



A Preliminary Study of PRC Political Influence and Interference Activities in American Higher Education



ANASTASYA LLOYD-DAMNJANOVIC



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Foreword

U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS are in uncharted territory. In late 2017, after 40 years in which Beijing and Washington emphasized mutual cooperation, President Donald Trump used his National Security Strategy (NSS) to declare that relations with China had become fundamentally contentious. China, like Russia, challenged “American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity...determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence.” With that statement, Washington joined Beijing in viewing bilateral relations as essentially competitive. The age of rivalry had begun.

The NSS also identified American universities as vectors for the loss of strategically vital knowledge to China. This was new. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1979, Sino-U.S. educational relations, and the work of the millions of Chinese students who studied in the United States in particular, had been one of the relationship’s great successes. Chinese students who stayed in the States after graduating became leading American scientists, entrepreneurs, educators, and artists. Many who returned to China built constructive ties between U.S. and Chinese institutions. The contribution American colleges have made to constructive relations are impossible to quantify, hard to overstate, and profoundly in the United States’ interest. Why, then, should the NSS focus on American campuses and the Chinese who study there?

The answer lies largely in Beijing’s framing of its strategic ambitions. Under Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping, China has made explicit its quest for “comprehensive national power” (国家综合实力), China’s term for the kind of military, economic, technological, normative, and cultural power the United States has long enjoyed. This is not a surprising—or inherently nefarious—aspiration for a wealthy civilization-state like China.

But, in a finite world, China cannot attain the power and status it desires unless American influence and prestige wane.

Xi has made clear, moreover, that technological innovation is the key to China's rejuvenation, that technical knowledge must be attained from the world's great corporations and universities, many of which are American, and that Chinese students and people of Chinese heritage throughout the world must contribute to his "China Dream." The connection between China's grand strategy and its overseas students is thus clear, at least in theory. Operationalizing those connections is the job of the United Front Work Department and other Chinese government agencies, which have been revitalized under Xi's leadership.

Xi has strengthened political control of educational institutions within China, including programs affiliated with American universities. He has called on Chinese faculty and students to study and serve "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and issued warnings about the malign influence of foreign scholars. In Xi's China, education is more politicized than it has been since the era of Mao Zedong. It is therefore reasonable—it is a strategic necessity—to study the impact of Chinese government-sponsored activities on American institutions of higher education.

U.S. colleges and universities create knowledge—and promote American well-being—through their exercise of academic freedom and openness. Openness demands that American universities admit the world's best students, many of whom are Chinese. Academic freedom requires that all scholars in the United States respect principles of free inquiry and critical discourse, regardless of their countries of origin. With China as the greatest source of foreign students to the U.S., and with China's authoritarian government summoning students to serve a motherland engaged in worldwide competition with the U.S., prudence dictates a close look at the impact of Chinese students and the Chinese officials charged with managing them on American campuses.

Anastasya Lloyd-Damnjanovic's research advances American understanding of this emergent issue. Her findings, which the Wilson Center's Kissinger Institute on China and the United States presents in these pages, are cause for heightened vigilance and cautious optimism. Her preliminary report is the most comprehensive survey to date of the experiences of faculty, students,

and administrators coping with the impact of China's political agenda and educational culture on American campuses. Through hundreds of interviews and cogent analysis, she identifies trends that will concern American educators and policymakers, but also finds that American universities are well-equipped to manage the challenge, particularly if they work with each other and share information with government agencies charged with protecting national security.

The Wilson Center is proud to partner with the Stephen A. Schwarzman Education Foundation in sponsoring Anastasya Lloyd-Damjanovic's work as a Schwarzman Associate and welcomes discussion of her research. Please send comments and questions on the evolving issues addressed in this report to the Kissinger Institute at China@wilsoncenter.org.

Robert Daly

Director

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I AM GRATEFUL to my colleagues for their insightful remarks and encouragement. I would also like to thank the Stephen A. Schwarzman Education Foundation and the Wilson Center for their support of this research over the past year.

If you are an educator and would like to share your experiences of PRC influence and interference activities, you can reach me at prcinfluence@email.com.

The views expressed in this monograph are my own.

Anastasya Lloyd-Damnjanovic
Washington, DC
August 2018

Executive Summary

AS THE CHINESE Communist Party (CCP) consolidates its control over every aspect of domestic society, it increasingly seeks to shape the world in its image. Mammoth multimedia platforms broadcasting the “Voice of China,” development projects like the Belt and Road Initiative, and the power to limit foreign companies’ access to its lucrative market are just a few of the tools at Beijing’s disposal. Officials of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) present their global initiatives as public goods, but many Americans see the PRC’s moves as those of a peer competitor aiming to create a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests.

Concerns about the PRC’s political influence on people and organizations within the United States have coalesced in recent months, prompting a slew of congressional hearings on the subject. In the American education sector, lawmakers and journalists have focused their attention on the state-sponsored Confucius Institutes, which allegedly promote CCP propaganda and censor campus activities critical of China. Academic and public discussions, however, have largely ignored the challenges that may arise from the activities of PRC diplomats and the community of PRC nationals enrolled as students at American universities.

This preliminary study finds that these concerns are warranted, even if they are sometimes overblown and fraught with potential for mischaracterization, or worse, racial profiling.

Over the past two decades, PRC diplomats stationed in the United States have infringed on the academic freedom of American university faculty, students, administrators, and staff by:

- Complaining to universities about invited speakers and events;
- Pressuring and/or offering inducements to faculty whose work involves content deemed sensitive by the PRC authorities (hereafter,

“sensitive content”); and

- Retaliating against American universities’ cooperative initiatives with PRC partner institutions

PRC diplomats have also infringed on the personal safety of people at American universities by:

- Probing faculty and staff for information in a manner consistent with intelligence collection; and
- Employing intimidating modes of conversation

A small number of PRC students have infringed on the academic freedom of American university faculty, students, administrators, and staff in recent years by:

- Demanding the removal of research, promotional and decorative materials involving sensitive content from university spaces;
- Demanding faculty alter their language or teaching materials involving sensitive content on political rather than evidence-based grounds;
- Interrupting and heckling other members of the university community who engage in critical discussion of China; and
- Pressuring universities to cancel academic activities involving sensitive content

PRC students have also acted in ways that concerned or intimidated faculty, staff, and other students at American universities by:

- Monitoring people and activities on campus involving sensitive content;
- Probing faculty for information in a suspicious manner; and
- Engaging in intimidation, abusive conduct, or harassment of other members of the university community

Student activities probably derive from these individuals' nationalistic beliefs, which they may air in ways inconsistent with university norms for reasons of chauvinism, defensiveness, or lack of familiarity with Western academic practice. PRC students envisioning a career in the party may also believe they can accrue future professional benefits by combatting criticism of China while abroad.

The PRC students documented in this study likely represent a tiny proportion of the more than 350,000 PRC nationals currently studying in the United States. Any suggestion that all or most PRC students are CCP agents is appallingly broad and dangerously inaccurate. Countermeasures should neither vilify PRC students as a group nor lose sight of the fact that these students, along with faculty members of Chinese descent, are often the victims of influence and interference activities perpetrated by PRC diplomats and nationalistic peers. PRC students make significant contributions to the American economy, scientific innovation, and culture. Nor is the PRC the only country that seeks to influence people and processes within American higher education.

By documenting numerous cases in which PRC diplomats and a small number of students have infringed on university community members' academic freedom and personal safety, the study offers several insights, among them that:

- PRC diplomats engage in a range of activities to monitor, influence and induce the cessation of academic activities involving sensitive content on American campuses
- PRC students are not a homogeneous group; they can be both perpetrators and victims of politically-motivated attempts to infringe on the academic freedom and personal safety of university community members
- PRC students have employed language typically associated with progressive campus activist movements to oppose academic activities involving sensitive content
- There is great diversity among China Studies faculty and university administrators in terms of exposure to and concern about PRC influence and interference activities

- PRC influence and interference activities have occurred not just at cash-strapped public university systems with high enrollments of PRC nationals, but also at wealthy Ivy League institutions and small liberal arts institutions

The study's primary recommendation is that government and academia jointly convene a non-partisan team of researchers to investigate PRC influence and interference activities at American universities.

In the meantime, American universities should adopt practices to make the campus environment less hospitable to PRC influence and interference activities, including:

- Experience-sharing among universities to develop a collective awareness of challenges arising from engagement with the PRC
- Collaboration with federal law enforcement to report instances of PRC diplomatic pressure and retaliation
- Procedures for rebuffing pressure tactics from PRC diplomats
- Reaffirming universities' traditional commitment to academic freedom and resisting attempts to limit campus speech or activity on the basis of whether that speech or activity gives someone offense
- A school-wide orientation about appropriate behavior in the American university at the beginning of the academic year for students from every country
- New faculty practices to turn moments when PRC students articulate the party line into learning opportunities, and to intervene when students from any country interrupt or heckle others
- Channels for faculty to report troubling incidents to higher administration
- Education for university police departments so that officers are better-equipped to handle disruptive students and un-enrolled visitors

Policymakers can consider responses to certain aspects of PRC influence and interference activities by:

- Creating a reporting system for universities that experience PRC influence and interference incidents
- Declaring *persona non grata* PRC diplomats who pressure universities that extend invitations to figures like the Dalai Lama or threaten faculty pursuing sensitive research topics
- Putting issues of influence and interference in academia on the agenda when meeting with PRC interlocutors
- Imposing a cost on the PRC when it punishes American institutions for upholding academic freedom on their own campuses
- Clarifying the circumstances under which a group is considered a “scholastic” or “academic” entity exempt from the Foreign Agent Registration Act, with an eye toward regulating the activities of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association

The challenges posed by PRC influence and interference activities in American higher education are real. Incomplete information, partisan politics, and the web of personal and institutional interests that deter universities from openly discussing PRC influence and interference activities will complicate the search for an effective solution. Yet the documented cases in which some faculty, administrators, and staff have resisted pressure from PRC diplomats and students give cause for optimism. If universities and policymakers can find new ways to support faculty, students, and others engaging in academic activity involving China, they can ensure the integrity of American higher education. Greater collaboration between academia and government against PRC influence and interference will bolster, not weaken, academic freedom. The United States should protect the higher education system that is one of its greatest strengths.

Introduction

A SEISMIC SHIFT has occurred in the way U.S. government officials, scholars, and analysts view the challenge posed by an emerging People's Republic of China (PRC). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Western countries facilitated the PRC's integration into the global economy in the hope that doing so would convince the PRC it had a stake in upholding the rules-based international order.¹ Instead, the PRC grew more authoritarian as it accumulated military and economic power. President Xi Jinping's abolition of presidential term limits in February 2018 put the final "nail in the coffin" of the consensus-based system of elite rule institutionalized under Deng Xiaoping, portending a return to personalistic dictatorial rule.²

As the Communist Party (CCP) consolidates its control over every aspect of Chinese society, it increasingly seeks to shape the world in its image. Mammoth multimedia platforms broadcasting the "Voice of China,"³ development projects like the Belt and Road Initiative,⁴ and the power to limit foreign companies' access to its lucrative domestic market are just a few of the tools at Beijing's disposal.⁵ PRC officials present their global initiatives as public goods, but Donald J. Trump's administration sees the

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1. "How the West got China wrong," *The Economist*, Mar 1, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/03/01/how-the-west-got-china-wrong>.
 2. Susan Shirk, "Xi Won't Go," *ChinaFile*, Feb 25, 2018, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/xi-wont-go>.
 3. Lily Kuo, "China state media merger to create propaganda giant," *The Guardian*, Mar 21, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/china-state-media-merger-to-create-propaganda-giant>.
 4. "What is China's belt and road initiative?," *The Economist*, May 17, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2017/05/economist-explains-11>.
 5. Emily Feng and Edward White, "China reprimands companies calling Tibet and Taiwan independent," *The Financial Times*, Jan 15, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/3f88cbba-f9b5-11e7-9b32-d7d59aace167>.

PRC's moves as those of a peer competitor aiming to create "a world antithetical to US values and interests."⁶

2017 saw growing calls among politicians and journalists in Australia and New Zealand to examine the PRC's "long arm of authoritarianism" in the politics, business, film, and educational affairs of other nations. In the United States, which has more robust foreign influence laws than its ANZUS allies, discussion has focused largely on the potential risks of PRC involvement in sectors like technology. Administration officials identified foreign students in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields at American universities as vectors for intellectual property theft in the National Security Strategy,⁷ while regulators alarmed by PRC investment in Silicon Valley have pushed to reform oversight bodies like the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States.⁸

Concerns about the PRC's *political* influence on people and organizations within the United States have coalesced in recent months, prompting a slew of congressional hearings on the subject. A bipartisan bill introduced in the House Foreign Affairs committee in June 2018 would require preparation of an unclassified interagency report examining CCP "political influence operations" in the United States.⁹ Lawmakers have also proposed new language in the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, noting "efforts by China to influence the media, cultural institutions, business, and academic and policy communities of the United States to be more favorable to its security and military strategy and objectives."¹⁰

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6. Donald J. Trump, "National Security Strategy of the United States," The White House, Dec 18, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/.../2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, 25.
 7. Trump, "National Security Strategy," 22.
 8. Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act of 2018, H.R.5841, 115th Cong. (2017–2018), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/5841?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22FIRRMA%22%5D%7D&tr=1>.
 9. To require an unclassified interagency report on the political influence operations of the Chinese Government and Communist Party with respect to the United States, and for other purposes, H.R.6010, 115th Cong. (2018), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/6010?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Countering+the+Chinese+Government+and+Communist+Party+Political+Influence+Operations+Act+of+2018%22%5D%7D&tr=1>.
 10. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, H.R.5515, 115th Cong. (2019),

In the American education sector, lawmakers and journalists have focused their attention on the state-sponsored Confucius Institutes, which allegedly promote CCP propaganda and censor campus activities critical of China.¹¹ Academic and public discussions, however, have largely ignored the challenges that may arise from the activities of PRC diplomats and the community of PRC nationals enrolled as students at American colleges and universities.¹²

Confucius Institutes have presented a quandary for analysts seeking to understand PRC soft power in America. Which influence activities are legitimate and which illegitimate? Are only those influence activities perpetrated by the CCP problematic? And is “influence” so nebulous a term that analysts should favor “interference” instead? The influence-versus-interference distinction in particular recalls medieval arguments over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. The result has been an analytic focus on the *identities and intentions* of actors involved in PRC influence and interference activities, rather than the *consequences* of such activities for values and institutions the United States reveres. The distinction may not be crucial as long as analysts agree that problematic activities constitute “infringements” on American values and institutions.

In the context of American higher education, this study defines these core values as *academic freedom* and the *personal safety* of people in the university community, both of which are fundamental to universities’ role in a democratic society.

This study addresses a simple question: *Is there evidence that PRC diplomats and PRC students have made politically-motivated attempts to infringe*

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/5515/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Countering+the+Chinese+Government+and+Communist+Partys+Political+Influence+Operations+Act+of+2018%22%5D%7D&r=3>.

11. See for example: “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes” [Part I], *ChinaFile*, Jun 31, 2014, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/debate-over-confucius-institutes>; “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes” [Part II], *ChinaFile*, Jul 1, 2014, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/debate-over-confucius-institutes-part-ii>; and Rachele Peterson, “Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education,” National Association of Scholars, Apr 2017, https://www.nas.org/images/documents/confucius_institutes/NAS_confuciusInstitutes.pdf.
12. An exception is the reporting of Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian.

on the academic freedom and personal safety of university persons at American universities? Using the innovative concept of “infringement,” the author interviewed more than 100 faculty over nine months to determine whether they had experienced any breaches of their academic freedom or personal safety by PRC diplomats and students. A small number of students, administrators, and staff were also interviewed about their experiences.

Infringements on academic freedom can take numerous forms, including complaints to universities regarding invited speakers; pressure on faculty to alter the focus of their research; PRC government retaliation against universities; demands to remove content PRC authorities deem “sensitive” from campus spaces; pressure on faculty to alter terminology or teaching materials; interruptions and heckling during academic activities; demands to cancel academic activities; and self-censorship. Infringements on university persons’ safety include probes consistent with intelligence-collection; monitoring; as well as intimidation, abusive conduct, and harassment.

This study finds some evidence that PRC diplomats and a small number of PRC students have attempted to infringe on the academic freedom and personal safety of university persons. A large proportion of the 100-plus faculty surveyed had no experience with most or all of the activities potentially indicative of PRC influence and interference. But a minority of faculty interviewed—particularly those working on borderlands issues or those of ethnic Chinese descent—have experienced multiple instances of activities potentially indicative of PRC influence and interference. Faculty without tenure appeared more prone to self-censor than faculty already tenured. Such patterns imply that certain types of China Studies faculty are more vulnerable to PRC influence and interference activities than others.

The findings suggest a worrisome trend in which faculty, students, administrators, and staff across a range of disciplines within American universities are encountering pressure to align their academic activities with PRC political preferences. Such pressure may limit critical discourse about China on campus, harming the learning environment for other students from the PRC, the United States, and third countries. If the infringements associated with PRC actors become widespread, faculty, students, administrators, and staff in the United States may find themselves acclimatizing to the PRC’s

domestic censorship standards. Ensuring that American higher educational institutions remain champions of free thought is crucial to the health of democratic society, and by extension, the security of the United States.

Further study is required to determine the nature and scope of PRC influence and interference activities in American higher education. In the interim, universities and policymakers can take a number of steps to make the campus environment less hospitable to PRC influence and interference activities and to deter PRC government pressure on American institutions. An effective policy response will be evidence-based, involve consultation with the Chinese American community, and acknowledge that the domestic defunding of higher education makes universities more vulnerable to PRC influence. Countermeasures should not undermine legitimate exchanges of culture, knowledge, and business between the two countries.

Most importantly, the public discourse surrounding countermeasures must highlight the positive contributions of PRC students to the United States to make clear that a few bad apples do not spoil the barrel. PRC students contributed \$12.55 billion to the U.S. economy in 2017, providing lifeblood for local businesses, the real estate market, the domestic tourism sector, and American universities starved of revenue after the 2008 recession.¹³ PRC nationals earned about 10 percent of all doctoral degrees awarded by American universities in 2016, according to the National Science Foundation's Survey of Earned Doctorates.¹⁴ Concentrated mostly in STEM fields, PRC students earning doctorates contribute to American scientific innovation in university laboratories, businesses, and start-ups around the country. PRC students enrich the learning environment for American students by exposing them to different ideas and cultural practices. Some studies suggest that PRC students who spend time living here leave with a more positive view of the United States, providing a potential boon to American soft power.¹⁵ Indeed, many people who are now titans of

13. "Open Doors Fact Sheet: China," Institute of International Education, 2017, <https://p.widencdn.net/ymtzur/Open-Doors-2017-Country-Sheets-China>.

14. "Survey of Earned Doctorates: 2016," National Science Foundation, Dec 6, 2017, <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvydoctorates/#tabs-2>.

15. Tea Leaf Nation Staff, "Do Years Studying in America Change Chinese Hearts and Minds?," *Foreign Policy*, Dec 7, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/07/do-years->

the business, philanthropic, music, and think tank industries in the United States originally immigrated as students from the PRC.¹⁶

Studying in the United States is a brave choice for foreign nationals. Many PRC students experience stress, social isolation, and homesickness during their time at American universities.¹⁷ A 2013 study of PRC students at Yale University found that 45% reported symptoms of depression and 29% reported symptoms of anxiety, rates startlingly high when compared with the 13% for depression and anxiety among the general population in American universities.¹⁸ One in four PRC students attending Ivy League universities in the United States drop out, according to a 2013 study that surveyed more than 9,000 returned overseas graduates.¹⁹ Life is hard for PRC students, the vast majority of whom are undoubtedly engaged in legitimate activities. It is important that countermeasures neither vilify PRC students as a group nor lose sight of the fact that these students, along with faculty members of Chinese descent, are often the victims of influence and interference activities perpetrated by PRC diplomats and nationalistic peers. Only a tiny proportion

studying-in-america change-chinese-hearts-and-mindschina-u-foreign-policy-student-survey/. It is important to note that studies in recent years have muddled this question with some finding that PRC students leave with a more negative view of the United States and a more positive view of the PRC. See for example Henry Chiu Hail, "Patriotism Abroad: Overseas Chinese Students' Encounters with Criticisms of China," *Journal of Studies in International Education* 19, no. 4 (Jan 2015): 311–326, accessed Jun 23, 2018, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1028315314567175> and Fenggang Yang, "Purdue Survey of Chinese Students in the United States: A General Report," *Purdue University* (2016), accessed Jun 23, 2018, https://www.purdue.edu/crcs/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CRCs-Report-of-Chinese-Students-in-the-US_Final-Version.pdf. More study of PRC student attitudes and the implications for American soft power is required.

16. Such as Panda Restaurant group founder and philanthropist Andrew Cherng, renowned opera singer Hao Jiang Tian, and Brookings China Center Director Cheng Li, for example.
17. Brook Larmer, "Alienation 101," *1843 Magazine*, April/May 2017, <https://www.1843magazine.com/features/alienation-101> and Helen Gao, "Chinese, Studying in America, and Struggling," *The New York Times*, Dec 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/12/opinion/chinese-students-mental-health.html>.
18. Xuesong Han, Xuemei Han, Qianlai Luo, Selby Jacobs, and Michel Jean-Baptiste, "Report of a Mental Health Survey Among Chinese International Students at Yale University," *Journal of American College Health* 61, no.1 (2013): 1–8.
19. Chris Luo, "Study: One in four Chinese students drop out of Ivy League schools," *South China Morning Post*, Oct 29, 2013, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1342846/study-one-four-chinese-students-drop-out-ivy-league-schools>.

of the more than 350,000 PRC students here in the United States are likely engaged in PRC influence and interference activities.

Of course, the PRC is not the only country that seeks to influence people and processes within American higher education. Before its transition to democracy in the late 1980s, the Republic of China (Taiwan) engaged in similar efforts to monitor and suppress opponents of the then-ruling Kuomintang party. The ROC financed student groups, established networks of “professional students” on American campuses to spy on pro-democracy activists, and punished dissidents by canceling their passports, harassing their families, and denying them government jobs.²⁰ The ROC’s security apparatus was even implicated in the 1981 murder of Carnegie Mellon mathematics professor Chen Wen-chen, a secret member of a Taiwanese independence organization detained during a visit home.²¹ The Hindu nationalist right in India seeks to reward American institutions promoting its preferred interpretations of history and current events through the donations and activities of the Dharma Civilization Foundation.²² Saudi Arabia has built extensive links with American universities through massive donations,²³ institutional partnerships²⁴ and high enrollments of Saudi students.²⁵ The King Fahd Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Arkansas, established through an initial \$20 million endowment from the Saudi government, is but one example. Right-wing pro-Israel groups exert

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20. Linda Gail Arrigo, “Patterns of Personal and Political Life Among Taiwanese-Americans,” *Taiwan Inquiry* (2006): 1–27, <http://www.linda-gail-arrigo.org/Articles/Life%20Patterns%20Among%20Taiwanese-Americans.pdf>.
 21. “Death of Taiwan Professor Causes Uproar on a Pittsburgh Campus,” *The New York Times*, July 21, 1981, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/21/world/death-of-taiwan-professor-causes-uproar-on-a-pittsburgh-campus.html>.
 22. Elizabeth Redden, “Donor With Opinions,” *Inside Higher Ed*, Dec 21, 2015, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/12/21/irvine-questions-about-professorships-funded-foundation-seeks-change-scholarly-study>.
 23. Karen W. Arenson, “Saudi Prince Gives Millions to Harvard and Georgetown,” *The New York Times*, Dec 13, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/13/education/saudi-prince-gives-millions-to-harvard-and-georgetown.html>.
 24. Tamar Lewin, “U.S. Universities Join Saudis in Partnerships,” *The New York Times*, Mar 6, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/06/education/06partner.html>.
 25. Ellen Knickmeyer, “Saudi Students Flood in as US Reopens Door,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov 8, 2012 (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304830704577492450467667154>).

political influence on American campuses through the Hillels, whose parent organization Hillel International maintains a “Standards of Partnership” policy against hosting or co-partnering with entities deemed anti-Israel or supportive of the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement.²⁶

What makes the PRC different is its scale and its geopolitical ambitions. Moreover, PRC authorities view the threat emanating from American universities through the prism of their unique political situation. A rival government persists in Taiwan, directly challenging the PRC’s claim to represent China. Tibet’s exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, has garnered a sympathetic international following while a Tibetan government-in-exile operates in India. There is strong and organized resistance to Han Chinese dominance in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. The suppressed spiritual movement Falun Gong has become a thorn in the PRC’s side with its worldwide denunciations of the government’s organ harvesting and illiberal treatment of religious minorities. PRC authorities’ suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 still taints the country’s international image. Territorial disputes with other countries over geographic features like the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands and the Spratly islands remain unresolved. In cultivating Chinese nationalism after Tiananmen, the CCP staked its legitimacy on the promise to address the “unfinished business” represented by these challenges to PRC sovereignty and territorial integrity. From the PRC’s perspective, its concerns about these threats should be viewed as legitimate by foreign analysts, even if its methods for managing them are not. How the PRC relates to its diplomats and students overseas reflects this ongoing sense of political insecurity and constitutes a defensive strategy.

PRC students are not the only students who express nationalistic views on American campuses. Conflict between student groups sympathetic to Israelis and Palestinians, for example, is practically routine.²⁷ Armenian

26. Batya Ungar-Sargon, “How the Israel Lobby Captured Hillel,” *Foreign Policy*, Nov 23, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/23/how-the-israel-lobby-captured-hillel-international-college-campus/> and Judy Maltz, “Hillel International Threatened to Cut Ties With Israeli Government Over Database of U.S. Jewish Students,” *Haaretz*, Oct 17, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-hillel-threatened-to-cut-ties-with-israeli-gov-t-over-database-1.5458151>.

27. Linda K. Wertheimer, “Students and the Middle East Conflict,” *The New York Times*, Aug 3, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/07/education/edlife/middle-east-conflict-on->

students at California State University Northridge employed disruptive means in 2016 to drown out a professor they accused of “denying” the Armenian genocide during a campus speech about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.²⁸ In recent years, American universities have become a battleground over so-called “political correctness” and the grounds on which universities may limit offensive speech.²⁹

An overzealous political response to PRC influence and interference activities risks compromising minorities’ civil liberties. The Anti-Japanese paranoia of the early 1940s, Red Scare of the 1950s and War on Terror in the early 2000s all offer cautionary tales that policymakers should keep in mind when communicating with the public. Best practices for policymakers include delineating the scope of PRC influence and interference activities, providing concrete evidence of wrongdoing, and working with the Chinese American community to develop outreach initiatives to PRC students and the immigrant diaspora.

This report first presents the historical background of this issue, putting present-day developments in the context of PRC authorities’ response to the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 and policy documents identifying diplomats and overseas students as strategic resources for managing foreign discourse about the PRC. It then surveys the terminology and fault lines characterizing contemporary debates about PRC influence and interference in Western societies before introducing the research question, methods and data sources. Finally, the report summarizes the findings and considers their implications for policy.

campus-anti-semitism.html.

28. Robert Spallone, “Armenian students protest Atatürk scholar to leave campus,” *The Sundial*, Nov 10, 2016, <http://sundial.csun.edu/2016/11/armenian-students-protest-atatrk-scholar-to-leave-campus/>.
29. For an excellent database of free speech controversies at American colleges and universities, see Georgetown University’s Free Speech Project.

Historical Context and Official Policy

U.S.-CHINA EDUCATIONAL exchanges date back to the late Qing period, when in 1872 reformist officials sent 120 promising students to schools in New England in the hope they would acquire knowledge to spur China's modernization.³⁰ This short-lived initiative, known as the China Educational Mission, was cancelled in 1881 after Qing officials became convinced that the students' acceptance of foreign ideas had compromised their loyalty.³¹ The PRC sent no students to the United States between the 1950s, and the mid-1970s, but diplomatic normalization reversed this situation, and the PRC displaced Taiwan as the leading sender of foreign students within a decade.³² An estimated 75,000 PRC students were enrolled at American colleges and universities in 1989.³³ After the crisis in Tiananmen Square, PRC authorities identified the West as a source of ideological contamination. They resolved to take measures that would inoculate future generations of overseas students from foreign ideas and turn their growing numbers to the party's advantage.

A survey of PRC government policy documents and official statements dating from 1990 to the present demonstrates that the PRC views overseas diplomats and students as strategic resources to promote its political

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30. "Chinese Educational Mission," Early Chinese MIT, n.d, accessed Jun 24, 2018, <https://earlychinesemit.mit.edu/chinese-educational-mission>.
 31. "Termination and Recall," China Education Mission Connections, n.d, accessed Jun 24, 2018, http://www.cemconnections.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=33&Itemid=39&limit=1&limitstart=1.
 32. "Open Doors Fact Sheet: China."
 33. William E. Schmidt, "Chinese in U.S. Urged to Stay Abroad," *The New York Times*, Jul 29, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/07/29/world/chinese-in-us-urged-to-stay-abroad.html>.

objectives. Overseas diplomats and students are envisioned as instruments for managing foreign discourse about China by promoting positive narratives and countering regime critics. The PRC's construction of organizations to manage overseas students and the consistency of its policy statements over nearly three decades underscore the importance it places on this population.

A POST-TIANANMEN RECKONING

After its suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests in June 1989, the PRC government faced lingering challenges to its legitimacy in the condemnations from foreign governments³⁴ and its overseas students, many of whom had sympathized with the protests and sought to remain abroad.³⁵ Some PRC students based in the United States expressed opposition to the massacre by abandoning university organizations with reputed party connections in favor of a pro-democracy umbrella organization called the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars.³⁶ The prospect that large numbers of overseas students might remain abroad distressed party elites, who feared the political implications of students' attitudes back home as well as the effect of "brain drain" on the national economy.

PRC authorities had formulated a policy response to the fallout from Tiananmen by March 1990, which they revealed in two documents articulating a set of working principles for Chinese students and scholars in the United States and Canada.³⁷ The American and Canadian governments' "plundering

34. Robert D. McFadden, "The West Condemns the Crackdown," *The New York Times*, Jun 5, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/05/world/the-west-condemns-the-crackdown.html>.

35. Andrew Rosenthal, "Bush to Formalize Shield for Chinese," *The New York Times*, Apr 7, 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/07/world/bush-to-formalize-shield-for-chinese-in-us.html>.

36. The organization, also known as the Federation of Independent Chinese Student Unions, was founded in late July 1989 and led by student activists Liu Yungchun and Han Lianchao. See Marianne Yen, "Chinese Students in U.S. Call for Regime's Ouster," *The Washington Post*, Jul 31, 1989, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1989/07/31/chinese-students-in-us-call-for-regimes-ouster/57268658-9615-4124-a171-d4206e0daa48/?utm_term=.ffa3e8f3bb95.

37. See "Appendix I: Summary of the Meeting of Educational Counselors (Consuls) in

[of] our human talents” and “years of ideological infiltration and corruption” had undermined these populations’ political loyalties so effectively that most were unlikely to return home.³⁸ The solution to this mass disaffection lay in ensuring the patriotism of future overseas students and scholars through a strategy of “counter-infiltration and countersubversion” that was inherently defensive and long-term.³⁹ Tactically, the policy involved categorizing overseas students and scholars on the basis of political loyalty, rebuilding the party organizations through which their activity could be monitored, and intensifying the ideological education of young people.

Under this system, overseas students and scholars were to be treated differently depending on their political category.⁴⁰ The first category, made up of ideologically reliable people with no interest in permanent emigration, were considered the “core forces” on whom the authorities could rely to co-opt the majority of overseas students and scholars. The core forces would be rewarded upon their return home with professional and personal benefits, but “some of them may, according to our needs, continue to stay abroad to study or work in order to give full play to their political role and their role of uniting and organizing overseas students and scholars.”⁴¹ The second and third categories were made up of people perceived as somewhat patriotic or at least not explicitly hostile to the government. They were to be co-opted by the core forces and receive lenient official treatment when it came to renewing their passports and permission to remain abroad. The participants and organizers of anti-government movements overseas, who constituted the fourth and fifth categories, were to lose their scholarships, be banned from the PRC, have their passports cancelled, and their families prohibited from visiting them abroad. The approach was summed up in the minutes from a meeting of education consuls at PRC embassies and

Chinese Embassies and Consulates” and “Appendix II: Directive on Policy toward Chinese Students and Scholars in the United States and Canada,” in Nicholas Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1994, first edition), see English translation 117–125, 130–134, Chinese original 126–129, 135–139.

38. Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, 130.

39. Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, 130.

40. Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, 130–133.

41. Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, 131.

consulates: “Our policy is to expand progressive forces, win over the middle-of-the-roaders, and isolate the reactionary.”⁴²

Because the associations that had served as mechanisms for organizing overseas students and scholars were broken by the Tiananmen movement, the policy emphasized discreetly rebuilding party organizations at American universities. PRC embassies and consulates were instructed to “organize those party members who have stood firm to conduct regular party activities, three to five per group.”⁴³ Those appearing less politically reliable “should be contacted regularly by designated members and watched.”⁴⁴ To avoid the appearance of infiltration, the policy emphasized that party organizations must operate secretly. “We can work like underground organizations, finding a few reliable individuals in each school and forming a party branch,” it said.⁴⁵ The work to win over the “middle-of-the-roaders” could also be done through “intermediary organizations, such as clubs devoted to recreation activities.”⁴⁶

The documents also alluded briefly to the last prong in this strategy: the intensification of ideological work to inculcate nationalistic values and party loyalty in future generations of overseas students.⁴⁷ Facing a crisis of legitimacy, domestic problems, and the collapse of communism internationally, the CCP was desperate to “construct a ‘China’ worthy of being saved.”⁴⁸ Its solution took the form of a state-led propaganda campaign of “patriotic education” in schools across the PRC beginning in 1991. Implemented from kindergartens to universities, the patriotic education

42. Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, 119.

43. Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, 122.

44. Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, 122.

45. Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, 123.

46. Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, 119–120.

47. “[We will] work from the perspective of international political struggle, hold high the banner of patriotism, intensify ideological and political work...” Eftimiades, *Chinese Intelligence Operations*, 131.

48. William A. Callahan, “History, Identity and Security: Producing and Consuming Nationalism in China,” *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2006): 183; Zheng Wang, “National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no.4 (2008): 783–806; Suisheng Zhao, “A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31, no.3 (1998): 287–302.

campaign suffused youth with a pride in Chinese history and tradition as well as a sense of victimization at the hands of foreign powers.⁴⁹ The CCP revised school textbooks, made trips to memorial sites standard,⁵⁰ taught patriotic songs, and organized students to watch patriotic films.⁵¹ By the late 1990s, the CCP's cultivation of nationalism in its young population had started to pay off. According to Zheng Wang, most participants of the 1999 anti-American protests, the 2005 anti-Japanese protests, and the 2008 counter demonstrations during the Olympic torch relays were college students and people in their twenties.⁵²

In short, PRC authorities' response to the fallout from the Tiananmen Square massacre became the foundation for contemporary policies that envision overseas diplomats and students as tools for managing foreign discourse about China. Foreign discourse poses a threat mainly because it provides the space for critical ideas that could "ricochet" back into the PRC, undermining regime stability. Efforts to manage foreign discourse take the form of promoting positive narratives and countering regime critics, both of which may unnaturally alter the foreign ecosystem of ideas.

PROMOTING POSITIVE NARRATIVES

Policy documents and official remarks in recent years indicate that PRC authorities believe overseas students play a crucial role in upholding the national image abroad. It is unclear whether overseas students are obligated to engage in activities that "cheerlead for China," though there are documented instances in which students have been paid and bused to cheer for visiting leaders. However, it is plausible that official communications serve a signaling role, indicating to receptive students what the PRC authorities would (and would not) like to see.

A 2014 China Scholarship Council (CSC) manual containing guidelines for funded students studying abroad refers, in Chapter 9, to conditions

49. Wang, "Patriotic Education Campaign in China," 784.

50. Wang, "Patriotic Education Campaign in China," 796.

51. Zhao, "A State-Led Nationalism," 292.

52. Wang, "Patriotic Education Campaign in China," 799.

under which an award may be terminated. The manual states that “engaging in any conduct that harms the national interest or image while studying abroad” is considered a breach of contract punishable by the required refund of 130% of the scholarship’s value.⁵³ The warning is reminiscent of the March 1990 policy directive’s provision to punish fifth category overseas state-sponsored students by ordering them to refund the cost of their study abroad. In contrast to the 1990 directive’s detailed explication of offenders’ violations, the CSC manual remains vague on the activities constituting conduct harming the national image. It is possible that such activities include publicly impugning the PRC in front of foreigners or acknowledging the right of critics to hold their views. The broad implication of these guidelines is that state-sponsored overseas students must refrain from endorsing negative narratives about the PRC in their host countries.

Another indication that PRC authorities see students as resources for foreign discourse management is found in Xi Jinping’s explicit reference to overseas students in a 2015 speech about the mission of the United Front Work Department (UFW), the CCP agency devoted to managing relations with domestic and foreign groups outside of the party.⁵⁴ “Students studying abroad are an important part of the talent pool, and a new focus of the United Front work,” Xi said.⁵⁵ “It is important to support their efforts to study abroad, to encourage them to return after their studies, allow them to

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53. Chinese text: 留学人员具有下列情形之一的, 属于全部违约, 应向国家留学基金委赔偿全部留学基金资助费用, 且应支付全部留学基金资助费用的30%作为违约金: (1) 在留学期间从事有损国家利益、国家形象的行为的。 See China Scholarship Council, “Notice for Study Abroad 国家公派留学人员违约行为的有关说明,” Sept 19, 2014, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgmu/chn/jy/jy/t1192933.htm>.
54. Marcel Angliviél de la Beaumelle, “The United Front Work Department: ‘Magic Weapon’ at Home and Abroad,” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief* 17, no. 9 (2017), accessed Mar 5, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/united-front-work-department-magic-weapon-home-abroad/>; Anne-Marie Brady, “Magic Weapons: China’s political influence activities under Xi Jinping,” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Sept 18, 2017, accessed Mar 5, 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/magicweaponsanne-mariebradyseptember162017.pdf>.
55. Chinese text: 留学人员是人才队伍的重要组成部分, 也是统战工作新的着力点。要坚持支持留学、鼓励回国、来去自由、发挥作用的方针, 鼓励留学人员回国工作或以多种形式为国服务。 See: “Xi Jinping: Consolidate the Most Extensive Patriotic United Front (习近平: 巩固发展最广泛爱国统一战线),” *Xinhua* (新华网), May 20, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-05/20/c_1115351358.htm.

travel freely, and use their talents, either by encouraging returned overseas students to return to work or serve the country in various forms.” Xi did not define those “various forms” of service, but given what is known about the UFWD’s mission, one could reasonably ask whether they entail behaviors associated with PRC influence and interference activities. The inclusion of overseas students among the populations to be supervised by the UFWD’s Third Bureau further suggests that the CCP recognizes overseas students’ utility in the department’s work.⁵⁶

Finally, a 2016 Ministry of Education directive made a similarly explicit reference to overseas students in its call to strengthen patriotism in education. “Assemble the broad numbers of students abroad as a positive patriotic energy,” the directive said.⁵⁷ “Build a multidimensional contact network linking home and abroad—the motherland, embassies and consulates, overseas student groups, and the broad number of Chinese students abroad—so that they fully feel that the motherland cares.” Put another way, overseas students are seen as a population to be mobilized in support of their country and connected through organizations like the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA), party cells, and the consulates. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian and James To note instances in which PRC students have mobilized to welcome visiting officials, actions that create the impression these students support the authorities.⁵⁸ PRC students have also initiated

56. Angliviè de la Beaumelle, “The United Front Work Department.”

57. Chinese text: 聚集广大海外留学人员爱国能量, 确立以人为媒介、以心口相传为手段的海外宣传模式, 形成人人发挥辐射作用、个个争做民间大使、句句易于入脑入心的宣传效应。构建“祖国—使领馆—留学团体—广大留学人员”的海内外立体联系网络, 使广大留学人员充分感受祖国关爱、主动宣传祖国发展。See “Party Branch of the Ministry of Education of China Presents Advice for the Implementation of Patriotic Education in the Education System (中共教育部党组关于教育系统深入开展爱国主义教育的实施意见),” Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (中共教育部党组), Jan 26, 2016, accessed Mar 6, 2018, http://www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A13/s7061/201601/t20160129_229131.html; Chris Buckley, “China Says Its Students, Even Those Abroad, Need More ‘Patriotic Education,’” *The New York Times*, Feb 10, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/11/world/asia/china-patriotic-education.html>.

58. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “China’s Long Arm Reaches Into American Campuses,” *Foreign Policy*, Mar 7, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/07/chinas-long-arm-reaches-into-american-campuses-chinese-students-scholars-association-university-communist-party/>; and James Jian Hua To, “Hand-in-Hand, Heart-to-Heart: Qiaowu and the Overseas Chinese,” (doctoral thesis, University of Canterbury, 2009), 30.

social media campaigns touting their pride for their homeland, such as the #ProudofChina video produced by University of Maryland's CSSA after PRC student Yang Shuping ignited a controversy by praising the United States' fresh air and civil liberties in her 2017 commencement speech.⁵⁹

COUNTERING REGIME OPPONENTS

Official remarks and media reports also indicate that PRC authorities see overseas students as allies in their ongoing efforts to counter regime opponents. Together with diplomats based at the embassy and consulates, overseas students are expected to discredit and combat people associated with Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan, Falun Gong, and the Chinese democracy movement.

Minister of Education Chen Zhili referred explicitly to the contributions of PRC diplomats and overseas students in the “struggle” (斗争) against regime opponents abroad in 2002, according to a Chinese-language media report. Chen praised education section diplomats for their work “organizing students studying abroad at important Chinese diplomatic events, fighting against Taiwan independence [supporters], Tibet independence [supporters], ‘Falungong’ cult organizations and overseas hostile forces.”⁶⁰ The remark suggests support at the highest levels of the PRC government for overseas student efforts to counter regime opponents. It is unclear, however, to which specific activities the Minister was referring.

A 2007 meeting of CSSA presidents at the Chinese consulate in Houston, TX echoed the explicit reference to overseas students' roles in combating

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59. “How Chinese Student react to the UMD 2017 speech #Proud of China (中国留学生回应马大毕业演讲事件),” Youtube.com, May 23, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SP-jRYeYAoo>. For context on the Yang Shuping controversy, see Mike Ives, “Chinese Student in Maryland Is Criticized at Home for Praising U.S.,” *The New York Times*, May 23, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/23/world/asia/chinese-student-fresh-air-yang-shuping.html>.
60. Chinese text: 驻外使、领馆教育处(组)配合我国外交工作总方针, 组织广大留学人员在国家重大外交活动中, 在与台独、藏独和“法轮功”邪教组织 以及海外敌对势力的斗争中以及推动优秀留学人才回国服务和为国服务等工作中, 做了大量的工作。See: Fan Zhai (翟帆), “At the National Education Foreign Affairs Working Conference, Chen Zhili Emphasized Expanding the World’s Vision, Create a New Situation (陈至立在全国教育外事工作会议上强调拓展世界眼光开创新的面局),” *China Education Daily* (中国教育报), Jul 5, 2002, www.jyb.com.cn.

regime opponents. “The chairpersons of various associations spoke first to introduce themselves in serving Chinese students, promoting Chinese history and culture, suppressing hostile forces and promoting Sino-American educational and cultural exchanges and cooperation,” a Chinese-language media report said.⁶¹ The inclusion of “suppressing hostile forces” in the otherwise mundane laundry list of tasks suggests that CSSA officers understand countering regime opponents as a core organizational responsibility. That reading is consistent with documented instances in which the CSSA protested events involving the Falun Dafa club at Columbia University in 2013⁶² and the Dalai Lama’s visit to the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) in 2017.⁶³

These official documents, statements, and news reports all demonstrate that the PRC regards overseas diplomats and students as strategic resources for managing foreign discourse about China.

ORGANIZATIONS FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS

Consistent with their 1990s policy directives, the PRC authorities rebuilt organizations that could be used to monitor, propagandize, and organize overseas students on American campuses. The primary vehicles for these purposes are the CSSA and party cells.

The CSSA is an association for overseas PRC students, faculty, and community members that as of 2013 had at least 196 branches at American

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61. Chinese text: 各个联谊会主席争先发言, 介绍自己在为中国学生服务、宣传和推广中国历史文化、打压敌对势力活动空间以及推动中美教育文化交流与合作方面的杰作。See: Education Section of the General Consulate in Houston (驻休斯顿总领馆教育组), “The Office of Educational Affairs at Houston General Consulate Held a Forum for CSSA Presidents (驻休斯顿总领馆教育组召开中国学联会主席座谈会),” *Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange* (中国留学服务中心), Jun 12, 2007. The Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE) is a public organization under the Ministry of Education. For more information about CSCSE, see CSCSE’s “About Us” page, n.d, accessed May 12, 2018, <http://www.cscse.edu.cn/tabid/132/default.aspx>.
62. Caroline Kao and David Xia, “Protest Ensues At Falun Dafa Discussion,” *The Columbia Spectator*, Mar 29, 2013, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/2007/04/23/protest-ensues-falun-dafa-discussion/>.
63. Elizabeth Redden, “Chinese Students vs. Dalai Lama,” *Inside Higher Ed*, Feb 16, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/02/16/some-chinese-students-uc-san-diego-condemn-choice-dalai-lama-commencement-speaker>.

universities.⁶⁴ Most of CSSA's activities are social. The organization plays a major role in arranging cultural events, helping newly arrived students settle in, and serving as a Chinese-language liaison between university administrators and the PRC student community. The 2007 meeting of CSSA presidents at the Houston consulate and a 2003 *Xinhua* report announcing the creation of a CSSA umbrella group for the Southwest at the Los Angeles consulate both show that CSSA leaders operate within regional sub-organizations in proximity to the PRC's embassy and five consulates.⁶⁵ A 2005 Ministry of Education document⁶⁶ and internal CSSA communications show that the organization receives at least some of its funding from the PRC government.⁶⁷ CSSA officers are known to meet periodically with consular officials and communicate with them via the Chinese messaging app WeChat.⁶⁸ Some CSSAs have carried out political activities by, for example, organizing "study sessions" during the 19th Party Congress and posting pro-CCP news articles.⁶⁹

It is important to note that there is significant variation among CSSAs, according to Princeton-Harvard China and the World program fellow Andrew Chubb, who studies the connection between the PRC's foreign policy and Chinese popular nationalism. Proximity to a consulate, the ambitions of individual officers, and the size of membership can all factor in to whether a

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64. Anna B. Puglisi, James C. Mulvenon, and William C. Hannas, *Chinese Industrial Espionage: Technology Acquisition and Military Modernisation* (London: Routledge, 2013), 142–143.
65. Zhi Linfei (支林飞), "The Southwest Chinese Students and Scholars Association is Established (美国西南中国学生学者联谊会主席联谊会成立)," *Xinhua* (新华网), Feb 9, 2003, http://web.archive.org/web/20030421214637/http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2003-02/09/content_720176.htm.
66. Ministry of Education (教育部), "Notice of the Ministry of Education on Printing and Distributing the Interim Measures for the Implementation of the Economic Responsibility System of the Education Section of Foreign Embassies and Consulates (教育部关于印发《驻外使、领馆教育处(组) 经济责任制实施暂行办法》的通知)," *China Education Economy Information Net* (中国教育经济信息网), 2005, <http://archive.fo/tvJWH#selection-63.0-63.36>.
67. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "Chinese Government Gave Money to Georgetown Chinese Student Group," *Foreign Policy*, Feb 14, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/14/exclusive-chinese-government-gave-money-to-georgetown-chinese-student-group-washington-china-communist-party-influence/>.
68. Allen-Ebrahimian, "China's Long Arm."
69. Allen-Ebrahimian, "China's Long Arm."

given CSSA chapter is politically active.⁷⁰ Consular control over the CSSAs may be overstated in some cases because of this variation.

Moreover, CSSA activities may sometimes seem to be the result of nefarious direction by consulates when they are in fact the result of individual officers' machinations or mistakes. Take, for example, the temporary closure of Columbia's CSSA in 2015, which the Falun Gong-associated *Epoch Times* suggested was due to administrators' discovery that the organization was engaging in espionage.⁷¹ In fact, the CSSA was shut down for repeatedly breaking student group regulations. "What happened in 2015 was that [CSSA officers] violated a number of rules, important rules, like safety rules of the club, or other rules like setting up bank account, or they had too many people in a room they were using," said Joan Kaufman, the former director of Columbia's Global Center for East Asia, who was involved in administrative discussions with the university's senior leadership to re-recognize the group.⁷² "It had nothing to do with espionage, spying, or anything like that."

Another example is found in the actions of the CSSA at UCSD, which demanded the university reconsider its invitation to the Dalai Lama to speak at the 2017 commencement. In a statement to the CSSA membership on WeChat, officers claimed that they had contacted the consulate in Los Angeles for guidance, echoed the official PRC stance on the Dalai Lama and made a vague warning. "If the school insists on its actions by inviting the Dalai Lama as a commencement speaker, our association will take further tough measures, and resist the school's unreasonable conduct," the statement said.⁷³ Many observers took the CSSA reference to coordination with the consulate as evidence of state-orchestrated behavior. But officers later released a second WeChat statement to their membership framing earlier

70. Interview with Andrew Chubb, Dec 14, 2017.

71. Matthew Robertson, "Columbia University Closes Chinese Students Group," *The Epoch Times*, Mar 24, 2015, https://www.theepochtimes.com/columbia-university-closes-chinese-students-group_1296843.html.

72. Interview with Joan Kaufman, Jan 19, 2018.

73. Chinese text: 若是校方一意孤行, 坚持在全校毕业典礼上邀请达赖喇嘛进行演讲, 我联合会必将进一步采取强硬措施, 坚决抵制校方无理行径. UCSDCSSA (@留学在UCSD), "CSSA's Statement on Dalai Lama's Speaking Event at UCSD (中国学生学者联合会关于达赖喇嘛演讲事件的声明)," WeChat, Feb 3, 2017, obtained Oct 6, 2017.

suggestions of consular coordination as a hasty error.⁷⁴ “In particular, the statement of CSSA’s contact with the Chinese consulate was distorted,” the statement said. “On such matter[s], our association has never received any instruction. Since its establishment, the CSSA, as an independent and non-political student group, only keeps in touch with Los Angeles consulate with regard to cultural exchange and students’ safety and education. The relationship does not involve any other aspect.” Taking the CSSA’s internal statement at face value, it is plausible that a small group of officers made the decision to publicly oppose the Dalai Lama’s invitation to prove their patriotic bonafides. Of course, while the CSSA officers’ statement asserts no state direction, it is also possible that the consulate helped draft the denial.

The other mechanism for monitoring, propagandizing, and organizing overseas students is party cells. Consistent with 1990 policy directives, PRC authorities have encouraged the proliferation of party cells at educational institutions in at least 20 countries, even doing so publicly in the English-language state tabloid *Global Times*.⁷⁵ An investigation published by *Foreign Policy* magazine in April 2018 demonstrated that party cells are used for a variety of purposes, including the promotion of ideology and humanitarian work.⁷⁶ In the United States, there are known party cells at a handful of institutions: the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ohio State University, UCSD, the West Virginia University College of Business and Economics, the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut, Northern Illinois University, and the University of North Dakota.

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74. Chinese text: 特别是有关本联合会与中国领馆取得联系的表述失真。在该事件上, 本联合会从未接受任何指示。中国学生学者联合会作为一个独立的、非政治性的学生团体, 自成立以来, 与洛杉矶总领馆仅在文化交流、学生安全教育方面保持联系, 不涉及其它方面。UCSD CSSA (@留学在UCSD), “UCSD CSSA New Statement Regarding the Incident of the Dalai Lama’s Commencement Speech (加州大学圣地亚哥分校中国学生学者联合会关于达赖喇嘛毕业典礼演讲一事的更新说明),” WeChat, Feb 27, 2017, obtained Oct 6, 2017.
75. Zhang Yu, “CPC members encounter obstacles while trying to establish Party branches overseas,” *The Global Times*, Nov 28, 2018, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1077619.shtml>.
76. Allen-Ebrahimian, “The Chinese Communist Party Is Setting Up Cells at Universities Across America,” *Foreign Policy*, Apr 18, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/18/the-chinese-communist-party-is-setting-up-cells-at-universities-across-america-china-students-beijing-surveillance/>.

The construction of these organizations coincided with a shift in the PRC's policy toward all overseas Chinese. While earlier generations of talented overseas citizens were encouraged to return home (回国服务), the PRC began in the post-1978 reform period to encourage its citizens to serve their country from abroad (为国服务), abrogating return as a requisite for patriotism.⁷⁷ Paired with the creation of agencies to liaise with Chinese communities abroad, this policy shift effectively “separat[ed] the nation-state from the fixed territory,” creating a transnational identity.⁷⁸ The PRC also adopted a flexible interpretation of citizenship in the late 1980s to co-opt ethnic Chinese of foreign nationality. Internal State Council documents from the period stipulated that party work toward ethnic Chinese abroad must treat them differently from regular foreigners, protect their interests, and safeguard their ties with the PRC.⁷⁹ According to University of Manchester researcher Elena Barabantseva, the purpose of the flexible citizenship policy was “to establish favorable conditions for the participation of the overseas Chinese in the [modernization] projects in the PRC or provide the emotional sense of belonging to the PRC.”⁸⁰

Of course, the system for managing overseas students pales in comparison to the increasingly heavy regulation of academic life within the PRC. Xi Jinping called for stricter ideological control of universities in late 2016, arguing that “higher education must be guided by Marxism” and universities be “strongholds that adhere to Party leadership.”⁸¹ He reiterated the subjugation of education to ideology a year later in his new political philosophy: “Party, government, the military, society and schools, north, south, east and west—the party leads them all.”⁸² All universities in the PRC are overseen

77. Hong Liu, “New Migrants and the Revival of Overseas Chinese Nationalism,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no.43, (2005): 302.

78. Liu, “New Migrants and the Revival of Overseas Chinese Nationalism,” 303.

79. Elena Barabantseva, “Trans-nationalising Chineseness: Overseas Chinese Policies of the PRC’s Central Government,” *ASIEN* 96 (2005): 13–14.

80. Barabantseva, “Trans-nationalising Chineseness,” 16.

81. “China: Xi calls for stricter ideological control of universities,” *BBC*, Dec 9, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/38261706>.

82. Nectar Gan, “Xi Jinping Thought—the Communist Party’s tighter grip on China in 16 characters,” *South China Morning Post*, Oct 25, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2116836/xi-jinping-thought-communist-partys-tighter-grip-china>.

by a party committee, which directs party activity on campus as well as the ideological supervision of students and teaching staff.⁸³ The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection has enhanced its monitoring of faculty in particular since late 2016,⁸⁴ reportedly using classroom informants to identify and dismiss faculty who engage in “improper speech.”⁸⁵ In May 2018, for example, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law professor Zhai Juhong was fired and expelled from the CCP after making remarks about Xi’s abolition of presidential term limits in class.⁸⁶ Many universities have also integrated “Xi Thought” into their core curricula following its inclusion in the party’s constitution in October 2017 and the country’s constitution in January 2018.⁸⁷ These pressures on Chinese universities to toe the party line and suppress critical thought undoubtedly inform PRC diplomats and students’ interactions with American universities.

AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED STATES: SIMILAR INITIAL CONDITIONS?

Concerns about PRC influence and interference in the United States have been driven partly by troubling incidents in Australia over the past year. The Australian investigative program *Four Corners* found in June 2017 that PRC authorities directed overseas student associations, made threats to dissidents based in Australia, and acquired local media to promote party propaganda

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83. Nectar Gan, “Chinese universities tighten ideological control of teaching staff,” *South China Morning Post*, Aug 28, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2108597/china-universities-tighten-ideological-control-teaching>.
84. “The Central Discipline Inspection Commission said that it would strengthen the supervision of ‘inappropriate speech’ made by university teachers (中纪委部门称加强监督高校教师‘不当言论’),” BBC 中文, Jan 12, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/china/2016/01/160121_china_education_political_inspection.
85. “Government Relies on Student Informants at China’s Universities,” *Radio Free Asia*, Jun 14, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/government-relies-on-student-informants-at-chinas-universities-06142018114732.html>.
86. “Chinese Lecturer Fired For Raising Presidential Term-Limit in Class,” *Radio Free Asia*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/lecturer-05212018105710.html>.
87. Christian Shepherd, “In China, universities seek to plant ‘Xi Thought’ in minds of students,” *Reuters*, Jun 22, 2018, <https://in.reuters.com/article/china-politics-education/in-china-universities-seek-to-plant-xi-thought-in-minds-of-students-idINKBN1JI0HZ>.

abroad.⁸⁸ Since May 2017, overseas students have pressured Australian faculty into apologizing in at least four instances after they claimed to be offended by comments or materials tangentially related to PRC territorial claims, officials, and school plagiarism policy.⁸⁹ Another story made the headlines in Australia after a PRC consulate asked a faculty member at the University of Sydney to reconsider holding a forum discussing Tiananmen Square.⁹⁰

Australian government officials have responded with public warnings to universities about the threat posed by foreign interference. Australia's domestic intelligence agency chief, Duncan Lewis, specifically mentioned foreign diplomats, foreign students, and the "atmospherics in universities" as areas requiring scrutiny to a Senate estimates committee in Canberra in 2017.⁹¹ He warned that malign activities could cause serious harm to Australia's sovereignty, political system, national security, and economy. Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Head Frances Adamson also pointedly remarked during a speech at the University of Adelaide in 2017 that the "silencing of anyone in our society—from students to lecturers to politicians—is an affront to our values."⁹² Adamson

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88. Nick McKenzie, Richard Baker, Sashka Koloff and Chris Uhlmann, "The Chinese Communist Party's power and influence in Australia," *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, Jun 3, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-04/the-chinese-communist-partys-power-and-influence-in-australia/8584270>.
89. The first incident occurred in May 2016, when a lecturer was suspended by Monash University after giving a quiz containing questions which offended overseas students said mocked PRC government officials. The three other incidents all occurred in August 2017. Overseas students pressured a lecturer at Australian National University into apologizing after he used Mandarin to communicate a plagiarism policy to his class. Overseas students also demanded apologies from lecturers at the University of Newcastle and the University of Sydney after they referred to Taiwan as an independent country and used a map showing India in control of disputed territories, respectively.
90. Primrose Riordan, "University Asked to Rethink Tiananmen Forum, Academic Says," *The Australian*, Jun 5, 2017, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/university-asked-to-rethink-tiananmen-forum-academic-says/news-story/c0198ee9c9ae74a7f372ad4579385f74>.
91. Stephen Dziedzic, "Government needs to be 'very conscious' of foreign interference in Australian universities, ASIO says," *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, Oct 24, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-25/government-very-conscious-foreign-interference-australian-unis/9082948>.
92. Andrew Greene, "DFAT boss warns international students to resist Chinese Communist Party's 'untoward' influence," *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, Oct 9, 2017,

emphasized that the government had evidence of attempted foreign interference in university processes and challenged administrators to take appropriate precautions. “When confronted with awkward choices, it is up to us to choose our response, whether to make an uncomfortable compromise or decide instead to remain true to our values, ‘immune from intolerance or external influence’ as Adelaide University’s founders envisaged,” she said. News reports indicate there have been discussions in diplomatic and security circles about whether the “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance comprising the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand should respond collectively to the threat.⁹³

Australian anxieties about foreign influence and interference activities have emerged within the context of the country’s increasing dependence on the PRC for trade and tourism. Education is Australia’s third-largest export and students from the PRC account for almost 30% of Australian universities’ international student population.⁹⁴ Universities rely heavily on international students, who pay full tuition, to provide financial aid to domestic students, support research, and sustain university operations. Some Australian academics argued in a recent open letter that the broader societal debate about PRC influence was fueled by racism, prompting other academics to retort that the concerns were grounded in fact.⁹⁵ Australia passed new foreign interference laws at the end of June 2018, one of which is modeled on the United States’ Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA).⁹⁶

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-09/universities-warned-to-resist-chinese-communist-party-influence/9030372>.

93. Andrew Greene, “Chinese Government intrusion into Western universities sparks push for collective action,” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, Oct 15, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-15/chinese-intrusion-on-western-universities-sparks-action/9048456>.
94. “Export income to Australia from international education activity in 2015–16,” Australian Government Department of Education and Training, Nov 2016, <https://international.education.gov.au/research/Research-Snapshots/Documents/Export%20Income%20FY2015-16.pdf>.
95. Stephen Dziedzic, “Racism claims could stifle debate about Chinese interference, academics warn,” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, Mar 27, 2018, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-28/chinese-interference-debate-could-be-stifled-by-racism-claims/9594634>.
96. Evelyn Douek, “What’s in Australia’s New Laws on Foreign Interference in Domestic Politics,” *Lawfare*, Jul 11, 2018, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/whats-australias-new-laws->

Like Australia, the United States is an open society with an economy heavily intertwined with the PRC's. It also has an underfunded higher educational system that targets PRC students for their ability to pay full tuition. Indeed, education was the United States' sixth-largest service export in 2017⁹⁷ and students from the PRC accounted for almost 35% of international students studying at American colleges and universities.⁹⁸ Some 350,755 students from the PRC studied at American colleges and universities in the 2016–2017 academic year, according to Institute of International Education data.⁹⁹ Unsurprisingly, the PRC was the leading place of origin for students coming to the U.S. for the 8th year in a row. Of those studying in the U.S. in the 2016–2017 academic year, 142,000 were undergraduates; 128,000 were graduate students; 59,000 pursued optional practical training; and 19,000 enrolled in non-degree programs.¹⁰⁰ Students from the PRC tend to pursue degrees in STEM fields and business management, with 23% studying business management, 19% studying engineering, 16% studying math/computer sciences, and 8% in the physical/life sciences.¹⁰¹

PRC students contributed about \$12.55 billion to the U.S. economy in 2017, providing a welcome cash infusion for American universities hurt by ongoing retrenchment to state funding following the 2008 recession.¹⁰² Consistent with this financial imperative, there was a large increase in PRC student enrollments at American universities after 2008.¹⁰³

foreign-interference-domestic-politics.

97. "Education and Training Services Resource Guide 2018," *Export.gov*, updated Apr 26, 2018, https://2016.export.gov/industry/education/eg_main_108888.asp.

98. Alice Shen, "Chinese students still drawn to US universities, but growth rate slowing," *South China Morning Post*, Nov 14, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2119903/chinese-students-still-drawn-us-universities-growth-rate-slowing>.

99. "Open Doors Fact Sheet: China."

100. "Academic Level," International Institute of Education, 2017, <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Academic-Level>.

101. "Fields of Study by Place of Origin," International Institute of Education, 2017, <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Fields-of-Study>.

102. "Open Doors Fact Sheet: China."

103. Based on yearly place of origin enrollment data provided by IIE.

Current State of Play: “Chinese” Influence and Interference in Society and Academia

TAKEN TOGETHER, THE policy documents, official remarks, and news reports surveyed in the previous section demonstrate that PRC authorities have historically perceived foreign academic institutions as a threat to their legitimacy because of the space such environments create for the interplay of critical analysis and activities. Moreover, these primary sources show that PRC authorities have viewed diplomatic staff, scholars, and students abroad as strategic resources for influencing foreign discourse about China since at least the early 1990s. Under Xi Jinping, the PRC has intensified its efforts to leverage the organs of state power and its people in service of this longstanding mission.

The PRC’s recent efforts to shape the world in ways amenable to its interests come as no surprise to Sinologists and intelligence analysts. There are many excellent works of scholarship on PRC propaganda, the United Front, and espionage, among them contributions by Lyman Van Slyke, Nicholas Eftimiades, David Shambaugh, and Anne-Marie Brady, who offer valuable approaches for understanding the history, ideology and mechanics of influence efforts abroad.¹⁰⁴

104. See for example Lyman Van Slyke’s *Enemies and Friends: The United Front in Chinese Communist History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967); David Shambaugh’s “China’s Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy,” *The China Journal*, no. 57 (2007): 25–58, <https://myweb.rollins.edu/tlairson/china/chipropaganda.pdf>; Nicholas Eftimiades’s *Chinese Intelligence Operations* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1994); and Anne-Marie Brady’s *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People’s Republic* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) and *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

In contrast to this longstanding awareness in expert circles, broader social concerns about PRC influence and interference efforts only began to coalesce within the last year. 2017 was marked by a sudden explosion of articles by think tank researchers, independent analysts, and journalists assessing the nature and scale of PRC influence activities in Western societies. Reports of PRC influence in the politics, economics, media, and educational institutions of liberal democracies like Australia and New Zealand provoked debate within the United States about whether similar activities were occurring on U.S. soil.¹⁰⁵ This debate has generated efforts to shine “sunlight” on American entities’ affiliations with the CCP but also has produced “heat” in the form of vague and at times alarmist pronouncements. The vocabulary available for characterizing foreign influence and interference activities remains limited because the public debate is so recent.

Discussions of terminology revolve around questions like whether it is appropriate to describe the origin of problematic activities with the catch-all adjective “Chinese”; whether Western governments should be concerned only about influence activities demonstrably linked to the CCP; and whether “interference” is a better term than “influence.” To date, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and China analyst Peter Mattis have advanced the most compelling definitions.

In a December 2017 speech introducing foreign influence and interference legislation, Turnbull made a clear distinction between “legitimate influence” and “unacceptable interference” by defining the latter as foreign influence activities that are “covert, coercive, or corrupt.”¹⁰⁶ Colloquially

105. Anne-Marie Brady, “Magic Weapons: China’s political influence activities under Xi Jinping,” Wilson Center, Sept 16, 2017, accessed May 14, 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/magic-weapons-chinas-political-influence-activities-under-xi-jinping>; Andrew Greene, “Prominent Australian academic says he has been silenced by Chinese Government,” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, Nov 13, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-13/academic-claims-hes-been-silenced-by-chinese-government/9142694>; Nick McKenzie, Richard Baker, Sashka Koloff and Chris Uhlmann, “The Chinese Communist Party’s power and influence in Australia,” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, Jun 3, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-04/the-chinese-communist-party-power-and-influence-in-australia/8584270>.

106. Malcolm Turnbull, “Speech introducing the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill 2017,” Malcolm Turnbull, Dec 7, 2017, <https://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/>

known as the “three C’s,” Turnbull’s criteria specify exactly what is problematic about certain forms of foreign influence. But Turnbull did not identify the agents engaging in the three C’s, noting only that “foreign actors who would do us harm are now on notice.” This lack of specificity was a tactful political choice, but necessarily left open the question of who might reasonably be subject to or exempt from scrutiny.

Peter Mattis sought to refine the debate in a March 2018 article in *War on the Rocks*.¹⁰⁷ He argued that Western governments should be concerned *only* about activities associated with the CCP, not those associated with people from the PRC. Mattis justified this distinction by arguing that including people from the PRC would amount to endorsing the CCP’s conflation of itself with the people. “Chinese people should not be caught between our governments and the CCP,” he wrote. “They should have choice.” Mattis also argued that “interference” characterizes the scope of problematic CCP activities more accurately than “influence” does “because it describes crossing boundaries established by law and disrupting the normal flow of political or social activity.”

But Mattis’s focus on “CCP” interference is too narrow to account for instances in which PRC nationals unaffiliated with the CCP nonetheless act in ways amenable to its interests. For example, this restrictive definition could not help us make sense of Korean airline Jeju Air’s recent decision to reword a promotional flyer after a PRC student complained on social media that it portrayed Taiwan and Hong Kong as separate countries, even though coercing foreign corporations into upholding PRC sovereignty claims is problematic.¹⁰⁸ Mattis is correct that people from the PRC should not be forced to choose a value system. PRC citizens hold myriad political views. It is also the case that Western analysts may be more comfortable using the term “CCP” interference because identifying the CCP makes it

speech-introducing-the-national-security-legislation-amendment-espionage-an.

107. Peter Mattis, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Chinese Communist Party Interference in the Public Square,” *War on the Rocks*, Mar 7, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/03/talk-talk-chinese-communist-party-interference-public-square/>.

108. “Jeju Air Job Ad in Korea Changed After Chinese Student Complaint Over Taiwan and Hong Kong,” *Branding in Asia*, Apr 17, 2018, <https://brandinginasia.com/chinese-student-anger/>.

easier to sidestep allegations of racism. Nonetheless, when PRC nationals seek to shut down critical discussion in the classroom or otherwise pressure American universities to align academic activity with PRC political preferences, their behavior is *corrosive* to American academic freedom and the institutions meant to enshrine it, even if they are not acting at the CCP’s behest. The policy response to PRC citizens acting independently should fall to universities, not the United States government. Yet any analysis of PRC influence and interference in American higher education would be incomplete if it did not examine the implications of PRC citizens’ activities. For that reason, “PRC” is a more accurate descriptor because it encompasses both CCP actors and nationalistic citizens.

The term “CCP interference” is too narrow because it focuses only on illegal activities; many problematic activities may not rise to the level of illegality but nonetheless are *undesirable*. Mattis’s focus on illegal activities is pragmatic, given his observation that “government investigative resources will always be focused more on the truly illegal rather than these gray areas.” Still, an excessively narrow focus risks losing sight of the subtle processes that may erode American institutions and values. PRC influence and interference activities are problematic not because of their legality, but rather because they may harm American higher education, which is a bedrock national asset.

Moreover, “interference” is an imperfect concept to characterize problematic activities because it necessarily implies *disruption*. “Influence,” by contrast, is broad enough to accommodate activities that may not be disruptive but nonetheless *induce* change by impressing, persuading, swaying, biasing, or otherwise incentivizing targets toward a particular course of action. Self-censorship within academia or universities’ pursuit of Confucius Institute funding, to take two examples, are phenomena more properly understood as products of PRC influence, not interference. “Influence” may thus be a preferable term because it is broad enough to include both disruptive and non-disruptive activities.

State-versus-non-state and influence-versus-interference distinctions may be secondary as long as analysts agree that problematic activities constitute “infringements” on American values, institutions, and practices. In this context, infringements may be understood as activities that violate, encroach upon, undermine, or frustrate values, institutions, and practices the United

States wants to protect. “Infringements” shifts the focus from the *identity, intentions, and methods* of the entities perpetrating problematic activities to the *consequences* of such activities for what the United States values. For that reason, this study will use infringements as its primary analytical tool in the following sections.

Foreign actors may seek to infringe on the values, institutions, and practices of other societies for political, economic, religious, or cultural reasons. The profit motives of PRC companies and the culture-sharing motives of Chinese community organizations sponsoring calligraphy classes are not what alarm American analysts. Rather, it is the *political* motive at the heart of activities associated with PRC influence and interference that American analysts view as malign. The covert, coercive, and corrupt nature of PRC influence and interference activities arguably stems from fundamental political differences between authoritarian and democratic societies. This study focuses on infringements motivated by political aims of the PRC, particularly as they relate to academic activities involving “sensitive content.” Sensitive content refers to topics whose discussion the PRC censors or otherwise circumscribes (see key terms in next section for further detail).

Discussion of PRC influence and interference activities in the American education sector falls into several categories. Policymakers and law enforcement agencies have historically focused on activities facilitating sensitive technology transfer to the PRC.¹⁰⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher Wray’s assertion during a February 2018 hearing that students, professors, and scientists from the PRC act as “non-traditional collectors” of intelligence on American campuses reflected law enforcement’s conventional interest in foreign espionage.¹¹⁰ The White House announced in May 2018 that the government will shorten the length of visas issued to PRC nationals in certain STEM fields as part of a strategy to prevent intellectual

109. “Overview of U.S. Export Control System,” U.S. Department of State, n.d., accessed May 10, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/strategictrade/overview/>.

110. Doina Chiacu and Patricia Zengerle, “U.S. senators concerned about Chinese access to intellectual property,” *Reuters*, Feb 13, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-security-china/u-s-senators-concerned-about-chinese-access-to-intellectual-property-idUSKCN1FX23M>.

property theft by U.S. rivals.¹¹¹ More recently, experts in the China and education spheres have investigated the state-sponsored Confucius Institutes for allegedly promoting CCP propaganda and imposing improper conditions on American institutions that agree to host them. Journalists have begun to probe the activities of the CSSA and party cells on American campuses,¹¹² entities which have been on China experts’ radar for years.¹¹³

Such revelations led *Hill* contributor Eric R. Terzuolo to urge greater government scrutiny of influence activities in a 2018 article titled “US colleges willfully blind to China’s influence.”¹¹⁴ “Despite some efforts to downplay the problem, the academic world is not a ‘safe space,’ insulated from international rivalries, and the Chinese clearly understand the increasingly central role in such competition of shaping intellectual capital and elite perceptions,” he wrote. “*At U.S. colleges and universities, Chinese efforts both exploit and violate academic freedom.*” Terzuolo’s article suggests that PRC influence activities undermine the values at the heart of American higher education, a serious charge that merits further consideration. But like so many op-eds on the subject, the article rehashed dominant narratives without offering empirical evidence for its claims.

Do PRC influence and interference activities threaten the integrity of American higher education? And if so, from which actors does this threat come? There has been no systematic study of the impact such activities, particularly those that are politically-motivated, may have on American universities’ ability to uphold their core values. These core values—*academic freedom* and *personal safety* of university persons—are fundamental to universities’ role in a democratic society. And while entities like Confucius Institutes have been thoroughly scrutinized, little attention has been paid to the two most obvious potential sources of PRC influence in American

111. “U.S. to shorten length of visas for some Chinese citizens: White House,” Reuters, published May 29, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-china-visas/us-to-shorten-length-of-visas-for-some-chinese-citizens-white-house-idUSKCN11V00H>.

112. Allen-Ebrahimian, “Chinese Government Gave Money;” “China’s Long Arm;” and “The Chinese Communist Party Is Setting Up Cells.”

113. See for example Eftimiades’s *Chinese Intelligence Operations* and Hannas, Mulvenon and Puglisi’s *Chinese Industrial Espionage*.

114. Eric R. Terzuolo, “US colleges willfully blind to China’s influence,” *The Hill*, Feb 25, 2018, <http://thehill.com/opinion/education/375483-us-colleges-willfully-blind-to-chinas-influence>.

higher education: the PRC diplomats who interact with educational institutions and the community of PRC nationals enrolled as students at American universities.

This exploratory study addresses the resultant gap in the policy and academic literature. At a time of growing anxiety about the United States’ rivalry with the PRC, it is easy to see how discussions of influence and interference risk becoming politicized and invoked in “Yellow Peril”-type arguments. The starting point of this study is that such discussions should be *nuanced* and *evidence-based*. If there is no evidence of problematic activities involving PRC diplomats and students, then public arguments asserting the contrary must be counteracted. If there is evidence, policymakers and academic communities must respond to it. Should evidence be found, the author hopes that this study will serve as a basis for further discussion in academic and policy circles.

Research Question

This study addresses a simple question: *Is there evidence that PRC diplomats and PRC students have made politically-motivated attempts to infringe on the academic freedom and personal safety of university persons at American universities?*

When possible, the study will distinguish between infringements tied to PRC government entities, PRC students, and other unidentified actors with a presence on campus. It will also assume that, while infringements tied to PRC government entities may be the product of coordinated policy, those attributable to students from the PRC and other actors may also be organic, i.e. motivated by personal conviction.

KEY TERMS

- “Academic freedom” is “a broad doctrine giving faculty great leeway in addressing their academic subjects, allowing them even to challenge conventional wisdom,” according to Ann Franke. “Under principles of academic freedom, a faculty member may research any topic. He or she may raise difficult subjects in a classroom discussion or may publish a controversial research paper.”¹¹⁵ Experts agree that students also have some degree of academic freedom, meaning that they have the right to research topics of interest, make historical comparisons, express disagreement with peers or faculty on substantive grounds, and engage in intellectual debate without fear of censorship or retaliation.
- “Personal safety” encompasses both physical safety (freedom from physical harm) as well as psychological welfare (freedom from

115. Ann Franke, “Academic Freedom Primer,” Difficult Dialogues Initiative, May 10, 2018, <http://agb.org/sites/default/files/legacy/u1525/Academic%20Freedom%20Primer.pdf>.

worry about physical safety, but also from hostility, intimidation, aggression, and harassment). As this study will demonstrate, the concern among faculty, students, administrators, and staff is not so much the threat of imminent physical harm, as the possibility that PRC diplomats and students could harm them in more subtle ways—for example, by denying a visa, thereby stunting a promising career; by initiating internet campaigns to stigmatize and expose them to public humiliation; by harassing their families back home in China; or even simply by violating their personal privacy through surveillance. What one person perceives as intimidation or harassment is to some degree subjective. Nonetheless, whether faculty, students, administrators, and staff feel intimidated matters because those feelings condition behavior in the classroom and what people are willing to say in their research.

- “Sensitive content” is defined as topics whose discussion the PRC censors or otherwise circumscribes. Sensitive content includes the so-called “five poisons” (Uyghurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong, Taiwanese, and Chinese democracy activists), the seven political “perils” outlined in the CCP’s infamous Document 9 (Western constitutional democracy, universal values, civil society, neoliberalism, Western journalism, “historical nihilism,” and questioning socialism with Chinese characteristics), and hot-button issues like Mao’s legacy, the Tiananmen Square protests, the political autonomy of Hong Kong, Sino-Japanese relations, and contentious labor politics.¹¹⁶ Disciplines that potentially involve sensitive content include history, politics, sociology, religion, philosophy, geography, anthropology, literature, and film.
- “Attempts” is defined as efforts to achieve an aim, without implying the success of such efforts unless otherwise indicated.

116. Samantha Hoffman and Peter Mattis, “Managing the Power Within: China’s State Security Commission,” *War on the Rocks*, Jul 16, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/07/managing-the-power-within-chinas-state-security-commission/> and “Document 9,” *ChinaFile*, Nov 8, 2013, <http://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>.

- “American universities” is a short-hand phrase including both colleges and universities in the United States.
- “University persons” includes faculty, students, administrators, and staff at American universities.
- “PRC diplomats” includes officials working in various sections of the PRC’s embassy and five consulates, often used interchangeably with the phrase “consular officials.”
- “Research-1 university” refers to one of the 115 universities in the United States that engage in extensive research activity, according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

Methods and Data Sources

THE PURPOSE OF this study is to determine whether evidence of PRC diplomat- and student- linked political influence and interference activities occurring at American universities exists *at all*. The study does *not* seek to quantify the frequency or scale of these phenomena, a task which would require random sampling, a large sample size, and other strict methodological controls.

Consistent with the study's exploratory purpose, the author looked for evidence of politically-motivated infringements in the places where, if they exist, one would most likely expect to find them. Accordingly, the author targeted faculty based at institutions with high enrollments of PRC nationals as well as faculty at smaller institutions with expertise in issues considered sensitive by PRC authorities. The study also involved interviews with administrators, staff, and students who claimed to have experienced infringements on their academic freedom and personal safety. These respondents were generally referred by faculty who had already been interviewed.

This report employed a case study approach to investigate the existence and diversity of ways in which politically-motivated infringements on the academic freedom and personal safety of university persons may occur at American universities. The author interviewed more than 100 faculty, first with a survey and then with open-ended questions to clarify previous responses and views on complex issues like self-censorship. The interviews were conducted by telephone between December 2017 and June 2018. The author also interviewed students, administrators, staff, and additional faculty who could verify evidence between October 2017 and June 2018. In addition to conducting interviews, the author consulted secondary sources such as academic studies, official reports, and newspapers.

The author chose interviewing as the primary research method because there is no publicly available data on these phenomena. This paucity of data

reflects the novelty of concerns about PRC influence in the United States and the disincentives within academia to study them. These disincentives include the prospect of being put on China's visa blacklist, the existence of which the PRC does not acknowledge, and the difficulty of getting research proposals approved by the university Institutional Review Board. Interviews can generate this missing data because they elicit observations directly from participants.

Interviewing has some drawbacks. Respondents' memories may be unreliable and their accounts influenced by hidden personal agendas. The author verified respondent accounts by conducting follow-up interviews, interviewing witnesses and others with knowledge of the incidents in question, and consulting contemporaneous records. In one case, the author verified an account by using open records laws to consult a police report. Verification was not possible in some cases because the incidents reported took place in private settings without witnesses. In a few cases, the author discarded interviews when the motivations and claims presented lacked credibility. Generally speaking, the author has high confidence in the accuracy of the data. Most respondents sought to qualify and delineate the problematic activities described in their accounts. The author did not perceive faculty attempts to exaggerate; on the contrary, faculty were reluctant to overstate the implications of their experiences.

The author used *Foreign Policy's* 2016 list of the top 25 American colleges and universities with the highest enrollments of PRC nationals holding F-1 visas as a starting point and contacted faculty at these institutions with expertise on China and related issues.¹¹⁷ Faculty interviewed for this project came from major public and private institutions, including but not limited to: the University of California system, the University of Washington system, the University of Colorado system, the University of Indiana system, the University of Illinois system, the University of Wisconsin system, Ohio State University, the University of Michigan, the University of Kansas, Purdue University, Boston University, the University of Virginia, Georgetown University, Harvard University, Cornell University, and

117. "The Most Chinese Schools in America," *Foreign Policy*, Jan 4, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/04/the-most-chinese-schools-in-america-rankings-data-education-china-u/>.

Columbia University. The author also contacted faculty not based at institutions with high enrollments of Chinese nationals on the assumption that their expertise in sensitive issues might make them more likely to experience these phenomena than faculty who did not work on China-related issues. Faculty were generally identified on the basis of their online profiles or through referrals.

The author focused on faculty in disciplines in which there are contested interpretations of figures and events inside and outside of the PRC (encapsulated by our previously defined term, sensitive content). Disciplines most likely to involve sensitive content include history, politics, sociology, anthropology, religion, philosophy, geography, literature, and film.

Prior to the survey, faculty respondents were asked about their discipline, tenure status, the number of courses taught in a year relating to China, whether they had PRC nationals in their classes, and whether their courses included sensitive content. Faculty were then surveyed with a list of questions regarding their experience with phenomena indicative of politically-motivated attempts to infringe on their academic freedom and personal safety. Faculty were asked to report only those attempted infringements that occurred in the United States.

The primary mode of contact was email. While the author did not keep count of the total number of interview requests sent, they certainly numbered in the mid to high hundreds. The response rate was low and leaves open the possibility of non-response bias in the results, even though the author made sure to interview faculty who had no experience of infringements on their academic freedom or personal safety. Responses were at times accompanied by curt remarks alleging that the premise of the study was political, alarmist, or racist.

“I have nothing to say about this endeavor, other than the anti-China hysteria your project legitimates and gives voice to is anathema to my thinking, teaching, and work,” one faculty member at New York University wrote.¹¹⁸ “I am no proponent of the Chinese Communist Party, and yet the Cold-War level Manchurian-candidate-like panic in the US, Australia, and other places about China is just absurd.” Another faculty member at the

118. A faculty member at New York University, email message to author, Apr 6, 2018.

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill accused the author of prejudice in response to an email requesting an interview.¹¹⁹ “I am concerned about the alarmism your email exhibits; yours is just a symptom of the near-hysteria of a new ‘red scare’ that reminds me of McCarthyism,” the faculty member wrote. “My experiences [with students] point to the opposite of what the new red scare may suggest...To think of them otherwise is an insult to the whole group and smacks of racism.”

It is essential that studies of PRC influence be conducted in an objective, balanced, and responsible fashion. Broad brushes, generalizations, and policy in the absence of a substantial empirical foundation *are* problematic. But to dismiss concerns about PRC influence and interference without even considering whether there is evidence is tantamount to burying one’s head in the sand. Moreover, responses like this increase the stigma associated with studying topics that are controversial but nonetheless important.

The author spoke with almost all respondents either on the record or on background, in the latter case negotiating generic descriptors for attribution to give faculty sufficient anonymity. Those who requested to speak on background desired anonymity for the reasons outlined in the self-censorship section of this report. It is telling that in a few cases, faculty agreed *only* to be interviewed off the record, i.e., on the condition that the information conveyed could not go down on paper. In one case, a faculty member insisted the interview be conducted at a time when she could access a hotel landline because she feared her cell phone was monitored. Many faculty expressed anxiety about being publicly identified in this study for fear that the PRC government might retaliate or that some social progressives in the United States might perceive criticisms of the PRC as “racist.” This was true even among respondents who claimed they do *not* self-censor.

Respondents included PRC citizens, naturalized American citizens of PRC origin, American citizens of Chinese heritage, and persons who were neither of PRC nationality nor of Chinese heritage. The only salient criteria for respondent selection were *location* at an American educational institution and *field of expertise*.

119. A faculty member at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, email message to author, Jun 12, 2018.

The author also interviewed educational experts, China experts outside of academia, and government officials in addition to the faculty, students, administrators, and staff mentioned previously. In total, the author conducted more than 180 interviews for the project.

Findings

This study found some evidence of politically-motivated attempts by PRC government entities and a small number of PRC students to infringe on the academic freedom and personal safety of university persons at American universities. The study broadly categorizes the problematic activities as “attempted” infringements because it is not clear in all cases whether they successfully compromised university persons’ academic freedom and/or personal safety.

Infringements linked to PRC embassy and consular officials, state-affiliated researchers and journalists with state media outlets can be understood as expressions of government policies that seek to influence foreign discourse in ways amenable to PRC interests. But it is difficult to discern the extent to which documented cases of student-initiated infringements may be state-directed, if they can be said to involve state direction at all. Student activities more likely reflect personal conviction, which they may air in ways inconsistent with university norms for reasons of chauvinism, defensiveness, or lack of familiarity with Western academic standards. PRC students envisioning a career in the party may also believe they can build their careers by “cheerleading for China” while abroad.

Formal affiliations and intention of actors notwithstanding, such activities demonstrate a *range* of attempted infringements on the academic freedom and personal safety of university members. Cumulatively, these activities may affect the ecology of the American university environment in ways that counteract, mute, or deter perspectives and activities critical of the PRC. This study *does not* make claims about the frequency or scale of these phenomena due to the lack of strict methodological controls on survey respondents. It finds sufficient evidence, however, to justify further inquiry and discussion.

ATTEMPTED INFRINGEMENTS ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM

A major aspect of the study was whether faculty at American universities experienced politically-motivated attempts to infringe on their academic freedom while engaged in academic activities involving sensitive content.

This study employed Ann Franke's definition of academic freedom for faculty, which provides an updated version of the American Association of University Professors' 1940 statement outlining the principles of academic freedom and tenure:

"Academic freedom protects college and university faculty members from unreasonable constraints on their professional activities. It is a broad doctrine giving faculty great leeway in addressing their academic subjects, allowing them even to challenge conventional wisdom. Under principles of academic freedom, a faculty member may research any topic. He or she may raise difficult subjects in a classroom discussion or may publish a controversial research paper."¹²⁰

These rights come with responsibilities. Faculty members must comport themselves in a professional manner; perform their academic duties competently; refrain from making false statements; present fact-based arguments; and refrain from harassing, threatening, intimidating, ridiculing, or otherwise imposing their views on students.¹²¹

While most respondents interviewed for this study are faculty, the study is also concerned with the educational experience of students. Experts disagree on whether students have the same kind of academic freedom as faculty, but this study accepts Franke's argument that, at minimum, "students need room to explore, learn, and grow" when engaging with controversial ideas and creative work. Students have the right to research topics of interest (if compatible with grading criteria), make historical comparisons, express disagreement with faculty and, as Cary Nelson points out, to "engage in intellectual debate without fear of censorship or retaliation."¹²²

120. Franke, "Academic Freedom Primer."

121. Cary Nelson, "Defining Academic Freedom," *Inside Higher Ed*, Dec 21, 2010, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2010/12/21/defining-academic-freedom>.

122. Nelson, "Defining Academic Freedom."

As with faculty, students' rights come with responsibilities. "With the right to disagree comes the responsibility to maintain appropriate behavior in class," Franke writes. Appropriate behavior can be understood to include refraining from general incivility, steering the conversation off-topic, monopolizing the discussion, preventing an academic activity from occurring, or otherwise compromising other students' "room to explore, learn and grow."

Infringements include activities seeking to:

- Influence the perspective of faculty or students on sensitive content, on the basis of political rather than evidence-based grounds;
- Adjust or alter academic activities involving sensitive content;
- Interrupt academic activities involving sensitive content; or
- Terminate academic activities involving sensitive content

Respondents were also asked about whether they had self-censored, what forms that self-censorship took, and whether they felt self-censorship was a problem among faculty working on issues relating to China in general.

The following sections detail concrete examples of attempted infringements on academic freedom by PRC government affiliates (primarily but not limited to diplomats), PRC students, and other campus actors (including unidentified visitors to class and fellow colleagues at American universities).

Infringements by PRC Government and Affiliated Entities

This study found a number of instances in which PRC government officials based at the country's embassy and consulates attempted to assess, influence, or induce the termination of academic activities involving sensitive content.¹²³

123. In addition to the Embassy in Washington, D.C., the PRC maintains consulates-general in New York, NY; Chicago, IL; San Francisco, CA; Los Angeles, CA; and Houston, TX.

Approaches by PRC Diplomats to Assess Sensitive Academic Activity

Like most foreign governments, the PRC directs its embassy and consulates to interact with American universities for the larger purpose of ensuring citizens' welfare. PRC diplomats routinely visit American campuses to "check in," attend cultural festivals, and participate in educational activities touching on U.S.-China relations. PRC diplomats also work with local law enforcement, university administrators, and family members to improve security measures after tragedies involving PRC students, such as the brutal murder of University of Southern California engineering student Xinran Ji in 2014 or the apparent targeting of female PRC students for invasive pelvic exams by disgraced USC gynecologist George Tyndall.¹²⁴ Unlike most foreign governments, however, the PRC also employs its diplomats to assess and influence potentially sensitive academic activity on American campuses.

In some cases, PRC diplomats' activities can be read as acts of observation that do not necessarily seek to impinge on academic processes. When officials from the Chicago consulate visited the University of Colorado, Boulder (CU Boulder) in 2016, they simply sought to ascertain who had issued the invitation to the Dalai Lama in advance of his visit to the area. An administrator involved in the meeting said he did not perceive any untoward behavior regarding the event, which was co-sponsored by the CU Boulder student government, the CU Boulder Cultural Events Board, and the Tibetan Association of Colorado.¹²⁵ The consular officials "wanted to make clear their understanding of whether it was a university invitation to the Dalai Lama or a community invitation, and once that was made clear they just said their concern was for their students," the administrator

124. Richard Winton, Kate Mather and Rosanna Xia, "4 teens to be charged as adults in killing of USC student, sources say," *The Los Angeles Times*, Jul 29, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-teens-usc-student-killing-charges-20140729-story.html>; Paul Pringle, Matt Hamilton, Harriet Ryan and Melissa Etehad, "Chinese government has 'serious concerns' about USC gynecologist and allegations of misconduct with students," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-chinese-consulate-usc-doctor-20180517-story.html>.

125. Interview with an administrator at CU Boulder, Mar 28, 2018.

said.¹²⁶ The diplomats indicated the visit could “excite” their students and that they would not be able to control any resultant protest activity. PRC diplomats’ action in this instance was appropriate insofar as alerting the university to potential protest activity helps ensure all students’ safety. That the diplomats’ message could double as a signal to the university that its activities are “watched” does not necessarily invalidate its salutary effects.

Approaches by PRC Diplomats to Influence Sensitive Academic Activity

But in other cases, it seems clear that PRC diplomats have acted to “influence the influencers” when faculty and students engage in academic activities involving sensitive content. These attempts at influence can take the form of complaints regarding university events, visiting delegations, pressure on experts to adopt views more amenable to the PRC, and retaliation against American universities.

Complaints

PRC diplomats have since at least the early 1990s made official expressions of displeasure to American universities for hosting certain speakers and events. For example, *The Washington Post* reported in 1991 that the PRC consulate in New York sent letters to several American institutions—including Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Cornell—condemning their invitations to the Dalai Lama.¹²⁷ These complaints continue to occur in various forms, often prompted by speakers and events representing “the five poisons.”

PRC diplomats often target university administrators because they are perceived as the ultimate arbiters of permissible activities on campus. Several administrators and faculty noted from their personal experience interacting

126. “Tickets go on sale Thursday for Dalai Lama visit to Boulder,” *The Denver Post*, Apr 27, 2016, <https://www.denverpost.com/2016/04/27/tickets-go-on-sale-thursday-for-dalai-lama-visit-to-boulder/>.

127. Valerie Strauss, “China Frowns on Dalai Lama’s U.S. Visit,” *The Washington Post*, Apr 5, 1991, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/04/05/china-frowns-on-dalai-lamas-us-visit/b94ddf58-f050-465c-b884-c2196ffa9f7c?utm_term=.660abf361277.

with PRC diplomats that the latter sometimes struggled to grasp the idea that administrators cannot interfere with faculty and student activities at will. This feature of the university environment is fundamental to American notions of academic freedom but absent in the PRC higher education system, where administrators, who are also political authorities in a system run by the CCP, wield authority over faculty.

Consider the following cases:

- Embassy officials made a number of phone calls to administrators and faculty at George Washington University (GW) in late 2013 in advance of a talk by the Republic of China (Taiwan) Representative to the United States, according to GW faculty member Edward McCord, who was Director of Asian Studies at the time.¹²⁸ According to McCord, Embassy officials conveyed a gentle suggestion along the lines of: “You must not realize Taiwan’s not a country, surely you don’t want someone illegitimate speaking here.” The Embassy’s attempt to dissuade administrators failed and the event proceeded as planned.
- Officials from the Chicago consulate contacted the University of Wisconsin-Madison sometime between 2010 and 2013 to complain that the university was hosting too many Taiwan-related events and too many high-profile people from Taiwan, according to an administrator and faculty member Edward Friedman.¹²⁹ The consular officials emphasized that Taiwan was part of China and that they regarded the university’s actions as akin to having diplomatic relations with the island. University administrators responded to the complaint by emphasizing that university centers had significant discretion in the events they host and that it was not the place of the chancellor, to whom the consulate sent its message, to interfere.
- Officials from the San Francisco consulate contacted UC Berkeley in 2009 to complain about the Dalai Lama’s upcoming speech on

128. Interview with Edward McCord, Mar 13, 2018.

129. Interview with an administrator at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Apr 30, 2018, and Edward Friedman, Nov 29, 2017.

campus, according to a former administrator with direct knowledge of the incident.¹³⁰ The consul general came to campus to hand-deliver a letter expressing the PRC government's objection to the visit and requesting the event's cancellation. The consul general also requested an appointment with the executive vice chancellor to discuss the matter. University officials acknowledged receipt of the letter and emphasized that, as a public university required to uphold free speech, they would not cancel the event. The former administrator summed up UC Berkeley's response as "thank you for your message, acknowledged, but we are not going to do anything about it."

- Officials from the Chicago consulate contacted the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2007 to complain about a faculty member's invitation to the Dalai Lama to speak at an event organized by the Center for Healthy Minds.¹³¹ Consular officials sent a complaint to the chancellor's office and requested a meeting with administrators while in town for other business. After conferring with resident China experts, administrators met with consular officials to hear their objections to the invitation. University administrators responded by stressing that faculty had a right to invite whomever they pleased to campus and that it was not the place of the chancellor, to whom the consulate sent its message, to interfere. They also emphasized the event was not political in nature.
- An official from the New York consulate contacted Smith College in 2007 to complain about a faculty member's invitation to the Dalai Lama to speak on campus.¹³² Faculty member Jay Garfield, who coordinated the event and maintains a personal friendship with the Tibetan spiritual leader, received a call from a consular official several months prior to the event requesting its cancellation. Garfield refused the request, prompting the official to remind him that proceeding with the event would "hurt the feelings of the Chinese people." Garfield retorted that the government might consider investing more

130. Interview with a former administrator at UC Berkeley, May 23, 2018.

131. Interview with an administrator at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Apr 30, 2018.

132. Interview with Jay Garfield, Jun 19, 2018.

in mental health resources for its people if their feelings were so easily hurt, a remark to which the official took umbrage. The official then threatened that serious consequences would befall Smith College if it did not cancel the event, including a ban prohibiting PRC students from applying to Smith, visa troubles for faculty wishing to do in-country research, and restrictions on PRC institutions cooperating with Smith. Garfield emphasized his institution's commitment to academic freedom and reiterated that the invitation to the Dalai Lama would stand. Noting that none of the threats materialized, Garfield said he believed such complaints are "totally ritualized," so universities "don't take it seriously."

Administrators and faculty interviewed in the above cases said they felt repelled by the propagandistic quality of PRC diplomats' complaints and tended to view these instances of outreach as ineffectual attempts at public diplomacy. It is also worth noting that in these cases every institution rebuffed PRC diplomats' requests. But GW, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and UC Berkeley are relatively large, well-funded universities. Would smaller American institutions more reliant on PRC students and cooperative initiatives for revenue also view PRC diplomats' complaints as mere annoyances? Or could they potentially perceive such complaints as ultimatums? Further study is required to answer these questions.

PRC diplomats may also express their displeasure to students in order to deter attendance at events featuring sensitive content or to make them more favorably disposed to the PRC's view on a given issue.

Consider the following cases:

- The Embassy sent an email chiding members of GW's chapter of the Global China Connection in late 2016 for holding an event about infrastructure development in Xinjiang, according to a student member from the PRC who viewed the email.¹³³ The email emphasized that the event was inappropriate and that students should refrain from holding similar events in the future.

133. Interview with a PRC student in the Washington, D.C. area, Dec 13, 2017.

- An embassy official gave a talk on U.S.-China relations to students the day before the Dalai Lama's 2013 visit to the University of Maryland in which he made remarks critical of the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, according to multiple faculty and staff then at the university.¹³⁴ "It was actually quite deft. It was not a direct attack on the Dalai Lama, who was not mentioned by name," according to Robert Daly, former director of the university's Maryland China Initiative.¹³⁵ "It was mentioned that a certain person would be speaking at the University of Maryland soon, and it was suggested that some things he said might not be completely credible." The audience comprised students from the PRC and others required to attend for class.

Students from the PRC may be especially sensitive to diplomats' warnings because it is well-known within the Chinese diaspora that PRC agents are sent to monitor attendance at events involving sensitive content.¹³⁶ It is not uncommon for PRC authorities to contact students' families back in China with a warning to refrain from engaging in similar activities in the future.

Delegations

PRC diplomats and government-affiliated entities have also arranged delegations of visiting officials and scholars to American universities for the ostensible purpose of exchanging views about sensitive subjects. Delegations focusing on Tibet, for example, have made numerous trips in recent years to Columbia, the University of Virginia (UVA), Harvard, and CU Boulder, according to faculty and administrators at each institution. Delegations focusing on Xinjiang have also visited Georgetown University at least twice in recent years.

Past delegation visits to Columbia, UVA, and CU Boulder have followed a similar format. The embassy or consulate first requests to meet with an

134. Interview with Scott Kastner, Nov 9, 2017, Margaret Pearson, Nov 8, 2017, and Robert Daly, Feb 26, 2018.

135. Interview with Robert Daly, Feb 26, 2018.

136. Peter Mattis, "An American Lens on China's Interference and Influence-Building Abroad," *Asan Forum*, Apr 30, 2018, <http://www.theasanforum.org/an-american-lens-on-chinas-interference-and-influence-building-abroad/>.

institution's Tibet experts. Delegation attendees then tour the institution's facilities and meet with resident experts for a series of presentations, one of which typically espouses official talking points on Tibetan development under PRC administration. By contrast, the Xinjiang delegations to Georgetown in 2016 and 2017 were proposed by researchers within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), a government think tank, rather than by consular officials. Delegation attendees included officials from the Foreign Ministry and the visits featured a set of scholarly presentations, one of which offered government boilerplate regarding the dangers of "Arabic style architecture" in Islamic mosques.¹³⁷

Most participating administrators and faculty interviewed for this study said that they found delegation visits choreographed and lacking in substance, but were resigned to fielding requests out of scholarly politeness. "We thought, OK, that's fine, they're just going to kind of give us their dog and pony show," said CU Boulder Center for Asian Studies Director Timothy Oakes regarding a 2016 delegation visit.¹³⁸ He noted that PRC delegates tried to create an informal atmosphere conducive to discussion but that their attempts fell flat in the absence of a substantive agenda. "Nobody really had anything to say, because we were like 'Well, what *are* you doing here?'" Oakes said. "And then of course they launched into this very long thing where they had a presentation about economic development in Tibet."

Delegation visits may serve as opportunities for information sharing, positive propaganda, networking with influential figures, or junket trips.¹³⁹ Georgetown faculty member James Millward, an expert on Xinjiang who hosted delegations in 2016 and 2017, said the visits could serve as useful venues for fact-finding and discussion. "I found all of these encounters positive, fully fitting the proper definition of *jiaoliu*," Millward said.¹⁴⁰ "Especially when smaller, [the delegations offer] a good opportunity to talk frankly."

137. Interview with James Millward, May 17, 2018.

138. Interview with Timothy Oakes, Apr 6, 2018.

139. Interview with a faculty member at a Research-1 University, Feb 28, 2018; Robert Barnett, Oct 30, 2017; Gray Tuttle, Apr 11, 2018; Timothy Oakes, Apr 6, 2018; and a staff member at Columbia, email message to the author, Jul 5, 2018.

140. 交流 [*jiaoliu*] "to communicate" or "to exchange," especially information. James Millward, email message to the author, May 19, 2018.

Delegations may also create media opportunities that PRC officials can use to create the impression that little daylight exists between Western and PRC academics on sensitive issues. In one case, a delegation arranged by Chicago consular officials to CU Boulder in 2016 tried to bring along a contingent of China Central Television (CCTV) journalists. Sensing that the delegation wanted to use the visit as an opportunity to portray a common stance on the Tibet question, Oakes turned down the delegation's request. Nonetheless, he emphasizing that CU Boulder's scholars were open to dialogue and the delegation visit proceeded successfully.

In other cases, the delegations strike observers as devoid of purpose, propagandistic or otherwise. "They really hardly put any energy or effort into showing up on campus and having a dialogue," Columbia faculty member Gray Tuttle said of past delegations at Harvard he had met as a graduate student.¹⁴¹ "It might be an exchange of name cards, that kind of thing. I've seen some of these things where the main people, like the leader of the delegation, won't show up to meetings...It's so half-hearted."

Pressure and Inducements to Influence Experts

PRC diplomats may also seek to influence how faculty at American universities approach sensitive content through pressure and inducements.

While visa denials are the most infamous tool by which the PRC exerts pressure on foreign faculty, diplomats may also explicitly press faculty to adopt a more favorable stance on a sensitive issue. In one case, for example, New York consular officials approached former Columbia faculty member Robert Barnett in 2004 and again in 2007 with requests that he "lean more in our direction" in his analyses of China's policy in Tibet.¹⁴² The officials, whom Barnett believed to be intelligence officers, threatened to stop speaking to him if he did not adopt a more favorable perspective. The warning is interesting because it suggests PRC diplomats not only believe their interactions with faculty are mutually recognized as channels for influencing PRC policymakers, but also that faculty fear the prospect of losing these channels.

141. Interview with Gray Tuttle, Apr 11, 2018.

142. Interview with Robert Barnett, Oct 30, 2017.

In another case, PRC diplomats sought to use a combination of pressure and inducements on a faculty member to dissuade him from co-producing a documentary about the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. City University of New York (CUNY) faculty member Ming Xia said that in 2009 he received a call from an official at the New York consulate who demanded he withdraw from the project to make *China's Unnatural Disaster: The Tears of Sichuan Province*, which was produced by HBO and nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary (Short Subject).¹⁴³ “We know this movie may give you financial rewards but we can give you much more,” the official told Xia, who rejected the consulate’s offer. “He also told me that I would pay the price if I went ahead with the movie and emphasized that [they] are going to do everything [they can] to stop this film.” Xia, who is now blacklisted, noted that the consulate probably assumed his PRC origin would make him vulnerable to intimidation. “They thought that I am from China, [so] I should have some understanding of the red line,” he said.

Such approaches can also occur outside of the territorial United States. For example, University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty member Edward Friedman said that Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials approached him while he was visiting the PRC for a conference in the early 2000s and offered him \$25,000 to write a book touting the PRC’s growing global profile.¹⁴⁴ The Ministry summoned Friedman to its offices for a meeting, where he was received by several officials who appeared to work in the Ministry’s public relations department. The senior official told him that they were aware Friedman held views critical of the CCP, but that they also knew he believed “China was winning in international relations.” The Ministry was interested in producing a short introduction to China and wanted Friedman to write it. He would be allowed to express both views so long as he emphasized the PRC’s success in foreign affairs. The Ministry would take care of the book’s publication and Friedman would be paid \$25,000 for his services. Friedman declined the offer, which he saw as a public relations ploy. The instance illustrates that the PRC keeps tabs on the political

143. Interview with Ming Xia, Jun 14, 2018.

144. Interview with Edward Friedman, Apr 13, 2018.

views of American university faculty and that it places a premium on co-opting foreign academics to amplify propagandist narratives.

While the activities of PRC diplomats seem consistent with policy documents and official remarks dating from the 1990s, it is also possible that PRC diplomats are motivated by personal ambitions or bureaucratic concerns. “I think oftentimes, individuals who work there look to advance their own career by scoring ‘political achievements,’ such as reporting to their boss that they have influenced a student event or academic activity,” said a faculty member in the CUNY system who has interacted with many PRC diplomats at the New York consulate over the years.¹⁴⁵ Consulates employ not just Foreign Ministry personnel but also staff “borrowed” from other government outlets and research institutes. Those borrowed staff are sometimes “the less useful and non-performing” staff who have been dispatched to serve overseas by their home organizations precisely because they are viewed as dispensable, the faculty member said. Borrowed consular officials may thus be keen to accumulate “political achievements” in the hopes of receiving a promotion, better treatment upon their return, or an extended period of leave so that their children can attend American schools.

PRC Government Retaliation against American Universities

The PRC government has retaliated in at least three instances against American universities after they hosted high-profile events featuring speakers or content deemed sensitive by PRC authorities. The retaliatory measures challenge American norms of academic freedom, which hold that no foreign or domestic government may tell universities who they can and cannot invite to campus.

Dalai Lama’s 2013 Visit to the University of Maryland

Groups of municipal- and provincial-level PRC government officials stopped attending training programs at the University of Maryland’s Maryland China Initiative after the Dalai Lama gave a speech on campus in 2013, according to former Maryland China Initiative director Robert Daly, who left

145. A faculty member in the CUNY system, email message to the author, Jun 13, 2018.

the university shortly afterward.¹⁴⁶ “We had come to rely almost entirely on training fees from China and therefore rely on the high opinion of the Foreign Experts Bureau, which had the ability to turn off the taps anytime they wanted,” he said. “China did essentially turn off the taps for a period of time.” Daly said he interpreted the move as a form of “limited retaliation” for the Dalai Lama’s visit because the Maryland China Initiative was not an academic office and the move did not threaten the university’s core academic activities.

Dalai Lama’s 2017 Visit to the University of California, San Diego

The University of California, San Diego has experienced multiple forms of retaliation against its cooperative programs and educational exchanges with the PRC since it hosted the Dalai Lama at its 2017 commencement, according to multiple administrators and faculty with direct knowledge of the impacted initiatives.

PRC authorities’ displeasure with UCSD became publicly known in September 2017, when faculty member Victor Shih tweeted what appeared to be a notice from the China Scholarship Council leaked on Chinese social media stating that the body would no longer process funding applications for PRC scholars wishing to study at the university.¹⁴⁷ Several PRC scholars expecting to study at UCSD had to cancel their plans after the CSC notified them it would not provide funding.¹⁴⁸ What has not been previously reported is that the fallout from the Dalai Lama’s visit took the form of subsequent PRC government communications and has affected UCSD’s history department as well as the Fudan-UC Center on Contemporary China.¹⁴⁹

UCSD faculty heard from their colleagues at PRC partner institutions in late summer 2017 that a PRC government entity, thought to be the Ministry of Education, had issued an oral directive ordering domestic universities to cease cooperating with UCSD. That summer, PRC colleagues at East China

146. Interview with Robert Daly, Feb 26, 2018.

147. Victor Shih (@vshih2), “China Scholarship Council puts a freeze on all CSC funded scholars to @GPS_UCSD, presumably due to Dalai Lama visit,” Twitter, Sept 16, 2017, <https://twitter.com/vshih2/status/908974180711960577>.

148. Interview with a faculty member at UCSD, Feb 21, 2018.

149. Interviews with faculty members at UCSD, Oct 6, 2017; Feb 6, 2018; Feb 21, 2018; UC-Fudan Center Director Richard Madsen, Nov 30, 2017; and off the record accounts.

Normal University (ECNU) notified counterparts in UCSD's history department that they had been ordered to terminate a collaborative arrangement under which the institutions hold an annual conference for graduate research and write letters for each other's graduate students to access in-country libraries and archives. However, ECNU colleagues contacted UCSD faculty again in January 2018, indicating in vague terms that the political problem had been resolved, creating the possibility that the upcoming summer conference which UCSD faculty had understood to be cancelled could in fact happen as planned. A UCSD/ECNU graduate student research conference took place at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in June 2018, suggesting that informal contacts continue under the PRC government's radar.¹⁵⁰

The Fudan-UC Center's PRC partners did not commit funds or renew the memorandum of understanding (MOU) sustaining the research center, which bridges Fudan University and the 10 University of California campuses. The deadline for the MOU renewal passed in December 2017 and, as of this writing, the Fudan-UC Center has still not received funds from the PRC side. PRC colleagues at Fudan had allocated funds per the MOU as of early 2018, but the Ministry of Education has prohibited the transfer of the funds, according to a faculty member at UCSD.¹⁵¹

While UCSD faculty were initially optimistic that the renewal and fund disbursement would occur before the center's Chinese co-director completes his term in the summer of 2018, recent developments have been discouraging. "I think with the Trump administration's tariffs, plus their perhaps [restriction of] visas for students who want to study in STEM fields, and the general overall temperature of the relationship, I don't see reasons for the Chinese side to be enthusiastic about changing their stance on this right now," one faculty member said.¹⁵² "We'll keep a presence here on this campus and try to maintain a relationship with [Fudan] as long as we can. If it comes to the point where there's no funding and no hope of it being renewed, then things will have to change. But for now, we're going to try to keep the fundamental relationship going."

150. A faculty member at UCSD, email message to the author, Jul 8, 2018.

151. Interview with a faculty member at UCSD, Jul 6, 2018.

152. Interview with a faculty member at UCSD, Jul 6, 2018.

Since signs of recrimination became apparent, UCSD has repeatedly sought clarification on the retaliatory measures and the status of its programs from the PRC government, but has received none, administrators and faculty said. Among these efforts was a letter that UC system president Janet Napolitano wrote to the Ministry of Education in December 2017. When asked why UCSD had not made the retaliation public, one faculty member said UCSD is seeking confirmation of the PRC government's policy before going public. "We will not yield to political pressure in so far as freedom of speech and campus freedom is concerned," the faculty member emphasized.¹⁵³ "It's not that we are being silent. We have been doing a lot of things."

Yang Shuping's 2017 Speech at the University of Maryland

The University of Maryland has experienced disruptions to its executive training programs since PRC student Yang Shuping's controversial June 2017 commencement speech, according to multiple university faculty.¹⁵⁴ The move targeted training programs run through the Office of China Affairs, the successor to the Maryland China Initiative overseen by Daly which suffered retaliation following the Dalai Lama's 2013 visit. A faculty member at UCSD, who has been in contact with the University of Maryland to share information regarding the experiences with retaliation, said his Maryland counterpart told him of the training program suspension.¹⁵⁵ He added that his Maryland counterpart believed the University of Maryland too was subject to a Ministry of Education directive ordering PRC partner institutions to cease cooperation with the university.

The Self-Censorship Debate

While self-censorship is an accepted fact of life within the PRC, whether faculty at American universities self-censor on American soil for fear of

153. Interview with a faculty member at UCSD, Feb 21, 2018.

154. Interviews with Scott Kastner, Nov 9, 2017, Margaret Pearson, Nov 8, 2017, and a faculty member at UCSD, Feb 21, 2018.

155. Interview with a faculty member at UCSD, Feb 21, 2018.

offending China is an open question. This study accordingly included several questions about self-censorship in the survey it gave to faculty.

The most elegant formulation of self-censorship has been offered by UC Irvine faculty member Perry Link, who described this dynamic as the “anaconda in the chandelier”:

If you live overseas you can run the risk of being cut off from your family and hometown. But most censorship does not directly involve such happenings. It involves *fear* of such happenings. By “fear” I do not mean a clear and present sense of panic. I mean a dull, well-entrenched leeriness that people who deal with the Chinese censorship system usually get used to, and eventually accept as part of their natural landscape. But the controlling power of the fear is impressive nonetheless. In sum, the Chinese government’s censorial authority in recent times has resembled not so much a man-eating tiger or fire-snorting dragon as a giant anaconda coiled in an overhead chandelier. Normally the great snake doesn’t move. It doesn’t have to. It feels no need to be clear about its prohibitions. Its constant silent message is “You yourself decide,” after which, more often than not, everyone in its shadow makes his or her large and small adjustments—all quite “naturally.” The Soviet Union, where Stalin’s notion of “engineering the soul” was first pursued, in practice fell far short of what the Chinese Communists have achieved in psychological engineering.¹⁵⁶

This study defined self-censorship to include refraining from making remarks in public, from pursuing certain research topics, or from associating with controversial figures for fear of upsetting the PRC government. Faculty were asked whether they had ever self-censored, why they self-censored, and what forms their self-censorship took. Faculty were also asked whether they believed self-censorship was a problem in China Studies in general.

156. Perry Link, “China: The Anaconda in the Chandelier,” *ChinaFile*, Apr 11, 2002, <http://www.chinafile.com/library/nyrb-china-archive/china-anaconda-chandelier>.

Faculty were quick to suggest other manifestations of self-censorship and a few said that what might be regarded by some as self-censorship was actually just greater self-awareness, which made them better teachers and researchers.

Motivations for Self-Censorship Among Respondents

Faculty respondents who said they engaged in self-censorship cited a variety of motivations.

The most commonly cited reasons were fears of being denied a visa to the PRC and the knock-on effects this might have on professional advancement. Respondents who named this concern often brought up prominent examples of blacklisted scholars, such as the “Xinjiang 13”¹⁵⁷ and editors of the “Tiananmen Papers.”¹⁵⁸ These fears were common not just among junior faculty but also among many senior faculty already protected by tenure.

Other faculty, particularly those working on ethnic borderlands issues, cited the safety of their research subjects as their primary concern. “I don’t really think it’s appropriate for me to indulge my capacity to say whatever I want to when it can come at the cost of people that I’ve been trying to help,” said a faculty member who works on Tibet at a Research 1 university on the East Coast.¹⁵⁹ University of Montana faculty member Eric Schluessel, who works on Xinjiang, said he always has to think about the political consequences his research might have for his contacts.¹⁶⁰ “That presence always shapes what I do to some degree,” Schluessel said. “I know

157. The “Xinjiang 13” is a group of American scholars who were blacklisted after contributing chapters to a 2004 book called *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*. See Daniel de Vise, “U.S. scholars say their book on China led to travel ban,” *The Washington Post*, Aug 20, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/us-scholars-say-their-book-on-china-led-to-travel-ban/2011/08/17/gIQAN3C9SJ_story.html?utm_term=.82195f9d4535. For a first-hand account, see James A. Millward, “Being Blacklisted by China, and What can be Learned from It,” *Medium*, Dec 28, 2017, <https://medium.com/@millwardj/being-blacklisted-by-china-and-what-can-be-learned-from-it-faf05eb8e1e2>.

158. The “Tiananmen Papers” are a compilation of secret PRC official documents relating to the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 edited and published in 2001 by American scholars Andrew Nathan and Perry Link, who were both blacklisted after the papers’ release. For more information, see Jonathan Mirsky, “These ‘Tiananmen Papers’ Look Real and Significant,” *The New York Times*, Jan 11, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/11/opinion/these-tiananmen-papers-look-real-and-significant.html>.

159. Interview with a faculty member at a Research-1 University on the East Coast, Feb 28, 2018.

160. Interview with Eric Schluessel, Mar 12, 2018.

that if I say certain things, if I write certain things, it's not so much that it can affect me, but it can affect people I know in China.”

In a related vein, faculty of PRC nationality or ethnic Chinese heritage sometimes said they self-censored for fear that critical remarks would cause trouble for family and friends based in the PRC. Faculty approached for interviews also offered this explanation in declining to speak with the author for this project, even when offered anonymity or the opportunity to speak off the record.

Some faculty said they self-censored because they feared that their own institutions would not stand up for them if they were denied a visa or became embroiled in a controversy involving offended students from the PRC. “I’m not trying to avoid upsetting the Chinese government as much as I am trying to not upset the students or upset the Chinese government in such a way that it uses influence on my superiors at my institution [in a manner] that would be negative for me,” said one faculty member at a California-based university who self-censors.¹⁶¹ CU Boulder faculty member Emily Yeh said that many faculty she knows believe their university’s administrators would not “have their back” in a dispute where academic freedom was at stake if doing so would compromise efforts to attract PRC students.¹⁶² “To the extent that they [universities] want to increase Chinese students, they see them as dollar signs,” Yeh said. “And that is a phenomenon everywhere, and that is really what drives administrators to not support professors who...may write things that piss people off.”

Faculty also cited peer pressure, feelings of awkwardness around colleagues, and a general desire to avoid “rocking the boat” as reasons they self-censored while engaging in academic activities in the United States.

Faculty who said they had self-censored previously but no longer did generally pointed to their acquisition of tenure, placement on the visa blacklist, or growing disillusionment with developments in the PRC as decisive factors. “I think being banned from China has been liberating since I no longer self-censor that way,” said University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty

161. Interview with a faculty member at a California-based university, May 18, 2018.

162. Interview with Emily Yeh, Feb 28, 2018.

member Edward Friedman.¹⁶³ Cornell faculty member Magnus Fiskesjo also said he had self-censored in the past but stopped after the PRC authorities abducted his friend Gui Minhai, a Hong Kong-based book seller, who remains in custody.¹⁶⁴ “I was more ‘careful’ in the past, but now I want to be more openly critical because of that,” Fiskesjo said.

Choice of Research Agenda

Academic freedom gives faculty and students the rights to study the topics they choose, draw conclusions consistent with their research findings, and make comparisons with the past. But interviews with numerous faculty conducted for this study show that some fear PRC retaliation against themselves or their interviewees so much that they avoid certain topics and time periods entirely. American universities may reinforce pressures on faculty to avoid sensitive research agendas by upholding high standards for research feasibility in their funding and hiring decisions.

This form of self-censorship is apparent in the approach of faculty who work on issues relating to the PRC’s ethnic borderlands. “I avoid [contemporary] Xinjiang like the plague,” said Indiana University East Asian Studies Center Director Michael Brose, who conducts historical research on fourth century Uyghurs. Columbia faculty member Gray Tuttle said that he and others in Tibet studies often shy away from contemporary topics for reasons of pragmatism. “There are definitely topics that I would know are completely off limits and therefore wouldn’t even consider doing,” he said.¹⁶⁵ “And with my own students as well—I can’t accept a student who’s going to research Tibetan dissident movements in China to do a seven or eight year PhD with me because [due to the PRC authorities’ restrictions] they are never going to be able to do it.”

Junior faculty may be more circumspect in taking on certain issues or time periods than senior faculty because their prospects for tenure ride on the outcome of research projects early in their careers. One junior faculty member at UC Berkeley echoed the remarks of many interviewed for this

163. Interview with Edward Friedman, Apr 13, 2018.

164. Interview with Magnus Fiskesjo, Apr 18, 2018.

165. Interview with Gray Tuttle, Apr 11, 2018.

project in laying out this career development dilemma.¹⁶⁶ “Someday, after I get tenure, there will be topics I write about and research that I would not write about and research now, when I’m not so concerned with gaining access or having ongoing access,” she said. “There will come a point when it’s more worth it to me to write more directly about some of these themes than it is now at the beginning of my career.” Graduate students may also be more vulnerable to pressure to alter their research agendas because they occupy a low place on the academic totem pole.

American universities may unwittingly reinforce these dynamics by emphasizing research feasibility when allocating grants to faculty and graduate students. Project funders may have no objection to the sensitive nature of proposed research topics, but nonetheless choose not to fund them because PRC officials are likely to prevent projects from being completed in accordance with American academic standards. The desire to fund projects that will culminate in a scholarly product is understandable, but one consequence is that faculty who recognize this preference may only submit proposals that have a high likelihood of receiving a grant, i.e. that are politically feasible to conduct in the PRC. “There are choices being made in terms of academic work that we could construe at some level as self-censorship, but it’s also part of the decision-making calculus that we go through all the time anyway in terms of saying ‘Can I really do this project? Is it really going to work? And can I really show that to someone I’m trying to get funding from to do this?’” said CU Boulder Center for Asian Studies Director Timothy Oakes.¹⁶⁷ “It’s a problem in that I think there’s a lack of hard-hitting critical scholarship because of that. It’s not like there isn’t some of it out there, but I think there could be more.”

American universities may also reinforce the taboo associated with certain research agendas by preferring to hire faculty who will not face political constraints on their scholarly output. A faculty member at UC Berkeley said she repeatedly faced skepticism from hiring panels when she applied for teaching positions in Chinese history.¹⁶⁸ “I had specific conversations with

166. Interview with a faculty member at UC Berkeley, Apr 16, 2018.

167. Interview with Timothy Oakes, Apr 6, 2018.

168. Interview with a faculty member at UC Berkeley, Apr 16, 2018.

a couple of the faculty committees who interviewed me who themselves expressed concern about whether I would be able to have an active research agenda given the sensitive nature of my topic, whether I would continue to be able to travel to China, whether I would be able to lead study abroad programs,” she said. “It became very clear to me that there’s also broad institutional disincentives to even support this kind of research topic by hiring, by funding graduate students who research these topics, except for a couple universities in the country.”

On the one hand, it makes sense that American universities wish to conserve financial resources by funding only those research projects which are feasible. On the other, by basing their judgments of feasibility on what PRC authorities are willing to allow in their own country, American universities are effectively reinforcing the PRC’s censorship of research on sensitive issues. Declining to support research involving sensitive content for reasons of feasibility harms Americans’ broad knowledge of China. UC Irvine faculty member Perry Link summarized the problem well in writing about Confucius Institutes’ censorship practices: “If we rule out not just June Fourth but all the other ‘sensitive’ issues—Xinjiang, Tibet, Taiwan, Falun Gong, Occupy Central, the Nobel Peace Prize, the spectacular private wealth of leaders’ families, the cynical arrests of rights advocates and sometimes their deaths in prisons, and more—we are left with a picture of China that is not only smaller than the whole but crucially different in nature.”¹⁶⁹

Reframing and Omitting Critical Language

Academic freedom also gives faculty and students the right to express themselves in terms consistent with their intellectual commitments, without fear of censorship or retaliation. But some faculty interviewed for this study said they are cautious about how they frame their research, even while engaged in academic activities in the United States, because they are worried about getting blacklisted or offending students from the PRC.

These concerns may affect how faculty use vocabulary, pose research questions, and frame critical research findings, according to numerous

169. *Chinafile*, “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes” [Part I].

interviewees. One faculty member at UC Berkeley explained that she sought to preempt negative reactions to her work on borderlands by couching her research questions “in layers of complexity and subtlety.”¹⁷⁰ A faculty member at James Madison University who works on Tibet said he and his colleagues consciously adjust the terminology they use, even when producing papers and presentations within the United States.¹⁷¹ “I think it’s something that we all regret because it is contrary to what I do believe many of us have as a commitment to academic freedom and liberal academic tradition,” the faculty member said. “Many of us are frustrated by the reality that we participate in this self-censorship because we’re committed to working in China.” Drexel University faculty member Rebecca Clothey, who works on Xinjiang, explained that she felt a similar pressure to be cautious for several years after a PRC national heckled her during a university talk about Uyghur higher education.¹⁷² “For a few years after that I was a lot more careful in the way that I presented my work...in fact people told me they found [my work] too pro-China,” she said. “That isn’t the way they put it, but that the point I was making was too subtle, people told me it was too subtle. And the reason why it was subtle is because I didn’t want to get yelled at.” In short, some faculty *do* pursue sensitive topics and make critical arguments, but because they go to such lengths to hedge their language, their contributions to their academic fields are obscured.

Another consequence of these concerns is that some faculty may refrain from making certain types of criticism in their publications or within the classroom at all. A faculty member at the University of Denver, who is ethnically Chinese, said there are some things he will not say publicly because he knows they would be interpreted as so explicitly anti-China that the country would shut its door to him permanently.¹⁷³ “If you’re an American scholar and China’s just the subject you study, there’s still the concern you’ll be cut off from data. That still hurts, but there’s a lack of the emotional dimension,” he said. “It’s hard for scholars of Chinese ancestry.” University of

170. Interview with a faculty member at UC Berkeley, Apr 16, 2018.

171. Interview with a faculty member at James Madison University, Apr 3, 2018.

172. Interview with Rebecca Clothey, Apr 12, 2018.

173. Interview with a faculty member at the University of Denver, Dec 7, 2017.

Wisconsin-Madison faculty member Edward Friedman, who is now black-listed, said he too could think of times early in his career where he had gone out of his way to avoid naming a specific leader or the party as the “villain” in his publications.¹⁷⁴ At minimum, faculty may spend considerable time weighing the risks of framing and presenting certain types of material. “Because I always have to think about these issues it does have a chilling effect on my work,” said University of Montana faculty member Eric Schluessel, who works on Xinjiang.¹⁷⁵

Self-censorship is sometimes evident to fellow colleagues. University of Wisconsin faculty member Louise Young said that she was stunned when she saw a colleague shy away from discussing the contentious politics surrounding tourism and roadbuilding in Tibet during a lecture at the university in 2016.¹⁷⁶ “The presentation just seemed really weird to me because it was completely missing the context, the politics of Chinese hegemony, that this was an imperialistic policy,” Young said. She asked a question during the Q&A directly addressing the political context and was disappointed when her colleague demurred. “I later discussed it with Chinese history colleagues and they said ‘Oh no you can’t talk about that, you never know who’s in the audience,’” she said. “And I was just absolutely shocked that they would justify that level of self-censorship. We’re in this tiny town in the middle of the country and the fact that the [Chinese] government is reaching over here and chilling a discussion about something like this seems completely obvious.”

Faculty anxiety about being perceived as overly critical of the PRC can also be obvious to the students they teach. A student from the PRC who studied at Pennsylvania State University recalled that his professor told students he or she wished to avoid discussion of sensitive issues during a history class in 2013.¹⁷⁷ “This particular professor told us he or she cannot be very critical of the Chinese government, especially on very sensitive issues—such as what happened in the Tiananmen Square, or the treatment

174. Interview with Edward Friedman, Nov 29, 2017.

175. Interview with Eric Schluessel, Mar 12, 2018.

176. Interview with Louise Young, Jun 14, 2018.

177. Interview with a PRC national student formerly at Pennsylvania State University, Feb 13, 2018.

of Falun Gong—because as an American scholar whose sole academic subjects are on China, he or she might go back to China to do field study, to interview people, and do all sorts of things in order to further his or her academic goals,” the student said. The student observed that his peers seemed sympathetic to the faculty member’s explanation. “I think academic freedom is all relative,” the student said, drawing a questionable parallel between academic practices in the United States and the PRC. “If you were a Chinese scholar or a Chinese expert on contemporary issues, you must take account of the deterrent effect of the Chinese government forcing you to make certain statements.”

Several faculty also noted that they sometimes self-censor for fear of upsetting colleagues who hold views more amenable to the PRC. One faculty member at CU Boulder said he believed some professional organizations for academics in the United States were engaging in self-censorship because of the growing presence of PRC nationals holding leadership positions.¹⁷⁸ “That’s great and they should be,” the faculty member said. “But the terms of conversation, academic priorities, those kinds of things, then get moved in a certain direction that silences other voices or precludes other kinds of conversations that might be had about, ‘Well I think our organization should weigh in on this issue, I think we should be saying this about Tibet, I think we should be saying this about Taiwan.’ People are not bringing those conversations to the table because they don’t want to have that awkward moment with their colleagues. It’s as simple as that.” Another faculty member at a large public university said the awkwardness factor heavily affects her calculations of what she can say around colleagues.¹⁷⁹ “A lot of people would say they try to uphold academic freedom but to be honest with you, my sense is that especially when we touch on certain issues that we know might hurt feelings or step on some people’s toes...people do get a little bit careful about what they are saying,” she said.

178. Interview with a faculty member at CU Boulder, Apr 6, 2018.

179. Interview with a faculty member at a large public university, Jan 22, 2018.

Association with Figures and Events Deemed Objectionable by PRC Authorities

Academic freedom is compromised when faculty and students feel they cannot freely associate without potential retaliation. Attempts to avoid associating with people and attending events that may invite retaliation can thus be understood as forms of self-censorship. Most experts accept this as a reality of conducting field work within the PRC, but there has been little acknowledgement that such self-censorship occurs when faculty engage in academic activities *within the United States*.

Several faculty interviewed for this study said they actively avoid associating with certain people and events in the United States because they fear retaliation by the PRC authorities. A faculty member at a Research-1 university said she takes pains to avoid interacting with the Uyghur activist community in the United States, particularly members of the World Uyghurs Congress, for fear she will be denied admittance to Xinjiang.¹⁸⁰ Another faculty member at Harvard, who is PRC-born, cited similar concerns in explaining why she shuns public interactions with the Chinese dissident community.¹⁸¹ Some faculty members may even feel uncomfortable about the prospect of participating in scholarly events involving sensitive content. For example, Boston University (BU) faculty member Frank Korom said two Sinologist colleagues rejected his invitation to participate in a conference he planned to host at BU about Tibet in 2008.¹⁸² Korom's colleagues emphasized they could lose their research access to PRC if the authorities discovered their participation in a conference about such a sensitive topic, he said. Considering their status as senior faculty, Korom found their opposition surprising and disappointing. The conference never got off the ground in large part because of reluctance from would-be participants.

Peer Pressure to Censor Sensitive Academic Activity

Cultural norms and practices within the academic community may also contribute to self-censorship.

180. Interview with a faculty member at a Research-1 university, Feb 20, 2018.

181. Interview with a faculty member at Harvard, Mar 14, 2018.

182. Interview with Frank Korom, Feb 21, 2018.

Senior faculty advising junior faculty and graduate students may counsel against pursuing sensitive research topics or explicitly criticizing the PRC for fear that a visa denial may stunt an otherwise promising career. In one case, a former faculty member at a major Midwestern university said that his advisors counseled him to drop a research project on PRC government transfer payments to ethnic minorities in 2007. “They were just like, ‘Look, if you publish this you’ll never go back to China, or you’ll be banned from China for quite some time,’” the faculty member said.¹⁸³ “So I dropped the project.”

Administrators may also encourage self-censorship for the sake of maintaining broader institutional relationships with the PRC. Administrative concern may at times manifest itself in explicit conversations with faculty. Consider the case of Chinese dissident and human rights lawyer Teng Biao, who was a visiting scholar at Harvard Law School from 2014 to 2015. Teng said that an influential person at Harvard dissuaded him from holding a talk on campus with another well-known dissident, Chen Guangcheng, because it would reflect poorly on Harvard given president Drew G. Faust’s upcoming visit with Xi Jinping in mid-March 2015.¹⁸⁴ The influential person expressed concern about the impact a public talk with Chen could have on Harvard’s cooperative programs with China and as well as the potential problems that could arise for the university if it hosted Chen, alluding to the blind dissident’s acrimonious departure from New York University in 2013.¹⁸⁵ The influential person said he had already taken some of the heat for Teng’s appointment, since the PRC government was not happy about Harvard hosting a dissident. He first warned Teng to cancel the talk on February 11, 2015 and again on March 10, 2015 after learning that Teng had persisted in making arrangements. The influential person made Teng promise to keep the conversation a secret

183. Interview with a former faculty member at a major Midwestern university, Feb 7, 2018.

184. Interview with Teng Biao, Dec 15, 2017, Feb 9, 2018, and diary entries from Feb 11, 2015 and Mar 10, 2015. For Faust’s visit with Xi, see: John S. Rosenberg, “Presidents Xi and Faust Confer in China,” *Harvard Magazine*, Mar 16, 2015, <https://harvardmagazine.com/2015/03/harvard-president-faust-china-president-xi>.

185. Peter Shadbolt, “Chinese dissident Chen Guangcheng: NYU is forcing me out,” *CNN*, Jun 17, 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/17/us/chen-nyu/index.html>.

and indicated that Harvard might be willing to host a similar talk with Chen after some time had passed. Believing he had no alternative, Teng wrote to Chen and his co-organizers to cancel the talk, which would have been held through a non-Harvard organization in a Harvard classroom at the beginning of April. While attempts to reach Chen for verification were unsuccessful, Teng contemporaneously recorded the details of the private meetings with the influential person in his diary and shared the diary entry with this study's author.

There can also be substantial ambiguity in administrator-faculty encounters regarding permission or funding for academic activities involving sensitive content. A 2014 email exchange between an administrator and faculty member at an Ivy League institution regarding an event about the Umbrella Movement¹⁸⁶ in Hong Kong, which the author viewed, is illustrative of this ambiguity.¹⁸⁷

The faculty member initially approached the administrator for funds to sponsor a “teach-in” about the Umbrella Movement. The proposal included plans to invite several Umbrella Movement activists and elicit participation by members of the Chinese diaspora and Chinese democracy movement living in New York City. The faculty member framed the event as “action-oriented.”

“I think it would be inappropriate for the East Asia program to take explicit political positions or be involved in any overtly political events,” the administrator wrote back, rejecting the funding request. “The East Asia Program is a university-wide program and represents [Ivy League institution] *in many aspects of the university's engagement with East Asia and I hope that you understand the complexity of our position.*” (Italics added for emphasis.)

Acknowledging the administrator's concern, the faculty member offered to alter the event so that it did not appear overtly partisan. “I am then wondering if we were to change the tenor of the event if that would make a difference,” he wrote. “Superficially we could call it a ‘seminar’ or a ‘debate’

186. The Umbrella Movement refers to a series of street protests that occurred in Hong Kong in late 2014 after the release of a decision regarding reforms to the city's electoral system that was widely perceived as giving the CCP the ability to preemptively screen and eliminate politically objectionable candidates.

187. Interview with a faculty member at an Ivy League institution, May 3, 2018, and email messages to the author from Sept 6, 2014 to Sept 9, 2014.

rather than a teach-in. More substantively, in choosing speakers I could reach out to groups on campus that we might presume would hold differing opinions, e.g. not just the Hong Kong student association but also mainland Chinese groups.”

The administrator did not find the faculty member’s offer satisfactory. “I understand the importance of the topic and the urgency of the situation,” he wrote. “My concern is whether the event is substantively academic enough (*and fits with our educational missions*).” (Italics added for emphasis.) The administrator told the faculty member he might reconsider if he provided an academic justification for the event, included the names of potential participants, and submitted the proposal to other China Studies faculty for consideration. The faculty member did not pursue the matter further and the event was never held.

This case highlights the potential conflict between the imperative to uphold the quality of academic activity and desires to preserve institutional interests. On the one hand, the faculty’s initial framing of the event as a “teach-in” attended primarily by Chinese democracy activists might justifiably have led the administrator to conclude that the event lacked scholarly merit. On the other hand, the administrator’s conspicuous mention of other university initiatives and plural educational missions raise questions about the role such considerations may play in decisions to provide funding for faculty-organized events involving sensitive content. The faculty member noted in an interview that he found the decision odd because this was not the first time controversial figures had been invited to campus to speak in a non-scholarly fashion. Indeed, American universities routinely invite advocates to speak on their campuses, consistent with their mission to engage students in thoughtful discussion about controversial issues.

Chilling Effect in the Classroom

Students at American universities have the right to express themselves in ways consistent with their intellectual commitments, without fear of censorship or retaliation. However, some faculty said they believe many of their students from the PRC do not enjoy academic freedom in the classroom because they are afraid someone will report them to the authorities if they are seen to engage in sensitive academic activities.

Many faculty respondents said this “chilling effect” manifests itself in the reluctance of PRC students to voice opinions or participate in class discussion about sensitive topics.

When University of Minnesota faculty member Jason McGrath tried to engage PRC students in his 2014 survey course in discussion about a film widely interpreted as an allegorical criticism of corruption in China, he was met with silence.¹⁸⁸ Frustrated, McGrath gently scolded the class until a student from the PRC who normally participated spoke up. “We’re uncomfortable talking about that because we don’t know who might be listening to us,” the student said. For McGrath, “that was the first time that I sort of suddenly had the realization that the students in my class, some of them at least are very aware—if it’s a large class with a lot of Chinese nationals and they don’t know them all—that they might be self-censoring what they say because they’re worried about who else in the class might be listening, and who they might be talking to.”

UC Berkeley faculty member Crystal Chang Cohen faced similar frustration when she tried to encourage students from the PRC to speak openly about their views during a class panel discussion in 2017.¹⁸⁹ “The PRC students in my class never will raise their hand and [articulate] an openly critical view of the party,” she said, noting this chilling effect. “They might sometimes have those conversations with me in office hours but they just won’t say it in a public setting.”

In other cases, students from the PRC may ask for accommodation. A faculty member in the University of Indiana system, for example, recalled an instance in the 2012–2013 academic year during his survey course on Asian religions in which a student from the PRC asked him to close the door when the faculty member started showing a film about Falun Gong.¹⁹⁰ The faculty member asked for the student’s rationale and the student said he did not want others from the PRC to see him watching the film.

Students from the PRC may also approach faculty privately to discuss the constraints they perceive on expression in the classroom. A faculty

188. Interview with Jason McGrath, Mar 31, 2018.

189. Interview with Crystal Chang Cohen, Jun 7, 2018.

190. Interview with a faculty member in the University of Indiana system, Dec 11, 2018.

member at Harvard, for example, said that at least three of her students from the PRC disclosed during office hours that their parents warned them against discussing politics in class in case another student reported them to the authorities.¹⁹¹

Breaking this informal taboo can be nerve-wracking. When a student from the PRC let slip a remark about Xi Jinping in one of BU faculty member Eugenio Menegon's classes, he immediately said "Oops!" aloud, seeming to recognize he had erred.¹⁹² This anecdote might seem comical, but it is a telling example of the pressure students from the PRC may feel to appear ideologically correct, even though they are thousands of miles from home.

Counterargument 1: The Benefits of Greater "Self-Awareness"

Not every faculty member surveyed agreed with the idea that self-censorship is a problem in China Studies. A few faculty members emphasized that they do not self-censor but rather are more "self-aware" while teaching classes with high enrollments of students from the PRC.

Such self-awareness can be beneficial pedagogically because it reminds faculty to avoid catering to American preconceptions about the PRC and to be more rigorous in defending their claims. "Certainly now I'm aware that half of my students are from China and so I try to be careful when I talk about it not to speak of it as an Other," said University of Minnesota faculty member Jason McGrath, who teaches four China courses a year with large proportions of students from the PRC.¹⁹³ American University faculty member Justin Jacobs also said that the presence of PRC students in his classes forces him to be a better scholar because he has to go the extra mile to persuade them he is not hostile by default in his scholarly interpretations.¹⁹⁴

University of Wisconsin faculty member Louise Young said that she had probably self-censored in the past but believes that the neutrality with which she presents certain issues in class does not detract from students'

191. Interview with a faculty member at Harvard, Mar 14, 2018.

192. Interview with Eugenio Menegon, Mar 1, 2018.

193. Interview with Jason McGrath, Jan 31, 2018.

194. Interview with Justin Jacobs, Mar 27, 2018.

learning experience. “I’d be very careful about how I talked about issues like the contemporary debates over the Nanjing Massacre. I’m very careful how I talk about Chinese government policies and the kind of rivalries between Japan and China,” she said, noting areas especially sensitive for students from the PRC. “I don’t get perceived as being pro-Japan. But I don’t know that that’s such a problem. I think I generally try to keep my political views a little opaque and I try to present things from various sides.”

For faculty hoping to influence policymaking in China, phrasing issues the right way is essential because overtly critical language may alienate PRC government officials. University of Montana affiliate faculty member Richard Harris, who has done research on ecological issues in Tibet, said altering one’s language was part-and-parcel of doing research on China.¹⁹⁵ “Sometimes self-censorship is not so much ‘I’m bending to the will of the awful Chinese government’ so much as it is ‘Hey I want to be heard, so how do I say what I want to say in a way that I want to say it and that is heard and not dismissed?’,” he said.

Counterargument 2: Self-Censorship is Not a Problem

It is important to note that a large proportion of faculty surveyed for this study said they do not believe self-censorship is a problem in China Studies. Some did not rule out the possibility that phenomena of the type reported in the Australian media might occur on American campuses, but said they had seen no evidence of it among their own colleagues and acquaintances. Others said they were confident in the strength of American institutions and most faculty’s commitment to academic freedom. Still others pointed out that most pressure to circumscribe speech about China in their classes comes not from PRC students but rather from American students who identify with the far right or far left of the domestic political spectrum. And a few faculty responded to the question of whether self-censorship is a problem in China Studies with a simple answer: “Not yet.”

195. Interview with Richard Harris, Jun 13, 2018.

Infringements by PRC Students and Other Campus Actors

This study found a number of instances in which students from the PRC sought to influence or induce the cessation of academic activities involving sensitive content at American universities. These efforts ranged from demands to remove materials containing sensitive content from university spaces to boycotts of events involving controversial speakers.

Demands to Remove Sensitive Materials

Students from the PRC have demanded the removal of research, promotional, and decorative materials involving sensitive content from university spaces. Such moves challenge American norms of academic freedom that hold that universities should protect the expression of diverse perspectives.

American students themselves have often demanded the removal of “triggering” content from university spaces on political grounds. Hofstra University students protesting “white supremacy” pressured administrators in 2018 to remove a statue of Thomas Jefferson near the school’s student center,¹⁹⁶ while their peers at Princeton University two years earlier successfully lobbied administrators to take down an “unduly celebratory” wall-size photograph of Woodrow Wilson from a dining hall.¹⁹⁷ This study found several instances of this common student behavior “with Chinese characteristics,” that is, involving PRC students seeking to align academic activity with PRC political preferences. Universities should be aware of the potential for increases in such activities given the large uptick in PRC nationals studying at American universities since 2008.

Consider the following cases:

196. “Hofstra students hold protest, counter protest over Thomas Jefferson statue,” ABC 7 News, Mar 30, 2018, <http://abc7ny.com/education/hofstra-students-hold-protest-over-thomas-jefferson-statue/3281908/>.

197. Mary Hui and Susan Svrluga, “Princeton to remove ‘overly celebratory’ mural of Woodrow Wilson,” *The Washington Post*, Apr 27, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/04/27/princeton-to-remove-overly-celebratory-mural-of-woodrow-wilson/?utm_term=.e96cc7ffced9.

- Members of the CSSA running the China table at an international students' cultural festival at CU Boulder in 2002 demanded that festival organizers edit a "fact sheet" produced by participating Tibetans about Tibet's culture and history, a CU Boulder staff member with direct knowledge of the incident said.¹⁹⁸ According to a university police report obtained through an open records request, the CSSA objected to the idea that Tibetan students be allowed a separate booth at all, contending that "the booth should be identified as the Autonomous Region, Tibet, China."¹⁹⁹
- A male PRC student approached a staff member working in the GW library around 2017 to complain about some of the Japanese-language books in the collection, according to a staff member, who no longer works there.²⁰⁰ The student expressed anger that an American library would contain books "denying" the Nanjing massacre and other historical evidence. He demanded that the offending books be removed, asked to speak with the manager, and said he would file an official complaint. According to the former staff member, GW librarians working in the Chinese and Japanese collections conferred about the issue. Though they acknowledged the sensitivity of historical portrayals of the issue, they agreed that it was not their place to remove the books from the collection and decided to take no further action. If the student continued to press the issue, the librarians would consider putting a warning note on the books themselves to indicate the existence of potentially upsetting content inside, the former staff member said.
- Three students from the PRC approached Smith College faculty member Jay Garfield in the 2012–2013 academic year to request that he remove a Tibetan flag from his office on the grounds that its display

198. Interview with a staff member at CU Boulder, Mar 28, 2018.

199. University of Colorado Boulder Police Department, *Harassment Incident Summary Report*, Apr 13, 2002, obtained May 9, 2018.

200. Interview with a former staff member in the George Washington University library, Dec 18, 2017.

“hurt their feelings.”²⁰¹ Garfield asked the students, with whom he had never interacted and who were not enrolled in any of his classes, how the flag’s display could have hurt their feelings considering that they had never been in his office before. The students replied that they had become offended after hearing about the flag from other PRC students at Smith, who also objected to the display. Garfield replied that he displays the flag because he teaches Tibetan studies and noted that decorating his office was his prerogative, consistent with the institution’s commitment to academic freedom. The students then told Garfield that they considered the flag a form of “hate speech.” After Garfield disagreed with the hate speech characterization, the students left his office without incident.

- Han Chinese students from the PRC and Tibetan students at Mount Holyoke College tore down each other’s fliers regarding Chinese policies in Tibet in 2008 after campus tensions erupted over the disruption of the Olympic torch relay, according to faculty member Calvin Chen.²⁰² Faculty later convened a forum for students to discuss their grievances, drawing a large crowd.

Students from the PRC may feel uncomfortable in the presence of sensitive materials because they have grown up in a country that promotes radically different interpretations of historical figures and events. Just as some American students view the display of the Confederate flag as a proxy for racist attitudes, many students from the PRC view Tibet’s flag and portraits of the Dalai Lama as reflections of sympathy for “terrorists” in the western region.²⁰³ PRC students’ reactions are arguably natural, and some students find ways to express their discomfort without challenging American academic norms. For example, a graduate student from the PRC asked Smith College faculty member Jay Garfield in 2018 if it would be possible to meet

201. Interview with Jay Garfield, Jun 19, 2018.

202. Interview with Calvin Chen, Dec 15, 2017.

203. Tania Branigan, “Dalai Lama’s prayers for Tibetans ‘terrorism in disguise’, China says,” *CNN*, Oct 19, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/19/dalai-lama-prayers-tibetans-terrorism>.

in a place other than Garfield's office because the Tibetan flag and portraits of the Dalai Lama made it "a hostile environment" and an "uncomfortable place to be."²⁰⁴ In doing so, the graduate student acknowledged that Garfield had a right to decorate his office as he pleased but made his preference to meet elsewhere clear. A compromise location was agreed upon and the meeting took place without incident, illustrating one way in which faculty and students from the PRC may negotiate contentious issues.

Pressure to Alter Terminology or Teaching Materials Involving Sensitive Content

Demands on faculty and students to alter their language or teaching materials in ways inconsistent with their intellectual commitments pose a challenge to American norms of academic freedom. This study found several cases similar to the reported Australian incidents, which featured tensions over language or teaching materials involving sensitive content, including maps.²⁰⁵

This study found one case in which PRC students explicitly challenged a faculty member's right to portray academic material with the terminology she saw fit. A faculty member at Pennsylvania State University said that in 2017 two students from the PRC approached her after class to ask that she stop using the word "country" to describe Taiwan on the grounds that it made them "uncomfortable."²⁰⁶ The faculty member explained the historical and political reasons underlying her choice to describe Taiwan as a "country" and told the students she would not adjust her language. The students did not further contest her usage of the word and remained enrolled for rest of the course.

204. Interview with Jay Garfield, Jun 19, 2018.

205. The PRC recently announced that all digital maps provided in China be stored on servers within its borders and has cracked down on foreign companies, including airlines, the Marriott International hotel chain and the fashion retailer Zara for listing Taiwan and Tibet as countries on its websites. See David Z. Morris, "China Tightens Control of Online Maps," *Fortune*, Dec 18, 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/12/18/china-online-maps/> and Brenda Goh and John Ruwitch, "China cracks down on foreign companies calling Taiwan, other regions countries," *Reuters*, Jan 12, 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-china-delta/china-cracks-down-on-foreign-companies-calling-taiwan-other-regions-countries-idUKKBN1F10R3>.

206. Interview with a faculty member at Pennsylvania State University, Feb 5, 2018.

Much like a 2017 incident at the University of Sydney in which students criticized an instructor's use of a map showing India in control of disputed territories, students from the PRC at UC Berkeley complained in 2013 after a faculty member administered a map quiz that portrayed Taiwan as an entity distinct from the PRC.²⁰⁷ UC Berkeley faculty member Crystal Chang Cohen said she learned of the PRC students' complaints from her teaching assistants, who administered the quiz to students in sections of her large Asian studies survey course. Cohen recalled that the complaints pertained to the map's alleged "distortion of facts," since PRC students felt that "of course Taiwan is a part of China." The faculty member noted that she preempted complaints in subsequent years by telling her students they could write "Taiwan, province of China" on the map quiz if they wished given the contested nature of the territorial claim.

In another case, a student from the PRC complained in 2016 to a faculty member teaching a politics course at a small liberal arts college on the East Coast that the course readings on corruption in China did not "shed a light on the merits of the Chinese system."²⁰⁸ The student's complaint followed an argument in class with an American student, who had made somewhat chauvinistic claims about the superiority of American democracy, the faculty member recalled. The student from the PRC said that changing the readings would be required to change the American student's impression of China. The faculty member demurred, noting that it was not the mission of her course to change students' values and that the readings on Chinese corruption offered a basis for productive academic discussion.

These incidents illustrate some of the ways in which faculty at American universities may come under pressure to align their teaching with the political preferences of the PRC. But universities have not always resisted pressure from PRC students offended by academic materials involving sensitive content. PRC students complained to the University of Washington in 2018 regarding a scholarship application's antiquated reference to a region in Northeast China on the grounds that the reference was culturally

207. Interview with Crystal Chang Cohen, Jun 7, 2018.

208. Interview with a faculty member at a small liberal arts college on the East Coast, Jun 6, 2018.

insensitive.²⁰⁹ Literature advertising the Statira Biggs Scholarship, established in 1952, stated that applicants from Japan, Korea and “Manchuria” were eligible to apply. Campus controversy appeared driven by ambiguity over the translation of the historical term, which could variously refer to a region in Northeast China, an older version of the Manchu people’s lands, or the puppet government of Manchukuo established by the imperial Japanese army when it colonized the area prior to World War II.

University of Washington offices changed the term “Manchuria” to “Northeast China” in all literature relating to the scholarship and apologized to the student body in an email. “Words have an impact. When we encouraged students to apply for the scholarship using this original description, we caused harm to members of our community and deeply regret doing so,” the university office said.²¹⁰ “Although we recognize that no one on the receiving end of hurtful words should have to be the one to point them out, we are grateful to those who had the courage to let us know the pain we caused so that we can resolve the issue as it relates to this scholarship, and take steps to avoid making similar mistakes in the future.” One PRC student interviewed by the school newspaper in the aftermath of the controversy expressed satisfaction with its resolution.²¹¹ “I believe it sets a good example of the kind of intercommunication and interactions between the Chinese student community and the school,” he said.

Of course, American students too challenge academic freedom by requesting that faculty add “trigger warnings” to their syllabi, refrain from using certain words, or avoid teaching controversial issues altogether because discussion may provoke feelings of distress. In a 2014 *New Yorker* article entitled “The Trouble with Rape Law,” Harvard faculty member Jeannie Suk Gersen pointed to examples of these troubling behaviors by

209. Sarah Corn, “Office of Student Financial Aid corrects outdated, charged reference to Northeast China,” *The Daily of the University of Washington*, published March 6, 2018, accessed April 2, 2018, http://www.dailyuw.com/news/article_5066e834-20db-11e8-8b15-5756ad2d85ba.html.

210. “February 16: An Apology,” International Student Services (ISS) Update, University of Washington, Feb 16, 2018, https://iss.washington.edu/?wysija-page=1&controller=email&action=view&email_id=215&wysijap=subscriptions&user_id=5.

211. Corn, “Office of Student Financial Aid corrects outdated, charged reference to Northeast China.”

law students opposed to discussion of rape and sexual misconduct in the context of their criminal law courses.²¹²

Interruptions, Heckling, and Aggressive Argumentation During Sensitive Academic Activities

While students are entitled to challenge faculty in the realm of ideas, the manner in which challenges are expressed matters. Expressions that are disruptive, coercive, or otherwise hinder faculty and students' ability to express their views are inconsistent with most understandings of academic freedom.

Consider the following cases:

- A former faculty member at a major Midwestern university said he was heckled by a PRC student during a presentation about PRC government transfer payments to ethnic minorities in 2007.²¹³ As the faculty member presented his finding that only certain minorities received additional subsidies, a female PRC student in the audience stood up and angrily interrupted him. “Your finding is impossible! The Chinese government cares about all ethnic minorities—in fact the Chinese government is very generous to them!” the faculty member recalled her saying. When the faculty member subsequently presented the same paper at a meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, he was interrupted by several Tibetans in attendance who angrily argued that the PRC government had given them little support.
- UC Berkeley faculty member Crystal Chang Cohen said that in 2016 she observed one student in her course aggressively heckle another for his remarks about the PRC's portrayal of imperial Japan's wartime atrocities.²¹⁴ As part of the class discussion about Japan's actions in China and Korea during World War II, Cohen asked her students to share what they had learned about the period in school. She called on one student from the PRC, who recalled that his early education was

212. Jeannie Suk Gersen, “The Trouble with Rape Law,” *The New Yorker*, Dec 15, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trouble-teaching-rape-law>.

213. Interview with a former faculty member at a major Midwestern university, Feb 7, 2018.

214. Interview with Crystal Chang Cohen, Jun 7, 2018.

very anti-Japanese but said that he recognized the political motives behind this portrayal upon moving to the United States. An ethnically-Chinese female student then stood up and heckled the male student in front of the entire class, which had several hundred people enrolled. “She verbally criticized him for having this thought,” said Cohen, recalling that the woman derided the male student as unpatriotic. “It was very disruptive, all the other students were confused as to what was going on. And the young man was so rattled.”

- A faculty member in the University of Indiana system recalled an incident in the 2012–2013 academic year in which someone who appeared to be a PRC national showed up to his Asian religions course on the day the faculty member lectured on Tibetan religions and denounced the Dalai Lama after the faculty member opened the floor to questions. The visitor, who stood up and spoke for several minutes, called the Dalai Lama a liar who led his followers to believe that they had cancer so that they would immolate themselves on his behalf.²¹⁵
- A faculty member at a California-based university said that someone who appeared to be a PRC national interrupted and heckled a guest speaker critical of the PRC government during a macroeconomics class in 2008.²¹⁶ The faculty member noticed the unfamiliar visitor because his class was small and he knew all his students by name. The visitor interrupted the speaker’s presentation and made “derogatory remarks directed at the guest speaker for his disloyalty to China by criticizing the communist regime.” The faculty member and students watched the speaker and heckler engage in a heated debate until the visitor left several minutes later. “It was very uncomfortable for everyone else in the classroom,” the faculty member recalled. “The non-Chinese students were left aghast.”
- University of Pennsylvania faculty member Arthur Waldron said he was interrupted by several people who appeared to be PRC nationals

215. Interview with a faculty member in the University of Indiana system, Dec 11, 2017.

216. Interview with a faculty member at a California-based university, May 17, 2018.

during a talk he gave on India-China relations at the Wharton School in recent years. The students accused Waldron of insulting Chinese culture and of Sinophobia.²¹⁷

- An argument broke out between PRC students and Taiwanese students over Taiwan's status in a class at the University of Washington in 2016, according to faculty member David Bachman. "The vehemence with which some of the Chinese students affirmed their view that Taiwan was an inalienable part of China came across to me as very intimidating and visceral to other students from Taiwan in the class," Bachman said.²¹⁸ After the incident, Bachman decided to reformat the class debate on Taiwan to avoid similar tensions in the future.
- PRC students at Cornell shouted, booed, and heckled a faculty member who made remarks critical of PRC government policy in Tibet at a panel discussion about the controversy surrounding the 2008 Beijing Olympics that year, according to Macquarie University faculty member Kevin Carrico, then a graduate student who attended the event.²¹⁹
- Pomona College faculty member Dru Gladney said that he witnessed audience members who appeared to be PRC nationals heckle Xinjiang expert Gardener Bovingdon at a 2013 conference about China and the Muslim World at UC Berkeley.²²⁰ Audience members repeatedly interrupted Bovingdon during his presentation and several audience members vociferously articulated the official PRC position during the Q&A in such a manner that the moderator had to intervene.

Of course, there are disruptive students from every political persuasion on American campuses. In 2017, for example, the student group Reedies Against Racism (RAR) at Reed College repeatedly disrupted the school's Humanities 101 course to protest "white supremacy."²²¹ In another well-known 2015 case,

217. Interview with Arthur Waldron, Oct 26, 2017.

218. Interview with David Bachman, Mar 15, 2018.

219. Interview with Kevin Carrico, Feb 7, 2018.

220. Interview with Dru Gladney, Mar 15, 2018.

221. Chris Bodenner, "The Surprising Revolt at the Most Liberal College in the Country,"

Yale student Jerelyn Luther breached university norms of civility by shouting down a dean during a discussion about the appropriateness of a university email exhorting students to be sensitive in their choice of Halloween costumes.²²² American students themselves often interrupt and heckle others in a way contrary to norms of appropriate behavior in the university environment.

As *Chronicle of Higher Education* reporters Tom Bartlett and Karin Fischer write in “The China Conundrum,” many faculty and administrators at American universities absorbing large numbers of students from the PRC are concerned that they bring with them behaviors that are normal in China but inimical to the values of American higher education.²²³ Several of the cases in this section demonstrate that faculty have handled well politically-motivated challenges to their pedagogy from PRC students. Given the sheer volume of PRC students in American universities and the deteriorating state of the U.S.-China bilateral relationship, however, universities should pay attention to further development of this issue.

Demands to Cancel or Boycott Attendance of Academic Activities Perceived as Critical of China

American norms of academic freedom require that universities retain full discretion in hosting academic activities and inviting speakers to campus. Students from the PRC have directly challenged this prerogative in recent years by demanding the cancellation of sensitive academic activities, as demonstrated by well-documented cases at MIT and UCSD.

Controversy erupted at MIT in 2006 after a graduate student from the PRC posted on the internet a link to an image of a martial Japanese woodprint, “Illustration of the Decapitation of Violent Chinese Soldiers,” taken out of context from the award-winning “Visualizing Cultures”

The Atlantic, Nov 2, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/11/the-surprising-revolt-at-reed/544682/>.

222. “Yale University Students Protest Halloween Costume Email (Video 3),” Youtube.com, Nov 6, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IEFD_JVYd0.

223. Tom Bartlett and Karin Fischer, “The China Conundrum,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Nov 3, 2011, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-China-Conundrum/129628>.

(VC) multi-media project.²²⁴ In the days after the post, the faculty members who administered the VC project received a flood of abusive emails, phone calls, and even death threats condemning them for their inclusion of the offensive woodprint. At the core of these complaints was the idea that to show an image—even for educational purposes—was to endorse it. The CSSA and some members of MIT’s Chinese alumni community joined the chorus of representations to administrators.²²⁵ At a large university meeting called later that month to address the incident, students from the PRC circulated written demands that MIT shut down the VC website, cancel academic workshops related to the media project, revise the project’s text and images, and officially apologize to the offended “Chinese community.”²²⁶ Seeking to mollify the students, the faculty apologized and agreed to temporarily take down the website to add content warnings.²²⁷ One week later, university president Susan Hockfield issued a statement affirming the principle of academic freedom and the university’s support for the VC project.²²⁸ The website was restored with content warnings, but the site’s temporary disruption and Hockfield’s belated defense of her faculty reflected the difficulty university administrators faced in balancing the need to defend academic freedom with the preferences of students and alumni from the PRC.

Eleven years later, student members of UCSD’s CSSA demanded the university reconsider its invitation to the Dalai Lama to speak at the 2017 commencement, as recounted earlier in this report. The CSSA also held at least one tabling event promoting the official PRC government position on

224. Interview with John Dower, Nov 16, 2017 and Peter Perdue, Nov 2, 2017; see also Peter Perdue’s account “Reflections on the ‘Visualizing Cultures’ Incident,” *MIT Faculty Newsletter* XVIII, no. 5 May/June 2006, <http://web.mit.edu/fnl/volume/185/perdue.html>.

225. MIT Chinese Student and Scholar Association, “On the ‘Visualizing Cultures’ Controversy and Its Implications,” *MIT Faculty Newsletter* XVIII, no. 5, May/June 2006, <http://web.mit.edu/fnl/volume/185/cssa.html> and Perdue, “Reflections.”

226. Perdue, “Reflections.”

227. “Statement from Professors Dower and Miyagawa,” *MIT News*, April 27, 2006, <http://news.mit.edu/2006/visualizing-cultures#2>.

228. “Statement from President Susan Hockfield,” *MIT News*, May 4, 2006, <http://news.mit.edu/2006/visualizing-cultures#3>.

the Dalai Lama prior to the commencement²²⁹ and a student at UCSD said he witnessed two small groups protesting on the day of the event.²³⁰

In addition to the well-documented cases at MIT and UCSD, this study uncovered another instance in which students from the PRC sought to cancel an academic event involving sensitive content. According to GW faculty member Edward McCord, students from the PRC conducted a phone campaign in coordination with several faculty members to discourage peers from attending a 2011 talk at GW by activist Chai Ling on female infanticide in China.²³¹ McCord said he learned of the phone campaign directly from students organizing the talk. There is no evidence the phone campaign succeeded in discouraging attendance; on the contrary, the event was packed, McCord recalled.

ATTEMPTED INFRINGEMENTS ON UNIVERSITY PERSONS' PERSONAL SAFETY

This study also examines whether faculty, administrators, staff, and students at American universities have experienced attempts to infringe on their personal safety while engaged in academic activities involving sensitive content.

Recall that earlier we defined personal safety to include threats to physical as well as psychological welfare. Psychological welfare can be understood not only as the freedom from worry about physical safety, but also from concern about hostility, intimidation, aggression, and harassment.²³²

This study emphasizes the psychological aspect of personal safety because the pressures faculty, students, administrators, and staff may face to align their academic activities with PRC pressures are subtle. The prospect of imminent physical harm is not necessary for coercion; there are other, more

229. Jaz Twersky, "Chinese Student Group Objects to the Dalai Lama on Library Walk," *The Triton*, May 31, 2018, <http://triton.news/2017/05/chinese-students-object-dalai-lama-library-walk/> and interview with UCSD student on Sep 29, 2017.

230. Interview with a student at UCSD, Sep 29, 2017.

231. Interview with Edward McCord, Mar 13, 2018.

232. This is the formulation of psychological safety put forward by Thompson Rivers University in British Columbia. See "Personal Safety," Thompson Rivers University, n.d, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://www.tru.ca/hsafety/workinglearningsafely/personal.html>.

indirect methods of harm that might plausibly affect the manner in which university persons pursue academic activities. These include the denial of visas, which could stunt an otherwise promising career; internet campaigns known as “human flesh searches,” designed to stigmatize and humiliate people; the harassment of family, friends, and research participants in the PRC; and the sense that one’s personal privacy is violated through surveillance. The subjectivity inherent in peoples’ perceptions of intimidation must be acknowledged, but the subjective factor does not invalidate the observation that phenomena which cause people to feel intimidated affect the atmosphere in which academic activity occurs. Whether faculty, students, administrators, and staff feel intimidated matters insofar as these feelings condition behavior in the classroom or what people are willing to say in their research.

American universities have codes of conduct to protect university persons’ safety by prohibiting discrimination, harassment, and retaliation on the basis of certain factors, or protected classes. These factors generally include race, gender, sex, disability, and national origin but also can include political affiliation or political philosophy, as is the case at CU Boulder.²³³

Of note are CU Boulder’s definitions of abusive conduct and harassment, which are helpful to keep in mind while assessing politically-motivated infringements on university persons’ personal safety. Abusive conduct may include “verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, coercion, or other conduct which has caused a person substantial emotional distress and where the circumstances would cause a reasonable person to suffer substantial emotional distress.” Harassment includes “unwelcome verbal or physical conduct related to one’s protected class that unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work or academic performance or creates an intimidating or hostile work or educational environment.”²³⁴

233. “Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures,” *University of Colorado Boulder*, n.d, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://www.colorado.edu/policies/discrimination-and-harassment-policy-and-procedures>.

234. CU Boulder’s policy considers the “subjective” and “objective” factors comprising a hostile environment. “The subjective perspective evaluates whether or not the complainant experienced harassment based on protected class,” the policy says. “The objective perspective evaluates whether or not the unwelcome conduct by an individual(s) against another individual based upon their protected class is sufficiently severe or pervasive that

Infringements include:

- Approaches, probes, or requests that could plausibly be associated with intelligence-gathering;
- Unfamiliar visitors to events involving sensitive content;
- Monitoring of sensitive academic activities; and
- Communications and actions constituting intimidation, abuse, or harassment

The following sections detail concrete examples of attempted infringements on university persons' personal safety by PRC government affiliates, PRC students, and other campus actors at American universities.

Infringements by PRC Government and Affiliated Entities

This study found instances in which PRC government officials based at the embassy and consulates attempted to infringe on university persons' personal safety.

Approaches, Probes, or Requests by PRC Government Entities

This study found several examples in which PRC diplomats or affiliated entities approached faculty to ask questions, probe them for information, and make requests regarding sensitive content. PRC diplomats' overtures to experts are not in themselves suspect and indeed mirror the practices of diplomats from other countries. What made these overtures distinct were faculty suspicions that PRC diplomats were in fact officials from other parts of the government—such as the United Front Work Department or the intelligence services—explicitly tasked with propaganda or espionage work. On their face, PRC diplomats' overtures to faculty to discuss political issues over a free meal may seem benign. From the PRC's perspective, however,

it alters the conditions of education or employment and creates an environment that a reasonable person would find intimidating, hostile or offensive.”

such meetings represent opportunities to assess faculty's views, signal that faculty are persons of interest, create leverage, and gather intelligence about faculty's area of expertise. Becoming unknowingly enmeshed in the activities of a foreign power's intelligence apparatus is arguably a factor that may undermine faculty's personal safety as defined previously, hence the inclusion of this section.

Consider the following cases:

- A faculty member at a Research-1 university on the East Coast said that embassy officials affiliated with the United Front Work Department approached him about ten times between 2004 and 2015 with questions about the situation in Tibet over a meal.²³⁵
- Former Columbia faculty member Robert Barnett said that he was frequently visited while at Columbia by officials from the New York consulate whom he suspected to be working in intelligence or for the United Front Work Department under cultural cover.²³⁶ The officials sought his perspective on developments in Tibet, changes in U.S. policy toward the region, American officials' plans to meet with the Dali Lama, and other issues. He noted that meetings with suspected intelligence officers followed a similar pattern. First, the officials might engage him with remarks flattering his expertise. They would then segue into a discussion of the wrong-headedness of Western views on Tibet, speaking instead of taking notes. Finally, the officials would slip in a policy-relevant question. It was at this point that one could usually infer the meeting was for intelligence purposes, Barnett said.

Meetings of this kind might serve as a means of gathering information about foreign experts themselves. The PRC keeps tabs on academics studying Tibet, according to Columbia faculty member Gray Tuttle. While studying abroad in the PRC as a graduate student, Tuttle turned down a request from government officials who approached him asking for helping

235. Interview with a faculty member at a Research-1 University on the East Coast, Mar 7, 2018.

236. Interview with Robert Barnett, Oct 30, 2017.

“filling in their files” about Tibetologists.²³⁷ It is likely that PRC authorities keep similar records on foreign experts of Xinjiang.

Approaches, Probes, or Requests by PRC Researchers or Journalists

Faculty who work in sensitive areas are sometimes approached by researchers or journalists from the PRC who are necessarily affiliated with the party-state by virtue of its control of all aspects of Chinese society. Interacting with professionals embedded in the party-state is an unavoidable feature of maintaining people-to-people contacts with the PRC, and experts generally accept this as one of the “costs of doing business.” Such interactions are not suspect in themselves unless they take on the characteristics of intelligence-gathering activities described in the previous section.

Sometimes suspect approaches can come from researchers affiliated with research institutes closely aligned with the PRC government. For example, Cal State Fullerton faculty member Tenzin Dorjee said that he was approached in 2018 by a researcher from the Beijing-based China Tibetology Research Center, an institute that promotes government narratives of Tibet’s successful development under PRC administration and accuses the Dalai Lama of having a “splittist” agenda.²³⁸ Their meeting focused on political issues and featured an odd request. Dorjee, who is of Tibetan heritage and also a Commissioner for the U.S. International Religious Freedom Commission, noted that the researcher seemed extremely well-informed about his background. The researcher asked Dorjee about the Dalai Lama’s promotion of the “Middle Way” and probed him about whether it was a trojan horse for an independence movement. He also asked Dorjee about his duties as a Commissioner and requested reading recommendations specifically for books banned in China. The latter struck Dorjee as odd since the researcher clearly couldn’t take these back in his luggage.

Faculty also receive interview requests from PRC journalists who say they are affiliated with major state news outlets, such as *Xinhua*, or other media entities covering institutions like the United Nations.

237. Interview with Gray Tuttle, Apr 11, 2018.

238. Interview with Tenzin Dorjee, Mar 19, 2018.

Consider the following cases:

- Columbia faculty member Gray Tuttle said that a PRC national who represented himself as a journalist covering the United Nations approached him three times between 2005 and 2008.²³⁹ During their meetings, the journalist asked Tuttle questions about the Dalai Lama's health and other issues relating to Tibet. "It seemed like he was just kind of fishing but not for anything in particular," Tuttle said.
- A staff member at Columbia said that PRC nationals who represented themselves as journalists covering the United Nations approached her several times between 2010 and 2013.²⁴⁰ The journalists said they wanted to interview her about Tibet for their newspaper, but "the questions were somewhat vague and I didn't get a sense that any story or article was being written."
- University of South Carolina (Aiken) faculty member Frank Xie, who is a prominent practitioner of Falun Gong, said that a PRC journalist covering United Nations affairs for the Shanghai-based *Wenhui Daily* approached him seven or eight times with questions about the religious group while Xie was teaching at Drexel University between 2003 and 2009.²⁴¹ The journalist queried Xie about his own writings, Falun Gong's religious precepts, the identities of other practitioners, and the degree to which Falun Gong was an organized movement in the United States. Xie said he perceived the questions as efforts to gather intelligence and at one point remarked to the journalist: "Hey, I know you're a spy, why are you doing this?" Xie noted that the journalist did not deny this characterization. While Xie said he did not perceive the overtures as personally threatening, he felt that he could not refuse the journalist's requests for meetings.
- CUNY faculty member Ming Xia said that a PRC journalist for the Shanghai-based *Wenhui Daily* approached him two or three

239. Interview with Gray Tuttle, Apr 11, 2018.

240. Interview with a staff member at Columbia, Feb 20, 2018.

241. Interview with Frank Xie, Apr 30, 2018.

times between 2011 and 2014 with questions about the prospects for democracy in China, the Dalai Lama (with whom Xia maintains a friendship), China's Tibet policy, and Falun Gong.²⁴² The reporter said that he would be writing reports not for publication but rather for internal consumption. "He asked [questions like] how is Falun Gong organized in the United States, where do they get money, why are they so well-resourced?" Xia said. "He gave me his business card as a real journalist but he also made it very clear that his writings would not be published openly so I had the sense he was affiliated with the Chinese intelligence community."

Like the overtures of PRC diplomats, the cases of outreach by other PRC government affiliates or journalists might represent state-backed operations to collect intelligence. Pomona College faculty member Dru Gladney said he frequently receives interview requests from PRC journalists and chooses his words carefully in part because he senses their articles are not for the Chinese public but rather for the authorities.²⁴³ "My assumption is that all Chinese journalists who talk to me are reporting back to the government, and I assume that going in," he said.

PRC journalists may also interview faculty to obtain quotations for use in state propaganda. It is well-known within the China Studies community that American faculty are often quoted out of context to support positions with which they may not agree, according to University of Washington faculty member David Bachman.²⁴⁴ Many faculty interviewed for this study said they tended to decline requests from PRC journalists for fear they would be misquoted. Citing similar concerns, other faculty said they keep their remarks neutral to minimize the chances their name will be attached to a sensationalist soundbite.

242. Interview with Ming Xia, Jun 14, 2018.

243. Interview with Dru Gladney, Mar 15, 2018.

244. Interview with David Bachman, Mar 15, 2018.

Intimidating Modes of Conversation by PRC Government Entities

This study found several examples in which PRC diplomats employed intimidating modes of conversation with faculty and staff who engaged in activity involving sensitive content.

In two cases, PRC diplomats aggressively questioned faculty and staff about their travel plans and views. A faculty member at a Research-1 University said she feared she would be denied a visa after receiving a late-night call from the consulate in 2015 regarding her recent visa application.²⁴⁵ The consular official probed her about her “actual” reasons for traveling to Xinjiang, as opposed to the reasons stated on her application. “I would consider that a form of intimidation,” she said. At Columbia, a staff member said she was cornered and aggressively questioned about her political views on Tibet in 2012 by a PRC national on a visiting delegation arranged by the New York consulate.²⁴⁶ “I definitely remember it was pointed and I felt really uncomfortable,” the staff member said.

In a third case, Chicago consular officials made intimidating remarks to a staff member at CU Boulder during a meeting at the university in 2006.²⁴⁷ Consular officials asked to meet with the staff member during a visit to campus and pointedly brought up a 2002 altercation between Tibetans and the former president of the CSSA that occurred under the staff member’s supervision years before (see the next section for full details). The senior consular official probed the staff member about why she had not done more to “help” the CSSA president. During a subsequent meeting break, one of other consular officials tried to engage the staff member in conversation about her surname and family origins. The consular official asked repeatedly until the staff member reluctantly admitted her family originally came from the PRC. The consular official then turned gleefully to her colleagues and said in Chinese, “Hey guess what, her grandparents are from China!” The remarks caused the staff member to believe the consulate was considering using her family ties for retribution.

245. Interview with a faculty member at a Research-1 university, Mar 2, 2018.

246. Interview with a staff member at Columbia, Oct 27, 2017 and Feb 20, 2018.

247. Interview with a staff member at CU Boulder, Mar 28, 2018.

It is also plausible that PRC diplomats may condone the harassment of faculty and students by others from the PRC, as a complicated 2009 case at Columbia illustrates. Former Columbia faculty member Robert Barnett said he was the target of a harassment campaign in 2009 after he removed a male PRC national from a Sino-Tibetan reconciliation group for inappropriate behavior toward fellow students.²⁴⁸ Barnett, who administered the group composed of five PRC nationals and five Tibetan exiles, said he became concerned after reading a series of emails the male PRC national sent to other students in the group. The student's first email indicated that he had met with New York consular officials responsible for Tibetan affairs and conveyed the consulate's request that the Tibetans pay them a visit. When the Tibetans refused, the student sent a series of insulting emails in response. Barnett intervened, communicating that the PRC student's treatment of the Tibetans was unacceptable. After a week or two the student was removed from the project. Around that time, Barnett became aware that a faculty member of PRC origin from a university in the area made a complaint to Columbia alleging that Barnett had been abusive to PRC students and wrote letters to some of his colleagues disseminating the allegation. Barnett said he suspected coordination between the student and the professor, which was confirmed when the student accidentally replied-all to a group email he likely sought to forward to the professor in which he called on her to help him "depose" Barnett. The letter-writing campaign eventually petered out, Barnett said, but "one would be lazy to overlook the fact that it seems to have been done with the involvement of the consulate." Barnett did not provide the emails for verification.

Infringements by PRC Students and Other Campus Actors

This study found a number of instances in which people who appeared to be students from the PRC engaged in activities undermining the personal safety of faculty and other students at American universities. These activities took numerous forms, including:

248. Interview with Robert Barnett, Oct 30, 2017.

- Monitoring of academic activities involving sensitive content;
- Suspect probes and requests for information; as well as
- Intimidation, abusive communications, and harassment

In these cases, interviewees had a high degree of confidence that the actors were PRC nationals enrolled as students at their institutions. But some of the phenomena observed involved PRC nationals not enrolled as students, as with the incidents described under the “Visiting Scholars from the PRC” and “Unfamiliar Visitors to Class” section. We refer to those who were not obviously students more generically as “campus actors” to indicate their presence on campus.

Monitoring by PRC Students and Campus Actors

Numerous faculty and students reported experiences in which they felt they were being monitored by students or campus actors who appeared to be from the PRC while engaging in sensitive academic activities. The following categories capture the various means by which faculty and students perceived this monitoring.

Photos and Recordings

Several faculty said they noticed people who appeared to be PRC nationals taking video recordings or photos during events involving sensitive academic content that led them to wonder if they were being surveilled.

Consider the following cases:

- A faculty member at UCSD who attended a 2016 panel discussion with Hong Kong Umbrella Movement leader Joshua Wong at the University of California, Los Angeles noticed that a male student who appeared to be a PRC national filmed the faculty member’s conversation with Wong after the panel for several minutes on his smartphone.²⁴⁹ The student stood within two feet of the pair for the duration of the conversation. “When Joshua Wong comes, I would imagine they would

249. Interview with a faculty member at UCSD, Feb 7, 2018.

send more than just one person to monitor the situation,” the faculty member said, speculating that the recording was made at the request of the Los Angeles consulate.

- Georgetown University faculty member James Millward said he noticed a male student who appeared to be a PRC national using a smartphone to film a conference on Uyghur studies at GW in 2014.²⁵⁰ Millward said he noticed the filming activity because the person was leaning back in his chair with his smart phone propped on his stomach, its lens trained on the stage. While the papers delivered throughout the panel were scholarly, the opening session featured political content and was attended by members of the exiled Uyghur community, including Rabiya Kadir.
- A faculty member at a “Big 10” university in the Midwest said he has noticed people who appeared to be PRC nationals taking photos of him on multiple occasions during lectures and talks at his institution.²⁵¹ The faculty member noted that the people did not appear to be students or regular attendees, and took more photos than would seem normal.
- Miami University faculty member Stanley Toops said he noticed people who appeared to be PRC nationals taking photos of him and other participants during a conference at Johns Hopkins’ School of Advanced International Studies in 2005.²⁵² Toops said the people taking photos and notes seemed to be acting with an intensity that was “more than what normally passes for attention.”
- A faculty member at a California-based university said he noticed several people who appeared to be PRC nationals taking photos of him and the audience with their smartphones at a screening of a film about China’s role in the international economy at his university in 2011.²⁵³ “I try not to be paranoid but I felt that they were photographing me and the other students in the crowd, not in a way that seemed journalistic,

250. Interview with James Millward, May 17, 2018.

251. Interview with faculty member at a Big 10 university, Dec 7, 2018.

252. Interview with Stanley Toops, Apr 6, 2018.

253. Interview with a faculty member at a California-based university, May 17, 2018.

but more like [for] identification photos,” the faculty member said. Whereas a journalist might try to get a few photos of an event, perhaps zooming in on one or two audience members who seem engaged, the faculty member noted that the people appeared to be systematically photographing each attendee’s face.

In Person

Some faculty and students said they noticed people who appeared to be PRC nationals follow them or were told by other students from the PRC that they were being watched.

Consider the following cases:

- A faculty member at a Research-1 university said that one of his former PhD students, who is a PRC national, confided that he had been asked by the Ministry of State Security to report on the political attitudes of ethnically Chinese faculty at the university during his visit to the United States over the 2018 lunar New Year.²⁵⁴
- Drexel University faculty member Rebecca Clothey said three students who appeared to be from the PRC “accompanied” her and Uyghur photographer Kurbanjan Samat to an invite-only lunch after a talk about his new book *I am from Xinjiang* at the University of Pennsylvania in 2015.²⁵⁵ The talk organizers provided lunch for audience members, so Clothey thought it was odd that the three students followed the group convening for an invite-only lunch. The three students sat at a table right next to the Uyghur speaker, who discreetly told Clothey to ignore them. “They weren’t invited, they *came*,” Clothey said, noting that her Uyghur students told her they declined to attend the talk because they feared students from the PRC would be there spying on attendees.
- A student from the PRC who attends a university in the Washington, D.C. area said that an unfamiliar male PRC national showed up to a

254. Interview with a faculty member at a Research-1 University, Mar 15, 2018.

255. Interview with Rebecca Clothey, Apr 12, 2018.

meeting of a Chinese-language student discussion group for current affairs in 2017 and sought to ascertain the identities of the organizers and attendees.²⁵⁶ According to the student, the visitor arrived about five minutes before the session on internet freedom in the PRC was set to start and asked who was in charge of the event. The visitor took out a pencil and notepad, then turned to ask other attendees their names. The student felt the visitor's behavior was suspicious and asked why he wanted to know the identity of the organizers. The visitor claimed he was a graduate student at the university wanting to interview group members for a class assignment, but the student felt the explanation was implausible. The student continued to press the visitor on his reasons for attending until the visitor left several minutes later. The student said that, after the incident, he gave up on idea of applying to register the discussion group as an official student organization. Attendance by students from the PRC fell precipitously at subsequent meetings, he said.

- CU Boulder faculty member Emily Yeh said that in 2009 or 2010 a graduate student from the PRC in her department told her that the president of the CSSA had called late one night to ask for information about Yeh's work on Tibet.²⁵⁷ The graduate student told the CSSA president she didn't know anything and expressed irritation at the request.
- A faculty member who works on Xinjiang at a Research-1 university said she recently learned from Uyghur colleagues based in Germany that PRC officials, presumably affiliated with the intelligence services, had visited them to inquire about the faculty member's activities after she traveled there for an academic meeting in 2005.²⁵⁸

Visiting Scholars from the PRC

Some faculty and graduate students interviewed for this project noted interactions with visiting scholars from the PRC that caused them to feel intimidated and fear they were being monitored.

256. Interview with a PRC student in the Washington, D.C. area, Dec 13, 2018.

257. Interview with Emily Yeh, Feb 28, 2018.

258. Interview with a faculty member at a Research-1 University, Mar 2, 2018.

Consider for example the following cases:

- A faculty member at Harvard said that two of her colleagues, both visiting scholars from the PRC at the Harvard-Yenching Institute, confided in her that they had caught another visiting PRC scholar searching their offices after hours and heard him openly discuss writing periodic reports to the government during the 2016–2017 academic year.²⁵⁹ The faculty member’s colleagues said they thought the reports pertained to the political views and activities of ethnically Chinese faculty, visiting scholars, and students at Harvard. They warned the faculty member to refrain from discussing sensitive political issues in front of unfamiliar ethnic Chinese.
- A former graduate student at Harvard said that she noticed a visiting scholar from the PRC affiliated with the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies routinely “skulk around the office” after hours during the 2014–2015 academic year.²⁶⁰ She noticed the suspicious behavior because she and the other graduate students routinely stayed after hours in the Center to work. The PRC visiting scholar showed an intense interest in the work of the graduate students focusing on borderlands issues, she said.
- The same former graduate student at Harvard said that the same visiting scholar from the PRC once questioned and followed her and a visiting Uyghur friend during the 2014–2015 academic year.²⁶¹ The visiting scholar approached the former graduate student and her Uyghur friend while the two were studying in the library. He displayed a keen interest in the Uyghur friend’s hometown in the PRC and in her activities at Harvard. The line of questioning made the former graduate feel uneasy, so she made an excuse to leave and exited the library with her Uyghur friend. The two noticed the visiting scholar follow them down the street for several blocks before he disappeared.

259. Interview with a faculty member at Harvard, Mar 14, 2018.

260. Interview with a former PhD student at Harvard, Jun 29, 2018.

261. Interview with a former PhD student at Harvard, Jun 29, 2018.

- A faculty member at Ohio State University said a visiting scholar from the PRC tried to sit in on her graduate class without asking permission in the spring of 2016.²⁶² The visiting scholar was “pushy” in trying to obtain access to the teaching materials that she posted on the course software site and appeared dissuaded by the faculty member’s request that he abide by the class policy that anyone who wasn’t regularly enrolled submit a CV. “After I made that CV request he disappeared,” the faculty member said. “And given that he was older, like in his mid-forties maybe, I had a strong suspicion that actually he was a party functionary who had no relevance academically but was there for whatever reason.” The faculty member said she is always cautious about who is in her classes, particularly at the graduate level.

Unfamiliar Visitors to Class

Some faculty also reported seeing unfamiliar visitors to their classes covering sensitive content. While some visitors appeared student-aged, others seemed older, possibly indicating that they were not regular members of the campus community. Given the open nature of universities, it is difficult to know whether these visitors were simply auditing the classes or pursuing alternative agendas. Nonetheless, faculty said that the visitors’ presence made them nervous and wonder whether they were being monitored.

Consider the following cases:

- A faculty member at Harvard said that someone who appears to be a PRC national has been sitting in on her class twice weekly without permission since the start of the 2018 spring semester.²⁶³ The visitor, who appears older than student-aged, has never participated in class. The faculty member said she had spoken with her students about the visitor and found that no one appears to know him. The faculty member added that she has seen other unfamiliar visitors to class in the past but has allowed them to remain, unsure whether it would be reasonable to ask them to leave.

262. Interview with a faculty member at Ohio State University, Jan 23, 2018.

263. Interview with a faculty member at Harvard, Mar 14, 2018.

- A faculty member at UC Berkeley estimated that unfamiliar visitors who appear to be PRC nationals had appeared in her large survey courses more than five times in the last five years.²⁶⁴ She noted that the visitors generally appear older than student-aged. The faculty member expressed frustration that the visitors tended to brush off her attempts to engage them in conversation about their identity and reasons for visiting her class.
- A faculty member at UC Berkeley said he noticed an unfamiliar visitor who appeared to be a PRC national sit in on his lecture about the Cultural Revolution in 2015.²⁶⁵ The faculty member noticed the visitor before the lecture started and asked him to identify himself after class. The visitor, who appeared older than student-aged, took extensive notes throughout the lecture and left the classroom before the faculty member could ascertain his identity. “It just struck me as this guy has to be surveilling [me],” the faculty member said. “The way he acted was off.”
- A faculty member at a California-based university said that he noticed unfamiliar visitors to class who appeared to be PRC nationals several times in his courses touching on China’s role in economics and international trade in recent years.²⁶⁶

The cases illustrate that some faculty working in areas viewed as sensitive by the PRC across a variety of disciplines believe they are monitored from time to time. For some, the default assumption is that someone may be watching classroom activities. “Do I think there have been intelligence agents in my class? Yes,” said retired Johns Hopkins faculty member David Lampton.²⁶⁷ “My assumption’s always been that it’s pervasive.” A faculty member who works on Xinjiang at a Research-1 university said she believes monitoring may extend beyond the classroom and U.S.-based institutions. “[PRC] surveillance does not end at the U.S. border. I’m surveilled in every

264. Interview with a faculty member at UC Berkeley, Apr 18, 2018.

265. Interview with a faculty member at UC Berkeley, Apr 23, 2018.

266. Interview with a faculty member at a California-based university, May 17, 2018.

267. Interview with David Lampton, Feb 26, 2018.

country I go to, in every lecture I give, in every city I visit,” she said.²⁶⁸ The faculty member added that she believed her telephone communications are monitored because consular officials appear to “know things I haven’t told them.” These instances of possible monitoring by classroom visitors are also interesting because they complement reports that PRC students are themselves surveilled while abroad and debriefed about their academic activities when they return home.²⁶⁹

Approaches, Probes, and Requests by PRC Students

This study found several examples in which PRC students approached faculty to ask questions, probe them for information, and make requests regarding sensitive content. Questions about sensitive content are not in themselves suspect, especially because recent generations of students from the PRC are inculcated with the nationalist history promoted through the patriotic education campaign. Many PRC students may simply be curious about topics and events seldom discussed in their home country. But what made these overtures distinctive was faculty’s suspicion that PRC students were seeking personal information in the context of discussions about sensitive content without a plausible “need to know.”

Consider the following cases:

- A staff member at Columbia said that she had received three requests for information about the identities and locations of members of the local Tibetan community from PRC nationals enrolled as students in the last 7–10 years, ostensibly for the purpose of conducting ethnographic research.²⁷⁰ “It felt a bit funny, like not maybe academic research *per se*,” the staff member said. She directed the students to publicly-available resources about the Tibetan community instead.
- The same staff member at Columbia said students from the PRC have probed her for personal information in a suspicious manner three or four

268. Interview with a faculty member at a Research-1 University, Mar 2, 2018.

269. Allen-Ebrahimian, “China’s Long Arm,” and Stephanie Saul, “On Campuses Far From China, Still Under Beijing’s Watchful Eye,” *The New York Times*, May 4, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/04/us/chinese-students-western-campuses-china-influence.html>.

270. Interview with a staff member at Columbia, Feb 20, 2018.

times in the last 10 years.²⁷¹ The vagueness of the students' conversation, inconsistent explanation of their research interests, and repeated questions about the staff member's personal life and Tibet connections all seemed like red flags. "Sometimes in the same consultation the subject they're studying will change like three times, and then the conversation will start turning to my own connections and interests, and do I know a lot of people, and that sort of thing," she said.

- A faculty member at Ohio State University said that a student from the PRC enrolled in two of her classes approached her in the spring of 2016 seeking personal information and her participation in a project about freedom of information in China.²⁷² The faculty member noted that the student had refrained from providing biographical details as requested of all students at the beginning of the course and frequently sought to converse with her during the break between the two classes. On one occasion, the student told the faculty member that he was involved in a project to set up an equivalent of Wikipedia in China and sought her participation. "From the very moment that he shared this with me, I somehow interpreted it as a—what is that called?—a lure. You know, like Wikipedia, freedom of information issues and so on. Somehow I could never buy the fact that this was real. And one reason why was because he...could not write." The faculty member said she felt it would be odd that someone who appeared to struggle with writing well would be involved in generating content for a website, noting that "it didn't add up." The student did not turn in major assignments for either course and disappeared from both soon afterward.

Intimidation, Abusive Conduct, or Harassment by PRC Students

This study found several examples in which PRC students acted in ways that faculty and students perceived as intimidation, abusive conduct, or harassment after the latter engaged in academic activities involving sensitive content.

271. Interview with a staff member at Columbia, Feb 20, 2018.

272. Interview with a faculty member at Ohio State University, Jan 23, 2018.

Reports of such harassment are not new. MIT faculty member Shigeru Miyagawa received abusive messages and death threats following the 2006 Visualizing Cultures controversy recounted earlier.²⁷³ Canadian human rights lawyer David Matas received a death threat on Columbia's CSSA email list serv in advance of a 2008 panel discussion hosted by Columbia's Falun Dafa Club and Columbia's chapter of Amnesty International.²⁷⁴ Duke University student Grace Wang received death threats and was ostracized by her peers after attempting to mediate between ethnic Chinese and Tibetan students at a campus protest in 2008.²⁷⁵ The same fate befell University of Maryland student Yang Shuping after she made a 2017 commencement speech praising the fresh air and freedom she experienced in the United States.²⁷⁶

But this study uncovered several previously unknown examples in which PRC students have harassed faculty and students after they engaged in academic activities involving sensitive content.

Consider the following cases:

- Former Columbia faculty member Robert Barnett was harassed by a PRC student with the possible knowledge of the New York consulate after expelling the student from a Sino-Tibetan reconciliation group for behavioral reasons (see previous section).
- A faculty member at the University of Denver recalled two instances between 2011 and 2013 in which male PRC nationals enrolled as students in his classes sent him abusive emails after lectures contesting his interpretation of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Noting the lecturer's Chinese ethnicity, one student berated the faculty member by saying "Why are you trying to humiliate our motherland [in front

273. Perdue, "Reflections."

274. David Matas, "Learning About the Communist Party of China," EndTransplantAbuse.org, n.d, accessed May 5, 2018, <https://endtransplantabuse.org/learning-about-the-communist-party-of-china/>.

275. Shaila Dewan, "Chinese Student in U.S. is Caught in Confrontation," *The New York Times*, Apr 17, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/17/us/17student.html>.

276. Mike Ives, "Chinese Student in Maryland is Criticized at Home for Praising U.S.," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/23/world/asia/chinese-student-fresh-air-yang-shuping.html>.

of] Westerners?” The other student accused the faculty member of lying about Tiananmen’s casualties, insisting that not a single person was killed.²⁷⁷ The faculty member said he regarded the emails as forms of harassment.

- A former faculty member at Indiana University said that people who appeared to be PRC students attempted to intimidate him after he participated in a panel discussion about Tibet in 2008.²⁷⁸ The faculty member, who is ethnically Chinese, provided the official PRC perspective on Tibet during the panel, which was organized by the student organization Campaign for Free Tibet. “At that time I perceived myself being very careful,” the faculty member said, noting that back then discussions of local corruption in the context of central government subsidies to ethnic minorities did not seem especially sensitive. After the event, the faculty member noticed that he and his background had become a topic of discussion among members of the CSSA email list serv. A week later, the faculty member was walking in the park with his children when someone of student age who appeared to be a PRC national approached, pointed, and called him a “dog” in Chinese.²⁷⁹ During a trip to the local farmer’s market several days later, the faculty member noticed someone of student age who appeared to be ethnically Chinese approached with a camera and took a close-up photograph of his son’s face. The faculty member said that the photographic activity made him fear for the safety of his son, a toddler at the time, and for his family. “It is intimidating,” the faculty member said, recalling the incident. “You can never be 100% sure it is related to the [Tibet] speaking event, but it happened right after.”
- A former graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison said that he received abusive emails from the CSSA in 2004.²⁸⁰ After Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi made a surprise visit to

277. Interview with University of Denver faculty member, Dec 7, 2017.

278. Interview with a former faculty member at Indiana University, May 15, 2018.

279. 狗 (gou) is an offensive epithet in Chinese.

280. Interview with a former graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dec 7, 2017.

the controversial Yasukuni Shrine early that year, CSSA members circulated possible slogans the group could display in protest on their e-mail list serv. One of the slogans, “Down with the Japs!,” struck the graduate student, himself a PRC national, as racist and inappropriate. The graduate student responded to the group voicing his objections and received a deluge of replies accusing him of being a traitor to the Chinese nation, including one death threat. While the graduate student said he did not feel seriously threatened, he felt disturbed that the other CSSA members, some of whom used anonymous emails, knew exactly who he was given that he sent messages from his university email. He decided to be more careful in his interactions with the group afterward. The incident was confirmed by a faculty member who supervised the graduate student at the time.

- A Taiwanese student at the University of Washington was harassed by a male PRC national in 2018 after a conversation about national identity, according to the Taiwanese student and another student who directly witnessed the incident.²⁸¹ The incident occurred at a support session for international students that was conducted in Chinese and organized by a group of PRC students. What started as a civil conversation between the Taiwanese student and other attendees escalated into an altercation when a male student from the PRC aggressively contested the female Taiwanese student’s remark that she self-identifies as Taiwanese, rather than Chinese. The Taiwanese student said she was especially upset by the PRC student’s insistence that what she thought didn’t matter since the PRC would eventually “annihilate” Taiwan anyway. “This guy just erupted. It was quite visceral, his reaction to what she was saying,” a student who witnessed the incident said. “He was saying ‘It doesn’t matter what you think, it matters what the *Party* thinks, and the Party thinks that it’s One China, and that you are Chinese, whether you want to admit it or not!’” Other students from the PRC sought to back up the Taiwanese student and to de-escalate the situation. The Taiwanese student was visibly upset and later sought clarification from

281. Interviews with a Taiwanese student at the University of Washington, Apr 3, 2018, and a graduate student at the University of Washington, Apr 17, 2018.

peers about potential recourse. “It is definitely a kind of harassment, but at first I did not recognize it as harassment,” the Taiwanese student said, explaining her shock that such a thing could happen in the United States.

- An altercation between Tibetan students and the president of the CSSA during CU Boulder’s International Festival in 2002 ended with a harassment complaint to university police, according to a university staff member and a police report obtained through an open records request.²⁸² Tensions had built between the two groups steadily throughout the evening, first over CSSA objections to materials the Tibetan students displayed at their booth and later over Tibetan objections to a Han Chinese student’s performance of a Tibetan dance in what they regarded as inappropriate form and costume. When it came time for the Tibetans to perform their dance, members of the audience yelled “Free Tibet!” The calls prompted the president of the CSSA to yell “Liar, liar!” and to engage in a verbal confrontation with several Tibetans. Two witnesses told police that the CSSA president appeared angry and agitated, moving close to the Tibetans to point his finger in their faces, curse, and state several times his intention to “beat them up.”²⁸³ Another witness noted that the CSSA president “started screaming, ‘We will beat you, we will beat you,’ with his arms extended over his head, shaking his fists in a manner which caused the Tibetans to feel threatened.”²⁸⁴ A number of Tibetan students and community member witnesses told police that the CSSA president’s actions made them feel unsafe and saddened. “Many stated that they thought that since this was America, they would not have to deal with this sort of anti-Tibet sentiment,” the report noted.²⁸⁵ “Several also stated that there might be some sort of reprisal to them.” The CSSA requested a copy of the incident report soon after it was filed, leading

282. Interview with a staff member at CU Boulder, Mar 28, 2018 and University of Colorado Boulder Police Department, *Harassment Incident Summary Report*.

283. University of Colorado Boulder Police Department, *Harassment Incident Summary Report*, 3.

284. University of Colorado Boulder Police Department, *Harassment Incident Summary Report*, 5.

285. University of Colorado Boulder Police Department, *Harassment Incident Summary Report*, 4.

a police department detective to telephone the university staff member expressing his concern for the welfare of the Tibetans, whose names, addresses, and phone numbers had not been redacted in the report. The staff member also received a call from the Dean of Students, who told her that the university president had received a letter from the CSSA the day after the incident blaming the staff member for the trouble and demanding she make a public apology to be printed in the local paper. When a detective sought subsequently to obtain the CSSA president's signature for a court summons, the detective told the CSSA president he suspected "you spy on fellow students for the [PRC] government."²⁸⁶ The remark prompted the CSSA president to state that he was going to report the detective to the consulate.

286. University of Colorado Boulder Police Department, *Harassment Incident Summary Report*, 6.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

THIS STUDY FINDS some evidence that PRC diplomats, government-affiliated entities, a small number of students, and other campus actors have attempted in recent years to infringe on the academic freedom and personal safety of university persons on American campuses. The findings offer several insights about PRC influence and interference activities in American higher education and suggest that universities and policymakers should respond to such activities. Much investigative work remains to be done by scholars and journalists, who can contribute their findings to the public record. The evidence suggests a worrisome trend but does not in the author's judgement rise to the level of a PRC-orchestrated wave.

INSIGHTS

While preliminary, the study offers several insights and challenges prevailing assumptions about PRC influence and interference activities in American higher education.

1. By discovering numerous cases in which PRC diplomats and a small number of students have attempted to infringe on university persons' academic freedom and personal safety, the study makes an original contribution to the public debate about PRC influence and interference in the United States. Moreover, the concept of infringement offers an innovative theoretical alternative to the influence-versus-interference dichotomy that has so far characterized the discourse.

2. The study shows that PRC diplomats engage in a range of activities to monitor, influence, and induce the termination of academic activities involving sensitive content on American campuses. Complaints, delegation visits, pressure and inducements, probes for information, and intimidating modes of conversation are all approaches PRC diplomats may employ against offending academics or American institutions. Emanating from the embassy and five consulates, such influence and interference activities are consistent with PRC policy statements dating from the 1990s and may properly be understood as state-directed.

3. The study demonstrates that PRC students are not a homogeneous group; they can be both perpetrators and victims of politically-motivated attempts to infringe on academic freedom and university persons' personal safety. In some cases, such as the harassment incident at CU Boulder's International Festival in 2002, the PRC students in question are top-ranking officers of the CSSA. The CSSA is an organization with well-documented financial and political ties to the consulates, so it is plausible that its officers may act with knowledge or even under the direction of the state in opposing campus activities and people critical of the PRC.²⁸⁷ But in the majority of cases documented, it seems more likely that PRC students are acting independently on the basis of their own beliefs. Some may seek to shut down critical discussion of the PRC because it contradicts their political views; others may believe they are educating peers ill-informed about the PRC; and still others may simply misunderstand the boundaries of appropriate behavior in a university environment. Their targets include faculty whose teaching and research involves sensitive content, fellow students, and university administrators seen as endorsing offending academic activities.

The documented instances of PRC nationals engaging in problematic activities likely represent *a tiny proportion* of the more than 350,000 PRC nationals currently studying in the United States. Any

287. Allen-Ebrahimian, "China's Long Arm."

suggestion that all or most PRC students are CCP agents is appallingly broad and dangerously inaccurate. The majority of faculty interviewed for this study said that their experiences with PRC students had been positive. Some faculty emphasized that their PRC students displayed commendable curiosity and contributed valuable perspective to discussions typically dominated by American students.

Other faculty noted that their PRC students participate less frequently than students from other demographics and believe their silence in class belies anxiety about government surveillance. Indeed, there are cases in which PRC students have become the victims of monitoring, harassment or ostracism by other PRC students after engaging in academic activities perceived as critical of China. Even those seeking simply to discuss a sensitive issue in a public setting may be watched.

The key point is that PRC students, like all others, respond in a variety of ways to academic activities involving sensitive content on campus. While some PRC students attempt to infringe on others' academic freedom and personal safety for political reasons, it is probable that the *vast majority* are engaged in legitimate activities falling within the scope of ordinary university life.

4. PRC students have employed language typically associated with progressive campus activist movements to oppose academic activities involving sensitive content. Consider the case of the CSSA at UCSD, which expressed outrage at the university's 2017 invitation to the Dalai Lama. "UCSD is a place for students to cultivate their minds and enrich their knowledge," the CSSA wrote in a WeChat statement.²⁸⁸ "Currently, the various actions undertaken by the university have contravened the spirit of respect, tolerance, equality, and earnestness—the ethos upon which the university is built." The statement, which included party boilerplate about the Dalai Lama as a "splittist," threatened consequences if the visit proceeded and alluded

288. Josh Horwitz, "Chinese students in the US are using 'inclusion' and 'diversity' to oppose a Dalai Lama graduation speech," *Quartz*, Feb 17, 2018, <https://qz.com/908922/chinese-students-at-ucsd-are-evoking-diversity-to-justify-their-opposition-to-the-dalai-lamas-graduation-speech/>.

to coordination with the Los Angeles consulate. It was accompanied by social media hashtags such as #ChineseStudentsMatter, a seeming allusion to the better-known #BlackLivesMatter. UCSD officials met with CSSA officers to discuss their concerns but proceeded as planned with the invitation.

2017 was not the first time PRC students employed such discourse to pressure an American university over academic activity involving sensitive content. “The ‘Throwing off Asia’ exhibit recently Spotlighted on MIT’s homepage has shaken our confidence in the cultural sensitivity we have come to associate with this accepting environment,” CSSA officers wrote in a 2006 letter to administrators during the infamous Visualizing Cultures controversy recounted earlier.²⁸⁹ “In particular, the vivid images of the wartime atrocities inflicted on the Chinese conjured up haunting emotions of loss and rage, not unlike those emotions people around the world feel toward the much better-known and more talked-about events of the Holocaust.” Unlike the CSSA officers at UCSD, those at MIT called for the addition of historical context rather than outright censorship of the exhibit. Nonetheless, MIT CSSA officers’ justification for altering the VC project’s content relied explicitly on the proposition that the students’ offense required redress. After taking down the website and adding trigger warnings, MIT restored the VC project and reaffirmed its commitment to academic freedom in a public statement. But universities have not always resisted PRC students’ demands, as recounted earlier in the case of the University of Washington’s apology to students for causing “harm” by using the word “Manchuria” in promotional materials for the Statira Biggs scholarship.

5. There is great diversity among China Studies faculty in terms of exposure to and concern about PRC influence and interference activities. A large proportion of the 100-plus faculty surveyed had no experience with most or all of the activities potentially indicative of

289. “MIT Webpage Controversy,” Yaomingmania, Apr 27, 2006, <http://yaomingmania.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=9869>.

PRC influence and interference. Faculty falling into this category often said they had never self-censored while engaged in academic activities in the United States and tended to think that self-censorship was not a problem in the China Studies community at large. Even so, many of these faculty asked to be interviewed on background, citing concerns about losing research access to China, upsetting their university, or drawing unwelcome attention to themselves. In this respect, faculty appeared to display considerable cognitive dissonance.

But other faculty—particularly those working on borderlands issues or those of ethnic Chinese descent—have experienced multiple instances of activities potentially indicative of PRC influence and interference. Faculty in this category, especially those without tenure, tended to say that they frequently self-censor and express concern that self-censorship is a major problem in China Studies. It is also noteworthy that these faculty come from a variety of disciplines, including history, political science, geography, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, religious studies, literature, and film. Some faculty in this second group pointed to personal experiences in which a colleague or administrator had discouraged them from pursuing academic activities involving sensitive content. They viewed colleagues and administrators as complicit in attempts to curb academic activities when these might hinder personal advancement or impact institutional cooperation with the PRC.

The personal and institutional incentives to remain silent about PRC influence and interference activities were especially noticeable in a few interviews the author excluded from the study. Several administrators and faculty voiced serious concern to the author about PRC activities but declined permission to use their experiences in the study. The choice was striking not only because these administrators and faculty were offered anonymity, but also because they had already left the institutions where the activities occurred. These administrators and faculty's anxiety about "biting the hand that feeds" took precedence over their clear desire to speak their minds.

A third group of faculty reported no personal experience with activities potentially indicative of PRC influence and interference

but indicated concern about the Confucius Institutes, CSSAs, and PRC students in Australia. Pointing to the increasingly repressive atmosphere within the PRC and its growing international clout, faculty in this category tended to reserve judgment about whether PRC influence and interference activities could eventually occur in the United States.

This variation reflects not only the opacity of PRC methods and the rapid evolution of the issue, but also a lack of information-sharing among faculty about their experiences, a potentially significant barrier to improving awareness and instituting countermeasures across China Studies.

6. There is also diversity among administrators. Some administrators have dissuaded faculty from pursuing academic activities involving sensitive content for the apparent purpose of preserving institutional cooperation with the PRC. But in other cases, administrators have upheld their institutions' commitments to academic freedom by resisting pressure from PRC diplomats to cancel speaking engagements by the Dalai Lama or other figures. Staff have also resisted attempts to impose PRC political preferences on university activities. It is therefore inaccurate to vilify administrators and staff as a group when assessing the factors that may make some American institutions more sensitive to PRC preferences.
7. The PRC influence and interference activities documented in this study occurred not just at cash-strapped public university systems with high enrollments of PRC nationals, but also at wealthy Ivy League institutions and small liberal arts institutions such as Smith College. This matters because it indicates that institutions across the spectrum of American higher education may eventually face pressure to align their academic activities with PRC political preferences.

This study's findings suggest a worrisome trend in which faculty, students, administrators, and staff across a range of disciplines within American institutions are encountering PRC influence and interference

activities, which this study has reframed through the concept of infringements. Such infringements may limit critical discourse about China within the classroom, harming the learning environment for all. If the infringements associated with PRC actors become widespread and systematic, faculty, students, administrators and staff in the United States may find themselves “playing by China’s rules,” or gradually adopting the PRC’s domestic censorship standards.

RESPONDING TO PRC INFLUENCE AND INTERFERENCE ACTIVITIES IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Neither universities nor policymakers alone can address the challenges PRC influence and interference activities pose to American higher education. Academics and policymakers should cooperate to assess this phenomenon’s scope and to develop a reporting system to track instances of PRC influence and interference. Policymakers must refrain from heavy-handed measures that threaten universities’ autonomy, while university presidents, administrators, and faculty must put the integrity of the American higher education system before their personal and institutional interests.

Further Inquiry

Independent investigation by journalists and scholars is important, but the gravity of the situation demands a coordinated, well-resourced approach. A non-partisan team of researchers should be convened to formally investigate PRC influence and interference activities at American universities. The research team could operate under the direction of an advisory committee composed of China scholars, university presidents, administration officials, officials from the two congressional China commissions, education officials, law enforcement, and intelligence officials. The involvement of a cross-section of academic and government leaders is recommended for substantive and political reasons. On the substantive side, law enforcement and intelligence communities are well-placed to provide the research team evidence of state-sponsored influence and interference activities collected

through surveillance. Academics can use their training and knowledge of university processes to identify sound research methods and promising avenues for inquiry. On the political side, involving both academia and government could check these populations' respective incentives to downplay or politicize the findings of the inquiry. The investigation could be conducted over one to two years to allow sufficient time for a thorough assessment, including, for example, a standardized survey given to a large sample of China Studies faculty, interviews with affected members of the university community, and evaluations of institutional dependence on PRC funding. The research team could produce a report with recommendations to be implemented by universities and policymakers.

While this study explored challenges arising from the activities of PRC diplomats and PRC students, other facets of PRC influence and interference demand examination. These areas include influence and interference activities related to professional organizations like the Association for Asian Studies, self-censorship in China-themed academic journals, implicit conditions in endowed chairs and fellowships, and institutions' dependence on PRC-sourced donations.

Steps for Universities

In the meantime, American universities should adopt practices to make campus environments less hospitable to PRC influence and interference activities.

- Universities should share experiences to develop a collective awareness of challenges arising from engagement with the PRC. Experience-sharing will help universities which might otherwise dismiss a single instance of diplomatic pressure to recognize larger patterns of influence and interference that affect multiple institutions.
- Universities should collaborate with federal law enforcement by reporting PRC diplomatic pressure and retaliation. Reporting will be crucial to U.S. government efforts to assess and respond to state-sponsored influence and interference activities.
- Universities should develop standard procedures for rebuffing pressure tactics from PRC diplomats.

- Universities should institute a school-wide orientation about appropriate behavior in the American university at the beginning of the academic year for new students and faculty from every country, including the United States. An orientation may deter those unfamiliar with a liberal educational system from expressing their views in a disruptive fashion.
- When PRC students articulate the CCP's party line, faculty should use the opportunity to "teach the controversy" by engaging the class in productive discussion.
- Faculty should intervene if they witness any students—including those from the PRC—heckling or engaging in other forms of inappropriate classroom behavior. Faculty can refer consistently problematic students to administrators for discipline.
- Universities should create channels for faculty to report troubling incidents to administrators.
- Universities should institute policies prohibiting un-enrolled visitors to class.
- Universities should educate their police departments so that officers are better-equipped to handle disruptive students and un-enrolled visitors.

To make China Studies faculty feel that "the institution has their back," universities must reaffirm their commitment to academic freedom and resist attempts to limit campus speech or activity purely on the basis of whether that speech or activity gives someone offense. That is not to say that there is no merit to the claims of historically marginalized groups who have been the driving force in recent years for university responsiveness to students' feelings. But offensiveness is not a clear or consistent standard for evaluating the validity of ideas. How universities treat this issue is crucial because limiting speech or other academic activity on the grounds of offensiveness is the single best argument the CCP can deploy to oppose its critics on American campuses.

How can faculty be confident that their institutions will defend their right to research and teach controversial issues, such as the Tiananmen

Square protests of 1989 or the PRC's repression of Chinese civil society, if university officials bend readily to student complaints? Many faculty interviewed for this study expressed exactly that concern should something they write or say in class offend a PRC student for political reasons. If universities affirm their traditional protections for academic freedom and free speech, the effect will trickle down to faculty in China Studies, eliminating a powerful pressure to self-censor. Universities across the United States can follow the lead of the University of Chicago and Princeton University, which have issued statements affirming their commitment to freedom of inquiry and expression.²⁹⁰

CSSA officers and ordinary PRC students are shrewd observers of campus politics. It is unsurprising, and even natural, that they should imitate their American peers. It is up to universities to make clear what will and will not be tolerated to those they are tasked to educate.

Steps for Policymakers

Good policy is evidence-based. A cautious approach is ideal until a comprehensive investigation sheds more light on the nature and scope of PRC influence and interference activities at American universities. In explaining the rationale for eventual policy choices, policymakers should delineate the scope of problematic activities and provide concrete evidence to avoid broad characterizations of any particular group.

In the meantime, policymakers can consider responses to the PRC's coercion of American institutions.

- Policymakers can create a reporting system for universities that experience PRC influence and interference activities.

290. Robert J. Zimmer and Eric D. Isaacs, "Statement on Free Expression at the University of Chicago," University of Chicago, Jan 6, 2015, <https://parents.uchicago.edu/page/statement-free-expression-university-chicago> and "Faculty adopts statement affirming commitment to freedom of expression at Princeton," Princeton University, Apr 7, 2015, <https://www.princeton.edu/news/2015/04/07/faculty-adopts-statement-affirming-commitment-freedom-expression-princeton>.

- Policymakers can consider declaring *persona non grata* PRC diplomats who pressure universities when they extend invitations to figures like the Dalai Lama or threaten faculty when they pursue sensitive research topics.
- Policymakers should put issues of influence and interference in academia on the agenda when meeting with their PRC interlocutors.
- Policymakers can consider imposing a cost on the PRC when it punishes American institutions for upholding academic freedom on their own campuses.
- With an eye toward branches of the CSSA that have engaged in overtly political activities, policymakers can clarify the circumstances under which a group is considered a “scholastic” or “academic” entity exempt from FARA. If policymakers go this route, they should be aware that the PRC may retaliate with similar restrictions on American students in China.

Policymakers should address the concerns of advocacy groups representing Chinese Americans in developing policies to combat PRC influence and interference activities. These groups understand the government’s need to ensure national security but worry that policies intended to address security challenges may lead to discrimination and wrongful prosecution. A number of organizations representing Chinese Americans articulated these worries in a March 2018 letter to FBI Director Christopher Wray after he described PRC intelligence-gathering efforts as a “whole-of-society threat” requiring a “whole-of-society response.”²⁹¹ The concern is understandable, considering the legacy of Japanese American internment during World War II and various political “scares” throughout the 20th century.

291. “Community Organizations Call for Meeting with FBI Director Christopher Wray Regarding Profiling of Students, Scholars, and Scientists with Chinese Origins,” Committee of 100, Mar 1, 2018, https://www.committee100.org/press_release/community-organizations-call-for-meeting-with-fbi-director-christopher-wray-regarding-profiling-of-students-scholars-and-scientists-with-chinese-origins/.

An ideal response to PRC influence and interference activities would not target students from the PRC, these groups say, but rather proceed from impartially applied principles about what is acceptable for all students in the university environment. “The fundamental issue is no different than the university system has been facing [for years]: academic freedom versus the limits on academic expression,” Committee of 100 public policy committee chair Charlie Woo said.²⁹² “I think if the students from China make it an issue that we should examine, fine, let us examine it. But these issues are there with or without the Chinese students.” Chinese American Citizens Alliance vice president for public and civic affairs Ted Gong agreed, noting that PRC students are not the only students who challenge academic freedom on American campuses. However, Gong said that if credible evidence of problematic activities is found, the issue would merit further attention. “CACA’s position is that we are an American organization that believes in our democratic values, and that includes freedom of speech and importantly having an environment for students to be able to inquire and question issues, or raise issues, to talk freely, especially in an academic setting,” Gong said.²⁹³ “Those things that curtail or stop people from doing [those] things, from any group, is something that we would have to look at.” PRC students may come to the United States with different understandings of how to engage in constructive dialogue in the classroom and may require some help learning the standards of the American university environment, Woo said.

Policy makers should avoid measures that undermine academia’s autonomy given its centrality to American democracy. Imposing the restrictive practices of the national security state on universities will alienate the populations whose cooperation is crucial for success. Purging universities of all funding, cooperative initiatives, and exchanges with the PRC that may represent sources of influence might have the unfortunate side effect of harming China Studies. “Often [overzealous attempts to reduce contacts with China] ends up undermining the legitimate study of the largest nation in the world,” University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty member

292. Interview with Charlie Woo, Apr 10, 2018.

293. Interview with Ted Gong, Jun 28, 2018.

Joseph Dennis wrote in an email.²⁹⁴ “However one feels about China, it deserves thorough study from multiple disciplinary perspectives.” It would be worrisome if the countermeasures designed to combat the threat of PRC influence and interference activities themselves threatened the integrity of American higher educational institutions.

An effective approach must also recognize how domestic political choices affect American universities’ vulnerability to PRC influence and interference. Educational institutions are increasingly recruiting students from the PRC, cooperating with PRC partner institutions, and establishing satellite campuses abroad. A key reason American universities turn to the PRC for funding is that they have been starved of revenue at the state level since the 2008 recession. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, overall state funding for public two- and four-year colleges in the 2017 school year was nearly \$9 billion below its 2008 level, after adjusting for inflation.²⁹⁵ Even the wealthiest private institutions suffered financial hardship during the recession because their endowment values fell precipitously.²⁹⁶ The federal government also significantly reduced funding for foreign language study under the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs, in addition to eliminating the Foreign Language Assistance Program.²⁹⁷ In this economic context, it is unsurprising that American universities seek external funds to make up the shortfall, and this subsequent vulnerability is surely not lost on PRC authorities. Properly funding higher education, including programs for

294. Joseph Dennis, email message to the author, Jun 15, 2018.

295. Michael Mitchell, Michael Leachman and Kathleen Masterson, “A Lost Decade in Higher Education Funding: State Cuts Have Driven Up Tuition and Reduced Quality,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Aug 23, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/a-lost-decade-in-higher-education-funding>.

296. Roger Geiger, “Impact of the Financial Crisis on Higher Education in the United States,” *International Higher Education* 59 (2015): 9–11, <https://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/ihe/article/viewFile/8486/7620>.

297. U.S. Congress, “A National Security Crisis: Foreign Language Capabilities in the Federal Government: Hearing Before the Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia Subcommittee of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, United States Senate,” 112th Cong, 2nd session, (2012), <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112shrg75214/pdf/CHRG-112shrg75214.pdf>, 24.

foreign language study, will reduce the financial temptation institutions feel to engage with and placate the PRC.

The challenges posed by PRC influence and interference activities in American higher education are real. Incomplete information, partisan politics, and the web of personal and institutional interests that deter universities from openly discussing PRC influence and interference activities will complicate the search for an effective solution. The policy approach to Confucius Institutes, which has demonized the universities hosting them, arguably offers a blue print of what not to do in confronting the sensitive issues surveyed in this study. Yet the documented cases in which some faculty, administrators, and staff have resisted pressure from PRC diplomats and students give cause for optimism. Academic freedom is alive and well in the United States. If universities and policymakers can find new ways to protect faculty, students, and others engaging in academic activity involving China, they can ensure the integrity of American higher education. Greater collaboration between academia and government against PRC influence and interference will bolster, not weaken, academic freedom.

Countermeasures against PRC influence and interference activities may at first glance require reconciling the fundamentally incompatible imperatives of the national security state and the independent academia so vital to American democracy. Critics may argue against attempting any policy response at all for fear of undermining American universities' autonomy or the openness of domestic society, asserting that "we must live with the weaknesses of our strengths." Such an assertion creates false choices between inaction and action, between consistency with American values and safety. As a democratic society, it is true that the United States must live with the vulnerabilities created by its openness. That does not mean that the United States cannot protect the higher education system that is one of its greatest strengths.

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