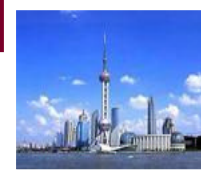




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China Newsletter - February 2014

Foreign Educators Move to China

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The Chinese culture has always placed a great deal of importance on education. Historically, in what was primarily an agrarian society, education was one of the primary factors that set one person apart from another and allowed them, and their families, to advance socially in a hierarchical society. In present-day China, where Chinese families have been increasingly earning more, and the middle class continues to expand, an increased number of Chinese families have been able to provide for their children's advanced educational needs. This has created a great deal of competition among students to enter a prestigious Chinese university.

In China, it matters what university you attend. Those that attend the most prestigious universities will almost always get the better job offer. Those that don't, will find their employment options limited. Entrance to these universities is determined by one's score on an entrance exam, although in China, connections are always important and can be a significant factor in determining one's admission to a university. However, for most students, their score on the exam will determine





if and where they're accepted. In addition, even when they're accepted into a university, higher scoring students will be allowed to obtain a degree in the most desirable areas, which are engineering or business. Lower scoring students, in contrast, will only find degrees such as philosophy or liberal arts available to them. The reason for this is that Chinese society values technical and business degrees, which can make money for the firm which employs them, over degrees which generate lower revenue for an employer. Consequently, it's much harder for students with these types of degrees to be hired and attain social mobility.¹

Within China, a person's education affects the entire family. Since China's one-child policy went into effect in 1978, most households only have one child to care for their parents in their old age. And, with an increasing life expectancy, it's not unusual to find four grandparents and two parents with only one child to support them. Chinese families know this, which is one reason why the entire family, parents and grandparents, will pool their money in order to send their children to the

best school possible in order for them to obtain higher paying jobs after graduation. They'll also pay for tutors and weekend study sessions so that they have a greater opportunity to perform well on the college entrance exams and qualify for business or engineering classes at the most prestigious schools.

Chinese parents will, as a matter of course, send their children to take extra classes after school, on weekends, and during school breaks. Children culturally accept this as, within Chinese society, there's a belief that parents know best. As a result, parents normally choose engineering or business classes for their child rather than liberal arts courses, which the child may really like. They will also choose the child's school. Ensuring that their children study hard, get into the best schools, and obtain a desirable degree gives parents a sense that their children will be able to take care of them in their advanced years.

If financially able, Chinese parents have a preference for sending their children abroad to receive a foreign education, with the United States being the country of



choice. In fact, nearly 290,000 Chinese students hold active US student visas, more than the number of students from Europe, South America, Africa, Australia, and elsewhere in North America combined. Yet this number is relatively small, comprising only two-tenths of 1 percent of college-age Chinese citizens, according to the United Nations.⁴ However, as the cost of attending American universities in the United States has soared to an average of \$38,000 or more per year, education in the US, according to the *Foreign Policy Journal*, is way out of reach for the average Chinese family. As a result, many foreign universities have been extending their brands to China, opening campuses and establishing joint venture programs across the country, in order to satisfy this pent-up demand for US education. Consequently, the cost of a Western education in China has become substantially cheaper and more available to a great many Chinese families who could not afford to send their children abroad. A bachelor's degree at the University of Nottingham's Ningbo Campus, for example, costs \$14,000. Although

this is still higher than the \$3,200 for a BA degree at Shanghai University, many Chinese families feel that a Western education offers their children an edge when applying for employment in China's increasingly tight job market.¹

Having a foreign university campus in China does have its downside, as China frequently censors what's taught. For example, Beijing has banned classroom discussion on seven topics, including human rights and past mistakes by the Communist Party. In many ways this is an extension of what exists in Chinese universities where the Communist Party has a number of representatives in their administration. As an example of the Party's sensitivity to criticism, Wellesley College entered into a partnership agreement with Peking University. Professor, Xia Yeliang, a government critic, was threatened with termination because of his government-critical views. In support, 130 Wellesley faculty members sent a letter to Peking University's president warning that a termination of Xia would affect their partnership. The government paid no attention to



the letter, and Xia was fired. Peking University contends that this was due to his teachings, although most consider his firing a response by the government to Xia's politics. In spite of this, the faculty of Wellesley voted to keep the partnership after assessing the value of the Beijing campus to the college. In another example professor Zhang Xuezhong, who teaches at the East China University of Political Science and Law in Shanghai, which has partnerships with the University of Wisconsin Law School and the law school at Willamette University, lost his job after refusing to apologize for writing that the Communist Party was hostile to the rule of law. In response, Richard Saller, dean of the school of humanities and sciences at Stanford University, which recently opened a \$7 million center at Peking University, believes that "engagement is a better strategy than taking such moral high ground that we can't engage with some of these universities."²

In Chinese universities, a Communist Party secretary is the most senior official. In 2004 the University of Nottingham opened a campus in Ningbo, a city of about 6

million people, approximately a three hour drive from Shanghai. This campus is a joint venture with Zhejiang Wanli University. According to Julie Sanders, vice provost at Nottingham Ningbo, a Party representative is "part of the senior management board" at Ningbo. "I meet monthly with the Party. We talk through what I'm planning to do – any pressures that might put on them... It doesn't feel to me like a control mechanism. It does mean we have to talk." While Sanders says this doesn't affect academic content, the government still must still approve all books brought into the library and what goes on the shelves.³

Nevertheless, foreign education in China continues to grow as greater numbers of Chinese take advantage of Western universities at a significantly lower cost than studying abroad. This trend is expected to continue as households have more spendable income and competition for admission to Chinese universities intensifies.

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Endnotes:

1. <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2014/03/02/foreign-education-in-china/>
2. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1379172/western-universities-test-academic-ideals-when-setting-shop-china>
3. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/02/14/western-universities-take-different-approaches-branches-shanghai>
4. <http://chronicle.com/blogs/data/2014/02/07/almost-one-third-of-all-foreign-students-are-from-china/>

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