

SINO-U.S. TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION—“BUYING” AN AMERICAN HIGHER  
EDUCATION PROGRAM: A PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION STUDY

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
College of Education

DECEMBER 2009

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of JERRY VINCENT NIX find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Jerry Dale Nix, and to my mother, Mary Lynn Massey Nix. They sacrificed nearly everything to ensure that I received the best education available. Pop, Mom, I love you both; much obliged!

I also cannot ever put into words how much my grandma, Marie Moser Nix, and her brother, my great uncle, Ralph Myron Moser, shaped whatever good is in me; I hope your spirits are watching me when I graduate.

To “the smart Nix”, my uncle, Josef Timothy, thanks for showing me how to be myself in whichever society I live.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earning a Ph.D. is a great individual milestone, but it is not really an individual effort. Many people made this possible. If I could thank everyone that helped me along the way, this section would rival the research text in length.

First of all, thanks to the Chair of my committee, Dr. Forrest W. Parkay. It was his suggestion that I look into this area of research; I do not regret taking his advice. From the first course of my Master's program until the end of this document, Forrest has been a beacon and a rock. Without his guidance and patience, this document would still be piled in a heap of field notes.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Paul E. Pitre and Dr. Gail C. Furman for serving on my dissertation committee; Gail, that qualitative class, and the dissertation class, helped a great deal. Many other professors taught me and put up with me, the list would go on and on; I appreciate you all. Professors Joseph Breuning, Columbus Hopper, and Gary Long got me interested in looking at others with an academic eye. Mentors in higher education and in business settings allowed me great opportunities to observe and to learn; I am grateful.

Many friends aided me. A special thanks to Stephen Paul Farmer, who helped me get back on my feet and made me want to attend university; he showed me I did not need to “get dirty” to earn a living. Thanks to Dr. Wayne T. Lamar for putting me back together. To the first resident advisor I ever had, Shah Nagree, thanks for not kicking me out of school; you opened my eyes to a whole new world and I am much better for knowing you. Triple thanks to Kyoko Miyamura for keeping me at UM and motivating me to continue studying at WSU; you were and always will be a wonderful inspiration.

Thanks to Ed Heresniak for being able to keep me on track while reading this document and for all your insight into what I wanted to say. Thanks to Dennis Williams for those Thursday “faculty meetings” where we tossed so many ideas and thoughts around. Thank you, too, Charlie Heath, your willingness to discuss my research, and your insights on China were immeasurably useful.

Thanks to my siblings, Brooks, Jay, Sharissa and Alecia; you never gave up on me; I love you all dearly. Thanks to my better half, Song Lan, “Misty,” who has provided unending support while I was (and still am) trying to understand China and its people; 我回来了! Thanks to my Chinese Mama and Baba for all of your support, and your input when I was confused about Chinese society.

I am also obliged to all of my students in China; y'all taught me more than I ever taught y'all, it's true. Thanks to all of the colleagues I met in China during this research process; you have all been blessings to me. Thank you, China!

Finally, my sincere gratitude goes out to the people in New York that were so gracious and forthcoming during this research project. I will forever be grateful to the people in China that employed me, and allowed me to undertake this study. We might not always agree, but without your support I would not have written any of this; I hope you find it useful.

*We ain't never gonna' change,  
We ain't doin' nothin' wrong.  
We ain't never gonna' change,  
So shut your mouth and play along!*

Drive-By Truckers  
Never Gonna' Change  
*The Dirty South*  
August, 2004  
New West Records

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Abstract

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December 2009

Chair: Forrest W. Parkay

This study explores the social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of a U.S.-based transnational education (TNE) program in China. TNE refers to education programs provided by an institution located in another country, and this study focused on higher (tertiary) education

Six questions provided the focus for this study: (1) What are the organizational dynamics of the TNE program? (2) How do social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions influence program operation? (3) How do Chinese government policies influence program operation and quality? (4) Does the program reflect standards outlined by professional associations that monitor TNE program quality? (5) What satisfactions and dissatisfactions do TNE students report? (6) What satisfactions and dissatisfactions do TNE instructors report?

In the U.S., “Northeast College” a private, four-year institution initiated the TNE program, partnering with five Chinese universities. In China, the Director of Northeast China Programs, International (NCPI)—a private, for-profit company—administered the program.

Data were gathered at two of the five universities while the researcher was an NCPI-hired instructor during 2007-2008. Data consisted of observational field notes, TNE program documents, correspondence with NCPI staff, and semi-structured interviews with students and instructors.

Four key findings emerged from this case study : (1) Chinese government policies appear to foster “academic capitalism” and to encourage “buying” higher education programs from developed countries; in turn, institutions such as Northeast College appear willing to “sell” their educational program; (2) the TNE program lacks transparency and accountability measures that characterize the vast majority of U.S. colleges and universities; (3) the primary goal for this TNE program is profit (\$10 million gross in 2008),—at best, student learning is a secondary goal; and (4) the Director of NCPI relied on the Chinese cultural concepts of *guanxi* (a complex network of interpersonal connections, in which favors or service for others are reciprocated) to establish the program and “face” (sense of worth and perceived status) to market the program to students and their parents.

The study concludes with nine policy recommendations to diminish the negative consequences of buying, selling, and trading higher education programs in a global market.

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## NOMENCLATURE / ACRONYMS

Academic Capitalism	Universities' and faculty's increasing attention to market potential (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997).
ACE	American Council on Education (U.S. based).
Accreditation Mills	Dubious providers of accreditation and quality assurance that may offer a certification of quality of institutions without a proper basis.
Agent	Third-party TNE negotiator between Chinese and U.S. constituents.
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Singapore based).
AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.
AUQA	Australian University Quality Agency.
BRIDGE	British Degrees in Russia Project.
Capitalism	Economic and social system in which the means of production (or capital) are privately controlled.
CEPES	European Center for Higher Education (Romania based).
CERI	Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (France based).
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation (U.S. based).
CMP	Contract Member Parties.
CQAIE	Centre for Quality Assurance in International Education (U.S. based).
Cross-border	Crossing borders into another country, for example trade.
Degree Mills	Dubious providers of educational offerings or operations that offer certificates and degrees that may be considered bogus.

Doha Round	Doha Development Round or Doha Development Agenda (DDA) is the current trade-negotiation round of the World Trade Organization (WTO) which commenced in November 2001, in Doha, Qatar. The negotiations collapsed on July 29, 2008 over issues of agricultural trade between the United States, China, and India.
ES	Educational Services.
EU	European Union.
Face	In China, face is similar to the Western concept of a good reputation, but not always. Face is inseparable from the Chinese concept of <i>Guanxi</i> .
GATE	Global Alliance on Transnational Education.
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services.
Globalization	A continuing process through which regional economies, societies and cultures have become integrated through a global network of trade.
Guanxi	Quality connections.
HEI	Higher Education Institution.
IAU	International Association of Universities.
IIE	Institute of International Education.
Internationalization	A process of increasing involvement of enterprises in international markets.
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights.
MOE	Ministry of Education (in China).
NCITE	National Committee for International Trade in Education (U.S. based).

Neoconservatism	Political philosophy which supports using economic and military power to bring liberalism, democracy, and human rights to other countries; originated in the U.S.
Neoliberalism	Label for the resurgence or reformulation of classical economic liberalism. Opponents of Capitalism sometimes use this as a pejorative.
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
OERI	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (U.S. based).
Project 985	Chinese project to enhance its universities' reputations and rankings.
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency (U.K. Based).
SEC	State Education Council (China based).
TNE	Transnational Education.
UKIERI	United Kingdom and India Education Research Initiative.
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
WTO	World Trade Organization.