Few American institutions of higher learning have had historical relationships with China that are comparable in scope and importance to that of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. One reason why this may be regarded as surprising is that the University of Illinois, as a public educational institution, was generally constrained from providing direct religious instruction to any of its students, and had no school of theology from which missionaries were sent to China. Another reason is that the University was not involved in teaching any of the one hundred and twenty Chinese students who came to the U.S. as participants in the 1872-1881 Chinese Educational Mission, and indeed, did not begin to provide instruction to any student from China until the twentieth century. A third reason is that the University was not located in or near any of the large U.S. cities in which numerous people of Chinese background lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

One of the major points made by Poshek Fu, a Professor at the University of Illinois, is that the historical relationship between the University of Illinois and China developed largely through the efforts of Edmund James, President of the University of Illinois from 1904-1920, and his successor, David Kinley, who held the position from 1920-1930.

James was a leading advocate of giving excess funds, from the U.S. share of the indemnity for the Boxer Uprising, to China’s government for the purpose of providing American education to Chinese students. In a 1906 memorandum which was submitted to President Theodore Roosevelt, James asserted that the U.S. could most effectively increase its moral, intellectual, and commercial influences in China by being the “nation which succeeds in educating the young Chinese of the present generation” (30).1

1 The title of James’s memorandum was “Memorandum concerning the sending of an Educational Commission to China.” The entire text of the memorandum was printed in Arthur H. Smith, America and China To-day: A Study of Conditions and Relations (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1907), 213-218.
In May, 1908, the U.S. Congress authorized a remission of excess Boxer Indemnity funds. In July, 1908, through an exchange of notes with William W. Rockhill (U.S. Minister to China), the Qing government made reference to President Theodore Roosevelt’s desire to promote the coming of Chinese students to study in the United States, and stated its “intention to send henceforth yearly to the United States a considerable number of students there to receive their education.” In 1909, the Qing government established the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program for students from China to study in the U.S.

Fu says that it was “no coincidence” that James invited Wu Tingfang, the Qing government’s Minister to the U.S., to give a commencement speech at the University of Illinois in 1908, the year in which Congress authorized a remission from the Boxer Indemnity (31). Wu, soon after his visit to the University, asked James for details about such matters as the University’s admissions policy and tuition. James responded by writing about the relatively low fees and living expenses for the University’s students, about his desire to extend, through Wu, a cordial welcome for any Chinese student who wished to study at the University, and about his interest in contacting the Chinese officials who would be administering the Boxer Indemnity scholarship program (32). According to Fu, information about the low tuition and living cost for foreign students in Champaign-Urbana received widely circulated publicity in China, probably with the help of Wu, and this publicity was especially effective in attracting self-supporting Chinese students, who outnumbered those who came to the U.S. through the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program and other scholarship programs (33). Wu became involved in specifically recommending some Chinese students as candidates to attend the University (32).

Before the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program started, only about a dozen students from China studied at the University of Illinois or its preparatory school, which was known as the University Academy. Fu does not mention the name or date of arrival of the first Chinese student. There evidently is still some uncertainty regarding those details (the first Chinese student arrived in 1906 or 1907). The Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program made it possible for many students from China to attend American universities in the period from 1909 to the late 1930s. Fu has stated, in support of his view that the University benefited relatively little from the Boxer Indemnity scholarships, that “from 1909 to 1911, the overwhelming majority of the 180 recipients went to the Ivy League schools, and only 18 came to [the University of] Illinois” (32). This reviewer looks at those numbers differently, and regards a 10 percent yield for the University, in the first years of the nationwide scholarship program, as impressive. Even if the program had a less-than-anticipated impact at the University, it nevertheless was an important aspect of the history of Sino-American interaction, with some

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benefits for both countries.6 James’s advocacy for the creation of the program is a notable element of the historical relationship between the University of Illinois and China (29-31).

Fu points out that James developed a number of strategies for recruiting and retaining Chinese students, including using networks that he had built with American missionary communities in China and schools such as the Honan [Henan] Preparatory School, and arranging for the 1913 national conference of the Chinese Students’ Alliance to be held on the University of Illinois campus (32-33).7 In order to help Chinese and other foreign students to adjust to the culture at the University, James in 1913 created the office of the Advisor of Foreign Students, and insisted that the Advisor be a faculty member (not an administrator) who had intimate experiences with foreign cultures (33). To emphasize the importance of the position, James gave the first appointee (James Seymour, a professor of Romance Languages at the University) an increased salary (33). Seymour launched, with Edmund James’s blessings, such programs as language enrichment classes, private language tutoring, and a host family system (33). Seymour also spent many hours talking with foreign students about their adjustment problems, and made his office “a home away from home for many Chinese students at the University of Illinois” (33). Fu regards the creation of the office of Advisor of Foreign Students as one of Edmund James’s “most important legacies at Illinois” (33). Fu has commented, without providing specific examples, that the success of that office inspired other universities to establish similar offices (33).

David Kinley, James’s successor as president of the University, had a clearer-eyed awareness than James of the limits for American educational influence in China (35, 37). Kinley did not create any innovative programs regarding Chinese students, but largely sustained James’s pioneering policies, and also spent time closely following the careers of, and maintaining friendships with, some of the alumni in China (35-36). Before becoming president, Kinley had taught at the University and had been a mentor for C. C. Wang (Wang Jingchun), who in 1911 became the first Chinese student to obtain a Ph.D. at the University (35).8 Kinley and James helped to make arrangements for a course-teaching graduate student assistantship for Wang (35).9 Wang, who became one of China’s leading railway administrators, and who for several years (c. 1928-1931) led the Chinese Educational Mission in the U.S., was a longtime friend of Kinley’s (36). In 1930, soon after stepping down from the presidency, Kinley made the first visit to China by anyone who was or had been a top official of the University (35). While visiting cities in China, he had extensive interaction with University of Illinois alumni/ae. (37).10 Mrs. Kinley, who accompanied her husband on the trip, died of smallpox while

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7 Huang, 40-45.

8 Huang, 99, 168; James Herbert Kelley, ed., The Alumni Record of the University of Illinois: Including Historical Sketch and Annals of the University and Biographical data regarding Members of the Faculties and the Boards of Trustees (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 1913), 644.

9 Huang, 59, 182-184. University of Illinois student Tu Weitsen, rather than Wang, obtained practical training at a railway in Chicago. 49.

10 Huang, 143. Fu has inaccurately indicated that Wang met and accompanied Kinley in China. At the time of Kinley’s visit to China, Wang was attending an international conference in England. 154.
at Beijing, and flowers and banners for her funeral service were sent by Illini Alumni Club branches at Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing.11

In his article, Fu selects and briefly discusses some of the University’s notable Chinese alumni, including C. C. Wang, H. Y. Moh (Mu Ouchu / Mu Xiangyue, a renowned cotton industry entrepreneur), Coching Chu (Zhu Kezhen, President of National Chekiang University and pioneer of Chinese meteorology), Chen Loh-kwan (an engineer who during World War II supervised the rapid and remarkable construction of a huge airfield near Chongqing, using thousands of unskilled laborers), educator/reformer T’ao Hsing-chih (Tao Xingzhi), film director Ang Lee, politician/women’s rights advocate Annette Lu Hsiu-lien, and inorganic chemist/ceramics expert Yan Dongsheng (33-38). Many others could have been added. They include, for example, architect/engineer Chuang Tsin (Zhuang Jun, the first Chinese graduate of an American architectural program),12 botanist Chien Sung-shu (Qian Chongshu), hydrologist Huang Wan-li (Huang Wanli), organic chemist Hsing Ch’i-yi (Xing Qiyi), chemical engineering educator S. H. Li (Li Shouheng), Su-ching Chen (Chen Xujing, sociologist, president of Lingnan University, and president of Jinan University), H. L. Chang (Zhang Honglie, president of Chung Chow University), physician Margaret Hied-Ding Lin, and computer scientist Andrew Chi-Chih Yao (Yao Qizhi). Judges include two students who transferred from the University of Chicago: Wenfu Yiko Hu (Hu I-ku), who obtained his law degree from the University of Illinois in 1909, and his colleague Showin Wetzen Hsu (Xu Weizhen), who studied law at the University for less than a year and did not obtain a degree there.13 After the fall of the Qing government, both became Justices of the Supreme Court of the new Republic of China.14 Both had very prominent judicial careers.

Fu understandably chose to focus on the University’s heritage of educating Chinese students. Some of the University’s other students also have made notable contributions to the trans-Pacific cultural connections between the University and China. Examples include missionary/educator Wilhelmina “Minnie” Vautrin, agronomy advisor Harry H. Love, journalist Rayna Prohme, parasitologist Ernest Carroll Faust, missionary/physician Charles Whittier Young, missionary/physician Ruth Bennett Morgan, diplomat Louis Hill Gourley, and architect Charles Alexander Gunn. No one has generated more goodwill in China for the University than Vautrin, who is remembered for her courageous efforts to protect many Chinese women and girls during the 1937-38 Nanjing Massacre.15

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11 Huang, 144.


14 Kelley; University of Chicago Magazine 7:3 (January 1915), 84-85; University of Chicago Magazine 7:4 (February 1915), 128.

15 This reviewer personally observed some of that goodwill while he was providing some information in August 2016 to filmmakers from the Jiangsu Broadcasting Corporation who have been preparing a series of films about the Nanjing Massacre. Vautrin’s heroic efforts at Nanjing received wide international publicity after the publication of the
Many American universities and colleges have not kept fully accurate and reliable records regarding their Chinese students (sometimes not carefully distinguished from Chinese-American students) in the pre-1950 period. Fu understandably has refrained from addressing whether the University of Illinois may have granted more Ph.D. degrees to Chinese students prior to 1950 than any other American university, and has refrained from identifying in which years, in the pre-1950 period, the University may have had more Chinese students than any other U.S. university or college. He instead comments that the University of Illinois became “a Mecca of learning for Chinese students eager to discover the ingenuity of the West in the 1910s and 1920s” (35). He notes that “the number of Chinese students dwindled after 1930 and improved only in 1946, when China after World War II sent huge numbers of students of study in the United States” (37). The Great Depression and World War II presumably were factors contributing to the reduction of the Chinese student population during the period from the early 1930s to 1945. The post-war “wave of Chinese students came to an abrupt end in 1949 when the Chinese Communists seized power” (37). From then until the early 1980s, the major sources of new Chinese students at the University, and at other U.S. institutions of higher learning, were Taiwan and Hong Kong (37-38).

After the People’s Republic of China (PRC) began to establish relationships in the U.S., the University of Illinois was not in the first group of U.S. educational institutions that Beijing officials chose as destinations for Chinese students (38). But the University’s historical ties to, and reputation in, China were such that in 1983, it received an invitation to send a delegation there. The invitation, which was accepted, came from Yan Dongsheng, an alumnus who was then Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and included the following statement: the “University of Illinois has been well-known for her outstanding contribution in many disciplines of science and engineering and has been successful for promoting interaction and friendship between academic communities and scientists” (38).

After 1983, when the PRC allowed students to study abroad on private funding, many graduate students from the PRC were attracted to the University, especially for science and engineering programs (39). After 2000, rapidly rising numbers of PRC students started to travel overseas for undergraduate instruction, and in the U.S., especially after 2007-2008, the number of PRC students skyrocketed: the University of Illinois “is one of the top schools in Chinese student enrollment” (39). As of 21 September 2017, the University of Illinois had 47,826 students (33,824 undergraduates) enrolled, including 5,932 students (3,286 undergraduates) from the PRC (excluding Hong Kong and Macau), 329 students (108 undergraduates) from Taiwan, 39 students (25 undergraduates) from Hong Kong, and six students (four undergraduates) from Macau. Fu does not contend that the University’s PRC students are there because of the University’s impressive history of trans-Pacific cultural connections with China. They have enrolled in large numbers at following bestselling book by a Chinese-American alumna of the University of Illinois: Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

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16 As part of her doctoral dissertation, Carol Huang attempted to compile and interpret some historical statistics about Chinese students at Illinois and other U.S. universities and colleges. Huang, 21, 39-40, 53, 57, 78-81, 86-87, 89, 91, 126-128, 139-140, 213, 301.

many U.S. universities. Many PRC students undoubtedly are attracted to the University because of its fine academic reputation, especially with regard to science and engineering.

Fu mentions journalist Elizabeth Redden’s description of the University of Illinois as the “University of China at Illinois” (27). He comments that the University has become “emblematic” (39), in media headlines, of the following national trends in the U.S.:

“At a time of serious financial troubles for education and research, the Chinese undergraduates who pay the full cost of an education have in effect helped many universities stay solvent and fulfill their missions of fostering equality and continuing academic competitiveness. Yet at institutions benefiting most from this windfall, campus services to help Chinese students adapt to a different educational culture remained woefully insufficient” (39).

Fu points out that Chinese students at the University of Illinois generally “have been little prepared to navigate the increasingly fragmented and financially beleaguered American college culture” (40), including how to “cope with the problems of racialization and minoritization that they [have] faced on campus and beyond” (40). In recent years, the University has begun to make more efforts to help its Chinese students to adjust to the culture on campus, including creating a new Director of International Student Integration position, adding Mandarin-speaking staff to the counseling center, conducting freshman orientations in some Chinese cities, and adding classes and workshops to help international students to become more familiar with topics ranging from American football to American-style dating.18

Fu comments that despite the large number of Chinese students on campus, the University of Illinois “has continued to be slow and halting in developing sustainable academic exchange programs and strong institutional relationships with the PRC” (39). He notes that a private foundation decided to stop funding an exchange program which brought scholars from PRC universities to the University of Illinois “in part because of growing skepticism about the commitment of the University leadership to strengthening connections with the rapidly rising China, especially in the wake of a last minute cancellation of a long-planned network-building reunion conference” (40).19 A Confucius Institute was established on the University’s campus in November, 2013, through special arrangements which thus far seem to have helped the University to face fewer issues than a number of other U.S. educational institutions regarding academic freedom in the context of Confucius Institutes.20

Fu’s article was released in May 2017. On 9 June 2017, a young woman from the PRC, who had come to the University as a visiting scholar, evidently was abducted in Urbana, and has disappeared. On 30 June 2017, a


19 The program, known as the Freeman Fellows Program, was sponsored by the Freeman Foundation.

suspect who previously had studied at the University was arrested. This incident has received much attention in the PRC, and the University is taking steps to improve campus security.\textsuperscript{21}

Fu’s article, which is a revised version of an earlier paper, is recommended by this reviewer.\textsuperscript{22} Fu has taken pertinent sources into consideration. His article is a thoughtful, coherent, and concise discussion of a topic which deserves a full-length book.


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