedia.com/2020/05/14/usc-us-china-institute-director-says-the-relationship-of-two-countries-is-at-its-worst-since-1979/. Both groups' polling took place in April 2020.
- ¹⁰ Josh Rogin, "COVID-19 Has Brought Trump's Warring China Factions Together," Washington Post, May 21, 2020.
- ¹¹ Institute for International Education, "Open Doors Report 2020," www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Fact-Sheets-and-Infographics/Leading-Places-of-Origin-Fact-Sheets.
- ¹² Institute for International Education, "Open Doors Report 2020," www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Fact-Sheets-and-Infographics/Leading-Places-of-Origin-Fact-Sheets, Fact Sheet China 2019
- ¹³ In addition, 21 Republican House members wrote to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf in June 2020 urging retention of the OPT program and its visa allowance so that the US could remain competitive with other countries in hiring of international students. We are indebted to Dr. Gil Latz, vice-provost at The Ohio State University, for providing information on this matter.
- ¹⁴ Institute for International Education, "Open Doors Report 2020," www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Enrollment.
- ¹⁵ American Councils for International Education et al., The National K-12 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey Report, June 2017.
- ¹⁶ "Expanding Chinese-Language Capacity in the United States," The Asia Society, New York, June 2005.
- ¹⁷ Mirka Martel, "Covid-19 Effects on U.S. Higher Education Campuses: From Emergency Response to Planning for Future Student Mobility," IIE Covid-19 Snapshot Survey, May 2020.
- ¹⁸ "Chinese Students Cherish US Education Dream, Despite Year of Uncertainty," South China Morning Post, January 5, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3044211/chinas-students-cherish-us-education-dream-despite-year>.
- ¹⁹ National Association of Scholars, "How Many Confucius Institutes are in the United States?," <https://www.nas.org/blogs/article/how-many-confucius-institutes-are-in-the-united-states>.
- ²⁰ For examples, see Mel Gurtov, "Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and the Insecurity of China's Leadership," Global Asia, March 2020, https://www.globalasia.org/v15no1/feature/hong-kong-xinjiang-and-the-insecurity-of-chinas-leadership_mel-gurtov. Congress has enacted legislation to terminate or at least restrict the activities of Confucius Institutes. The most important is P.L. 115-232, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2019, which denies defense department funds to any school that provides Chinese language programs offered by a Confucius Institute.
- ²¹ Gurtov and Selden, "The Dangerous New U.S. Consensus on China and the Future of U.S.-China Relations," The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, July 21, 2019, vol. 17, no. 5, <https://apjif.org/2019/15/Gurtov-Selden.html>.
- ²² In 2019 Li called the Confucius Institutes "an important part of China's overseas propaganda setup." That remark has been quoted dozens of times by those who want to put an end to CIs.
- ²³ As the president of MIT laments, these days anyone of Chinese ethnicity "now feel[s] unfairly scrutinized, stigmatized and on edge" when dealing with the U.S. government. L. Rafael Reif, commenting on Emory University's firing of two professors of Chinese ethnicity, one tenured and both naturalized US citizens. Nick Anderson, "Scrutiny of Chinese American Scientists Raises Fears of Ethnic Profiling," Washington Post, July 19, 2019.
- ²⁴ S.939 has both Republican (Senator John Kennedy of Louisiana) and Democratic (Senator Doug Jones of Alabama) sponsorship. They assert that Chinese-trained teachers are approved by the Communist party and are therefore party hacks; that CIs must agree to be governed by both Chinese and U.S. law; that the party must approve all CI events and speakers; that CIs must agree that "certain topics will be off limits"; and that CI teachers teach communist party versions of "Chinese history, culture and current events." The bill is in the Congressional Record at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/939>, and Kennedy's introduction of the bill is at <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2020/06/10/senate-section/article/S2859-1>.
- ²⁵ Meng Weizhan's study cited above found that except in China's military think tanks, Chinese scholars of international relations, including U.S. foreign policy, overwhelmingly favor improved U.S.-China relations and in quite a few cases are actually critical of the new assertiveness of their own country's foreign policy.