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# A Fraught Exchange? U.S. Media on Chinese International Undergraduates and the American University

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## Abstract

In this article, we analyze the U.S. media discourse on Chinese international undergraduate students, the largest international student group since 2009. The discourse describes a market *exchange*, but reveals a struggle between: on the one hand, “a fair exchange”—between excellent Chinese students and world-class American liberal education; and, on the other hand, a “faltering exchange”—between ethically suspect and inassimilable Chinese students and a mercenary and possibly mediocre American university. We argue that this media reporting builds on long-standing seemingly contradictory images of an alluring China market and a threatening “Yellow Peril.” We suggest that this media contest indexes the challenges of campus internationalization; just as the media questions real value on both sides of the exchange, so too is the campus encounter fragile and fraught.

## Keywords

Chinese international students, internationalization, higher education, media

*The New York Times* published two lengthy articles (each over 3,500 words) on the influx of Chinese international undergraduate students almost exactly a year apart: “The China Boom” (November 2010) and “The China Conundrum” (November

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2011). The articles' quite significant differences index Americans' competing views of Chinese students in the United States.

"The China Boom" began with Drew University freshman, Li Wanrong, who was reported to have frequently said "wow" to describe her college life, particularly her ballroom dance class, nightlife, and pizza. In the piece we meet a number of Chinese students who were enthusiastic about their prestigious American colleges and universities. The article documented a largely win-win exchange between Chinese students and American universities: Chinese students impressed with the American liberal education; and American universities with Chinese students' talent and potential to serve as personal internationalizers. The mother of an Italian American student with a Chinese international roommate, for example, was "thrilled" to see her daughter live with someone "smart," and delighted that they could teach each other Mandarin and Italian, and discuss political differences in the intimacy of their dorm room. Likewise, a Chinese parent described his son's study abroad as a "real miracle" that would develop his son as a "global citizen" (Levin, 2010).

A year later, in 2011, "The China Conundrum" described instead a teetering exchange. By then the precipitous increase of Chinese international students had become apparent, with threefold growth to 40,000 in only 3 years (57,000 as of 2010-2011), while over the same period the number of South Korean students showed a modest increase (1.7%) and Indian students declined (1%; these had been the largest international student groups; Open Doors International, 2010, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Also clear by 2011 were American universities' financial interest in these students and a Chinese "frenzy" for an American university education. The article sketches the possibility of overly zealous parties who have perhaps deceived each other. In this transformed exchange, the American university must manage the "tide of application fraud," namely cheating, plagiarism, and cramming methods that yield artificially high SAT and TOEFL scores. Even more daunting are seemingly incommensurable cultural differences, among them, memorization as a respected method of learning, and little respect for intellectual property. On the other side of the exchange, the article introduced Chinese students unhappy with their end of the bargain. In the telling words of one student, "They pretend to welcome you but they don't." The piece described, for example, "short-term" remedial adjustment programs (e.g., language institutes) that some students are never able to test out of. This makes for a cynical portrait of American universities—knowingly admitting students who are not ready to join their ranks (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011).

In this article we analyze the American media representation of this exchange. We read over 150 newspaper articles on Chinese undergraduate international students published in the United States between 2006 and 2012, and analyzed 70 articles that take up the human dimension of this phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> The media foremost presents the voices of American university administrators and Chinese students; secondary voices are those of American students and their parents as well as Chinese parents.

The discourse reveals a struggle between, on the one hand, lofty ideals of excellent Chinese students and world-class American liberal education; and, on the other hand, images of ethically suspected and inassimilable Chinese students and a mercenary and

possibly mediocre American university. We are aware of the media's propensity to highlight sensational perspectives and remarks, be they optimistic or pessimistic. Further, we know well that the social life of the actual encounter between the American university and Chinese students cannot be wholly indexed by these media accounts. Nonetheless, we feel that even sensational accounts can teach us about the discursive landscape that certainly to some extent affects the encounter.<sup>3</sup>

We argue that recent media reporting on Chinese students builds on long-standing seemingly contradictory images of an alluring China market, on the one hand, and an image of threatening migrants, on the other hand. In this vein, Chinese undergraduates represent at once a powerful and exponential market for American liberal education and a threat to American educational integrity (Mitchell, 2004).

The market exchange is fair to the extent that an American liberal education (i.e., one that develops creative and flexible people) and a hungry and exemplary Chinese student can take full advantage of each other. This exchange depends on ideas about a less liberal China, whose universities and education system lacks academic freedom and deprives students of liberal personal development (Kim, 2007). Fair exchange thus promises truly transformative globalization for both parties: the Chinese student by U.S. liberal education; and U.S. education by the cultural diversity of the Chinese student. This is precisely the type of idealized educational exchange that Senator Fulbright described as "humaniz[ing] mankind" through teaching people to "live in peace" (Fulbright, 1976).

The exchange falters when the ideals of internationalization of education, namely "sharing of ideas, cultures, knowledge, and values" (Knight, 2010, p. 215; see also Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, Forbes-Mewett, 2010) are not realized. These ideals run counter to the market imperative that arguably drives the internationalization of higher education (Altbach, 2011; Knight, 2011b; Witt, 2011). Rich international students associated with "the rhetoric of an inevitable and invincible neoliberal form of globalization" can be understood to defy the values and commitments of American higher education (Mitchell, 2004: 13; see also Ong, 2006).

While national media outlets observe the arrival of the Chinese students as a large-scale phenomenon, for local media the arrival of Chinese students testifies to their full participation in the global economic and cultural order. The very issues that concern the media about this market exchange—be it fair or fraught—are also of real interest to students (both domestic and international), teachers, and administrators at American colleges and universities. There are, for example, social (and financial) costs when Chinese students worry about being "used" as cash cows, or when American universities wonder whether they have been cheated by testing and admission fraud. While the story of Chinese international undergraduates in the United States is a particular American story, it is but one node in the global story of Chinese undergraduate student mobility. Indeed, Chinese students are making critical economic and social contributions in many countries—South Korea, Australia, and Britain among them. It is clear that there are many countries anxiously observing the U.S. experiment, wondering how the U.S. higher education system "as a whole will cope" with "such a surge in enrolment and with incredible institutional diversity" (Smart, 2011). We offer this

media case study in this spirit: as one instance of an encounter whose coordinates are specific but nonetheless reflect the larger context of the nearly ubiquitous marketization and internationalization imperative of higher education everywhere.

We turn first to a discussion of China in the American imagination, appreciating that the discourse on the exchange today builds on a long legacy of the representation of China.

## The Chinese Market in the American Imagination

With gross domestic product increases of 10% annually on average since 1978, China surpassed Japan to become the second largest economy in the world and is today a prime mover of global economy and politics (Fukumoto & Muto, 2012). Fascination with China, however, is neither new nor without tension. American popular metaphors and proxies for China have turned on two prevailing images—the allure of the China market and the threat of “Yellow Peril,” a term that became popular at the turn of the 20th century, when the influx of Chinese and Japanese immigrants to America was portrayed as threat to the West in popular fiction.<sup>4</sup> We note that the phrase “Yellow Peril” never appears in the recent media on Chinese study abroad students that we discuss here.

In American eyes, China has been constantly fashioned as an incommensurable other; in his landmark 1958 book, *Images of Asia: American Views of China and India*, Harold Isaacs described the “familiarity of Chinese strangeness” (p. 70). He argued that American images of the Chinese tend to come in pairs, such as “heathens and humanists,” “wise sages and sadist executioners,” and “thrifty and honorable men and sly and devious villains” (p. 70). Americans have thus long wrestled with the radical strangeness of the Chinese, “superior and inferior” (p. 70) to Americans but never comparable (see also Jannuzi, 2003). The fascination with the Chinese market turns on the promise of China’s seemingly limitless population. Jodi Kim (2010) traces America’s imagination of China since the late 19th century, chronicling how phrases such as “the El Dorado of commerce” or “a billion bellies out there” captured the American imagination (p. 67).

That same unfathomable vastness, however, fuels “Yellow Peril” anxiety (Lyman, 2000). With the Communist revolution of 1949, images of China as “Red menace,” or “dangerous foe” became dominant (Isaacs, 1958, p. 88). With the end of the Cold War, one stream of thinking suggested that “finally the Chinese would become more like Americans” (Tucker, 2003, p. 20), but Yellow Peril thinking also persisted (Johnson, 2004). Indeed, for many the 1989 Tiananmen Square and the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995-1996, for example, confirmed China’s radical difference and potential threat (Mann, 2003; Tucker, 2003).

The work of historian Paul Kramer (2009) reminds us that this dual image has long been at work in the United States views of educational exchanges with China as well. Chinese students in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were hailed as “‘native’ would-be missionaries” who would reform China’s “primitive consciousness” (p. 787). Yet, Chinese students were also objects of suspicion, as in 1912 when

Senator Gallinger opposed their admission to military academies, proclaiming, "I'm not sure that it is good policy to educate representatives of the warlike Chinese people, whose number is 400 or 500 million" (Kramer, 2009, p. 790). Kramer thus makes clear that educational exchange has always been an instance of political and economic trade.

Media reporting today builds on this history with its characterization of Chinese college students as both inevitable clients of American liberal education (with the potential to be transformed into democratic subjects) and as inassimilable others who threaten to undermine America with their radical differences.

## A Numbers Game

As the number of Chinese students surpassed that of South Korean and Indian students in the 2009-2010 academic year, mass media coverage of these students surged. The nearly 40% annual growth of Chinese undergraduate students beginning in 2007 has certainly made an impression. Many media report on schools where increases have been nearly exponential: such as, the University of Delaware where Chinese students increased from 8 to 517 between 2007 and 2011; Grinnell College in rural Iowa where one of every 10 applicants reviewed for the incoming class of 2011 was from China (Steinberg, 2011); or Mount Holyoke College with enough Chinese applicants to fill its entire freshman class (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011).

The media imagines the Chinese market as one that will continue to grow given the country's 1.3 billion population, the precipitous rise of its middle class, and its citizens' escalating demand for higher education. Already in a 2006 article when there were under 10,000 Chinese students in the United States, University of Charleston president was quoted to say, "Every year 5 million people want to go to college in China but can't because there's not enough room . . . that's what got me thinking" (Karmasek, 2006); with "got me thinking," we understand this President to be alluding to the potential of the market. The Utah Valley State College Vice President was advised by an expert that "the time is ripe . . . to recruit some of China's 8 million high school students" (Walsh, 2006). On the domestic front, the media is forthright that Chinese student demand found its match in American university need, financial and otherwise; prominent, not surprisingly, is a media stream that both reports on the defunding of public universities and on the financial woes of all colleges and universities. A 2011 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, "State by State, Colleges Team Up to Recruit Students From Abroad" documented the increase of consortia of colleges devoted to promoting states as academic destinations for international students (Fischer, 2011). A 2012 *New York Times* article reported on the financial contribution of international students: nearly US\$21 billion to the U.S. economy through their expenditures on tuition and living expenses (Lewin, 2012).

Clear in the media representation of this numbers game is that the ideal of international exchange is a *market* exchange, in which the Chinese student's demand for higher education and the American university's demand for student bodies are evenly matched. We turn now to a review of the representation of a "fair" exchange. We then

continue with the media on the “faltering” exchange between Chinese undergraduates and U.S. higher education.

## A Fair Exchange

The imagined fair exchange is that between the American university’s liberal education and the Chinese student who is both better poised to take full advantage of that education than her American counterpart—because of her diligence, and work habits despite of (or nurtured by) China’s presumed less liberal atmosphere (e.g., in terms of personal and political freedom)—and who can contribute to the American university as an internationalization agent.

### *The Liberal American University and the Chinese Antipodal Other*

In the media, the liberal American university is confirmed through the mirror of the Chinese student consumer. The aforementioned “China Boom” introduced a number of Chinese students to show both their desires for a liberal education and their successful transformation in U.S. colleges and universities. The mother of Ding Yinghan of Hamilton College was reported to say, “In the U.S. they focus on creative-thinking skills, while in China they only focus on theory . . . so what university students learn here [in China] doesn’t prepare them for the real world” (Levin, 2010). Yale sophomore Frances Liu, was effusive about having located an original of Edith Wharton’s *Age of Innocence* in the rare book library: “The experience has given her a deep appreciation for the West’s values of transparency and access to information.” Liu was quoted saying, “In China, I’m used to secrecy, so being 18 and able to touch history with my bare fingers really impressed me.” Liu’s admission to being “used to secrecy” is taken to proclaim her celebration of the West’s values of “transparency and access to information” (Levin, 2010).

In some articles it is not the voice of a Chinese student herself who attests to the value of the American university, but instead the second-hand reports of university officials. A 2010 piece in *The Oklahoman*, for example, quoted University of Central Oklahoma Assistant Director of International Services, Timothy Kok, who said, “Many of the [Chinese] students . . . appreciate the flexibility and creativity of the U.S. higher education system, particularly the focus placed on small, discussion-oriented classes” (Slipke, 2010). A 2009 *The Washington Post* article described that The University of Virginia was purportedly enjoying “great name recognition in China” thanks to the columns in which Qiao Ma gave “glowing account[s] of life at the Charlottesville campus.” Now at the Harvard Business School, Ma recalled her UVA days where she was “really encouraged to think as an independent person and not be afraid to speak my mind” (Kinzie, 2009). Two years later, a 2011 *San Jose Mercury News* article called Chinese students an “admissions officer’s dream,” featuring the personal transformation of Minao Wang of Wuxi, China who reported, “[Before arriving] I was really shy, but I have learned how to speak up. America has really changed me” (Krieger, 2011). Across this reporting, the assets of American universities are



remarkably consistent: flexibility, creativity, and a culture of open discussion. In return, Chinese students bear witness to the value of American education through their personal transformation.

### *The Exemplary Chinese Student*

The exchange imagines Chinese students who brings value to the American university, foremost for being students who are better poised to take full advantage of American higher education—because of their diligence, work habits, as well as cultural attributes. In the media, these attributes are assumed or affirmed by American observers such as admissions officers and American parents. This discourse builds on a healthy media stream about the competitive strength of the Asian student. For example, A 2006 *San Antonio Express* article, “U.S. College Curriculum Has Gone Soft,” opined about the competitive edge of Chinese and Indian students: “Here come the Chinese and Indian youths who are serious about making their country No. 1 in this new global economy.” The article continued, “If our schools continue on the present course of not challenging students and continue to move them along . . . then our students will become the customer service telephone answering people in the future, replacing those now operating in foreign countries” (Campbell, 2006). Other articles were measured and matter-of-fact about Chinese students who simply had the habit of studying harder. In this vein, a 2011 *New York Times* article, “Recruiting in China Pays Off For U.S. Colleges,” quoted Grinnell College (Iowa) Dean of Admission and Financial Aid Seth Allen, on the qualities of Chinese students who “are required to devote significantly more time to their studies than American students, and this generally carries through when they come to college in the U.S.” (Steinberg, 2011).

Other articles reached further: both in asserting the inherent difference of the Chinese student and in positing the effects that she can have on the American student body. A 2006 article about 22 Chinese students at Longwood University in the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, quoted the Director of International Affairs saying, “Maybe the Chinese students’ good habits will rub off”: “They study . . . When they go to their room, they are at their desk” (Ruff, 2006). The hope then is that Chinese attributes will perhaps “rub off” as they model an ideal studenthood for their American peers.

### *The Chinese Student as Internationalization Agent*

Chinese students are poised to do more than teach Americans the ways of exemplary students; they are also a gateway to China. A 2011 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article reported the increasing numbers of college consortia that promote particular states as academic destinations for international students, for example, StudyMississippi and StudyIowa. The article noted that the internationalization of the campuses and diversification of the student bodies, along with extra tuition revenue, are major imperatives for such consortia (Fischer, 2011). Again and again, articles observed the importance of China to the 21st century: in the words of Drew University President, “China is going to matter greatly to all students in the 21st century”



(Levin, 2010). One media stream offered Chinese international students as presenting American students with an international experience in the comfort of their own campuses. A 2009 *USA Today* article reported on an admissions officer at the University of Nebraska who tells parents, “It’s ‘the next best thing’ for their children, after studying abroad” (Marklein, 2009). Interestingly some media from relatively remote and less prestigious nooks of American higher education made this point with a focus on their particular location as if to say “how wonderful that *even their students* can have access to China” (Marklein, 2009). For example, Clinton Community College (Plattsburg, NY) President John E. Jablonski noted, “What a wonderful resource of knowledge for Clinton County students to be able to mingle with people of a different culture and a different perspective on global markets” (“Editorial,” 2009). Or again, in the words of Wright State President (Dayton, OH), the Chinese international students offered “a window to the world for Dayton” (Larsen, 2009; see also McLaughlin, 2008).

The successful exchange thus relies on a unique seller and buyer, in this case the American university and the Chinese student. Increasingly, however, it is becoming clear that both the buyer and the seller might not possess such singular assets, and furthermore, that the exchange is plagued by uncertainty or even deception. We now turn to the image of a faltering exchange.

## The Faltering Exchange

The aforementioned 2011 *New York Times* article, “The China Conundrum” reveals that, a few years into the exchange, both the American university and the Chinese student do not always fulfill their promise and that the U.S. university might not be Chinese students’ unique object of desire. Some media accounts suggest that some of Chinese students who study abroad are weak students who could not get into universities in China; interestingly, some Chinese media refers to “study abroad trash” (Liu, 2012), while the United States might be interested in them as little more than cash cows in a time of financial woes. And it might be dangerous for U.S. higher education to become so dependent on Chinese students, especially as the Chinese higher education sector itself is becoming more and more competitive (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011).

### *Mercenary American Universities and the Rise of Chinese Higher Education*

The United States and Chinese media alike have become increasingly self-conscious that Chinese students are becoming cash cows supporting American higher education. This explicit linking of the market and the troubled U.S. sector calls into question the ethics and balance of the exchange, leaving open the possibility of the exploitation of Chinese students lured to the United States with little attention to fit or preparation. In this vein, the media has begun to query the sincerity of the American commitment to these students.

In a 2006 article, “Hot Market in Higher Education Promises Benefits on Both Sides,” Madeleine Green, Vice President for International Initiatives for the American Council on Education (IIE) at the time, was reported to have said, “American universities are also shopping for partners that will polish their reputations.” Some schools, she continued, look to “collaborate on research, [and] broaden their students’ horizons,” but others “want to cash in on an enormous market for education in the most populous nation on the planet” (Stancill, 2006). According to a 2011 *New York Times* article, attracting students who can pay full tuition “pays off for U.S. colleges” (Steinberg, 2011). In a 2012 *New York Times* article, “Taking More Seats on Campus, Foreigners Also Pay the Freight,” the University of Washington Dean of admissions is reported to have described this educational import in relation to China as the largest U.S. creditor, saying, “This is a way of getting some of that money back” (Lewin, 2012). A 2012 *Bloomberg* article, “North Dakota School Awarded Unearned Degrees, State Says,” reports on a public university that waived entrance requirements to admit unqualified Chinese students and allowed them to graduate without required coursework (Staley, 2012). The mercenary American university and the Chinese student are finding mutually beneficial terms of exchange, far removed from the ideal of transformative liberal education.

Despite Chinese students’ significant monetary contributions, some Chinese students as well as American university officials report unsatisfactory returns, and thus the possibility of the exploitation of the Chinese student. The 2011 “China Conundrum” quoted Jennifer Gregan-Paxton, an undergraduate advisor at the University of Delaware saying that Chinese students stuck together because they “wouldn’t necessarily get the warmest reception” from the American peers. The article also reported Chinese students’ grievances about the American university. Ms. Tang, for example, recalled classes, in which “the professor ignored her questions and only listened to American students” and in which she was “given the cold shoulder” while working on a group project. She continued, “They pretend to welcome you but they do not,” adding, “I will remember that all my life” (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011). A 2012 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, “Many Foreign Students Are Friendless in the U.S., Study Finds,” reports that students from East Asia, particularly from China, tend to have no American friends or fewer than they would like, and are generally dissatisfied with the quality of their friendships (Fischer, 2012b; see also Gareis, 2012).<sup>5</sup>

The potential exploitation of Chinese students in the exchange relationship is fittingly accompanied with an anxiety that the American university might not after all have a competitive advantage in the global higher education market. In 2006, before noticeable numbers of Chinese students arrived, an article in Albany’s *The Times Union* already registered worry about the shelf life of agreements between American and Chinese universities: “The Chinese research university infrastructure is rapidly maturing with labs and technical facilities as good as any in the world” (Hall, 2006). In the same vein, a 2007 *Clover Herald* article cited China’s multibillion dollar, 20-year effort to increase the quality of its higher education system, expressing concern about the future of China’s student export market in the light of the growth of its own higher education sector: “But over the next decade, the number of Chinese

students applying to UVA may drop off as more Chinese students decide to attend college within their own country's borders" (McNeill, 2007).

Furthermore, a 2010 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, "China Props Up Foreign Students' Numbers in U.S." efficiently laid out all the issues: demand could falter, China could even decide to control study abroad, other countries could compete for the market, and the Chinese higher education market could expand. The article warns about the problems of relying too much on particular sending countries, and foremost on China, pointing both to "growing competition worldwide and increased capacity for higher education in students' home countries" (Fischer, 2010).

Increasingly clear in the above media representation is that not all U.S. institutions of higher education are excellent. Scholars of global isomorphism in higher education suggest that top-tier universities all over the world are much the same, including those in China (Mohrman, 2012; Witt, 2011). Like "educational hubs" in Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong (Knight, 2011a), China has already begun to compete with the United States not only for its own students but also for students from around the world—the same students who have historically headed in the highest numbers to the United States. In this way, the Chinese youth of this exchange are thus not necessarily exemplary internationalizers but heterogeneous shoppers in a global marketplace of post-national higher education. Furthermore, these students are increasingly charged with duplicity, as we find in the following section.

### *Questioning the Quality and Character of the Chinese Student*

The media weighs in that the market equilibrium is also breached by the quality and character of the Chinese student. Suggested is that their two biggest potentials—as financial resources and internationalization agents—might instead pose a threat to the health of American higher education and students.

As "The China Conundrum" article reveals, there is increasingly a near media obsession with the authenticity of the Chinese student's college application. While some articles do note that Americans too avail themselves of quite parallel services, the media nonetheless seems quite willing to decry the possible deceit of a Chinese applicant with nothing other than the ability to purchase expensive application services.

A 2011 *New York Times* article, "Recruiting in China Pays Off for U.S. Colleges" focused on the case of Grinnell College, where the aforementioned Dean of Admission and Financial Aid reported that "they spend most of their time on Chinese applications trying to parse the essays—paying particular attention, as they might with an American candidate, to whether they detect the authentic voice and sensibility" (Steinberg, 2011). The 2011 "China Conundrum" cited staggering percentages from a report from a consulting company for American colleges about China: "90% of Chinese applicants submit false recommendations, 70% have other people write their personal essays, 50% have forged high school transcripts, and 10% list academic awards and other achievements they did not receive" (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011).

As troubling as intentional deception, however, is whether Chinese students bring diversity in general, or more specifically a desired diversity. A 2011 article in the *San Jose Mercury News* reported Vanderbilt's admissions dean saying, "A homogeneous international population doesn't increase campus diversity" (Krieger, 2011). Some media reports highlighted that instead of transforming Chinese students, American universities are pressured to adapt to them, often with anxiety and reluctance (see Mitchell, 2004 for a parallel discussion of wealthy Hong Kong new arrivals in Vancouver in the 1990s). "The China Conundrum" quoted professors who said that they have "significantly changed their teaching practices" to accommodate Chinese students. For example, Dr. St. Pierre at the University of Delaware required that students leave their books at the front of the classroom to prevent cheating during exams and reduced the number of oral presentations. With this example of accommodation, Chinese students are thus posed as a problem because of their unfamiliarity with concepts such as intellectual property, creativity, and open debate (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011). One conservative report called into question the very goals of the Chinese student who perhaps "want degrees not democracy" (Lee, 2010). This 2010 *The Washington Times* comment reveals an anxiety that the Chinese student is in fact not at all interested in learning from American political and other freedoms. In this albeit sensationalistic account, the U.S. university figures as a degree mill for Chinese students "who retain the expectation that their nation will soon retake its rightful place as a great power." The article's last line is telling: "Americans need to understand . . . that American values do not apply to China" (Lee, 2010).

As the quality of both American higher education and the Chinese student are disputed, so too are any idealistic notions of internationalization or international exchange. The potential of Chinese students to bring diversity to the American university is challenged twofold: first because of their sheer numbers which make for their easy segregation (de Wit, 2011); and second because it is increasingly clear that their value is foremost that of consumers who can pay for their education. This then suggests not a fair exchange, but instead a risky one, uncertain at best and deceptive at worst.

## Conclusion

A recent op-ed in Kansas State University's student newspaper sparked controversy. The newspaper featured editorials that took pro and con positions on the rise of international students. The student author who editorialized against internationalization, "Public Universities Should Not Accept Students From Countries That Have Bad Relations With U.S." opines that U.S. public universities should not educate international students, "who could, in the near future, become the enemy," referring to students from Afghanistan, China, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey (Fischer, 2012a). The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that 70% of the international students at Kansas State University publically protested the article, and that in response the university issued an official statement to promote mutual understanding.

Although blatant incidents like this one are quite rare, we have shown here that the exchange between the American university and Chinese students is quite precarious.

First and foremost, American media (and in it the voices of university officials, and American and Chinese students and parents) has framed the influx of Chinese undergraduates as a market exchange between Chinese students' demand for a particular sort of higher education and American universities' demand for particular students. When meeting its ideals, the exchange is appreciated as a mutually beneficial one in which American universities and Chinese students offer each other unique assets (liberal education on the one hand; and cultural assets and diversity on the other hand) and thus affirm each other's value. However, it has become quickly apparent that the encounter can be betrayed by the disappointments, mediocre quality, and deception of both the American university and the Chinese student. The director of international students and scholar services at American University in Washington, DC commented on the aforementioned Kansas State case, saying, "We cannot assume that real engagement will happen by osmosis" (Fischer, 2012a), highlighting that student exchange in and of itself promises little.

The faltering market warns that both the Chinese student and the American university must navigate with caution, understanding that each party can equally deceive the other and that real internationalization requires much more than osmosis. As many scholars and policy analysts have observed, internationalization ideals of meaningful transformation are hard to realize. Indeed, these ideals are quite at odds with the contemporary market logics of Chinese international student exchange—fair or fraught.

It is perhaps productive today to consider whether a discursive space is opening for new terms of international student exchange. With the continuously increasing global undergraduate mobility, internationalization ideals might come to center on coexistence rather than heretofore notions of friendship; this is not, however, to suggest that the exchange will be empty or meaningless. We say this hopefully, imagining a profound revision of the very terms of exchange that will rely less on the presumed singularity or particular value of either the American university or the Chinese international undergraduate student. We thus think that it will be productive for all if we begin to challenge the perhaps tired terms on which the exchange is figured and instead develop constructs and metaphors that are consistent with this highly flexible and rapidly transforming market.

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## Notes

1. The combined number of Chinese graduate and undergraduate students reached a record of 158,000 in 2011 (Open Doors International, 2010, 2011). However, Chinese graduate students in the United States did not receive particular media attention. Their 60% increase over 3 years is moderate compared to the threefold increase in the number of undergraduate students. While American universities gradually adapted to the increasing number of Chinese graduate students, which hit 51,000 in 2001, the undergraduate increases were quite sudden and considerably more dramatic.
2. Forty-four of the articles were published in nationwide papers such as *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Times*, *Bloomberg News*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Geographically, more than three of the reports are from Virginia, New Jersey, Ohio, and North Carolina. States represented in more than one news report include Alabama, California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Washington, and West Virginia. In addition to the domestic reports, we also read 25 articles published in China, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and Singapore.
3. We are grateful to Jing Lin for cautioning us about the possible negative consequences of reproducing sensational accounts.
4. For example, Matthew Phipps Shiel, *The Yellow Danger* (1989) and *The Yellow Wave* (1905); Emile Driant, *The Yellow Invasion* (1905); and J. Allan Dunn, *The Peril of the Pacific* (1916).
5. A growing number of Chinese students in American private boarding schools report similar issues (Gordon, 2011). Although not a focus of our analysis, noteworthy is that the Chinese media is well aware that Chinese students are cash cows for American college. For example, a 2006 *China Daily* article questioned the value of U.S. degrees, noting that they were three to four times as expensive as those in China ("Uni Must," 2006). In 2009, *The China Daily* warned, "Beware, Not All Universities Abroad Are Good," noting that some American universities were "set up to lure unsuspecting Chinese and Indian students into coughing up exorbitant amounts as tuition and other charges" ("Beware," 2009). See Li and Zhang (2011) on the financial disequilibrium of China's export and import in the global higher education market.

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