

Bloomberg

China Rush to U.S. Colleges Reveals Predatory Fees for Recruits

By Daniel Golden - May 22, 2011

Leon Lin was ecstatic when he found out he'd be leaving home in southern China to study at the University of Connecticut. As the Chinese agent whom his parents paid \$5,000 to help him get into the school told him, the university's flagship campus at Storrs was a highly ranked institution, with 25,000 students and ready access to [Boston](#) and [New York City](#). And eventually Lin would return home with the status and career advantage of a U.S. degree.

It never crossed his mind that he'd pay \$47,000 a year to live in an almost empty country inn and attend classes five miles down the road at a UConn satellite campus comprising two buildings and 250 students. He shares a room and a microwave with his only compatriot on the Torrington campus, Li Rirong, a fellow freshman with similarly dashed dreams.

"I didn't know there was a regional campus," said 20-year-old Lin. "I knew there were lots of [international students](#) at Storrs. I said, 'Torrington campus, what the hell?'"

Lin and Li reflect the most extreme result of an industry burgeoning from the fourfold rise since 2006 in the number of Chinese undergraduates at U.S. colleges. More than 400 agencies licensed by the Chinese government, and many others that aren't, cater to families eager to see their children gain the prestige of a U.S. degree. For thousands of dollars, agents help fill out applications, ghost-write essays and arrange visas.

U.S. Ties

These agents also often misrepresent or conceal their U.S. affiliations. They receive payments not only from the families, who even pony up a share of any scholarships awarded to their children, but also from an increasing number of colleges, as well as small operators seeking to profit stateside from the influx of Chinese students.

Eager to mine a newly affluent [China](#), the [State University of New York](#), Tulane University in [New Orleans](#) and scores of other schools are starting to pay agents a commission for each student enrolled -- an incentive that's banned when recruiting U.S. students.

The upshot is that some Chinese students end up paying at least twice as much as their American counterparts to go to colleges that aren't necessarily the best match for them.

"We're pretty much against commercial recruiting agents," said [Alina Romanowski](#), deputy assistant secretary for academic programs at the U.S. State Department, which offers free college advising abroad through its EducationUSA arm. "We want to make sure people don't have to pay for" information about college, she said. "It's out there, it's available, and we provide it."

Horses, River Rafting

In Lin and Li's case, their agents were working with a former U.S. Treasury investigator-turned-real-estate-developer. He aimed to recruit Chinese students to attend campuses like [Torrington](#) that lack their own housing, and enlist them as rent-paying tenants. At least one of the agents in China and the developer represented themselves to students as having a relationship with the University of [Connecticut](#) -- a relationship that never existed.

The developer, Timothy Martin of Granby, Connecticut, also promised the young men access to flight training, equestrian lessons, river rafting and other recreations, none of which materialized. Lin and Li each pay his firm \$22,200 a year for room and board at the inn -- about \$9,000 more than it would cost them to live in a dormitory at Storrs. That's on top of about \$25,000 they each pay in out-of-state tuition, three times the in-state rate.

The Real Thing

Martin said his company has given Lin and Li value for their money.

"We're not selling RC Cola in China and saying it's Coke," he said. "We're selling Coke."

So far, Lin and Li's experience in the U.S. has been one of isolation and frustration. Torrington has no other foreign students, and little in the way of English-language help. "It's just a desert for them here," said Christine Mosman, Torrington's student affairs coordinator. "It's so sad."

China passed [South Korea](#) in the 2009-2010 academic year as the leading source of international undergraduates at U.S. colleges, accounting for almost 40,000 students, according to the [Institute of International Education](#), a New York-based nonprofit group. China's one-child-per-family policy and its growing wealth mean middle-class families there can afford U.S. tuitions that far exceed the cost of Chinese universities.

Few Counselors

About 80 percent of these students use agents, according to a May 2010 report by [Zinch China](#), an online social network that matches Chinese students with colleges and scholarships. Since placement at domestic universities is determined by an entrance exam, Chinese high schools rarely provide guidance counselors, and agents fill the gap for students looking overseas.

The system works well for many Chinese applicants whose agents take into account their academic records and personal preferences and guide them to appropriate U.S. colleges.

One of China's biggest agencies, Guangzhou-based EIC Group, charges \$4,000 to \$6,000 -- depending on the ranking of the colleges -- for a maximum of six applications, plus \$150 to \$300 for each additional application, according to a contract reviewed by Bloomberg News. If students don't pay fees on time, EIC can withhold letters of acceptance and visa documents. "All the negative consequences are borne by the client," the contract states.

Students must also pay 10 percent of any college scholarships or financial aid to EIC. "Anything wrong with that?" said Albert Li of EIC's U.S. department in Beijing. "It's an award for our writer, for the consultant, it's kind of encouragement."

Scholarship Share

For agents to benefit from financial aid is "horribly wrong," said Yenbo Wu, associate vice president for international education at [San Francisco State University](#). "That money shouldn't be collected. That's for students."

EIC is certified by the [American International Recruitment Council](#), a Bethesda, [Maryland](#), nonprofit organization that helps colleges vet agents. Founded in 2008, the council has 129 member colleges and reviews agents for legal, financial or ethical problems.

Agents are entitled to a share of scholarship money, said the council's executive director, John Deupree. "When you go to a restaurant, you're supposed to tip on the full price even if you have a coupon, because the waiter does the same amount of work," he said.

Audrey Li, 19, a Beijing high-school graduate seeking to study art and architecture, agreed to pay her agent more than \$3,000, plus 10 percent of any financial aid.

'That's Robbery'

After she was admitted to Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, [New York](#), the agency missed the Jan. 1 application deadline for a \$20,000 merit scholarship. She begged the college for another chance, and was awarded the scholarship, plus \$15,000 in additional aid. Because of its

mistake, the agency waived its \$3,500 share, Li said.

“The agent has absolutely no reason to take any amount of any student’s scholarships since the money is supposed to be awarded solely toward the student,” she said. “Some other agents even take 15 percent -- that’s robbery!”

U.S. colleges are prohibited from paying incentives to recruit students who qualify for federal financial aid. There’s no such ban on recruiting international students, who are ineligible for federal grants and loans.

EIC’s clients include Drexel University in Philadelphia and San Diego State University. The [American Language Institute](#) at San Diego State’s College of Extended Studies pays the agency 15 percent of tuition, or commission of \$299.25 to \$897 a semester, for each student recruited to an English-language program, including five students this term, spokeswoman Gina Jacobs said. The institute doesn’t provide scholarships, she said.

\$8 a Day

Some of the services provided by agents in China violate ethical standards for college admissions in the U.S. About 90 percent of recommendation letters for Chinese students are fake and 70 percent of essays aren’t written by the applicant, according to the Zinch China report. “Many agents in China have folders full of ‘successful’ essays, which they tweak each year,” Zinch China Chairman Tom Melcher wrote. “Others hire recent returnees to write essays.”

One former employee of an agency in eastern China was paid \$8 a day to craft essays in 2009-2010 for 20 applicants to U.S. colleges, she said, asking not to be identified. All of them were admitted, she said.

Most of the applicants planned to major in finance or accounting, so for them she wrote essays describing how the student had been motivated by reading a biography of a famous American businessman such as [Bill Gates](#), she said in a telephone interview. For recommendations, teachers’ names were signed without their knowledge, and extracurricular credentials such as student-union president were made up, said the 23-year-old.

‘Pay for Success’

U.S. colleges are flocking to use agents that recruit in China. Doing so allows them to boost international revenue while avoiding the up-front expense of sending their own admissions staff.

Aiming to increase international enrollment to 32,000 from 18,000, the State University of New York

system has accepted bids from agents, including five in China, whom it will pay 10 percent of first-year tuition for every student recruited. International students at the New York system pay tuition of \$13,380, more than 2 1/2 times the [in-state rate](#).

Because SUNY “doesn’t have a lot of liquidity to invest in recruitment,” it makes sense to “pay for success,” said Mitch Leventhal, vice chancellor for global affairs. SUNY will make sure applicants know that their agents are paid by the university, he said.

Tulane, Rutgers

At least 80 American schools have signed up with IDP Education since that agency -- half-owned by 38 Australian universities and half by online employment firm [Seek Ltd. \(SEK\)](#) -- began recruiting international students to U.S. colleges in 2009. Schools including Tulane, Rutgers in [New Brunswick, New Jersey](#), and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, [Florida](#), pay IDP \$2,500 for each enrollment.

IDP charges some students in China from \$3,000 for community colleges to \$7,000 for top-30 colleges, and takes 10 percent of any financial aid or scholarship, according to a contract reviewed by Bloomberg News. Because IDP isn’t licensed to operate in China, it forms partnerships with agents there, “and it is really their contract that the students have to sign,” spokesman Matthew Ulmer said in an e-mail. Revamping its China operation is a company priority, he said.

Whac-a-Mole

Agents’ practices in China have raised alarms at the U.S. State Department and elsewhere. The department’s [EducationUSA](#) wing stopped contracting with institutions in China for college counseling in 2009 after finding that some of its partners were acting as agents or receiving commissions from agents or U.S. universities.

Agents “may lead students to choose a college or university that will not meet their needs,” according to an August 2009 policy.

Lauryne Massinga, EducationUSA’s regional education advising coordinator for China, said that as soon as it warns one agent to stop using its logo, another starts. “It’s like the game Whac-a-Mole,” she said.

The [National Association for College Admission Counseling](#), an Arlington, Virginia, nonprofit group for admissions professionals, issued a statement last week that paying recruiters to increase enrollment isn’t appropriate domestically or internationally, said NACAC Executive Director Joyce

Smith. "Some schools are using agents as a quick fix," she said.

Relationship Building

Fifteen schools, including Wake Forest University and the [University of Maryland](#), have joined an alliance called [CNA-USA](#) to bypass agents and build relationships directly with Chinese high schools, said Richard Hesel, principal of Art & Science Group, a Baltimore-based consulting firm that helped set up CNA- USA last year. Representatives have visited high schools in [Guangdong province](#), conducted application workshops for students, and provided college counseling at no cost to the families or high schools, Hesel said.

The [University of Connecticut](#), which has increased international enrollment from 25 to 128 in five years, sends admissions staff to China. "We tell students, 'We don't have agents,'" Lee Melvin, vice president for enrollment planning and management. "They can't call on your behalf. They can't write essays on your behalf. We'll build our international population ourselves."

That didn't protect Lin and Li. They were steered to an empty inn and a branch campus meant for commuters by their Chinese agents and Martin, the former federal investigator.

'Clever Guy'

In an interview at a Friendly's restaurant in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, Martin, 49, talked about how earlier that morning, his car had broken down as he was taking two of the four Chinese high-school students who live and pay rent in his Granby home to a standardized test.

Born in [White Plains](#), New York, Martin attended Manhattan College in the Bronx, served three years in the Coast Guard, and then became a Treasury agent investigating [money laundering](#).

He left the government in 1995 because it was "busting my chops" about how he could afford his Westport, Connecticut, home on Long Island Sound, he said. Outside income as a builder paid for the home, he said. "I walked away clean."

Martin "is a clever guy in an unconventional sense," said Richard Klugman, a former Treasury colleague.

Martin embarked on a career in real estate, which included renovating a crack house in Torrington into a hotel. Two of his properties went into foreclosure in the past three years as real estate values plunged nationwide.

He formed [American International Student Centers](#) in early 2010, run out of his house. Martin's

partner, a native of China, hires agents there on commission, including the companies that brought Lin and Li to Torrington.

“I have a lot of connections” among agencies in China, said the partner, who asked not to be identified.

‘Sort of Tricking Them’

American International Student Centers started by supplying Chinese students to Connecticut high schools. It has enrolled 14 international students at Woodstock Academy, which serves as a free public school for the area. Foreign students pay \$11,201 in out-of-district tuition and \$4,000 in English training if needed, said Woodstock headmaster Kim Caron. American International Student Centers, which places the students with local families or rents housing for them, charges them about \$25,000 for room and board, Martin said.

American International’s website bills Woodstock as “formerly a Yale Prep.” Martin based the description on a Wikipedia entry stating that Woodstock had an informal connection with Yale until 1956.

“That’s all the Chinese need to hear,” Martin said. “I’m sort of tricking them. They’re going to a public school. But they’re happy with it.”

Declining Enrollment

Caron asked Martin this month to take down the “Yale Prep” description. “That is not accurate,” the headmaster said. “We were not ever known as Yale University Prep School.”

There is no record in Yale’s archives of a relationship with Woodstock, said Judith Ann Schiff, the university’s chief research archivist. Two major histories of Yale don’t mention the academy, and it was not among the 17 active prep school clubs at the university in 1910, she said.

The [Gilbert School](#) in Winsted, Connecticut, is in discussions with Martin to import 20 foreign students, said Superintendent David Cressy. “Enrollment has been declining,” he said. “If you don’t want to make difficult cuts in programs, you look for other sources of revenue.”

When his partner told him that some Chinese parents wanted to send their children to U.S. colleges as well, Martin had the idea to recruit Chinese students to UConn’s Torrington campus and put them up at the [Tollgate Hill Inn](#) in nearby Litchfield. Martin had discussed leasing the Tollgate, one of the 50 oldest inns in the U.S., from owner John Pecora, an old friend. “It’s very slow up here during the winter,” Pecora said.

‘Upscale’ Housing

Martin said he didn't worry that the Torrington campus lacked resources for foreign students. "The Chinese only care about the ranking." He charges more than university housing because the inn is "upscale compared to what they get at Storrs," he said.

Martin broached his idea with two UConn staff members at the Torrington campus last June 23, and asked for authorization on university letterhead to solicit applicants, according to e-mails reviewed by Bloomberg News. Torrington officials referred his request to Melvin, the vice president for enrollment planning, who denied it within a month, they said.

Martin's partner began approaching agents in China anyway, offering one of them \$1,000 per student. The company was also purporting to be affiliated with UConn. An agent wrote the university seeking confirmation that American International Student Centers was representing it. The agent attached a letter she had received from the company. It carried the UConn seal and asserted that "special consideration will be given to students applying through the AISC for the Torrington campus."

54 Credits

"I overstated my boundaries," Martin said, adding that he assumed at the time that he had an agreement with UConn.

The letter from Martin's company also guaranteed that Torrington students could [transfer](#) to Storrs after one year. Most students need 54 credits to transfer, or almost two years' worth, Torrington admissions counselor Dana Forchette said.

Melvin shot off a warning to Martin. "As we have repeatedly indicated, the University of Connecticut hasn't agreed to any special arrangements or partnerships with AISC, nor have we agreed to extend preferential treatment to applicants through your programs," he wrote in an Aug. 16 letter. Use of UConn's seal, he wrote, "should be discontinued at once."

Martin was sorry for "any misuse that might have occurred," he answered in an Aug. 30 e-mail. He said he was asking the company's representatives to remove UConn logos from their correspondence.

College Fair

More than three months after Martin's apology, Lin was billed \$22,200 to pay American International Student Centers for room and board at the inn, according to an invoice reviewed by Bloomberg News. The Dec. 16 bill displayed the university seal and was headed, "University of

Connecticut Office of Undergraduate Admissions.”

The misrepresentation wasn't Martin's fault because agents in China billed the students and forwarded the money to his company, he said.

Beijing Star Overseas-Study Service Co., the agent for Lin's roommate, Li, feigned a connection with the University of Connecticut in March at one of China's biggest college fairs.

At the [China International Education Exhibition](#), employees of Beijing Star, a state-owned company under the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, set up a UConn booth and handed business cards to throngs of Chinese students. The cards featured UConn's oak-leaf logo and Web address and the title of “director of admission” at the university's “China liaison office.”

Misunderstanding

In a pitch on the site Nihao Wang, where Chinese students search for universities, Beijing Star labels its own phone number as “UConn Beijing's Office Number.”

Beijing Star hasn't posed as an official representative of UConn, Yang Jingfeng, who handles market promotion for America, said in a telephone interview. “This is a misunderstanding,” said Yang, who had a “director of admission” business card at the fair.

Martin said he was unaware until after the college fair that Beijing Star was calling itself UConn's China office. While he would have discouraged that tactic, “I don't believe UConn owns its logo in China,” he said. “I don't think Beijing Star is breaking the law.”

While UConn officials didn't endorse American International Student Centers, they told Martin that his recruits were welcome to apply. Three were enrolled at Torrington for the semester that started in January. One female student refused to go, complaining she had been misled. The university found housing for her at [Storrs](#).

Hotel Living

That left Li and Lin in the Tollgate's newest building, a 1992 colonial, where their room has become an island of college life, littered with clothes and the remnants of old meals. They sometimes study in the lower ballroom.

Interviewed in the lobby, they said they come from middle- class families. Lin's father is a civil servant; Li's, a businessman.

Lin didn't know he was targeted for Torrington until he received his student visa, he said. When he told his agency, Academic [Asia China](#), that he wanted to transfer to Storrs, it had him send an e-mail to Martin's partner at American International Student Centers. "I thought AISC was part of UConn," the student said.

Lu Yuan, America program director for [Academic Asia China](#), said he believes that UConn-Torrington is cooperating with Martin's partner. "This situation is quite common throughout American universities," he said.

Main Campus

Lu acknowledged that Lin -- and the female student, also represented by Academic Asia, who refused to attend Torrington -- "didn't know which campus they were going to. From our point of view, we wanted them to apply for the main campus." Academic Asia's agreement with Martin's partner is "under discussion," Lu said. "The student feedback was not very good, so we are not in a situation of cooperation."

Li, a 18-year-old from Beijing, paid Beijing Star \$2,300. While the agency did tell Li he would start at Torrington, it said he could transfer to Storrs after a year. "I didn't know I had to have 54 credits," he said.

An American International Student Centers Internet [slide show](#) touting the Tollgate Inn and Torrington encouraged Li to enroll, he said. The show featured opportunities for skiing, snowboarding, flight training, equestrian and fly-fishing lessons, river rafting, crew and lacrosse.

Asked if Martin provided these pastimes, Li said, "Never."

'Copied and Pasted'

Li and Lin didn't take advantage of the offers, Martin said. Horseback riding? "They had no interest," Martin said. Fly fishing? "Not yet. Maybe I'll take them." As for crew and lacrosse, "That's a mistake," he said. "It's copied and pasted from high-school Web sites."

Their academic experience has been disappointing at times for them and for Torrington staff. "During orientation, I was completely stunned at how difficult it was to communicate with them," Mosman, the student-affairs coordinator, said.

To ease their transition, she enrolled the two finance majors in all the same courses, including math, economics and Asian history, which she figured would be a snap. Instead, the history instructor requires oral participation, and "these two guys won't talk in class," she said. "Instructors come to me

and say, 'What do I do?'"

Lin's grades are "so-so," he said, and he dropped one class. While Li has an "A" average, he has had to "spend much time" improving his writing and speaking, he said. Both rely on computerized translation programs.

Boring Life

They drive to and from campus in a black Nissan loaner from Martin with more than 170,000 miles on it. Because the inn's restaurant is closed until Memorial Day, they often eat dinner at a nearby Chinese restaurant, they said. Grateful for Mosman's advocacy, they gave her a present: dried Chinese mushrooms.

Life is "boring," Li said. "School, restaurant, here. We have some American friends, not very many."

"Maybe two or three," Lin said.

Both students sought their families' guidance. "My parents were angry," Lin said. Li's parents told him to "just go with it," he said.

Martin took back the car May 9, telling them they would have to pay \$500 a week to use it for the summer. "Business man still a man. Why can't [he] show me some humanity?" Lin said. Martin said the fee includes the cost of insuring additional drivers.

'BeLIEve'

On April 7, Melvin instructed the UConn [admissions](#) office to return applications to candidates recruited by Martin, who had lined up 15 for next semester. Martin responded in an e-mail to university officials: "This moron has shut down a program that would have brought Connecticut millions of foreign dollars."

The FBI is "currently looking into this matter," Elizabeth Vitullo, a compliance and public information specialist at the university, said in an e-mail response to a Bloomberg request for documents. The FBI declined to comment.

UConn is trying to extricate Lin and Li. Lin expects to transfer to Storrs in September, and Li in January. Li had intended to remain at Torrington and mentor next year's freshmen from China, Mosman said. He was upset when Melvin told him that UConn would stop admitting Chinese students for Torrington.

Li told Mosman, “I am very sad, I have ruined it for the other Chinese students,” she said. “It broke my heart.”

Asked what other Chinese students could learn from his experience, Li reached for a notebook and wrote, “believe.” He then drew a box around the middle three letters: “lie.”

To contact the reporter on this story: Daniel Golden in Boston at dlgolden@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Jonathan Kaufman at jkaufman17@bloomberg.net

©2012 BLOOMBERG L.P. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Bloomberg

China Halts U.S. College Freedom at Class Door

By Oliver Staley and Daniel Golden - Nov 28, 2011

In the 25 years [Johns Hopkins University](#) and Nanjing University have run a joint campus in China, it's never published an academic journal. When American student Brendon Stewart tried last year, he found out why.

Intended to showcase the best work by Chinese and American students and faculty to a far-flung audience, Stewart's journal broke the [Hopkins-Nanjing Center's](#) rules that confine academic freedom to the classroom. Administrators prevented the journal from circulating outside campus, and a student was pressured to withdraw an article about Chinese protest movements. About 75 copies sat in a box in Stewart's dorm room for a year.

"You think you're going to a place that has academic freedom, and maybe in theory you do, but in reality you don't," said Stewart, 27, who earned a master's degree in international studies this year from Hopkins-Nanjing and now works for an accounting firm in Beijing. "The place is run by Chinese administrators, and I don't think the U.S. side had a lot of bargaining power to protect the interests of its students. At the end of the day, it's a campus on Chinese soil."

The muzzling of Stewart's journal exposes the compromises to academic freedom that some American universities make in [China](#). While professors and students openly discuss sensitive subjects such as the Tibetan independence movement or the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests on the Hopkins-Nanjing campus, they can't do so in the surrounding community. Even on-campus protections only cover class discussions, not activities typical of U.S. campuses, such as showing documentary films in a student lounge.

Price for Expansion

The Hopkins-Nanjing Center is a model for a growing number of U.S. colleges, including [Duke University](#) and [New York University](#), which are establishing footholds in China. As the newcomers take advantage of multimillion-dollar subsidies from China, they may jeopardize the intellectual give-and-take that characterizes American higher education, said June Teufel Dreyer, a [University of Miami](#) political science professor and China specialist.

"In their enthusiasm to be part of the Chinese educational picture, American universities may be ceding

some measure of their independence to avoid offending the government,” Dreyer said.

The Hopkins-Nanjing Center has achieved its goal of being a “safe place” where Chinese and American students can debate controversial aspects of both societies, [Johns Hopkins](#) President Ronald Daniels said in a telephone interview.

“Is it what we would desire for every project, every center we’re involved in?” Daniels asked. “The answer is no. We would hope over time that the scope for discussion can extend beyond the center.”

Academic Freedom

Academic freedom “gives both students and faculty the right to express their views -- in speech, writing and through electronic communication, both on and off campus -- without fear of sanction,” Cary Nelson, president of the [American Association](#) of University Professors, wrote in a 2010 essay.

Limits on academic freedom are one reason [Stanford University](#) and [Columbia University](#) haven’t opened campuses in China. Columbia has a [study center](#) in Beijing, while Stanford plans to open one on the campus of Peking University next year. Such centers, which provide offices for visiting professors and host lectures and fundraisers, are easily exited, Columbia President Lee Bollinger said.

“The one thing we have to do is maintain our academic integrity, our academic independence,” Bollinger said. “There are too many examples of a strict and stern control that lead you to think that this is kind of an explosive mix.”

No Guarantee

Stanford President John Hennessy said its center has no protection of academic freedom and other schools’ agreements don’t guarantee rights taken for granted in the U.S.

“Even the ones you get are so scripted as to not be freedom as we imagine it in this country,” Hennessy said.

At least a dozen private and public U.S. colleges either have or are planning campuses in China. They are part of American colleges’ increasing and lucrative involvement with China. About 57,000 Chinese undergraduates, most paying full tuition, attended U.S. colleges in 2010-2011, six times as many as in 2005-06. A Chinese government affiliate has contributed millions of dollars to establish Confucius Institutes for Chinese language and culture on 75 American campuses.

China’s government encourages cooperation between Chinese and foreign universities. China is seeking “more substantive, productive and enduring partnerships,” Liu Yanshen, a Ministry of Education official, said in an October speech in [New York](#).

NYU to Shanghai

NYU plans to open a [liberal arts campus](#) in 2013 in Shanghai, where the municipal government, along with tuition and philanthropy, will cover the expense, President John Sexton said in an interview.

Students and faculty at the new campus shouldn't assume they can criticize government leaders or policies without repercussions, Sexton said in his office in [Manhattan's](#) Washington Square.

"I have no trouble distinguishing between rights of academic freedom and rights of political expression," he said. "These are two different things."

The city of Kunshan, 40 miles west of Shanghai, is spending an estimated \$260 million to build a new university jointly run by Duke and Wuhan University. Duke's share of planning and operating expenses is expected to be \$43 million over six years.

Duke Conversations

[Duke](#) administrators have had "pretty good conversations with people at Hopkins" and would be comfortable drawing similar distinctions between "intra-campus discussion and what you do at large," President Richard Brodhead said.

"We know China does not observe the same norms of First Amendment rights that we're used to in this country," Brodhead said in his office in Durham, [North Carolina](#). "If you want to engage in China, you have to acknowledge that fact."

U.S. universities also encounter challenges to academic freedom in the [Middle East](#). The [University of Connecticut](#) scrapped plans in 2007 to expand to Dubai amid criticism of the Emirate's Israel policies. NYU last year opened an Abu Dhabi campus, which enjoys the same academic freedom as the [Washington](#) Square campus, according to the university's web site.

The Hopkins-Nanjing Center occupies a 10-story tower of brick and glass within a gated compound on the northwest corner of the Nanjing University campus. "They probably have the strictest security on campus," said Man Fang, 24, a Nanjing University student.

The center, which grants one-year certificates and two-year master's degrees, has 164 students. Half of them are Chinese, and most of the rest are American. Chinese students take courses in English and international students in Mandarin.

Understanding

U.S. administrators try to anticipate the needs of their Chinese counterparts. "If you want understanding, you don't constantly antagonize people," said Carolyn Townsley, director of the center's Washington support office.

Tuition covers most of the center's cost, President Daniels said. The center charges international

students \$22,000 for a certificate and \$36,000 a year for a master's, plus housing. Nanjing University paid two-thirds of a \$25 million-plus physical expansion completed in August 2006, said Robert Daly, co-director from 2001-2007.

The Hopkins-Nanjing Center opened in 1986 as the first campus jointly run by U.S. and Chinese universities. Hopkins insisted the center should safeguard academic freedom in the classroom, with a library giving students access to the same materials as in the U.S., said George Packard, former dean of Hopkins' School of [Advanced International Studies](#) in Washington, who helped negotiate the deal.

Campus as Sanctuary

The most recent written version of the agreement, from 2005, formalizes the concept of the campus as a sanctuary:

“Within the HNC, no student, faculty member, research fellow, administrator, or visitor will be restricted in formal or casual speech, writing, access to research materials, or selection of research, lecture, or presentation topics.”

This approach precluded publications circulating outside the center, Daly said. “To have a voice reflective of the center would be to push the freedoms outside,” he said.

While necessary to establish the center, the restrictions on speech outside the classroom were “unreasonable, and we don't believe in them,” Packard said.

Jason Patent, the American co-director, tells American students at an orientation briefing that they can't expect the same levels of freedom as in the U.S., he said in an interview.

“The [U.S. Constitution](#) does not follow you here,” he reminds them.

American students at Hopkins-Nanjing said they discuss sensitive subjects in class -- and recognize the hazards of doing so outside it. “It's been very interesting to engage with the professors on topics that are somewhat taboo in China,” said Daniel Stein, 26, from New York.

‘Protected Space’

Brendon Stewart learned how the “protected space” agreement works in practice. A native of [Albuquerque, New Mexico](#), he enrolled at Hopkins-Nanjing after a stint in the [Peace Corps](#) in Lanzhou, China.

Stewart began his journal late in 2009 to inject some vitality into a torpid campus, he said. The bilingual journal would show off the center's finest scholarship in Chinese history and politics and would be sent to donors and prospective students.

“If you want to start a journal at an American university, you just start it,” Stewart said. “We thought we were adding value. We were like, ‘How does this not exist?’”

Encouraged by Jan Kiely, then American co-director of the center, Stewart began soliciting articles from students and faculty, aiming for equal Chinese and U.S. representation. “I didn’t foresee the way it was to become a problem,” Kiely said.

No Center Funds

Still, he and Chinese administrators rejected Stewart’s request for 3,000 yuan (\$470) to print the journal. The center rarely funds student projects, Kiely said. On Kiely’s advice, Stewart asked HNC alumni for donations, and he received an anonymous gift from an American alumnus in China.

Shortly before the journal was to be published, Mitchell Lazerus, an American student, posted a one-page essay denouncing the Communist party on a white board outside the cafeteria. The essay soured the atmosphere at the center, Stewart said. Lazerus did not respond to e-mails.

Days later, a Chinese professor withdrew an article he had submitted about the financial crisis.

Stewart then heard a rumor that all the Chinese students with articles in the journal wanted them removed because they were afraid it would reflect Lazerus’s political views. To reassure them, Stewart showed them the galleys.

Powers That Be

“The word came back that they were all very sorry because they saw how hard we worked, but the powers that be wouldn’t allow them to participate,” said Stewart.

Most of the Chinese students involved in editing and layout asked Stewart to remove their names. He complied.

Chinese authorities at Hopkins-Nanjing were worried that a student-produced journal would draw unwanted attention to the center’s special protected status, Kiely said. Huang Chengfeng, the Chinese co-director of the Hopkins-Nanjing Center, declined an interview request.

One Chinese student author said that a dean from Nanjing University unaffiliated with the Hopkins-Nanjing Center prevailed on him to withdraw his article, which argued that the Communist regime gains from grassroots protests because they root out local corruption without challenging the party’s power.

The Chinese dean suggested that removing the article would be in the student’s best interest. “I did not expect that it would turn out to be such a mess,” said the student, who asked that his name not be used because he is concerned about repercussions from Chinese officials. “I didn’t expect such a rigid

monitoring over students' behavior.”

‘A Very Difficult Position’

Kiely held a forum to clear the air. He told students academic freedom “doesn’t include being able to put Chinese students and professors in a very difficult position in their own country,” he said.

Administrators told Stewart that he could publish his journal if he submitted it for their review and limited circulation to students and center personnel, he said. They removed the word “center” from the journal’s title so that it didn’t appear to be an official publication, he said.

Many of the 300 printed copies were never distributed, Stewart said. “I learned some incredible lessons about how the system works,” he said. “I got a lot more cynical.”

The journal “wasn’t part of our academic program,” Kiely said. “It was intellectual activity and carried out in that spirit, but it was not part of the program, and that’s where we drew the line.”

Stewart’s journal was placed in the center’s library, Hopkins President Daniels said. The on-campus access “respects the boundaries that we have to operate in,” he said.

Conflicted Values

The squelching was the “most obvious incident” where the center’s stated values conflicted with reality, said Adam Webb, a professor of international politics at Hopkins-Nanjing and a contributor to the journal.

Administrators also intervened on the eve of the 20th anniversary of Tiananmen Square in 2009, when students discussed the uprisings in an online Google group. One American student, who asked not to be named, offered to screen a 1995 Chinese- language documentary about the protests, “The Gate of Heavenly Peace,” which he had saved on his laptop.

“Everyone was debating about this and I said, ‘How about we set up a time to watch the documentary and have a discussion?’” the student said.

Film Interrupted

About a dozen American and Chinese students and their Chinese guests gathered one Saturday evening in the lounge on the center’s second floor. Once the film began, an American administrator said they couldn’t watch it there. They finished their viewing in the organizer’s dorm room.

Chinese police monitoring the Internet conversation had alerted the center’s Chinese administrators, who contacted their American counterparts, Kiely said.

The Chinese reaction was “heavy handed,” he said. “Something like that of course makes them very

nervous.”

It was “inappropriate” to show a video banned in China to an audience that included Chinese visitors unaffiliated with the center, said Felisa Neuringer Klubes, spokeswoman for Hopkins’ School of Advanced International Studies. The video is available to faculty, staff and students in the library, she said.

China mandates political-study courses in such topics as the ideology of Mao Zedong and [Deng Xiaoping](#), Daly said. While Hopkins-Nanjing was exempted from this requirement, other joint campuses may have to grapple with it, he said.

Studying Mao

During early discussions with NYU, Chinese officials mentioned a requirement for a Chinese study course, said May Lee, NYU’s associate vice chancellor for [Asia](#). Two British schools fulfill that mandate at their China campuses with standard history courses, she said. NYU would not teach anything it objected to, Sexton said.

Neither Duke nor NYU has an agreement specifying what kinds of speech will be permitted at their campuses.

“We haven’t negotiated in advance about such things,” Duke President Brodhead said. “We’ve made it clear that we have values and principles and if it becomes untenable, we have an exit clause.”

The ministry of education assured Sexton that the university can manage its academic program as it sees fit, he said. “If it gets to a point where we feel that our core and essence is being compromised, we can leave without having jeopardized” the university’s finances or reputation.

Earlier NYU effort

Restrictions on academic freedom helped trip up a prior NYU collaboration in China. In 2006, officials at [Shanghai Jiao Tong University](#)’s law school asked NYU law professor Jerome A. Cohen to start a joint law center. Cohen has studied China since the 1960s and met leaders such as Zhou Enlai and Deng. After retiring from law practice, he began pushing to reform China’s criminal justice system.

“I may cause you nothing but trouble,” Cohen told Jiao Tong administrators.

They reassured Cohen of their support. Then the Jiao Tong administrator who had pushed for the center died, and party representatives began to criticize the program, Cohen said.

“It became clear that things would go better if I resigned as head of the NYU side,” he said. “I didn’t step down because it was a matter of principle.”

The three-year agreement between the two universities wasn't renewed. "We just let it drop," Cohen said.

The Jiao Tong program was "fairly small," said NYU spokesman John Beckman. At NYU's study-abroad site in Shanghai, professors haven't had issues with academic freedom, he said.

Cohen again encountered China's limits on free speech when [Tsinghua University](#) School of Law in Beijing and the American Bar Association's China office celebrated his 80th birthday with a May 2010 conference on the role of the criminal defense lawyer in China.

Removed From Panel

At Cohen's urging, the [ABA](#) invited Mo Shaoping, a human rights lawyer whose clients have included Nobel Peace Prize winner [Liu Xiaobo](#) and other dissidents, as a speaker.

The day before the event, Mo was dropped from the panel, presumably by Communist party officials at the upper levels of the university, Cohen said. After Cohen threatened to cancel the conference, he and an ABA representative were allowed to tell the audience about Mo's removal and to criticize the decision.

"I didn't want to be associated with the denial of free speech to a friend," Cohen said.

The curbing of Brendon Stewart's free speech rights didn't stop him from trying again. Following the turmoil about the journal, the Hopkins-Nanjing Center clarified its rules on extracurricular activities in 2010-11. From now on, students would need the administration's approval for events and clubs.

Even with his prior ordeal, Stewart applied through official channels to publish another journal.

His application was rejected.

To contact the reporters on this story: Oliver Staley in New York at ostaley@bloomberg.net; Dan Golden in Boston at dlgolden@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Jonathan Kaufman at jkaufman17@bloomberg.net

China's Test Prep Juggernaut

Test preparation company New Oriental Education is helping a rising generation of Chinese students to ace U.S. college entrance exams

By Daniel Golden

On a Sunday afternoon in March, Morgan Meng, a broad-shouldered, mustachioed high school senior from Jinan in eastern China, wanders through an exhibit hall in Beijing, browsing tables stacked with brochures showing leafy campuses and smiling, multi-ethnic faces. Elsewhere at the "Colleges that Change Lives" fair, hundreds of Chinese parents and students overflow conference rooms where admissions representatives from the likes of Hendrix College in Conway, Ark., are promising small classes, mild winters, and Asian cuisine. For hundreds of American institutions, from obscure colleges to prominent universities, Chinese students, who typically pay full international tuition, have become highly desirable.

Meng has been admitted to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he plans to major in history. He's one of tens of thousands of Chinese undergraduates expected to attend stateside schools next year. Prosperous Chinese families see an American education as a sign of status that can help their children find jobs once they return home. In conversation, Meng responds to questions about his readiness for studying in America by saying, "Let me think." Then he waits for an interpreter to explain in Chinese. "I have the concern about English," he says haltingly. "I may read the textbook smoothly. I can't always catch up with the professor. Their speaking speed may be faster. There may be some"—he turns to the interpreter, who suggests the word "slang"—"that it is difficult to communicate with classmates."

Still, the language barrier didn't stop him from scoring 680 out of 800 in writing and 590 out of 800 in critical reading on the SAT, which is given in English, in addition to 770 on the math portion. Like thousands of other students in China, Meng learned to game the test, earning a score that belies how modest his language skills actually are. By taking an intensive two-month, six-days-a-week course offered by New Oriental Education & Technology Group—sponsor of the college fair—he raised his overall score on the SAT from 1670 to 2040 out of 2400, making him an attractive candidate for a whole new league of American colleges. His score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which measures proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening and is one of two tests international students may take to demonstrate their grasp of English, soared from 65 to 90 out of 120. Many universities, including Illinois, require a minimum TOEFL score of 79.

A rising generation of Chinese students whose ambition for a U.S. education exceeds their English fluency is acing the entrance tests, thanks largely to New Oriental. The test preparation company, which was once fined for stealing test questions, is frustrating college officials and faculty members, not to mention the kids who end up unable to follow some of their courses. While New Oriental has undoubtedly helped plenty of Chinese students gain access to education and careers they'd otherwise miss out on, the company has a growing number of critics who question if it really serves the best interests of the kids it helps to go abroad.

"Do I agree with their educational principles? No," says Paul Kanarek, senior vice-president for international business at The Princeton Review, a New Oriental competitor. "Do I think what they're doing is healthy for the students they serve? No. Are they setting these kids up for failure at U.S. universities? Definitely."

Chinese undergraduates are flooding into American colleges, many of which are financially strapped. In 2009-2010, China passed South Korea to become America's largest source of international undergraduates, with 39,921. Because of China's one-child policy and increasing affluence, larger numbers of its students can afford U.S. colleges that cost far more than Chinese universities. In most cases, they aren't eligible for financial aid. They pay as much as \$50,000 a year in tuition and room and board at private colleges and up to \$35,000 at public ones. While their math skills are usually impressive, some can't follow a lecture or participate in a class discussion.

Not that it's stopping them. In the year ended Feb. 28, more than 200,000 students in New Oriental classrooms across China devoted weeks or months to cramming vocabulary words and learning shortcuts that help them respond with the accuracy of IBM's (IBM) Watson computer on English-language standardized tests—whether they understand the material or not. New Oriental delivers tiger test prep for tiger parents, dominating the fast-growing market for grooming Chinese students for U.S. entrance exams and fending off American competitors such as Washington Post's (WPO) Kaplan and The Princeton Review (REVU), which have been trying to elbow their way into the lucrative Chinese test preparation business. New Oriental's courses, which are taught primarily in Chinese, rely on exhaustive dissection of old test questions to help inflate students' scores. And because they're so superbly trained to beat the exams, New Oriental students with shaky English not only get into selective U.S. colleges but also test out of the transitional programs many schools have for foreign students who don't speak English well.

"New Oriental seems to have cracked the SAT code," says Phillip Muth, associate dean for admissions at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Its 1,200 applicants from China this year had an average of 610 out of 800 on the SAT's reading section and 670 in writing, as opposed to 641 in reading and 650 in writing for U.S. applicants. In math, they achieved an average of 783, compared with 669 for U.S. students. When the students arrive on campus, Muth continues, "You can tell immediately that English isn't their first language."

Josh Ferchau, coordinator for international admission at Knox College in Galesburg, Ill., has seen Chinese applicants improve TOEFL scores 20 points in a month. "That's pretty incredible," he says. "I'm sure a lot of that can be attributed to how they prepare for tests."

Around scenic West Lake in Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province in eastern China, the magnolias are budding. Young couples push strollers, while seniors limber up with tai chi poses or play traditional musical instruments. Over green tea and spicy scallops, Xie Jinzheng, one of New Oriental's star teachers, explains how to beat the TOEFL's oral section.

The company seeks bright, gregarious college students and recent graduates such as 24-year-old Xie and encourages them to approach their classes with humor and passion. New Oriental has its own inventory of jokes,

and it urges teachers to search for others on the Internet or in books. New Oriental students post their favorites online, such as one teacher's quip that "PhD" stands for "permanent head damage," and "MBA" for "married but available." The company also motivates teachers to boost their students' scores by tying their compensation to student evaluations. Since the bonus is linked to class size, and some courses have as many as 300 students, popular teachers can earn more in incentives than in salaries. Students can also vote to banish teachers from their classes, à la *Survivor*, though it rarely happens.

Xie has taught the oral section of the TOEFL for New Oriental for three years. Searching for patterns and clues, he's taken the test six times and pored over websites where Chinese students share test questions. His research enabled him to sort the questions used to measure English speaking ability into categories such as "People," "Places," and "Events." He then designed speeches that students can memorize and recite with minor variations in response to any question. For instance, a typical "Places" item might require students to describe their favorite park. Xie suggests the response: "You know, there is a river in the park. After dinner, I want to walk along the bank, and the breath of fresh air can really refresh my mind."

If students are asked about their favorite restaurant, they substitute, "You know, there is a river next to the cafe. After a cup of coffee, I want to walk along the bank, and the breath of fresh air can really refresh my mind." For favorite country: "You know, I rent a house in America. Beside my house, there is a river. After dinner"

Such ingenuity has earned Xie near-perfect evaluations and, he says, raised his students' scores on the oral section, worth a maximum of 30 points, by 5 to 10 points. When asked if students actually learn to speak better English in his classes, he says: "That's the problem. Our education program is just for the test, not for life in America. Just to get high scores."

New Oriental teachers favor a similar one-size-fits-all strategy for the SAT's writing portion—preparing canned biographies of famous Americans or Europeans that can be applied to any topic. "They really don't recommend thinking on the spot and writing with your heart," says Lisa Wu, 22, a junior at the University of Virginia, whose New Oriental course helped her increase her SAT score from 1900 on a practice test to 2170. "SAT essays are really predictable. You can use the same example for different things."

Silu Wang and Zhu Xinyu, two Beijing teenagers who each scored 2200 on the SAT, say New Oriental deserves much of the credit. Zhu, 18, prepared essays on luminaries living and dead, such as Thomas Edison, Coco Chanel, James Cameron, J.D. Salinger, Howard Schultz, Woody Allen, and Florence Nightingale. She received the maximum score on the essay, she says. Zhu was admitted to the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Virginia. She is a "wonderful student from one of the best schools in China" and excelled in an English-language phone interview, says Muth, the UVA associate dean of admissions.

Wang, 19, chose Steve Jobs as her preferred subject. "His experience covers a lot of topics," she says. "You can always use Steve Jobs."

On SAT grammar questions, Zhu and Wang followed New Oriental's advice to eliminate any answer containing the word "being" or a comma followed by "which." For reading comprehension, they avoided any responses including "despair," "befuddle," "bafflement," or "apologize." Such tips are typically based on analysis of prior tests. "It sounds ridiculous, but it works," says Wang, who has been admitted to the University of Southern California and New York University.

Jia Wen, a 25-year-old graduate student in finance at Boston College, recounted some other odd New Oriental gimmicks she learned for the TOEFL's listening section. Her teacher told her to remember that if the answer choices involve food, for instance, hamburgers always taste better than pizza. And that girls in the passages are always more intelligent and harder-working than boys. "You don't need to understand," says Wen, who scored

110. "After many practices, you can recognize the correct answer just by looking at the choices."

China has used tests to discover talent and determine status since it introduced civil service exams 1,500 years ago. Each year 10 million high-school seniors compete for half as many university slots by taking China's nine-hour entrance exam, the intimidating Gaokao. They study as much as 14 to 16 hours a day for a year, and if all else fails, they occasionally cheat by hiring replacements known as "gunmen" to take the test for them or by using high-tech devices such as receivers in the shape of watches, belts, erasers, and ballpoint pens, according to student websites.

Following this tradition, some of New Oriental's SAT teachers recommend a maneuver that violates the rules. The SAT is given in 10 sections—seven are 25 minutes long, two are 20 minutes, and one lasts 10 minutes. Wu, the University of Virginia junior, says her teacher suggested that students who have trouble with reading but can breeze through math should interrupt math after five minutes and flip back in the booklet to reading, even though returning to earlier sections is prohibited. Once the students completed the reading, they would return to math. That way, they would evade test monitors, who check for flippers at the start and end of the math period.

Flipping "is quite common," says John Zhang, a London School of Economics student who teaches at New Oriental during holidays. "A lot of the teachers I know give that advice." He adds that teachers omit the tactic from written materials because of liability concerns if a student is caught. If test center staffers catch someone flipping, they are supposed to direct the offender to the correct section and warn that another violation would be grounds for dismissal, according to the nonprofit Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, N.J., which designs and administers the SAT and Advanced Placement programs, and creates the TOEFL and Graduate Records Examination (GRE). While flipping is "basically cheating" under current rules, it should be permitted, Zhang says. "Every student has different strengths. If you're a really good reader, why not allow you to return to math to grab a couple more points?"

New Oriental's founder and chief executive officer, Michael Minhong Yu, says the flipping strategy is not part of New Oriental's teaching material and that the company does not advocate any violation of testing rules. "We don't see ourselves doing much, much better," than our competitors in improving students' scores, he says modestly. "Maybe a little better."

Like China itself, Yu, 48, rose from rural poverty in the Yangtze River Delta to cosmopolitan affluence. He owned 18.5 percent of New Oriental as of Aug. 31 and was worth \$950 million in 2010, according to *Forbes* magazine. The son of illiterate peasants, he failed China's college-entrance exam twice. He worried that if he flunked again, he would be stuck in the middle of nowhere. "I hated the country," he says during an interview in New Oriental's seashell-shaped glass headquarters in Beijing's university district. "I studied like mad." He did well on the test on his third try and enrolled at Peking University. When he failed to get a scholarship for U.S. graduate school, he became a lecturer at his alma mater.

Yu founded New Oriental in Beijing in 1993, after Peking University disciplined him for collecting income from teaching TOEFL classes on the side. He put up posters to attract students to his fledgling company. He had trouble obtaining government approval and finally persuaded reluctant officials to grant him a license by inviting them to one of his lectures. In 1994, Yu published a study guide. Its nickname, *Red Treasure Book*, was reminiscent of Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book*, which Chinese students followed 40 years ago. Yu's version contains thousands of English vocabulary words used on U.S. entrance exams and mnemonic devices for them: "I developed a new way of remembering words," he says. For example, Yu says, students could recall the word "charisma" by dividing it into "ch" for China, "ris" for rice, and "ma" for Mao. "In almost everyone's mind, Mao was charismatic," he says.

By 1995 he'd saved enough money to study in America, but he didn't want to abandon New Oriental. That December he visited the U.S. to recruit two former college classmates to work with him. Yu brought thousands of dollars in cash with him to demonstrate how successful his company was. Instead of teaming up with him, his friends returned to China and started their own test prep company that later merged with New Oriental. They later tried to challenge Yu's leadership on the grounds that he had never studied abroad and his relatives had too much influence in company affairs, says Lu Yuegang, who wrote a book about New Oriental's early years. Yu prevailed in the ensuing power struggle.

As the company flourished, Yu's sudden wealth made him a target. In 1998 two assailants invaded his Beijing home, tied him to his bed and injected him with tranquilizers, sending him into a coma. They stole 2 million yuan (more than \$300,000) and left him to die. Miraculously, he lived. Some New Oriental teachers joke in their classes that Yu survived only because the drugs were made in China. After the incident, Yu, who earlier had relocated his family to Vancouver, Canada, so his children could be educated there, decided to make the move permanent for safety reasons. His attackers, who had committed other violent crimes, were ultimately executed in 2006.

New Oriental went public at \$15 a share in 2006 and now trades around \$125, with a nearly \$5 billion market value. Revenue from test-prep and other businesses, such as after-school tutoring, quadrupled to \$386 million in the year ended May 31, 2010, from \$96 million four years before; it rose 49 percent, to \$132.5 million, in the last quarter ended Feb. 28 from the year before. "We know what Chinese students are thinking about and their study habits," Yu says. "Kaplan and Princeton Review have come to China several times. Their problem is that they don't understand what Chinese students are thinking. Their methods are ineffective here." Kaplan is an investor in Beijing New Channel, a test-prep firm founded by a former New Oriental chief executive, while The Princeton Review wants to expand beyond its current clientele of expatriates' children at international high schools. "I am in awe of New Oriental's success in a marketplace that fractured, that difficult, that competitive," The Princeton Review's Kanarek says.

New Oriental built its business on the TOEFL and graduate-school entrance exams, such as the GRE and GMAT, and introduced SAT classes in 2006. Twenty thousand students took SAT prep in China with New Oriental last year, representing at least a 90 percent share of that market, says Yu. The company originally gained renown for huge classes in which teachers used microphones and students in the back rows watched on overhead television screens; sometimes students from the hinterland slept in dormitories. The company now gives smaller and one-on-one VIP courses as well. It caters to Chinese-Americans by offering SAT preparation in English in Beijing and Shanghai during summer and winter vacations.

Yu says New Oriental is more effective than its competitors because it requires more hours in class than U.S. prep companies do and because its teachers cover ground faster. New Oriental students must learn at least 100 vocabulary words a day, as opposed to 20 or 30 at Kaplan or The Princeton Review. A typical New Oriental course lasts 60 to 80 classroom hours, compared with 20 to 30 in the U.S., he says, while more expensive courses for smaller groups may take up as many as 250 hours of class time.

The company has spread throughout China, in part because of shrewd marketing. It gives refunds to top-performing students and publicizes their success stories. It also cultivates local political officials. Xie, the teacher in Hangzhou, says the son of the city's vice-mayor is taking his class for free. When New Oriental expanded last year to Qingtian, a suburb of Hangzhou, it enjoyed low rent on middle-school classrooms in return for giving free classes to the principal's daughter, according to Sophia Hou, a former New Oriental teacher in Hangzhou.

New Oriental has also mended its relationship with ETS, which sued New Oriental in a Beijing court in 2001 for infringing its copyright by obtaining 1,800 GRE questions. "We had to draw a line in the sand," former ETS general

counsel Stanford von Mayrhauser says. During settlement talks in Washington, D.C., von Mayrhauser sat across from Yu. "I remember his saying, 'You're going to lose, no Western company can win in Beijing. Even if you win, you'll only get \$5,000,' " Von Mayrhauser says. "That pretty much ended the meeting." For once, a New Oriental prediction was off the mark. The court awarded ETS \$1.25 million in damages, which was reduced on appeal to \$750,000 in 2004, according to von Mayrhauser. Yu says that New Oriental doesn't comment on past litigation.

The two sides reconciled in 2007, when ETS gave New Oriental exclusive rights in China to incorporate an online TOEFL practice test into its courses. Yu says ETS realized he "is not a vicious person" and was only following standard Chinese business practices. He adds that New Oriental respects intellectual property rights even though it's losing 200 million yuan a year, or \$30.5 million, from Chinese competitors using its materials without permission.

The cultural preoccupation with testing manifests itself in other ways. Michigan State University in East Lansing unwittingly accepted several Chinese students who'd had someone take the TOEFL for them, according to Patricia W. Croom, the school's associate director for international admissions. The students were required to leave. And questions on U.S. standardized tests, which are often recycled to ensure consistency of scores over time, are widely, if sometimes illicitly, available in China. While students who take tests such as the SAT and GRE sign a confidentiality agreement, many in China post questions on websites. Such sharing prompted ETS to suspend the computerized version of the GRE in China, Korea, and Taiwan in 2003 because scores kept rising as long as the same pool of questions was used. Chinese students' "knowledge of the tests is absolutely astonishing," says Mark Coggins, Kaplan chief executive for Asia Pacific. "Their analysis—What does the test do? How is it constituted?—is enormous."

Morgan Meng, who attended the college fair New Oriental hosted in March, was one of 22 students in his SAT-prep course, which cost 40,000 yuan, or \$6,100. It involved the kinds of relentless drills that would have made a tiger mother proud. He spent five hours a day in class for 53 days. "I enlarged my vocabulary very much," he says. "I can read many essays quicker than other students." In addition, "they taught us many skills with filling blanks."

Test preparation was only part of Meng's New Oriental package. Because the government bars Chinese students from taking the SAT on the mainland, Meng paid 4,500 yuan, or nearly \$700, for each of three test-taking excursions New Oriental arranged to Hong Kong. For an additional 26,000 yuan, or \$4,000, he also hired New Oriental as his "agent" on his college applications. Most Chinese applicants to U.S. colleges employ agents to recommend schools, keep track of deadlines, assemble and submit forms, and sometimes even ghost student essays and teacher recommendations. Meng says the company helped him "promote"—by which he meant "improve," according to his interpreter—an essay that he submitted to colleges on the exploitation of cheap labor in developing countries.

At Illinois, where Meng plans to enroll, his language problems would likely not be addressed unless he flounders academically. While international students at the school have considerably higher SAT scores than domestic students, they go on academic probation at the same rate, according to Gregg Perry, Illinois's associate director for undergraduate admissions.

New Oriental wants to help students like Meng by offering extra tutoring and guiding them to colleges with strong English as second language programs. "It's tragic to have bright Chinese students who have worked to realize their dream of going to a U.S. college and can't keep up in class because their English isn't strong enough," says Annalee Nissenholtz, a St. Louis-based consultant to New Oriental.

Meng says he hopes to improve his English before he departs for college. "I'm a little flabbergasted to hear that he needed an interpreter," says Perry, who adds that he was unaware of New Oriental's existence. "There are a lot of kids in the U.S. who can't pull off his scores in reading and writing."

Golden is an editor-at-large for Bloomberg News.

Bloomberg

Chinese Atheists Lured to Find Jesus at U.S. Christian Schools

By Daniel Golden - Dec 20, 2011

Haiying Wu's family in Shandong Province wasn't religious. After a born-again Texan teaching English in [China](#) advised her that Christian schools in the U.S. are safe and academically strong, she enrolled at Ben Lippen High School in Columbia, South Carolina.

[Ben Lippen](#) required her to attend church and chapel, take Bible class, and join a Bible study group. At first, she didn't understand "why you need to believe in something you can't view or touch," she said. Gradually, it began to make sense. When the house parents in her dorm showed the 2004 film, "The Passion of the Christ," she wept. Shortly before her 2009 graduation, she was baptized.

Her parents were taken aback. "In China, I don't think there's any chance I would have become a Christian," said Wu, 21, a junior at [Tulane University](#) in [New Orleans](#). "It takes a lot to convert someone. Because Ben Lippen is such a strong religious environment, it makes you feel you have to learn about Christianity, and how come everybody around you believes."

As evangelical schools capitalize on the desire of affluent Chinese families for the prestige of an American education, many Chinese students are learning first-hand how the Bible Belt got its name.

While proselytizing is banned in China, Protestant -- and, to a lesser extent, Catholic -- high schools are doing their missionary work on this side of the [Pacific Ocean](#). Through placement agents and religious networking, they're recruiting growing numbers of students from China, most of them atheists, and encouraging them to convert, in the hope that some of them will spread the faith back home.

Little Preparation

Plunged with little preparation into an intense religious environment, Chinese students often struggle to fit in. Some shed their skepticism and become Christians, delighting school officials and dismaying their families in China.

Eighty of Ben Lippen's 108 international students come from China, up from hardly any five years ago, said Emery Nickerson, director of the boarding program. A "large minority" commit to Christianity, he said.

“I’m pleased that so many of these kids come to Christ while they’re here,” said Ben Lippen School Headmaster Mickey Bowdon. “I’m not sure the Chinese government would be.”

China’s Ministry of Education and State Administration for Religious Affairs declined to respond to written questions.

“The government is in a real quandary,” said Daniel Bays, director of the Asia Studies Program at [Calvin College](#) in [Grand Rapids, Michigan](#), who researches Christianity in China. “They can’t forbid people from sending their kids overseas. They may worry about these kids coming back, but they can’t do much about it. These kids are just added to the crop of suspects that they already have to deal with.”

Proselytizing Students

Teachers, classmates and host parents with whom Chinese students stay are sometimes overly fervent in proselytizing them, said former Ben Lippen Headmaster David Edgren.

“What we have are wonderful, sensitive, caring, committed Christian people who want so much for this particular Chinese student to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ the way they do,” said Edgren, who now recruits Chinese students for Ben Lippen and other evangelical schools. “There is sometimes a tendency for the Christian student/host family/teacher to press for and receive what appears to be a commitment.”

Non-believing Chinese parents choose Christian schools for their moral values, college placement records, and lower tuition than secular private schools, Edgren said. Because the U.S. is regarded in China as a Christian nation, many parents see Christian schools as part of mainstream American culture, said Susannah Clarke, who taught in China for three years and helps with a Bible study group at Ben Lippen.

Confucius Institutes

Religious schools are the latest entrant in the race by American educational institutions to tap the lucrative China market. About 57,000 Chinese undergraduates, most paying full tuition, attended U.S. colleges in 2010-2011, six times as many as in 2005-06. A Chinese government affiliate has contributed millions of dollars to establish [Confucius Institutes](#) for Chinese language and culture on 75 American campuses.

Limited to [one year](#) of attendance at U.S. public secondary schools under federal law, Chinese students are flocking to private high schools, where they diversify student bodies and offset declines in domestic enrollment caused by the economic downturn.

The number of Chinese students at U.S. private high schools soared to 6,725 in 2010-11 from 65 in 2005-06, according to the U.S. Department of [Homeland Security](#), which doesn’t keep separate

statistics for religious schools.

Beijing Recruiting Fair

Religious schools boost Chinese enrollment by sending staff members to China and using agents such as [New Oriental Education & Technology Group Inc. \(EDU\)](#), China's largest education firm by market capitalization.

Known for preparing Chinese students for the SATs and other exams, New Oriental also connects them with U.S. high schools. Eight Protestant U.S. schools, including Ben Lippen, and two Catholic schools were represented at a New Oriental recruiting fair in Beijing in October.

One New Oriental business partner uses a religious appeal to open doors at Christian schools that aren't used to taking foreigners. [Eduboston](#) placed 119 Chinese students this year at 15 New England schools, including one Protestant and 12 Catholic institutions, said President Kason Park.

When school administrators balk because they don't have international advisers or English-as-a-second-language programs, Park tells them about a pastor in China who was jailed for handing out Bibles.

"Some people sacrifice so much to spread the gospel," said Park, a Presbyterian. "Now we have people at our doorstep, offering money. I always tell the schools, 'God has a bigger plan than we see.'"

'Religion Permeates'

New Oriental's pipeline to religious schools worries Annalee Nissenholtz, a St. Louis-based counselor for international students and a consultant to the company.

"Relying on recruiters who do not emphasize their schools' religious focus, Chinese parents perceive these schools as 'safe' and 'family-oriented' places where their children will get a typical American experience," she said in an e-mail. "They have no idea how religion permeates the day to day environment. I would no more place a Chinese student in an evangelical Christian school than in an orthodox Jewish school."

'Foreign Concept'

The schools' religious emphasis, including teachers praying in class, has surprised some Chinese students, said Laura Chevalier, destinations program coordinator for the [Association of Christian Schools International](#) in [Colorado](#) Springs, Colorado.

"A Christian school is such a foreign concept coming out of China," Chevalier said. "Even if they've been prepped a lot, until they get in that environment, they might not have any context to understand."

Ben Lippen's application asks Chinese students what their understanding is of the Christian faith, who is [Jesus Christ](#), and what it means to live in a Christian community. They also must agree to attend religious services, Bible study and Bible class.

"They know, without a shadow of a doubt, they are coming to a Christian environment," Bowdon said. "They must be OK with that."

Placement agents sometimes fill out the forms for applicants, Nickerson said.

"Before students get here, there is always the question, 'Do the parents understand?' he said. "They aren't sending kids here to learn about who Jesus Christ is. We do our best to publicize our mission."

Influx of Non-Christians

Some religious schools have adapted their missions to fit the influx of non-Christians.

Students from [South Korea](#), which has a higher percentage of Christians than China, previously dominated international enrollment at Ben Lippen and other religious schools.

As the Chinese replaced the Koreans, Ben Lippen's trustees wrestled with the question of whether to require boarding students to be Christians, said Kelly Pengelly, former director of the boarding program. In October 2010, they decided that a majority didn't have to be Christian, she said.

Whitinsville Christian School in [Massachusetts](#), which requires applicants to submit recommendations from pastors, waived the rule earlier this year for Chinese students, said Roann Karns, international student coordinator.

Administrators at Whitinsville, which has seven Chinese students, "embraced the idea of being able to expose them to Christianity," she said.

Reconciling the Mission

While its mission statement says its purpose is "to serve as partners with Christian parents," [Southside Christian School](#) in Simpsonville, [South Carolina](#), recruited six Chinese students from non-Christian families last year and is increasing Chinese enrollment to 12 next month, said Stephen Reel, superintendent.

The school reconciles recruiting Chinese students with its mission by housing them with Christian families, he said. Several have "made some level of statement of faith," he said.

Wheaton Academy, an evangelical school in West Chicago, [Illinois](#), started an introductory Bible class last year for non-Christian international students, said Chief Operating Officer Jon Keith. Of its 37 international students, 22 come from China, he said.

Wheaton also plans to supply hundreds of international students a year, of whom between half and two-thirds would come from China, to 22 Christian schools nationwide, Keith said. Participating schools will pay Wheaton for membership in the network plus “a modest per-student placement fee,” Keith said.

[St. Mary's Preparatory](#), a Catholic boys' school in Orchard Lake, Michigan, where 50 of 65 international students come from China, plans a “scaled-down” introductory catechism class for non-Catholics next year, said James Glowacki, headmaster.

‘Blank Slates’

Chinese students pay \$41,750 a year for tuition and room and board, \$15,000 more than boarders from the U.S., reflecting expenses such as advertising, international admissions staff, and English as a second language, he said.

While some trustees were leery of bringing so many non-Catholics to St. Mary's, they couldn't pass up the chance to evangelize. One trustee said, according to Glowacki, “We have blank slates coming that we have an opportunity to write upon.”

Communists Expelled Missionaries

Converting the Chinese isn't easy in their native country, even as Christianity is growing there. Between 80 million and 125 million Chinese -- out of a population of [1.33 billion](#) -- are Christians, including about 12 million Catholics, said [David Aikman](#), a former Time Magazine foreign correspondent and author of the book, “Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China And Changing the Global Balance of Power.”

Most Protestants worship at illegal “house” churches, which are sometimes tolerated by the regime, rather than the government-controlled Three Self Church, Aikman said.

Communists took control of China in 1949 and expelled foreign missionaries. Forbidden from evangelizing, American Christians who teach English or work in social service agencies in China spread the word discreetly.

“We made a pledge to local officials that we would not do overt faith-based teaching in our classrooms, and we honored that,” said Nathan Musgrave, assistant pastor at Heartland Evangelical Free Church in Central City, [Nebraska](#), who taught English from 2004 to 2008 to young adults in China, primarily farm and factory workers. “There was a lot of informal contact outside the classroom. Students would visit our homes, and issues of faith would come up naturally. We would share openly at that time, but not unless the student broached the subject.”

‘Prays With Teammates’

When Randy Liang wanted to study in the U.S., his parents' friends at a Christian group that provides medical and small business services in Shanxi Province recommended [Ben Lippen](#). He enrolled in January, 2010, as a sophomore, largely unfamiliar with the Scriptures and the English language.

He "really hated" the school at first, he said. "I thought they were trying to force me to be Christian. I couldn't understand what they're talking about. I thought, "This is boring."

Liang adjusted as his English improved and he joined teams in four sports: football, wrestling, cross-country and track. After watching a creationist video in Bible class, he developed doubts about evolution. Now a senior, he prays with teammates before games, he said. He lives in a teammate's home, and prays with the family for success on exams.

Still, Liang plans to postpone any religious commitment and concentrate on schoolwork until he's had more experience, he said. While those around him encourage him to become Christian, "I control my own brain," he said.

Bible Study

In a Ben Lippen classroom on a Sunday evening in early December, the discussion and the Bibles are in Mandarin. With Christmas approaching, a volunteer from the [Chinese Christian Church of Columbia](#) is teaching the nativity story to 20 Chinese teenage boys fulfilling their Bible Study requirement.

Some students send [text messages](#), or doze. Asked what Christmas means, one responds, in a joking allusion to a similarly-pronounced Chinese-language character, "Egg."

"They're bored," said the leader, Thomas Su, 35. "They come from an atheist background. They don't think it's the truth. They think, 'Why do I waste my time?' They were mocking me."

"A lot of them are anti-Christian. They know we'd like them to become Christian," said Susannah Clarke, who was instructing a girls' group across the hall. "It's been drummed into them: there's no God, the government is great. They know if they go back as a Christian, their parents will not be happy."

Cultural Gap

Bridging the linguistic, religious and cultural gap between Chinese and American students is a challenge at Ben Lippen. Named for a Scottish phrase meaning "mountain of trust," it stands on the hilltop campus of Columbia International University, overlooking the Broad River.

Ben Lippen has 392 students in grades 9-12. Day students, who must have at least one parent active in an evangelical church, make up almost three-fourths of the enrollment. Few of the 80 Chinese students come from Christian families, Nickerson said.

Twenty Chinese students stay with local evangelical families, such as Rick and Jennifer Byers. The school is paying them \$3,200 a month this year to host four Chinese students.

“We don’t do this for the money,” said Jennifer Byers. “We do this because we want to win these kids to Jesus Christ. If that’s what eternity is all about, that’s the most important thing we can do.”

‘No Touch’ Policy

The Chinese pay about \$30,000 a year for tuition and room and board, plus \$930 to \$2,270 for English as a second language. Tuition for day students is about \$11,000.

The school has a strict behavioral code. Any student who “professes to be homosexual/bisexual” or “supports or otherwise promotes such practices” may be expelled, the school handbook states. “To avoid temptation, we enforce a ‘no touch’ policy between the sexes at all times,” the handbook states.

For students who voluntarily confess and repent involvement in “sexual immorality, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs, the opportunity for reconciliation is available,” with lesser consequences such as suspension or drug testing, it says.

Chinese students often arrive at Ben Lippen with less English than their entrance exam scores predicted.

“There’s a lot of dishonesty or padding,” Nickerson said. Even if they are qualified to be high school juniors in China, they may spend a year or two as freshmen taking English-as-a- second-language courses until they become fluent enough to handle a regular load, Nickerson said. While taking Bible class in English, they worship at the Chinese church and participate in evening Bible study in Mandarin.

‘English Only’

Boarders must speak English in common areas of their dormitories. “Thank you for speaking English only” reads a sign in one house, where 11 of 14 residents come from China. Rule-breakers may lose their computers for a few hours, said Houseparent Marty Gilpatrick.

Like other Ben Lippen courses, English-as-a-second language instruction is steeped in Scriptures. Randy Headley, a former Ben Lippen history teacher, diverged from this approach last year when he taught ESL to newcomers from China.

While he used one Christian text, Johann Sebastian Bach’s church cantatas, he “tried to not push religion too hard,” and emphasized vocabulary such as the names of countries and vegetables, he said.

The Chinese “need a rest somewhere in the institution,” Headley said. “I gave them a rest. They appreciated it. Some Americans didn’t. Perhaps many ESL teachers thought it was their one chance to

save people.”

Intellectual Diversity

Chinese students enhance diversity of evangelical schools not only ethnically but also intellectually. When Ben Lippen teacher Tom Pengelly asked his comparative-government class whether God is sovereign over national leaders, a Chinese student responded, “No. If the Lord was sovereign, why would He allow Hitler, Mao, and [George W. Bush](#).”

Conservative Southerners in the class were scandalized by the pairing of Bush with two tyrants, Pengelly said. “One football player said, ‘You can’t say that!’”

Founded in 1940, Ben Lippen in its early decades housed and educated children of American missionaries. As missionaries began taking their children abroad, the school sought foreign students to replace them.

“Originally, we brought children of missionaries here,” Headmaster Bowdon said. “Now we’re preparing future missionaries. They’ll go back to their own country, with the claims of Christ and a transformed heart.”

Recruiting in China

David Edgren, who had taught English at a Chinese university, became headmaster in 1992. Three years later, he went to China and brought back 15 students.

“That was a very incredible thing from our school’s standpoint,” he said. “From that point on, I recruited in [Korea](#) and would go back and forth to China.”

One of those students, Henry Guo, drowned in a lake during a party celebrating the end of the 1995-96 school year. In the woods, near the Chinese students’ dormitories, a plaque memorializes him.

Guo converted at school, said Southside Christian’s Reel, then a Ben Lippen administrator.

“We had the assurance in our hearts that he had given his life to Christ and would have eternal salvation as a result,” he said. “That was the silver lining.”

Commission Payments

Ben Lippen’s Chinese population was dwindling by the time Edgren left in 2000 to become headmaster at [Nebraska Christian School](#) in Central City, Nebraska, where he also initiated Asian recruiting. By 2006, “there were zero Chinese students” at Ben Lippen, said then-Headmaster Brian Modarelli. Eager to fill beds, Modarelli turned to Edgren.

The 69-year-old Edgren now represents nine schools, six of them Christian. For each Chinese student

he places, Ben Lippen pays him 15 percent of the \$30,000 first-year tuition and room and board, 10 percent of the next year's payment, and 5 percent for the third and fourth years, Nickerson said. Depending on the school, his first-year commissions range from zero to 15 percent, and he splits the fees with agencies in China that find the students, Edgren said.

Multi-year payments motivate agents to encourage Chinese students to stay at Ben Lippen, Nickerson said.

"At some point, the student is going to be angry with us," he said. "If they just run to the agent and leave, the student hasn't learned, and we lose financially."

High School Tour

New Oriental, based in Beijing, supplies some of the students whom Edgren places, he said. Edgren began working with New Oriental in 2010, and took two company officials to visit 15 U.S. high schools, most of them Christian.

He and several evangelical school administrators, including Southside's Reel, had lunch with New Oriental executives at a premier Beijing restaurant before a 2010 recruiting fair sponsored by the company, Edgren said.

New Oriental doesn't have a religious agenda, and funnels students to Protestant and Catholic schools because of market demand and relationships with agents such as Park and Edgren, they said. New Oriental recently started a separate department for U.S. secondary schools, Park said.

"New Oriental does not promote religion of any denomination," President Louis Hsieh said in an e-mail. "It is the families' decision if they want their kids to attend a Christian or non-Christian high school or college."

Meeting Yao Ming

At the New Oriental fair this past October, high school representatives interviewed students and gave presentations. [Northland Christian School](#) in Houston provided students with a package of gifts, including a key chain, notepad and pen.

[Kevin Roberts](#), chairman of Northland's board, impressed students by telling them that he had met Yao Ming, the retired Chinese star of the [National Basketball Association](#)'s Houston Rockets, in the team's locker room and been given one of Yao's high-top shoes as a memento.

"Obviously, when you put a slide up there of Yao Ming, that's a good recruiting tool," said Headmaster Daniel Woods.

Guan Yuntian, a 15-year-old from Beijing, was interviewed by three schools, including Northland.

“Religious school is fine for me,” she said. “The school will be better disciplined than other schools,” and the tuition lower. “It’s not bad to have a religion as it may help me to be stronger.”

Zhang Shaoxuan, the father of another girl at the fair, would gladly send her to a Christian school, he said.

“Both religious school and private schools are fine, the public schools are what you don’t want to be in,” he said. “Because there will be all kinds of odd students there.”

Saving Face

His experience with Chinese culture has taught Edgren that many Chinese students at Christian schools convert to please administrators or save face, he said.

Of Ben Lippen’s 80 Chinese students, “if there are more than three, four, five believers as I would understand a commitment to Jesus Christ, I’d be surprised,” he said. “From a practical standpoint, we don’t know until the kid goes back to China. Many of them will not tell their parents.”

Chang Su was unusually blunt. A Shenzhen native, whose father is a computer engineer and whose mother teaches kindergarten, she “didn’t want anything to do with a Christian school,” she said.

She opted for Ben Lippen after missing the application deadline for secular private schools. Meeting Edgren, she informed him that she was not Christian, she said.

She was “so antagonistic,” said Edgren. He thanked her for her honesty and told her she would have to go to church.

Late for Church

Entering Ben Lippen as a junior in 2008, Su clashed with dormitory parents over the requirement to turn in her computer and cell phone at night. When she was late for church one Sunday, they and the other girls left without her; she took a taxi. Accusing her of lying and disrespect, school officials sent her to a Christian counselor, she said.

“It was a really hard time,” she said. “I didn’t feel loved at all. I cried a lot.”

Her teachers stood by her. “I could feel the love from them,” she said. “There was no reason for them to love me. They were willing to forgive me.”

The more she read the Bible, the more truth she discovered there. After praying for a month, she felt the Holy Spirit one night in March 2009.

“Before, what I believed, what Chinese people believe, is that people are innately good,” she said. “I realized that I was sinful. I was lying, not loving. Those are as bad as killing someone. There’s no

difference between me and a murderer.”

She was baptized in April, 2009. Now a sophomore at Davidson College in [North Carolina](#), Su proselytized vacationers this past summer on Myrtle Beach. She tells her parents and grandparents about Jesus. “They haven’t converted yet, but they’re open to it,” she said.

She hopes to become a neurosurgeon and return to China. “God wants me to go back to China,” she said. “Someday if Jesus calls me, I will be a missionary there.”

To contact the reporter on this story: Dan Golden in Boston at dlgolden@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Jonathan Kaufman at jkaufman17@bloomberg.net

©2012 BLOOMBERG L.P. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Bloomberg

China Banning U.S. Professors Elicits Silence From Colleges Employing Them

By Daniel Golden and Oliver Staley - Aug 10, 2011

They call themselves the “Xinjiang 13.” They have been denied permission to enter [China](#), prohibited from flying on a Chinese airline and pressured to adopt China- friendly views. To return to China, two wrote statements disavowing support for the independence movement in Xinjiang province.

They aren’t exiled Chinese dissidents. They are American scholars from universities, such as Georgetown and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who have suffered a backlash from China unprecedented in academia since diplomatic relations resumed in 1979. Their offense was co-writing “[Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland](#),” a 484-page paperback published in 2004.

“I wound up doing the stupidest thing, bringing all of the experts in the field into one room and having the Chinese take us all out,” said Justin Rudelson, a college friend of U.S. Treasury Secretary [Timothy Geithner](#) and former senior lecturer at Dartmouth College, who helped enlist contributors to the book and co-wrote one chapter.

The sanctions, which the scholars say were imposed by China’s security services, have hampered careers, personal relationships and American understanding of a large, mineral- rich province where China has suppressed separatist stirrings. Riots and attacks in Xinjiang in July left about 40 people dead.

“People who are engaged in perfectly legitimate scholarly pursuits can have their careers stymied if not destroyed,” said Tim Rieser, foreign policy adviser to Senator Patrick Leahy, a Vermont Democrat who chairs the Senate subcommittee that funds the U.S. State Department and who took up the cause of the Xinjiang experts.

‘Lack of Sympathy’

China’s [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) and Xi Yanchun, a spokeswoman for the Chinese Embassy in [Washington](#), didn’t respond to written questions about the treatment of the authors.

Colleges employing the Xinjiang scholars took no collective action, and most were reluctant to press Chinese authorities about individual cases. Dartmouth almost fired Rudelson because he couldn’t go to China, he and Rieser said.

“As a group, most of us have been very disappointed in the colleges’ and universities’ lack of sympathy and support,” said Dru Gladney, an anthropology professor at Pomona College in Claremont, California, who described himself and his American co-authors as the “Xinjiang 13.” Colleges are “so eager to jump on the China bandwagon, they put financial interests ahead of academic freedom.”

Almost 40,000 undergraduates from China study at U.S. universities, the most from any foreign country, according to the [Institute of International Education](#), a New York-based nonprofit group. Chinese students typically pay double or triple the in-state tuition at public universities.

Campuses in China

Restrictions on academic freedom may become an increasing pitfall as U.S. colleges expand their ties with China, according to administrators involved in joint programs.

[Duke University](#) and [New York University](#) plan campuses in China. The [University of Chicago](#) opened a [research center](#) in Beijing in 2010, and [Stanford University](#) expects to follow next year. Excluding those initiatives, 18 foreign universities, including nine from the U.S., have branch campuses in China and [Hong Kong](#), up from 14 in 2009 and zero in 2002, according to the [Observatory on Borderless Higher Education](#), a U.K. research group. The Chinese government, along with philanthropy and tuition, will pay for the New York University campus slated to open in [Shanghai](#) in 2013, the school’s president, John Sexton, said.

More than 60 U.S. colleges since 2004 have accepted tens of millions of dollars from the Office of Chinese Language Council International, a government-affiliated body known as the [Hanban](#), to establish Confucius Institutes for the study of Chinese language and culture.

Uighur Muslims

Along with [Tibet](#), which also has an independence movement, Xinjiang is one of China’s most sensitive issues, Rudelson said. Nicknamed the “Pivot of [Asia](#),” it borders Tibet and seven countries, five of which are Muslim, including Afghanistan and [Pakistan](#). About half of its residents are Uighurs, who are Muslims.

The Chinese government has threatened the Uighurs’ way of life by encouraging ethnic Chinese to settle in Xinjiang, Gladney said. Uighurs have responded with bombings of buses and movie theaters, and attacks such as a July 18 assault on a police station in which 18 people were killed, according to official Chinese media. A group of Uighurs in exile said police fired on peaceful protesters. About 20 more deaths occurred on July 30-31 from a truck hijacking and a restaurant shoot-out, for which Chinese authorities blamed Uighur terrorists trained in Pakistan.

Blacklisted

Some of America’s most prominent China scholars who explore hot-button issues are banned in

Beijing. Perry Link, a professor emeritus at [Princeton University](#) who teaches at the University of [California](#), Riverside, hasn't been able to enter China since 1995, he said. Link smuggled a dissident astrophysicist into the U.S. embassy in Beijing during the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising and helped edit the "Tiananmen Papers," a 2002 collection of leaked internal documents.

Link's co-editor on the "Tiananmen Papers," Columbia University Professor Andrew Nathan, said he is also blacklisted. Robert Barnett, who directs Columbia's Modern Tibetan Studies Program, ignored two warnings from Chinese officials that he should "lean more in China's direction," he said. He then encountered roadblocks from Chinese authorities dealing with Tibet when he applied for visas in 2008 and 2009, he said. He didn't feel a need in his case to ask Columbia administrators for help and hasn't sought a visa since, he said.

U.S. universities should fight for professors blacklisted by China, said Columbia President Lee Bollinger. He's discussed Nathan's situation with Chinese officials, who promised to "think about it," he said.

\$330,000 Grant

Xinjiang had attracted little academic attention until the New York-based [Henry Luce Foundation](#) approved a \$330,000 grant to the School of Advanced International Studies, or SAIS, at Johns Hopkins in 2000, said former foundation Vice President Terry Lautz.

"We expected that the project would fill a gap," said Lautz, who described the book as "very scholarly, very thorough, very carefully written and researched."

S. Frederick Starr, the volume's editor, chairs the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at SAIS, which is based in Washington. Not a Sinologist himself, Starr advised Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush on Soviet affairs. With Rudelson, deputy director of the institute from 1999-2001, Starr recruited the book's 15 co-authors: 13 Americans, one Israeli, and one Uighur.

'Pleasant Conversations'

Contributors were paid \$3,000 apiece, Rudelson said. Each tackled a different aspect of Xinjiang history and society, from the province's economy, ecology, education and public health to Islamic identity and the Chinese military presence. Starr and 11 authors were interviewed by phone for this article.

"I remember people saying at the beginning, 'Do you think China will ban us?'" Rudelson said.

Starr decided against having Chinese co-authors because he didn't want to cause them trouble with their government. He also informed the [Chinese embassy](#) at the outset about the book, giving assurances that the tone would be objective.

In response, the embassy “sent senior scholars who were obviously on a fact-finding mission,” Starr said. “We sat and had very pleasant conversations.”

On the eve of publication, Chinese authorities put out their own Xinjiang book, which was 70 pages and “obviously thrown together hastily,” Starr said. In a show of good faith, Starr distributed copies of the Chinese book at the publication party for the SAIS volume, he said.

Scholarly Hodgepodge

Then the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences prepared a translation of the Johns Hopkins book for Chinese officials and scholars. In an introduction to the Chinese translation, Pan Zhiping, a researcher at the academy, portrayed “Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland” as a U.S. government mouthpiece.

Featuring “a hodgepodge of scholars, scholars in preparation, phony scholars, and shameless fabricators of political rumor,” the book by the Xinjiang 13 “provides a theoretical basis for” America “one day taking action to dismember China and separate Xinjiang,” Pan wrote.

Pan said in a telephone interview that he sent his introduction to Wang Lequan, the Communist Party chief of Xinjiang Province from 1994 to 2010, and a member of the Politburo. Wang, who conducted “strike hard” campaigns against separatists and introduced Mandarin into Uighur-language primary schools, didn’t respond to requests for comment.

“I don’t really want to say” why the authors were barred, Pan said. “Maybe because they wrote the book, our government thinks they are not people that should be welcomed.”

No-Fly List

Some of the authors are legitimate scholars, Pan said. “I’ll say to our leaders that they are our good friends, it will be useful to sit down and chat with them,” he said.

Sichuan Airlines, a government-owned regional airline, put six of the authors on a no-fly list in 2006, according to a document provided to Bloomberg News. In the “urgent” communication, the airline’s Beijing management office instructed sales representatives to inspect the scholars’ documents and prevent them from boarding. Cai Chao, an officer with the airline’s department of corporate culture, declined to comment on whether the authors were prohibited and said the document can’t be verified because it lacks “our company’s formal document number and stamp.”

As the co-authors began applying to return to China, their visas were denied without explanation. Their editor, Starr, failed to advocate for them, they said.

‘Coordinated Response’

“If I had pulled together a book like this that got an entire generation of scholars on a certain topic

banned from the country they research, I'd like to think I would step forward to organize a coordinated response," said James Millward, a professor in Georgetown University's [School of Foreign Service](#) who co-wrote two chapters on Xinjiang's political history. Starr "just wanted nothing to do with it."

The Luce Foundation's Lautz said he urged Starr to "at least raise the issue" with China. "That didn't really happen," Lautz said.

Because he didn't try to go to China, and because he was inundated with invitations from high-level officials there, Starr took longer than the authors to recognize the blacklisting, Starr said. Still, he wrote to the Chinese ambassador to the U.S., emphasizing that the book wasn't political and seeking assurances that the visa denials were unrelated to it, he said.

Starr now realizes that Chinese diplomats and intellectuals who admired the book couldn't control "the completely murky world of the security folks," he said.

Weak Case

The School of Advanced International Studies had bigger priorities than academic freedom, he said.

"My sense is that SAIS itself, let alone Hopkins, was not prepared to go to the mat on this issue," said Starr. "There are a lot of other interests besides this one in China."

Johns Hopkins, based in Baltimore, and [SAIS](#) "stand for the free exchange of ideas and are proud of their record in general and in this case in particular," spokeswoman Felisa Klubes said in an e-mail.

When two of the book's authors sought assistance in 2006 from Professor David Lampton, director of SAIS's China Studies Program and dean of the faculty, he persuaded the Chinese embassy to grant a visa to one of them, Klubes said. He didn't help the other "because that person made what he felt was a weak case that the reason for the visa denial had to do with the book," she said. She declined to name the two scholars.

Appeals to Colleges

Some co-authors looked to their own colleges. Stanley Toops, an associate professor of geography at Miami University in Oxford, [Ohio](#), whose chapters covered Xinjiang's demography and water supply, applied for visas at the Chinese embassy in Washington and three of the five consulates in the U.S., to no avail, he said.

When he appealed to Jeffrey Herbst, then Miami's provost, Herbst advised Toops to call his congressman, Toops said. "We have a lot of contacts with China," Toops said. "We don't want to mess this connection up."

"I wasn't able to offer much assistance" to Toops, Herbst said. "The Chinese government isn't that

accessible.”

While Herbst -- now president of Colgate University in Hamilton, New York -- promoted the study of China at Miami, he said he wasn't worried that advocating for Toops would hurt the university's burgeoning China connections.

Confucius Institute

Miami established a [Confucius Institute](#) in 2007. The Hanban supplied \$100,000 in start-up funds, 3,000 volumes of books, audio-visual and multimedia materials, and one or two language instructors for whom it pays salaries and expenses, according to a contract obtained by Bloomberg News through a public records request. The Hanban has provided a total of \$924,785 for the institute through April 2011, according to Robin Parker, the university's general counsel.

Chinese undergraduate enrollment at [Miami](#) soared to 434 in August 2010 from 16 in August 2006, said David Keitges, director of international education. Non-Ohio residents pay \$38,917 a year in tuition, fees, and room and board, versus \$23,745 for residents, according to Miami's website.

Rudelson, a graduate of Hanover, New Hampshire-based Dartmouth -- where he and Geithner studied Chinese and traveled to Beijing together -- had visited Xinjiang regularly since 1985. When he became a senior lecturer in Chinese at the college in 2005, one of his duties was to lead Dartmouth's annual summer language-study program in China. Because he couldn't get a visa, his department colleagues at Dartmouth warned him that he might be fired, said Rudelson and Rieser, Leahy's foreign policy aide.

“At the end of the day, Dartmouth's priority was that the summer program go forward,” Rieser said.

No Xinjiang Entry

Rudelson appealed to Geithner. Then president of the [Federal Reserve Bank of New York](#), Geithner alerted his father, Peter Geithner, Rudelson said. Peter Geithner sits on the board of the [National Committee on United States-China Relations](#), a [New York-](#) based non-profit group chaired by former U.S. chief trade negotiator Carla Hills. She raised Rudelson's case with Chinese authorities, Rudelson said.

At the same time, Dartmouth “was working as hard as we could to get Justin back into China,” then-provost [Barry Scherr](#) said in an interview. Scherr arranged a meeting for himself and Rudelson with Zhou Wenzhong, who was China's ambassador to the U.S., when Zhou spoke at Dartmouth's business school in [October 2008](#). The ambassador advised Rudelson to write to the Chinese embassy, explaining his role in the Xinjiang project, Rudelson said. He complied.

“I said, ‘I don't support Uighur terrorism, I don't support that Xinjiang should be an independent country,’” Rudelson said. Those are his real views, he said.

Brief Respite

Two months later, Rudelson was granted a one-week visa to Beijing. He returned in 2009 with the language-study program. He reported his movements daily to the Ministry of State Security, and wasn't allowed into Xinjiang, which the program had toured in prior years. He left Dartmouth July 1 to teach Chinese at the Dallas-based Hockaday School for girls from pre-kindergarten through high school.

Like Rudelson, Millward submitted an account of the issues surrounding the Xinjiang book to the Chinese embassy, including a statement that he didn't favor independence for Xinjiang. He didn't compromise his views, he said. The Georgetown professor was then granted a visa.

It proved only a temporary respite. In 2008, Millward and a colleague at [Fudan University](#) in Shanghai planned to collaborate on a course about the Silk Road. They would lecture in each other's classrooms, share material on a computer bulletin board, and oversee joint student projects.

'Very Best'

Millward applied for his visa, and didn't hear back. Then came a terse e-mail from his Fudan colleague saying that, "due to circumstances," Millward wouldn't be able to teach there.

Instead of pushing back, Georgetown officials told Millward they would support his next visa application, he said.

"Georgetown didn't see the problem letting this precedent stand, and they wouldn't put anything on the line to help me," Millward said.

Georgetown has done its "very best" for Millward and regrets his visa problems, said Samuel Robfogel, director of [international initiatives](#) in the provost's office.

The ice is thawing for some of the Xinjiang 13. After extra screening procedures, Millward returned to China in July and August 2010 and July 2011, he said.

Shift to [Taiwan](#)

Former [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) professor Peter Perdue had to shift his research from Beijing to Taiwan in 2007 for a Fulbright fellowship awarded by the State Department because Chinese officials blocked his entry. The State Department doesn't comment on individual cases, said spokeswoman Sharon Witherell. Now a professor at Yale, Perdue attended an August 2010 conference in Beijing, he said.

Others see no easing. Gladney's invitation to speak at a conference in Tianjin, China in April was rescinded after a Communist party official vetoed his participation, he said.

A professor of Chinese history at Oakland University in Rochester, [Michigan](#), [Linda Benson](#) contributed the chapter on minority education in Xinjiang. After writing a 2008 book about British women missionaries to China's Muslim regions, she was invited to a May 2010 Christian-history conference in Gansu Province in northwest China. She was denied a visa.

The chapter written by Gardner Bovingdon, an associate professor at Indiana University in Bloomington, compared Uighur and official Chinese histories of Xinjiang. When Goldman Sachs Group Inc.'s board met in Urumqi, Xinjiang's capital, in 2006, it asked Bovingdon to speak. He couldn't get a visa. Goldman spokesman Stephen Cohen declined to comment on Bovingdon.

Bovingdon again sought a visa for a March 2011 excursion to Shanghai organized by an Indiana colleague and was rejected.

Unlike co-authors who disowned Xinjiang separatism, Bovingdon wouldn't make such concessions, he said.

"My understanding of what they've done is essentially self-criticism, which is the order of the day in China for years: 'Yes, I regret what I did,'" he said. "I would not have considered that a palatable way to go back."

To contact the reporter on this story: Daniel Golden in Boston at dlgolden@bloomberg.net; Oliver Staley in New York at ostaley@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Jonathan Kaufman at jkaufman17@bloomberg.net

©2012 BLOOMBERG L.P. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.