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Educated acquiescence: how academia sustains authoritarianism in China

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Abstract

As a presumed bastion of the Enlightenment values that support a critical intelligentsia, the university is often regarded as both the bedrock and beneficiary of liberal democracy. By contrast, authoritarian regimes are said to discourage higher education out of fear that the growth of a critical intelligentsia could imperil their survival. The case of China, past and present, challenges this conventional wisdom. Imperial China, the most enduring authoritarian political system in world history, thrived in large part precisely because of its sponsorship of a form of higher education closely tied to state interests. Although twentieth-century revolutions brought fundamental change to Chinese politics and pedagogy, the contemporary party-state also actively promotes higher education, cultivating a mutually advantageous state-scholar nexus and thereby reducing the likelihood of intellectual-led opposition. As in the imperial past, authoritarian rule in China today is buttressed by a pattern of *educated acquiescence*, with academia acceding to political compliance in exchange for the many benefits conferred upon it by the state. The role of educated acquiescence in enabling Chinese authoritarianism highlights the contributions of a cooperative academy to authoritarian durability and raises questions with prevailing assumptions that associate the flourishing of higher education with liberal democracy.

Keywords Authoritarian resilience · Civil society · Cultural governance · Educated acquiescence · Higher education · Intellectuals

In an influential essay, political scientists Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and George W. Downs (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs, 2005: 77–86) identify higher education as a valuable "public coordination good" which poses an existential threat to authoritarian rule if made widely accessible to citizens. They argue that "[a]round the world, from Beijing to Moscow to Caracas, authoritarian regimes seem to be well aware of the dangers of

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providing coordination goods to their people, and they refrain from doing so with remarkable consistency" (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2005, p. 84). The idea that authoritarianism is the enemy of higher education sits comfortably with familiar arguments that depict universities as the quintessential liberal democratic institution (Dewey 1916; Lipset 1959; Shils 1989). The suggestion that authoritarian endurance may hinge upon denying citizens access to higher education is moreover consistent with a substantial body of work on revolutions that highlights the powerful role of disaffected intellectuals in sparking radical change in non-democratic societies (Kautsky 1962; Skocpol 1979). As Bueno de Mesquita and Downs explain, "advanced education facilitates the creation of a large pool of potential opposition leaders, thereby increasing the supply of rivals to the incumbent government" (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2005, p. 83).

There is, however, another side to the relationship between higher education and authoritarian resilience. In fact, autocracies do not consistently withhold public access to higher education; the more sophisticated and successful of them actively support and shape institutions and operations of higher education with an eye toward winning the allegiance of the intelligentsia and thereby prolonging their reign. While numerous studies have examined the importance of *alienated* intellectuals in supplying revolutionary leadership, much less attention has been paid to the pivotal role of *acquiescent* intellectuals in buttressing authoritarian rule.

This article introduces the concept of *educated acquiescence* to emphasize the contributions of higher education – under certain conditions – to authoritarian persistence. To be clear, not all autocracies make concerted efforts to win over their intelligentsia and fewer still achieve this feat. In the case of educated acquiescence, the authoritarian state extends an attractive package of privileges and benefits (social prestige, political influence, material goods, and the like) to successful recipients of higher education – with criteria for success also defined by the state. The state structures academic activities in ways that promote its interests by directing intellectual production into officially approved and remunerated outlets and discouraging or disallowing independent critici. In these circumstances, academia may serve as an anchor of authoritarian stability rather than an engine of either revolution or democratization.

Existing theories of authoritarian endurance focus for the most part on regime origins and party institutions. Levitsky and Way (2012), building on the pathbreaking work of Samuel Huntington (1968, 1970), propose that durable authoritarianism is a product of violent revolutionary or counter-revolutionary conflict. Such conflict, they suggest, gives rise to the strong political parties that scholars such as Barbara Geddes (1999), Beatriz Magaloni (2006), Jason Brownlee (2007), and Milan Svolik(2012) have identified as critical for authoritarian persistence. In the case of the People's Republic of China (PRC), regime resilience has been attributed to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s "guerrilla policy style" developed over several decades of revolutionary struggle (Heilmann and Perry 2011). The CCP's wartime experience is credited with giving rise to a strong authoritarian regime party that is unusually adept at gathering information, extracting resources, and implementing policy at the grassroots (Koss 2018).

Important as revolutionary origins and party institutions are in explaining the capacity and durability of contemporary authoritarian regimes, including the PRC, these factors obviously cannot account for those enduring autocracies that predated

the advent of modern revolutions and political parties. In that regard, it is striking that China not only is home today to one of the world's longest surviving authoritarian regimes, founded more than seventy years ago, but also lays claim to an imperial dynastic tradition that was the most durable authoritarian political system in world history. Although twentieth-century revolutions and the political parties they spawned (the Nationalist and Communist parties) broke decisively with the imperial past, the previous two millennia of dynastic rule offer rich material for generating fruitful hypotheses about the bases of authoritarian persistence. Moreover, inasmuch as PRC leaders and Party theoreticians frequently point to the Chinese past as a source of valuable lessons for present-day governance, consideration of China's historical record is of more than arcane curiosity.[1] This paper will begin with a brief consideration of the sources of imperial China's political continuity, followed by a fuller discussion of the contemporary situation. In China, past and present, educated acquiescence constitutes a major pillar of regime sustainability.

Educated acquiescence in Imperial China

Historians have long agreed that a vital institutional underpinning of the Chinese imperial state was the Confucian examination system, which served for centuries as a mechanism to attract, evaluate, and enlist intellectual talent for government service. The origins of this ingenious system extend as far back as the Han Dynasty (206 BC – AD 220), although it was during the Tang and Song dynasties (7th to 13th centuries) that the imperial-sponsored examinations, supported by a network of Confucian academies, developed into a comprehensive and systematic means for educating and selecting officials. Blind examinations were introduced in the eleventh century, and by the early twelfth century a state-funded nationwide school system had been established. Higher education, tailored to success on the imperial examinations, was thus closely associated with state authority. In this respect, the Chinese situation differed from that of other premodern societies where higher education served to legitimate religious rather than political authority.

Assigning quotas of different ranks of examination degrees (which afforded opportunities for government appointment) to all provinces and prefectures, the state was able to command the attention and allegiance of educated men throughout the realm. Qiang Zha (2011: 21) explains, "Higher learning was thus a formalized part of the state system of rule, and those selected through these examinations were given positions of great responsibility on a meritocratic basis." By socializing and schooling bright, ambitious young men for government service, higher education in imperial China constituted a cornerstone of political strength and stability that helped sustain the system for centuries.

Only a miniscule proportion of exam takers, generally on the order of 1–5%, were awarded imperial degrees, but the fact that all males – regardless of regional location or class status – were in theory eligible to sit for the civil service examinations, endowed the institution with an aura of egalitarianism and inclusivity. Because examination

[1] See, for example, Liang (2013), a cadre training textbook, which opens with dozens of examples of successful governance techniques drawn from the Chinese imperial past.

essays were read blind, the process contributed to an impression of fairness rather than favoritism – even though in fact the great majority of degree recipients hailed from exceptionally wealthy families (able to afford the classical education necessary for success on the exams) who lived in exceptionally prosperous places (able to support high-quality Confucian academies) (Elman 2000, 2013).

Despite the elitism of outcome, the meritocratic and impartial reputation of the Confucian examination system made it a mainstay in upholding the legitimacy of the imperial Chinese state. While the content of the exams was ethical and abstract, calling for the recitation and interpretation of approved literary and philosophical texts, the system nevertheless served several pragmatic state purposes: unification of the written language, homogenization of political culture, standardization of academic curricula, and – most important of all – cooptation of the intelligentsia. The promise of official position for successful examinees generated loyalty and compliance among the educated. Degree holders who did not occupy bureaucratic posts, known as "literati" or "gentry," also performed critical grassroots governance functions in their native places, helping to carry out such tasks as education and moral instruction, tax collection, public works projects, mutual surveillance, and militia mobilization (Chang 1955).

The genius of the imperial system lay in its ability to produce educated acquiescence, inducing those with cultural capital to channel their ambitions in directions supportive of state authority. Historian Arthur Wright (1998: 67) explains, "the literate elite. .. entered into alliance with the monarchy. The monarch provided the symbols and the sinews of power: throne, police, army, the organs of social control. The literati provided the knowledge of precedent and statecraft that could legitimize power and make the state work." This symbiotic relationship between state and scholar was forged as early as 124 BC with the establishment of an imperial academy to offer officially approved instruction in the Confucian classics; by the mid-second century AD, the academy enrolled more than 10,000 students – many of whom were tapped for government service (Fairbank and Goldman 1998, p. 67).

Six hundred years later, the Tang emperor's founding of the Hanlin Academy further solidified the nexus between the imperial court and the literati, strengthening the bonds of educated acquiescence. A chief duty of the Hanlin Academy was to compose imperial edicts and other official documents in proper literary style. The Hanlin Academy also determined the orthodox interpretation of the Confucian classics that formed the basis of literati examinations. Exam papers were graded, and the results publicly announced, by state authorities. While the imperial state exercised the prerogative of ranking and licensing academic merit, scholars themselves enjoyed the prestige and material benefits of state-conferred recognition. Soon other Confucian academies, both public and private, sprang up around the country to train native sons for the civil service examination (Zhu et al., 2002). The spread of educational institutions meant that China came to enjoy one of the highest male literacy rates of any pre-modern society; by the late imperial period, almost every family could claim at least one literate member (Rawski 1979).

Due to this mutually beneficial relationship between the authoritarian state and higher education, China was initially spared the alienation of intellectuals that undid autocracies in other parts of the early modern world (Brinton 1938 and 1965). Only very occasionally did the system backfire, when – in the case of the nineteenth-century Taiping Rebellion, for example – an unsuccessful exam taker (who claimed to be the

younger brother of Jesus Christ) channeled his frustration into a frontal challenge to the imperial order (Spence 1996; Platt 2012). Although Chinese history was punctuated by frequent popular protests – tax and rent resistance, millenarian rebellion, ethnic conflict, and the like – seldom did these events include significant participation by Confucian degree holders.[2] Literati who remonstrated against the throne expressed their concerns as loyalists, not as leaders of opposition movements.[3] Prior to the advent of Western schools and values, higher education in China – thanks to its close connection to statecraft and bureaucratic recruitment – worked as a powerful bulwark for the preservation and perpetuation of imperial rule.

Revolutionary and reformist interregnum

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the introduction of new ideas and institutions from abroad (through the founding of Christian colleges by American and European missionaries among other means) undermined the authority of the *ancien regime* and helped to foment revolutionary change (Lutz 1971; Yeh 1990; Bays and Widmer 2009). The abolition of the Confucian examinations in 1905 severed the centuries-old bond between state and scholar, and contributed to the rapid radicalization of the Chinese intelligentsia. The Revolution of 1911 toppled the imperial dynasty and gave rise to a new political party, the Nationalists, led by the foreign-educated physician and philosopher Sun Yat-sen.

Untethered from close association with the state, university students and their professors became a potent force for political protest in Republican China. The May Fourth Movement of 1919, which championed Enlightenment values of "science and democracy" to overcome the weakness of the Chinese nation, was one notable outcome of the changed relationship between state and scholars (Schwarcz 1986). The establishment of the Chinese Communist Party two years later was another. The early leaders of the CCP, Mao Zedong included, were educated intellectuals who had been politicized in large part by their exposure to Western learning.[4] Founded by some of China's most distinguished academics, including the Dean and the Head Librarian of Peking University, the CCP from its inception appreciated the cardinal importance of education for both popular mobilization and political control (Munro 1977; Perry 2012).

After the victory of the Chinese Communist revolution, as the CCP sought a new *modus vivendi* with intellectuals, relations between state and scholars became highly fraught (Goldman 1981). In 1956, Mao Zedong's invitation to "let a hundred flowers bloom" elicited a wave of criticism from the universities that shocked the central leadership. The Anti-Rightist Movement of 1957 charged hundreds of thousands of intellectuals with harboring "bourgeois thoughts" (MacFarquhar 1974). A consequence

[2] In the late imperial period, literate women, excluded from the examinations, sometimes founded "heterodox" religious sects that could, especially if persecuted by the authorities, turn against the state. But such movements alarmed the gentry, who responded to the perceived threat by mobilizing local militia in opposition (Naquin 1977; Kuhn 1970).

[3] Celebrated examples of individual remonstrators include Qu Yuan (a third century BC official from the state of Chu who committed suicide to protest rampant corruption) and Hai Rui (a sixteenth century Ming Dynasty official who was dismissed, and later reinstated, after criticizing the emperor for dereliction of duty).

[4] Mao describes the impact of "new learning" on his political awakening in Snow (1972)

of this draconian campaign was that many of China's brightest minds were silenced or subjected to labor reform for decades. The Cultural Revolution (1966–76) witnessed another attack on intellectuals, this time carried out by state-mobilized student Red Guards. Most institutions of higher education ceased to function as such for much of the Cultural Revolution decade.

After Mao's death in 1976 the Chinese leadership showed renewed interest in Western models of higher education as a means of enlisting intellectual talent to facilitate an ambitious program of economic reform. High on the agenda of the post-Mao policies of Reform and Opening were international academic exchanges intended to provide world-class training for a new generation of educated youth who could spearhead China's modernization effort. Among the most popular higher education reforms was the reinstatement in 1977 of a national meritocratic examination for admission to university. The new system initially enrolled less than 1 % of the college age cohort, but the fact that the entrance examination (*gaokao*) was open to everyone, and was graded blind by state-appointed scholars, endowed it – like the imperial civil service exams – with widespread legitimacy.

While these post-Mao policies were greeted with enthusiasm by the aspiring intelligentsia, they did not bring immediate educational acquiescence. Neither the carrots nor the sticks included in the state's package of higher education reforms were enough to mollify the demands of academia. A major expansion in the number of universities and university students was not matched by a commensurate increase in government spending on higher education. The consequence was a noticeable decline in both the quality of instruction and the standard of living of faculty and students alike. Employment prospects for university graduates suffered, a situation made worse by the state's retreat from the system of guaranteed job assignments that had been a hallmark of Maoist socialism (Zhao 2001, pp. 80–90). Grievances generated by these developments were an important precipitant of a string of large-scale protests that Chinese students launched in the initial decade of Reform and Opening. Student mobilization was further facilitated by a loosening of the political control system at Chinese universities that also took place during this time (Zhao 2001, pp. 101–121). From Democracy Wall in 1978–79 to the Tiananmen Uprising of 1989, university students demanded a greater voice (for those with higher education if not necessarily for all Chinese) in the political system (Wasserstrom and Perry 1994).

In the spring of 1989, millions of ordinary citizens (angry about double-digit inflation, among other common concerns) joined university students and faculty in massive demonstrations that paralyzed major cities around the country for weeks (Calhoun 1997). The June Fourth Massacre brought an immediate end to the Tiananmen Uprising, but the collapse of Communism across Eastern Europe later that year, followed soon thereafter by the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, heightened anxiety among PRC leaders about the durability of their own political system. The role of dissident intellectuals in hastening the demise of European Communism was not lost on Chinese authorities (Zhang et al. 2002).[5] In light of the unsettling student and faculty activism that had recently snowballed in their own country, a top priority of the post-

[5] On the role of intellectual protest in the collapse of European Communism, see for example Joppke (1995); Bozoki (1999); and Garcelon (1997).

Tiananmen CCP leaders was to ensure that Chinese universities would no longer serve as springboards for politically threatening protest.

Educated acquiescence in post-Tiananmen China

In the more than three decades since the momentous student-led Tiananmen Uprising of 1989, China's university campuses have been uncharacteristically tranquil. The situation is particularly striking in light of the veritable explosion of popular protest among virtually all other sectors of post-Tiananmen Chinese society. Land conflicts by rural villagers, labor disputes by urban workers, environmental protests by a rising middle class – to name only some of the more prominent varieties of popular resistance – contribute to an impressive level of contention in contemporary China (O'Brien 2008; Perry and Selden 2010; Friedman 2014; Heurlin 2016; Wright 2019). The pervasive protest has prompted political scientist Xi Chen (2012) to label China's rowdy brand of politics "contentious authoritarianism." Yet amidst widespread social ferment, college students and their professors have remained conspicuously quiet. The only major exception has been periodic participation in state-sanctioned nationalistic demonstrations (Weiss 2014). Political criticism by intellectuals has for the most part been displaced from the streets to social media, where it can be readily detected and deleted by state censors (Yang 2011; Roberts 2018). Such compliance obviously is not attributable to any inherent passivity on the part of Chinese academics. From May Fourth 1919 to June Fourth 1989, every generation of twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals had engaged in politically consequential protest.

The success of the PRC's post-Tiananmen strategy for maintaining campus calm reflects important lessons gleaned from the searing experience of 1989. After June Fourth, the party-state reinstated and reinforced the pre-reform system of political controls on university campuses. In subsequent years, new techniques for "guiding" student and faculty behavior were introduced as well. Moreover, in stark contrast to the period leading up to Tiananmen, today the major Chinese universities are awash in generous government funding. These various measures, detailed in the next section of this paper, have repaired the nexus between state and scholar, thereby restoring a central pillar of authoritarian resilience.

The result of the post-Tiananmen approach has been a remarkable turnaround in China's campus climate. Rather than endorse Enlightenment values that encourage independent political criticism, Chinese academia advocates the party-state's patriotic agenda of national unity and technological advance. Joseph Fewsmith (2001: 12) observes that "in the years after Tiananmen. . . enlightenment ideals have – for the first time since the May Fourth Movement – been questioned or rejected by a substantial portion of intellectuals." Educated acquiescence entails an academy that does not complain (at least openly) about state plans and instead directs its energy toward fulfilling state demands.

Even when potentially unsettling higher education reforms were implemented in the wake of the Asian financial crisis of 1997, Chinese universities remained protest free. In November 1998, as concern about the financial crisis mounted in China, a prominent husband and wife duo of economists co-authored an influential open letter to the central leadership in which they suggested that China could escape the crisis (and thereby

preserve social stability) by further increasing higher education enrollments. Unlike the pre-Tiananmen era, however, this new round of expansion was designed to enrich both the universities and the wider economy. Tang and Zuo recommended that enrollments be doubled over the next three to four years, and that newly enrolled students be required to pay for their own tuition. They argued that Chinese families would be willing to dig into personal savings to give their children a college education, thus providing the Chinese economy with a significant boost in spending. This logic resonated with then Premier Zhu Rongji, and a hasty decision was made to increase both the number of students and the price of tuition in order to grow the Chinese economy (Wang 2014, p. 132). Underlying this drastic reform was the central leadership's anxiety about regime endurance:

> The rationale for Party interference was political. During the second quarter of 1999 when China's struggle with the Asian financial crisis was at a "critical juncture", social stability and regime survival were the Party's overriding concerns. The June 1999 Decision was an emergency measure that was greatly shaped by desire to avoid a scenario similar to "the dramatic fall of the Suharto regime in Indonesia", or the "élite turnovers" in other Asian countries. The Party intended to use radical expansion as a policy instrument to boost domestic consumption, stimulate economic growth and create jobs, as well as to delay the entry of high school graduates into job markets, make room for laid-off workers and reduce the unemployment rate. The scale of expansion was pushed to the limit. The side effects on higher education were of secondary importance when the Party considered that its rule was threatened (Wang 2014, p. 151).

In 1999, Chinese higher education enrolled 8.8 million students (10.5% of the age cohort); by 2006 the enrollment figure had increased nearly threefold to 25 million students (22% of the age cohort) and by 2014 the number of students exceeded 29 million (30% of the age cohort) (Zhang 2009). Today China leads the world in the total number of its college and university students. While the number of enrollees is projected to decline in the near future as a result of demographic trends, the percentage of the age cohort enrolled in tertiary education is expected to continue to increase steadily. Contrary to the argument of Bueno de Mesquita and Downs, the role of the authoritarian state in this impressive "massification" of higher education is central.[6] Although private schools proliferated after the reforms of 1998–99, public institutions still account for more than 80% of enrollments.[7]

The higher education reforms were not simply an across-the-board expansion. Convinced that China's future development would demand elite universities able to foster the intellectual innovation required to compete successfully in the global "knowledge economy" of the twenty-first century, PRC leaders embraced a policy package designed to propel a handful of the country's leading public institutions into the ranks of "world-class" universities. In short, a general massification of Chinese higher

[6] The seminal work on the phenomenon of massification is Trow (1973), who distinguishes among "elite" higher education, which enrolls under 15% of the eligible age cohort, "mass" education which enrolls 15–50%, and "universal" education which enrolls over 50%.

[7] *Washington Post* (February 12, 2012).

education was to be complemented by a selective pattern of strategic state investment. The effect was to render the elite universities more dependent upon state support and more attentive to state priorities. On the occasion of Peking University's centennial celebration in May of 1998, a speech by then President Jiang Zemin launched what came to be known as "Project 985" (for the year and month of Jiang's announcement) by which impressive infusions of central state funding were to be funneled to a small handful of universities (at first limited to nine, but later expanded to 34) deemed capable of becoming "world-class universities." The funding formula within Project 985 was also hierarchical: Peking University and Tsinghua University were given the privilege of being exclusively funded by the central government, whereas other Project 985 recipients were forced to seek matching funds from various sources at lower levels of the political system (Zha 2011, p. 31).

The result of this targeted funding by the central government has been a further stratification of Chinese universities, with a small number of aspiring global players on top of the pyramid structure, a sizeable number of provincial universities, independent colleges and degree-granting private universities in the middle, and a still larger number of vocational colleges bringing up the bottom tier (Zha 2011, p. 32). The elite universities, in a manner reminiscent of imperial academies, enjoy a close and mutually beneficial relationship with the central state. Top Party and government leaders are drawn overwhelmingly from the graduates of Tsinghua and Peking universities and often serve as honorary directors of programs at these schools.[8] Administrators at the elite universities are themselves afforded the ranks and privileges of government officials. And Chinese presidents, like emperors of old, are expected as part of their statecraft credentials to take a close interest in shaping these institutions of higher education.

China's current President, Xi Jinping, put his personal stamp on higher education policy by calling for "world-class universities with Chinese characteristics" in a May 2014 speech at Peking University. Rather than simply imitate famous foreign universities, Chinese educators – at the top five universities at least – are enjoined to develop an alternative (if unspecified) model. As Xi explains it, "the world can have only one Harvard . . . but China can have its own Peking, Tsinghua, Fudan, Nanjing and Zhejiang universities."[9] The commitment to catapult China's premier universities into world-class status (albeit with Chinese characteristics) has been accompanied by a push to globalize higher education through a host of academic exchanges and other international programs. One might have expected, contrary to the desires of the PRC leadership, that opening China's ivory tower to an infusion of scholars and dollars from around the world would work to liberalize the intellectual climate on Chinese campuses. Yet Chinese universities remain oases of political compliance amidst the social contention that has swept much of the rest of the country.

[8] The former and current General Secretaries, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, are both graduates of Tsinghua, while the current Premier, Li Keqiang, is a Peking University alumnus.

[9] 近平在北京大学师生座谈会上的讲话(全文) http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2014-5/05/content_2671258.htm

Sources of educated acquiescence in contemporary China

The causes of China's academic acquiescence are complex. First, and most obvious, is the array of control mechanisms that the party-state deploys to maintain order on university campuses (Yan 2014). Second is a range of more subtle techniques of "cultural governance" designed to produce political allegiance and regime loyalty (Perry 2017). Third, ironically, are opportunities for civic engagement afforded by a recent burgeoning of "civil society." Finally, and perhaps even more ironic, is the influence of the multiple metrics that have been adopted as part of Chinese universities' concerted bid to attain "world-class" status in the twenty-first century (Perry, 2014a, b, 2014).

Let us consider first the control mechanisms. To combat the potential threat of campus turmoil, China's Communist party-state has developed a battery of methods to monitor and restrain student behavior. College students are organized by "homeroom" as well as by class year, with these units headed by politically reliable peers who convey information both from and to the university administration. Peer surveillance and pressure is embedded within a professional oversight hierarchy. The cornerstone of the control regimen is made up of so-called "guidance counselors" (*fudaoyuan*), trained personnel tasked with keeping close tabs on their student charges to ensure that their beliefs and behavior do not violate approved boundaries. Although a system of guidance counselors was originally introduced at Tsinghua University as early as 1953, it assumed renewed and enlarged significance after 1989. Some of the counselors' duties are similar to those of resident tutors on many Western college campuses: helping to resolve personal problems, offering academic advice, and generally serving as older role models for undergraduates. Unlike resident tutors at Oxford or Harvard, however, the chief responsibility of the *fudaoyuan* is ideological and political. Mostly young instructors or advanced graduate students in their late twenties or early thirties, the guidance counselors (assisted by student informants) report directly to the deputy party secretaries responsible for student work at all levels of the university structure.[10]

In recent years these control methods have been "modernized" with the aid of new techniques and technologies. For example, as in the United States, mental health facilities are now a staple feature of Chinese college campuses. But in the PRC the definition of "mental illness" is broadly construed to include ideas and inclinations that the state deems politically dangerous, and the results of mandatory mental health screening for freshmen are forwarded to political cadres for analysis and possible preventative or punitive action (Yan 2014, pp. 503–504).

Another "modernized" means of gauging (and guiding) student opinion is afforded by the spread of the internet and social media. In 2008 China passed the U.S. as the world's biggest internet user, with micro-blogging via Weibo (the Chinese equivalent of Twitter) and messaging via WeChat (an alternative to Facebook) especially popular among college students. Blog postings, text messages, and other cellular and electronic communications facilitate the growth of (both virtual and actual) civil society among Chinese university students. They also enable the state to better monitor and respond to this burgeoning activism. Counselors and cadres combat subversive or suspicious

[10] Interview with Party Vice-Secretary for Student Affairs, Tsinghua University (2015).

content not only through censorship, but also by commissioning counter-posts that promote the officially prescribed point of view (Esarey 2015).

State-of-the-art hardware and software help ensure that classes and public lectures toe the party line. Surveillance cameras record the proceedings in classrooms and lecture halls so that they can be reviewed for political correctness. Students download apps on their smart phones to enable real-time complaints against professors who express opinions that stray from the official orthodoxy. Instructors deemed to have propagated incorrect ideas are subject to disciplinary warnings, salary reductions, and even (in rare instances) dismissal (Shepherd 2019).

The party-state deploys proactive as well as reactive measures in the effort to channel academic sentiment in directions favorable to the CCP's agenda. Since the 1990s, ideological and political education and military training have been standard components of the university curriculum. Such classes and exercises are designed to inculcate regime-supportive dispositions and deportment. Of growing importance in recent years has been instruction in "cultural proficiency" which presents Chinese history, art, philosophy and literature in ways that postulate an organic connection and essential compatibility between the splendors of China's ancient "tradition" and its contemporary "socialist" system. This is an extension of the Patriotic Education Campaign, launched in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Uprising, which highlighted both China's cultural heritage and its revolutionary experience as twin sources of legitimacy for the Chinese Communist Party (Zhao 2004).

One expression of this renewed interest in "traditional culture" has been a renaissance of Confucian academies dating from the imperial period. As of 2011, a total of 674 academies had been revived in some fashion or another, whether as functioning schools, museums, historical sites, or commemorative place names (Zhang 2013, p. 245). Cultural proficiency – thanks to generous funding from the Central Propaganda Department – is promoted not only in the classroom, but also in theaters, museums, field trips to historical sites, invited lectures by distinguished scholars and public intellectuals, research projects by renowned teams of social scientists and humanists, and so forth. The universities constitute a key node in a massive party-state initiative in cultural governance intended to convince citizens that CCP rule is endowed with "Chinese characteristics" which render its authority both natural and necessary.

While overt control mechanisms and formal ideological instruction are a common cause of grumbling among Chinese university students, the more subtle and sophisticated modes of cultural governance appear to enjoy considerable success. Although one hears many complaints on Chinese campuses, seldom is there a suggestion on the part of critics that the political system is in any way "un-Chinese." Under the banner of patriotism, the Propaganda Department's hybrid blending of China's ancient heritage with its twentieth-century revolutionary legacy to fashion an allegedly seamless "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (as Deng Xiaoping dubbed his post-Mao Reform and Opening) seems to have taken firm root. For a regime whose basic ideology and institutions were imported almost wholesale from the Soviet Union, achieving this level of cultural recognition and acceptance (at least among those who identify as Han Chinese, if not among ethnic minorities such as Tibetans or Uyghurs) is a significant achievement.

Recent studies by Chinese social scientists suggest that the party-state's ideological-cum-cultural propaganda has had the intended effect of depoliticizing university

students. An attitude survey of nearly a thousand students at two leading Chinese universities found that the students scored exceptionally high (compared to other social sectors) on indicators of patriotism and national identity, while scoring exceptionally low on measures of political efficacy and political participation (Xie 2013, p. 247). The thirst for "democracy" that inspired student protests throughout most of the twentieth century appears to have largely dissipated. On a questionnaire administered to a random national sample by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, only 43% of college student respondents answered "yes" to the question "Is democracy good?" Among other social groups (including professionals, civil servants, factory managers, workers, farmers, self-employed, and unemployed), the percentage of affirmative responses was a full ten to fifteen points higher, ranging from 53% to 58%. Only high-ranking cadres expressed less enthusiasm for democracy (41% affirmative responses) than college students (Zhang 2013, pp. 16, 22–23; Zhang 2013).[11]

Arguably even more effective in eliciting campus compliance than either control mechanisms or cultural governance are the expanded opportunities for voluntarism and community service that have developed apace in recent years. Student clubs of various sorts had been a feature of Chinese college life since the 1980s. The period since 2008, however, has witnessed a mushrooming of organizations whose mission extends beyond conventional campus recreational and educational activities to the provision of social services outside the academy. Although the Xi Jinping administration has blacklisted "civil society" as a dangerous Western notion, its emergence is actually an important contribution to campus calm in the contemporary PRC. The space for meaningful participation afforded by the growth of grassroots NGOs encourages college students (and their professors) to concentrate on varieties of activism that directly and indirectly benefit Communist rule – relieving the state of a portion of its social welfare burden while at the same time channeling youthful energy away from potentially disruptive behavior.

Many of the associations that have sprung up in recent years enjoy close connections to the party-state and its official "mass associations." The Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL) plays a particularly prominent role on Chinese university campuses, not only as a training camp for prospective party members but also as sponsor for a range of volunteer and philanthropic activities. The best known of these CYL endeavors, Project Hope, mobilizes a steady stream of college student volunteers to help staff the thousands of elementary schools that it has recently constructed in impoverished areas of the country.

While a disproportionate share of financial and political resources is concentrated in such GONGOs, or government-organized non-governmental organizations, they by no means monopolize the field of associational activity either on or off campus. The Ministry of Civil Affairs reported an official figure of nearly 800,000 "social organizations" and "social associations" in 2017, an 8.4% increase over the preceding year.[12] Unofficial estimates, which include a multitude of unregistered groups, put the total

[11] It could be that students are simply more apt to give answers they believe to be "politically correct," and that their responses do not reflect their actual views, but in either case their replies indicate an unusually high level of compliance or "educated acquiescence."

[12] Ministry of Civil Affairs, ed., *2017 Statistical Bulletin of Social Service Development* (2017年社会服务发展统计公报). https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/1052864159313028779.html

number of grassroots NGOs of various sorts at several million. Thanks to reforms making it easier for social service organizations to register with local municipal bureaus of civil affairs, such groups have been able to enlarge their fundraising efforts. After the catastrophic 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, when both government and social media encouraged citizens to open their own pocketbooks to aid the disaster victims, the practice of private giving spread rapidly in Chinese society. Charitable foundations and philanthropic venture funds proliferated, numbering in the thousands and affording expanded opportunities for community activism. The Wenchuan quake not only encouraged the rise of private philanthropy; it also triggered a massive volunteer movement as concerned citizens from across the country, especially college students, flocked to Sichuan to offer their personal assistance to the rescue effort (Xu 2017). The trend of youthful voluntarism for public causes accelerated a few months later when the government (via the CYL, the Confucius Institute and other official agencies) mobilized large numbers of student volunteers to assist at the Beijing Olympics. The experiences of 2008 were clearly transformative for Chinese youths, some of whom went on to establish private charities of their own and many others of whom have continued the practice of devoting a generous amount of personal time and money to further their favorite causes (Zhuang 2010).

While the battle against HIV/AIDS and environmental pollution awakened the first generation of China's grassroots NGO activists, today both the issues and the motives that underlie them are remarkably wide ranging. A variety of religious faiths – from Christianity to Buddhism – is inspiring the establishment of privately-operated medical clinics and nursing homes, for example (McCarthy 2013). A secular sense of social responsibility is fueling donation drives for everything from books for school libraries to winter coats for the poor. And the influence of socialist ideals can be detected in the labor NGOs that provide legal and welfare services for downtrodden workers.

Under some pressure to live up to its own officially espoused socialist ideology by upgrading the provision of social services, the party-state is anxious to reap the positive dividends of this fluorescence of community activism. In some cases, local governments even contract with civic organizations to facilitate the implementation of mandated welfare policies and other social services (Howell 2015). But the state's top priority remains that of "stability maintenance," or the perpetuation of Communist party rule. Fearful that networks of social activists could pose an existential threat akin to what transpired in Eastern Europe in 1989, the government keeps close tabs on NGOs and makes it difficult (through registration rules as well as public security surveillance and harassment) for local groups to forge links with counterparts in other regions of the country or to accept foreign funding. As the recent repression of human rights advocates, feminists and labor organizers attests, the party-state pays special attention to monitoring the involvement of intellectuals – college students included –to prevent their serving as bridges between groups operating in different locations or composed of disparate social classes or interests. Marxist societies on university campuses from Beijing to Guangzhou were recently deregistered, and dozens of idealist young members detained, to stymie an emerging alliance between sympathetic students and protesting factory workers in Shenzhen (Yang 2019).

Counter-intuitively, the recent associational upsurge in the PRC has proven to be more of a help than a hindrance to the perpetuation of Communist party-state rule. Rather than providing a platform for democratization, burgeoning civil society in

mainland China has offered an outlet for public service that relieves the state of some of its own onerous welfare burden while also fulfilling educated youths' desire for social engagement. The pervasive contestation that takes place outside the gates of university campuses has concentrated on economic and environmental issues that do not directly challenge CCP authority. And the campuses themselves, the cradle of political ferment in twentieth-century China, for the past thirty years have been remarkably quiet.

Important as student and faculty involvement in public service outreach has been, it would be misleading to suggest that China's current campus calm is primarily due to diverting intellectual attention away from academics toward social assistance. Thanks to generous government support, the universities can offer a menu of extremely attractive incentives to encourage certain types of scholarly productivity. Among the most powerful instruments in the PRC's toolkit for taming the universities is the package of assessment measures – by no means unique to China – which are internationally recognized as standard metrics for a globally competitive system of higher education. Instead of bringing political liberalization, China's impressive globalization of higher education has encouraged a frenzied "scaling" of its ivory tower that diverts interest and energy away from independent criticism in favor of enjoying state-supplied rewards for fulfilling "objective" production targets (Perry, 2014a, b).

A driving motivation behind China's contemporary higher education reforms has been the campaign to helicopter the country's leading universities into the upper echelons of "world-class universities" – as reflected in the *Times Higher Education*, *Shanghai Jiaotong*, *QS*, and other rankings of top research universities in the world. In return for massive state financial investment, the universities have introduced an elaborate system of evaluation and compensation – tailored to the benchmarks of world university rankings – that serves to structure and constrain the activities and attitudes of Chinese academics. The apparent objectivity and universality of this "meritocratic" method of rating and rewarding academic achievement (and the state recognition it brings) imbues the system with an aura of legitimacy not unlike that which surrounded the imperial Confucian examinations (Bell 2015).

Bibliometrics, or the counting of articles published in SCI and SSCI journals, has become the gold standard for assessing China's progress in scaling the ivory tower. As a result of this strategic ascent, armies of post-doctoral fellows have been hired by all of China's major universities. These are young scholars (often with considerable overseas research and study experience) who have no teaching duties and are employed on short-term contracts, renewable upon producing a specified quota of SCI or SSCI journal articles. Faculty members are rewarded with generous bonuses for publishing in these designated outlets; graduate students are required to publish in these venues in order to qualify for their degrees. The result is an academy more preoccupied with fulfilling "productivity" targets than with engaging in political criticism.

In determining the rankings of world universities, the number and size of research grants is an important criterion. China's Communist Party structures the system of research grants so that it functions simultaneously to improve the global rankings of Chinese universities and to inhibit the independence of researchers. The Party, through its propaganda departments at both central and provincial levels, exercises considerable control over university research by setting priorities for large-scale grants in the social sciences and humanities (Holbig 2014). The propaganda departments' influence can be seen in the extraordinary number of major research grants earmarked for the study of

"Xi Jinping Thought," for example.[13] There is considerable pressure on faculty to apply for these lucrative and prestigious grants, and discrimination against those who are unwilling or unsuccessful in garnering them. Such funding affects not only salaries and promotions, but also university standings (Shepherd 2012).

It is sometimes suggested that Chinese universities can never become "world-class" as long as Communist Party committees remain in charge of their administration. But that depends, of course, on how a world-class university is defined. If it is defined by the quantity of publications or the size of research grants, then the Party's ability to channel vast amounts of state resources toward such metrics is a decided advantage. The results can be seen in the impressive rise of China's top universities in the academic rankings of world universities over the past few years (Kirby 2014). Of course the *quality* of the scholarship being produced in this frenetic process is less easily assessed; if citations of scientific papers are any indication, it is perhaps telling that China trails the United States, Europe and Japan on this particular statistic.[14]

Critical sociologists have rightly pointed to a convergence among postindustrial countries, regardless of regime type, in promoting a professionalized higher education designed for the "knowledge economy" that is inherently depoliticizing (Kurzman and Owens 2002, pp. 71ff; Hodges 2000). Yet authoritarian states by definition can deploy a far wider array of incentives and punishments than is available to leaders operating under liberal democratic constraints. In the last few years, Chinese universities have introduced new regulations that encourage intellectuals to align their academic output even more closely with official priorities. In addition to publishing articles in high-impact scholarly journals, faculty are urged to prepare policy papers for submission to party and government agencies. Policy recommendations that elicit a positive response from the authorities can substitute for academic publications for purposes of tenure, promotion, and salary bonuses. Authors of such papers receive recognition and remuneration from their home universities as well as from relevant government agencies. This development coincides with the recent opening of hundreds of government-sponsored think tanks on Chinese university campuses. Today China ranks second only to the United States in the number of university-based think tanks. But whereas American think tanks have been criticized for "institutionalizing a mode of intellectual practice that relegates its producers to the margins of public and political life" (Medvetz 2012, p. 7), their Chinese counterparts enjoy influential and well compensated positions.

Conclusions

Why does the contemporary Chinese state lavish so much attention on higher education? An outside observer might suspect PRC authorities of betraying a streak of paranoia in devoting such concern to taming the presumed political threat of its universities. After all, rapid expansion in higher education enrollments, combined with

[13] Application guidelines and lists of state-supported projects can be found at the website of the National Planning Office: http://www.npopss-cn.gov.cn/n/2014/1211/c219469-26187444.html

[14] http://api.ning.com/files/HfvPkwzay-6HhFQwHTEQlzr6S8c9GXy3*vLJQfLzAdkMQPFj1Nd9WS-dAL8FMiMAyGT2MZQXmZyOMdR5YWmPnvoRyKGZHCQx/Top20.png

the growth of professional and technical training at the expense of liberal arts education, has rendered college students in China today – as in many other countries – more focused on securing a job than on sabotaging the system. But the party-state's worries are hardly groundless. As we have seen, Chinese university students played starring roles in a series of momentous "democracy" movements that stretched from May Fourth 1919 to June Fourth 1989. At the start of the twenty-first century, moreover, students in Central Europe acted as catalysts in igniting the Color Revolutions that swept much of the formerly Communist world (Bunce and Wolchik 2011).

As the PRC keenly appreciates, the possibility of college students serving as sparkplugs of political protest did not disappear when army tanks rolled into Tiananmen Square in 1989. In addition to China's twentieth-century cycles of student protest, there is ample contemporary evidence of the challenge posed by student power in those parts of Greater China where campus controls are less stringent than on the mainland. Twenty-five years after the suppression of the Tiananmen Uprising, events in both Taiwan and Hong Kong demonstrated the continuing capacity of Chinese students – in concert with civil society allies – to trigger mass movements with unwelcome political implications for Beijing. In Taiwan, the "Sunflower Student Movement" occupied the Legislative Yuan for the first time in its history and forced the ruling party to reconsider a cross-straits service trade agreement with the PRC. In Hong Kong's "Umbrella Movement" students and faculty spearheaded some of the largest demonstrations in the history of the island to register dissatisfaction with the PRC's stipulated process for selecting the city's chief executive (Ho 2019). More recently, the Anti-Extradition Law Movement has seen Hong Kong students at the front lines of even larger and more disruptive protests calling for democratic freedoms. Instead of resorting to riot police, as occurred in both Taipei and Hong Kong, Beijing would obviously prefer to prevent the emergence of student unrest in the first place. Ensuring that campuses are tightly monitored and that intellectual energies are channeled into system-supportive rather than system-subversive activities is therefore a critical element in the regime's comprehensive scheme for "stability maintenance."

In paying such attention to higher education, the Chinese leadership is surely mindful of its own eventful history. The Chinese Communist Party was a direct outcome of the alienated academy generated by the sudden collapse of the age-old state-scholar nexus after the abolition of the imperial examinations. In seeking to fashion a new twenty-first century partnership based on educated acquiescence, the CCP experiments with an eclectic set of practices, old and new, designed to induce the loyalty of its intellectuals and thereby preserve Party rule.

The PRC's success in the pursuit of educated acquiescence, in contrast to that of the dynastic order, seems unlikely to be measured in centuries, let alone millennia. The current program of "stability maintenance" is replete with contradictions and tensions (Yang 2016). In contrast to the imperial period, moreover, Chinese scholars today operate in a global academic context that exposes them to information and ideas that directly challenge CCP orthodoxy. As the Xi Jinping administration tightens its grip on the universities, one cannot help but wonder how long the attractions of compliance will override a yearning for greater intellectual independence. The recent slowdown of the Chinese economy has reduced the funding available for faculty salaries and productivity bonuses, weakening the material foundations of educated acquiescence.

Yet regardless of its eventual fate, the PRC's already decades-long achievement merits our serious attention.

Scholars have long debated the question of where the primary and proper loyalty of intellectuals resides, whether in a commitment to truth, universal values, the sacred, the life of the mind, ideas, or material interests (Eyal and Buchholz 2010, pp. 121–122). Educated acquiescence points to another powerful object of intellectuals' allegiance: the state itself. The Chinese case calls to mind Julien Benda's classic essay (1927 and 1956), *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, in which he warned that rising nationalist passions on the part of 1920s European intellectuals had reversed their traditional role as adherents of universal values and increased the prospects for international conflict. A notable difference with Chinese tradition, however, is that since imperial days the expected and ethical role of the scholar was to serve the state.

China's scholar-state nexus is predicated upon a fusion of cultural and political power that distinguishes it from most other countries where, as Jerome Karabel (1996, p. 209) points out, holders of cultural capital are usually subordinate to holders of political and economic capital. In Karabel's account, intellectuals' accommodation with the status quo is born of weakness vis a vis the political and economic elite. In the case of educated acquiescence, by contrast, those with cultural capital (including both the technical and the political intelligentsia) enjoy high standing in return for fulfilling state-established expectations. The state structures the scholarly enterprise through competitive examinations and other apparently "objective" means of academic ranking and remuneration in such a way as to further its own goals while at the same time assuring those with higher education of their own meritorious achievement. That both President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang lay claim to doctoral degrees (LLD and PhD respectively) indicates the power of cultural capital in legitimating political authority in the Chinese context.

Although China's Communist system differs from imperial China along numerous important dimensions, it shares with its autocratic ancestor a keen appreciation of the utility of higher education for regime durability. The current Chinese state continues to sponsor and stratify institutions of higher education according to criteria that advance state interests. Today, however, the primary yardstick for measuring academic achievement is not the Confucian classics but the global rankings. Scholars and state are partners in a concerted effort to boost the international standing of Chinese universities. In this process, a massification of student enrollment goes hand in hand with an increasing elitism of academic assessment. Scholars at leading Chinese universities benefit in terms of both personal income and professional prestige, while the party-state reaps the advantages of a preoccupied, pliant, and productive academe. Unlike imperial academies, contemporary universities are expected to constitute bases of intellectual innovation conducive to national success in the globally competitive "knowledge economy" of the twenty-first century. Like imperial academies, they are enjoined to wed their pedagogical mission to the larger goal of state stability.

The PRC is not alone among contemporary authoritarian states in funneling impressive amounts of public investment toward the project of building "world-class" universities in hopes that such institutions will serve both as motors of economic development and as mainstays of authoritarian rule. Singapore by government design already boasts an outstanding higher education infrastructure that has clearly redounded to the

island's economic benefit while not unraveling its authoritarian political fabric.[15] It may be that China's historic state-scholar nexus renders higher education of special saliency and efficacy in the development strategies of those societies, such as the four East Asian "tigers," that partake of a shared Confucian bureaucratic and cultural heritage (Ashton 1999).[16]

Tellingly, perhaps, the only contemporary autocracy whose founding predates that of the PRC (by one year) is North Korea, where serious state attention to higher education has also been evident since the inception of the regime. One of Kim Il Sung's first initiatives as President of the DPRK was to establish a comprehensive university (named for himself), to which renowned scholars from across the peninsula were invited to assume teaching and research positions.[17] Today Kim Il Sung University, North Korea's premier institution of higher education, boasts cutting edge computer and laboratory facilities intended to be globally competitive.[18] The logo of the ruling Workers' Party, in addition to a hammer and sickle, features at its center a scholar's calligraphy brush to indicate the party's special concern for intellectuals. In 1988 the North Korean regime reportedly surpassed its target of producing "an army of 1.3 million intellectuals," graduates of higher education who could advance the DPRK's goal of the "intellectualization of the whole society" (Eberstadt and Banister 1992).

Increasingly, significant investment in higher education can also be seen among authoritarian regimes outside of the formerly Confucian world. Russia's "Program 5–100," adopted in 2013, channels a generous level of state support toward that country's leading universities with the explicit intent of catapulting at least five of them into the top 100 in the global rankings. Beyond the obvious economic goals of enhancing national growth and international competitiveness, the possible political motives behind the initiative have been debated by sociologists studying contemporary Russian higher education reform. Natalia Forrat (2015: 18) suggests that the program is driven by the Putin regime's "fear of youth political mobilization similar to that which played a very important role in the color revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine in 2000-2004." Igor Chirikov (2016), however, claims that Putin's support for higher education is motivated by economic objectives rather than by fear of anti-regime student mobilization. Whatever the drivers of the Russian reform effort may be, Forrat and Chirikov agree that college students in Russia today demonstrate little appetite for political engagement. In the Middle East, as well, the United Arab Emirates and other oil-rich autocracies have welcomed the establishment of Western-style universities and branch campuses in the belief that the modern research university model – with its reputation for spurring economic development – "might, with sufficient resources and political

[15] "Innovations in Higher Education: Singapore at the Competitive Edge," *World Bank Technical Paper*, no. 222 (1994).

[16] Taiwan and South Korea did eventually democratize, of course, but their impressive economic takeoffs were engineered by authoritarian regimes that appreciated the instrumental use of higher education for such purposes.

[17] "Kim Il Sung University, Seventy-Year History," *Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, no. 729 (October 2016): 22–29; "Kim Il Sung University Greets its 70th Anniversary," *The Pyongyang Times* (October 1, 2016): 2.

[18] http://www.ryongnamsan.edu.kp/univ/intro/history/develop; "University Aims to be World's Top-class Institute," *The Pyongyang Times* (October 1, 2016).

will, be detached from its democratic moorings and reconstructed in their own societies . . . .” (Jones 2015, p. 25).[19]

These trends belie Bueno de Mesquita and Downs’ claim (2005) that authoritarian governments refrain from supplying higher education for fear of inciting anti-regime activism. On the contrary, a growing number of autocracies are investing heavily in institutions of higher education that to date have not served as breeding grounds for revolutionaries. Even if the de-politicization of the universities is as much a byproduct of the effort to build world-class engines of economic growth as a conscious state strategy to defuse student protests, the attendant benefits for autocracies are substantial. To the extent that this impressive state support for universities proves politically successful, moreover, it carries implications not only for authoritarian durability but for the vitality of democratic regimes as well.

Growing investment in modern universities by authoritarian states around the globe casts doubt on familiar theories that associate the flourishing of such educational institutions with robust democracies. Western social scientists from John Dewey (1916) to Seymour Martin Lipset (1959) stressed the importance of higher education for the emergence and endurance of liberal democracy. Even in an age of postmodern multiculturalism, Robert Rhoads (1998: 2) celebrates the college campus as “the central stage for the drama of democracy’s ebb and flow.” Commenting on this seemingly obvious symbiotic relationship, Edward Shils (1989: 455) observes that “[i]t is clear that the universities owe a great deal to liberal democracy and that liberal democracy owes a considerable part of its successful functioning to universities.” As the quintessential embodiment of Enlightenment values, the modern research university has often been acclaimed as an institution that is fundamentally incompatible with an illiberal political system (Wellmon 2015). These days, however, the most “enlightened” autocrats are betting billions of dollars otherwise. The Chinese example suggests that their wager might not be misplaced.

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[19] See also Vora (2015).

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