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U.S. China Relations: The Education Factor

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Education relations have long been viewed as deepening and stabilizing U.S. China relations.

high level political support from both governments, and the globalization of both Chinese and American universities. Recently, however, critics of the relationship have come to the fore.

are
just a few examples.¹

These critiques are provoked by the emergence of a more ideological China which has also become our global competitor.
protectionist economic position have introduced growing strains in the educational as well as the
primary educational and scientific collaborator, as its most influential model. The educational relationship is a strategic asset for both countries and supports a continuing American role in
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the educational relationship will take great care on both sides of the P3es of ths:v2004B004C0051TJETo1t4a ec

The trip was not without its challenges. Taiwan was an extraordinarily sensitive issue.

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given to the delegation. We had to return all of them. The delegation suddenly got up and left a

mats.

But what I learned then and subsequently over and over again was that *education is in the DNA of U.S. China relations*. President Theodore Roosevelt could have never have imagined the long-

way in the education of the Chinese people, so that the vast and populous Empire of China may

² He approved the remittal of Boxer Indemnity Funds to China for educational purposes. Tsinghua College was created to give preliminary training for the more than 1,000 Chinese students who received Boxer scholarships to study in

education community, many, like Gu, were still active in the 1970s and led the renewal of academic ties between our two countries.

educational model was inappropriate for China. The title of my thesis (and later book) was *An American Transplant: The Rockefeller Foundation and Peking Union Medical College*. I aimed

During the Reform and Opening era China has drawn on American educational models as it has instituted wide-reaching reforms in scientific research and higher education. It has also invested heavily in the physical and institutional transformation of its knowledge sector. Although still encumbered with recalcitrant bureaucracies the success of these changes has been a surprise. No, China does not yet have world-class universities but it is getting there. And it has become a destination for global science and education.

many countries including Japan, German, Russia, France, the United Kingdom as well as the United States. These do not fully account for this new era of institutional transformation, a transformation that university model and, more recently, the American liberal arts model.

During the Cultural Revol were depleted of both talent and purpose. Institutions were either emptied out with faculty, staff and students sent to the countryside or convulsed by inter-institution debilitating ideological conflict. I saw glimpses of that in travel with American academic delegations to China in the mid-1970s. Accompanying a Schistosomiasis delegation in 1975 we were confronted not just with tense faculty and empty labs but with clearly fraudulent claims that schistosomiasis had been completely eradicated in

In the summer of 1977 little seemed to have changed and my delegation, led by the presidents of the NAS, SSRC and ACLS, grew discouraged that any future fruitful intellectual dialogue would be possible. We were, however, introduced to the leaders of the new Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, spun off from the Chinese Academy of Science. And as we left via

Guangzhou my colleague from the Chinese Academy of Science pulled me aside and whispered:

scientific research. By 1977 the modernization of science and technology was enshrined as one of the four modernizations. An ambitious eight year plan to develop a high level research plan by 1985 was approved. In March 1978 the National Science Conference drew up a plan to focus on agriculture, energy, materials science, computer science, lasers, space science and technology, high energy physics and genetic engineering. I remember reading with great skepticism about that conference. Genetic engineering, high energy physics, materials science surely post-

I was, of course, wrong. China has demonstrated time and time again that it can move the needle forward in forefront areas of science and technology. In order to do so it has carried out a comprehensive restructuring of both its higher education and research institutional structure. Among the foreign models are the American research university, liberal arts education, and scientific peer review.

The American research university, greatly influenced by German models, fully emerged after World War II. Government funding for scientific and military research during the war had primarily been undertaken in government facilities. A far-reaching decision shifted government funding for science to universities, greatly amplifying the role of American universities in creating new knowledge. The comprehensive American university with undergraduate teaching and the most advanced research in open intellectual communities has been a powerful global institutional model. Academic freedom, the right to teach and publish freely, has been central to innovation and knowledge creation.

research away from Soviet model institutes to universities. Comprehensive universities which

State Council the NSFC had considerable autonomy in its operations. In 2018, however, the Ministry of Science and Technology. Although it is too early to judge some fear that its here-to-fore merit based grants and relative independence may be diminished.

The emerging Chinese academic model, while familiar in many dimensions, does not, however, include academic freedom as understood in the United States. When I first moved to Kunshan as executive vice chancellor to help Duke University establish a new joint venture university I had many conversations with Chinese colleagues about academic freedom. The governing documents for Duke Kunshan University which were approved by the Ministry of Education to teach, research and publish articles freely and openly, hold public academic discussions,

But I learned that Chinese educators often had a different meaning in mind when they discussed academic freedom: they meant the growing autonomy of universities from the Ministry of Education, not the freedom for individual faculty to openly express their own views in teaching and research. Since then the Chinese Communist Party has strengthened its ideological controls over the university community and in some instances endeavored to extend these to foreign faculty and to China studying abroad.

Concerns about academic freedom are at the heart of many of the issues facing U.S. - China education relations today. These are not easily solved. Central to the American model of higher education is the endorsement of an academic freedom that protects individuals from political retribution and also establishes a climate that promotes successful innovation. It is often

joint degree programs. These various collaborative endeavors demonstrated that even though the cultural and university systems had differences institutions and individuals could find ways to work together. In the last several years, however, the growing competitive and ideological climate which has affected both countries is challenging what had here-to-fore been seen, by both countries, as the most beneficial aspect of the bilateral relation.

Institutional collaboration is very different from educational exchange or students studying abroad. It requires a deepening of professional relationships, a strengthening of cultural ties, the necessity of compromise and of creating trust. The differences between curriculum standards, role of faculties and relative institutional autonomy must be addressed. From my own three-year experience as executive vice-chancellor at Duke Kunshan I can attest to the complexity and challenges of collaboration. Kunshan City had sought a world-class university for some years and attracted Duke by guarant

affected. Given the paucity of funds for Chinese language study anyway a clear option is for the U.S. government to increase rather than decrease its support for this critical language training.

announced return to Marxist ideology and heightened rhetoric against western learning values has intensified the opposition to Confucius Institutes. This concern about the presence of Chinese influence in American universities has been compounded by reports of political pressure on Chinese students to serve as political spokespersons on American campuses. A new report from the Woodrow Wilson Center carefully examines those charges. It concludes that Chinese embassy personnel have frequently attempted to influence American university decisions regarding sensitive topics

created a scientific research community that is approaching world-class levels. This is causing heart-

changed. Gone are the days when China had a critical need for American educational assistance. Gone are the days when American faculty members were always the senior partner in research collaboration. American education ventures in China, and sometimes in the United States, look to China for funding. We are well-positioned for a more equal relationship but on terms that respect American values.

China must recognize that an ideological campaign that continues to deny the educational value of western learning will, in short order, destroy the bilateral educational relationship and significantly endanger China as an international education destination. At the same time Americans must continue to be open to collaboration with Chinese institutions which have different characteristics than our own. We must reaffirm that the educational relationship is a cultural relationship that binds our peoples together. It is also a strategic relationship that eoples together

The Oil Prince's Legacy: Rockefeller Philanthropy in China (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2011), 4.

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