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The United States Welcomes Chinese Students

International students are welcome in the United States. We want future students and their families to see the United States as a welcoming destination to earn their degrees. We value the presence of students from China on our campuses, in our communities, and in our country.

I'll focus my remarks today on Chinese students in particular, because they make up a large proportion of students from abroad. Also to clarify misperceptions people have on the U.S. government's stance on students and scholars from China.

President Trump recently made clear, "We want to have Chinese students come and use our great schools, our great universities. They have been great students and tremendous assets."

In the President's words, "We want to keep these [students] here." I know you and your colleagues have done so much to host and welcome Chinese students in recent decades. Thank you for all of your efforts.

More than one million international students (1,094,792) currently study in the United States. The number of Chinese students studying in America has quadrupled in the past decade, to a new high of over 360,000 last year, more than the next seven countries combined.

The United States continues to admit qualified Chinese students for study at U.S. colleges and universities. Contrary to what you might have heard from the Government of China, the number of Chinese student visa applications refused has declined each of the last four years. This demonstrates that U.S. higher education is increasingly accessible to Chinese students.

The Department of State's EducationUSA team is highly engaged in China, reaching out to Chinese students and parents, helping them find the right U.S. institution, and preparing them for study and life here.

Chinese students contributed 15 billion dollars to the U.S. economy in 2018 alone, making international education one of our country's top exports. From a foreign relations standpoint, the friendships that are formed, the values shared, and the networks created, are even more important than the economic contributions of these Chinese students. I know everyone in this room is committed to this goal.

As a former university educator and exchange participant, I, like you, understand the transformative experience that international students can have both in and out of the classroom. Through their studies, extra-curricular activities and community engagement, we want Chinese

students to have that experience and make valuable contributions to our communities while they are here.

Chinese alumni of American universities, whether they choose to work in academic institutions, scientific labs, business communities, or diplomatic postings, are the foundation of U.S.-China relations – and they will continue to be in the future.

When Chinese leaders have in-depth experience of the United States through study here, it benefits the United States and the world at large.

We Aim to Provide a Welcoming Environment for Chinese Students

I again want to thank the 500 leaders of U.S. higher education institutions here today. Your efforts are essential to provide a high quality and safe educational environment for Chinese students -- and all international students -- to live and study alongside Americans.

By supporting and facilitating Chinese students' interactions, both in and out of the classroom, we help them understand American culture and American values. We want them to form friendships that develop into lifelong personal and professional networks.

U.S. students similarly learn from their Chinese counterparts. Americans gain important insights into Chinese culture and learn to appreciate new perspectives on the world. They acquire knowledge, skills, and understanding that are valued by employers and that benefit their future studies and careers.

U.S. Institutions Must do Better in Ensuring Chinese Students Fully Benefit from Their Studies in the United States

The United States has the finest higher education system in the world with 4,700 universities and colleges. The opportunity to study here is an enormous privilege that is life-changing. Unfortunately, however, too many Chinese students do not receive the full benefit of their time in the United States.

It is not enough just to attract these students to the United States. We must ensure international students – particularly those from China – fully integrate and experience our communities. As you know, at many U.S. institutions with significant numbers of Chinese students, it is all too easy for Chinese students to cluster together – missing the chance to live, study, and eat alongside their American and international peers.

We know that many institutions are working hard to help Chinese students who want to make friends with American peers. But many still find it difficult to do so, potentially leaving them feeling isolated, alone, and vulnerable. We applaud those schools who are making sure that international students getting a top-notch U.S. education don't miss out on the opportunity to broaden their horizons and make the most of living in the United States.

Chinese Students Live in a Propaganda Bubble

While physically residing in the United States, many Chinese students remain strongly anchored in China. Social media plays a powerful role in this.

In a recent study, more than 90 percent of Chinese respondents (approximately 1,000 Chinese students currently studying at a university in the United States) reported using WeChat as their primary means of connecting online. WeChat is the main social media platform in China under strict government monitoring.

Approximately 84 percent of the respondents reported relying solely on Chinese websites for news about the United States. Many non-Chinese messaging and social media apps are banned in China, so Chinese students must use apps like We Chat to communicate with friends and family at home.

We know the Chinese Communist Party is actively working to provide an inaccurate picture of the United States to Chinese citizens, including overseas students. The state-controlled Chinese media inundates Chinese students with Communist Party-curated content that exaggerates the dangers of living and studying in the United States.

Through Chinese social media, Chinese students continue to view the United States through this distorted lens. This constant flow of misinformation creates a bubble of fear that discourages Chinese students from fully engaging with American peers while here in the United States.

Allow me to illustrate what it is like within one of these bubbles:

- As an example, a group called “Chinese Life” beams disinformation in Mandarin directly to approximately 700,000 Chinese citizens in the United States and North America through the WeChat app.
- In this [first slide](#) (show slide #1), “Chinese life” is warning Chinese speakers in the United States of the threat of likely terrorist activity taking place in the U.S. on the 4th of July. This type of messaging is clearly aimed at sowing disinformation and instilling fear among Chinese residents in the United States.
- In this [second slide](#) (show slide #2), the same group is highlighting a number of points, including accusations that U.S. government agencies are spying on cell phone conversations, that violence against individuals of Chinese origin is likely, and that racial tensions and violence are prevalent across the United States.

Based on this constant negative and false narrative, and because many Chinese students might be reluctant to have deep interactions with their American peers, it is no surprise that only 16 percent of respondents in a recent study indicated their perception of the United States had improved since coming here.

Approximately 42 percent of the respondents indicated actually having a worse perception. While this study is of a limited pool of students, it provides insight into the experiences and attitudes of some Chinese students in the United States.

Unlike China, there is no censorship of foreign broadcasts in the United States. Chinese students can directly access Chinese state-run television programming. But accessing CCTV or other state television as a sole or primary source of entertainment and political news has consequences.

For example, a popular Chinese television series called “Over the Sea I Come to You” depicts a Chinese father living with his son who is studying in America, and portrays the United States as a dangerous place to live and study.

The reality is, U.S. colleges and universities value student safety as the top priority for both domestic and international students, and U.S. campuses are safe, welcoming environments for international students.

Despite the facts, given the drumbeat of these negative stories, it should be no surprise if Chinese students arrive in the United States with negative preconceived notions.

Even after arriving here, the constant stream of Chinese propaganda might continue to shape their perceptions of our country – even though they are living in California, Kansas, Nebraska, New York, Texas, or elsewhere -- unless they are able to fully experience the reality of the United States firsthand.

We must collectively work to ensure Chinese students have dynamic and full experiences on our campuses and in our communities, with the broadest possible exposure to our society and our people.

The United States is home to a pluralistic press, with a multitude of news and media sources. Thank you to the members of the press here with us today. We want Chinese students to experience our vibrant media and information culture and to gain the tools to discern for themselves where to find reliable sources of information.

A U.S. higher education experience is all about gaining critical thinking skills, having freedom of expression, and developing independent thought. Those are the values and skills we want international students to absorb while they are here.

Ensuring Freedom of Speech & Expression for all Students

The United States prizes academic freedom. U.S. college campuses are places for students to debate ideas, challenge viewpoints, and seek new understanding of the world. American higher education has a long tradition of protecting free speech and open inquiry. Open debate is the very foundation of our education system - and the American way of life.

Beyond social media, Chinese Students & Scholars Associations, which interact with Chinese diplomatic missions here, can have undue influence and exert pressure on Chinese students on our campuses. They are stifling speech and limiting opportunities for personal expression. Concerns have also been expressed about the role of Confucius Institutes.

Students in the United States must be free to express their views, without feeling pressured to censor their speech or avoid taking part in other legitimate activities on U.S. campuses.

There are credible reports of Chinese government officials pressuring Chinese students to monitor other students and report on one another on behalf of the Chinese government. We have heard many of these stories ourselves first hand.

We need to ensure students on our campuses are encouraged to speak up, as well as respect the views of others even if they do not agree. Chinese officials are also known to pressure and pay Chinese students to participate in Communist Party-sponsored political protests and counter-protests. We can and will push back hard against the Chinese government's efforts to chill free speech on American campuses.

In addition, we must seek to ensure Chinese students and exchange scholars are not pressured by their own government to engage in activities beyond the scope of legitimate academic pursuits.

Our partners in the intelligence and law enforcement communities have identified an increasing number of instances in which foreign intelligence services have co-opted individual academics, researchers, and others to conduct activities on behalf of foreign governments during their stay in the United States.

The United States will do everything in our power to protect all students, especially Chinese students, from authoritarian government control. Coercion of even a single Chinese student or scholar in the United States is unacceptable, and there is no excuse for the Chinese security apparatus to put at risk the U.S. visas granted to its own citizens.

We take the threat of espionage in academia and the business community seriously. There are visa and legal procedures in place to confront the issue. Also, we will not tolerate the theft of intellectual property.

But let me be clear: this is a very small percentage of the greater population. In 2019, only one ten thousandth of a percent – .0001 percent of student visa applicants from China have been refused on these grounds.

Students and researchers who act within established ethical guidelines of academic research have nothing to worry about. Those who do not follow the rules, however, regardless of national origin, should expect consequences.

I know you share our goal of making educational experiences in the United States a positive and transformative experience for all international students, allowing them to learn about and

understand American values. We know you have a strong tradition and track record of supporting academic freedom on your campuses and in your international programs.

Human Rights Watch has attempted to build on these best practices and produced a 12-point code of conduct that can be used in the United States and abroad to ensure freedom of speech, expression, and academic integrity. When international students are allowed to engage, unimpeded, in legitimate academic activities and fully immerse themselves in campus life, we all benefit.

U.S. Higher Education Must Contribute to Integrating Chinese Students on Campus

Many of you have significant expertise in welcoming and integrating international students. It's one of the great attractions of study on a campus in the United States.

Today, I ask all of you to double down on your efforts. To not only welcome Chinese students to your campuses, but to ensure they have every opportunity to fully experience the American classroom, our culture, and our communities.

Here are a few best practices we have observed:

- Make arrival orientations and other key informational sessions mandatory. These really are essential.
- Go beyond welcoming orientations.
- Organize cultural days and other events.
- Encourage Chinese students to live alongside Americans and join student clubs and organizations. Similarly, encourage U.S. students to proactively invite Chinese and other international students into their networks.
- Work with faculty to internationalize curricula and fully integrate international student perspectives.
- Share the best of America. Many State Department exchanges emphasize volunteerism and community engagement, an aspect of American culture that is often unfamiliar to international students. Work with local community groups to incorporate Chinese and other international students into volunteer and civic efforts.

An international education should be a transformative experience – it should open one's mind to new cultures and new ideas.

We cannot change what Chinese students hear and think about the United States before they arrive. But we can ensure that, once they get here, we:

- open our classrooms and homes
- expose Chinese students to our welcoming culture
- eat and live alongside them
- foster lifelong connections, and
- allow them to form their own conclusions about the United States.

Investing in Chinese Students Today will Contribute to Future U.S.-China Relations

Many Chinese students' understanding of the reality of China, the United States, and the world may be shaped by inaccurate messages they are receiving from their government. You are on the frontlines to help address this critical issue.

The United States must confront propaganda, misinformation, and false narratives with facts. But this is not something we in the government can do on our own. We need to do this together.

Chinese students come to the United States to benefit from our world-class educational institutions, to strengthen their critical thinking, to see the United States and get to know the American people. We want them to succeed in these endeavors, and to gain a better understanding of our system of democracy, rule of law, and liberty.

The people-to-people connections we foster today will shape the future relationship of our two countries. Thank you.