



BUFFALO STATE  
The State University of New York



Center for China Studies

**CCS Newsletter**

Email: [chinacenter@buffalostate.edu](mailto:chinacenter@buffalostate.edu)

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Website URL: <http://ccs.buffalostate.edu/>

Director: Zhang Jie, Ph.D.  
CASS 133, Buffalo State (SUNY)  
1300 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14222  
Telephone: (716) 878-6328  
FAX: (716) 878-4009  
E-mail: [chinacenter@buffalostate.edu](mailto:chinacenter@buffalostate.edu)  
Website URL: <http://ccs.buffalostate.edu/>

Newsletter Copy Editor: Christine Lai  
Newsletter Production Editor: Tricia Herritt

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**I. The Director's Notes**

Spring 2021 was the third semester for Buffalo State to be online for most of its teaching and learning as well as academic interactions. We saw off the last group of visiting Chinese scholars end of last semester and are waiting for the borders are open and new scholars to arrive. The annual China Week, a tradition of the CSS for about 20 years, had be to be suspended for the second year. Some graduating students are also waiting for the border to open so that they can be sent to China to start their English-teaching career as planned. Many of our usual activities became virtual. However, we are waiting with hope.

Along with the COVID 19 pandemic, other attacks to the nation include the recent anti-Asian violence and hate crimes against Chinese Americans. The Chinese community and other ethnic minority groups across the country as well as groups in local Buffalo have stood up in protest. This special issue of the CCS newsletter features three short essays by Buffalo State faculty in their reflection of the current situation and the US-China relations.

**II. Reflections on the Current  
US-China Relations**  
*by Dr. Christine Lai*

I often tell my marketing students, to conduct business in another country, you must understand the culture of the people, and to understand the culture of the people, you must understand their history. Historically, China's economy began with a feudal system under various emperors until it shifted to a controlled economy under the governance of the Chinese Communist Party. In the 1980s, Deng

Xiaoping introduced economic reforms resulting in today's hybrid controlled/free-market economic system. Over the decades the Chinese economy transitioned, formalized institutions such as capital markets and the legal system were first in their infancy then they slowly gained maturity and cultural acceptance. Until these institutions were fully matured, Chinese relied on the Chinese concept of "guanxi," a set of rules and a code of conduct influenced by Confucian values and cultural norms. Guanxi means a special relationship, personal trust, and depends on reciprocity. Relationships with family members and the closest friends were the incubators for business collaborations. Before the introduction of formal institutions, Chinese relied on strong relationships, guanxi, to reduce transaction costs, and provide hierarchy and structure to business collaborations.

What role does guanxi play in US – China relations today? While the US engages in arms-length business transactions with little if any personal relationship, guanxi is embedded into the Chinese way of conducting business. This extends into the political climate between the two countries. Guanxi can be described as a relationship of mutual dependence. Because the interdependent US and Chinese economies are the largest in the world, this relationship is "too big to fail." It is important for both countries to build personal relationships between political counterparts. The leaders of both countries must continue to learn to understand each other's history and culture for the economic well-being of the American and Chinese people.

Christine A Lai, PhD. M.B.A.  
Professor of Business Management & Fulbright Scholar  
Associate Chair of the Business Department



### III. Reflections on the Current US-China Relations

*by Dr. Dwight Hennessy*

My involvement with the Center for China Studies at Buffalo State College, and with scholars in multiple associated universities in China, began more than a decade ago. Over these years I have met some amazingly dedicated and talented faculty and students who have attended my classes and collaborated on various research projects both in the US and in China. Not only has this expanded my own interests but has also targeted some important social issues. In addition, I have had the pleasure of witnessing numerous presentations by visiting scholars and students across a variety of college-wide research venues. What has always impressed me is the passionate pursuit of intellectual excellence in these experiences – that cut across social, political, and cultural lines – purely motivated in the pursuit of learning and sharing of knowledge. These are things that excite most academics!

In 2016 I had the privilege of travelling to China to teach several lectures at Central University of Finance and Economics, and to present my research there, as well as at Shandong University and Tsinghua University. What I found routinely were true "scholars" who packed the lecture halls, eager to share ideas, outcomes, and applications. I learned as much as I taught, and this experience dramatically impacted my own teaching and research viewpoint. While I thoroughly enjoyed the incredible sites and amazing food during my visit, it the interactions and relationships that I formed that

stick with me to this day. And I know that in recent years there has been a strain on the relationships between China and both the United States (where I work) and Canada (where I live), as these nations disagree on issues such as COVID-19, human rights, technology, intellectual property, detainment of prisoners, and territorial disputes. These are not trivial issues. But my experience has shown me that scientists and academics can come together in a way that transcend boundaries and borders, to look for solutions to problems. This, I believe, is at the very heart of the mission of the Center for China Studies.....to “advance intellectual, personal, and professional growth” that promotes the well-being of all communities in this ever-changing world.

Dwight Hennessy, Ph.D.  
Professor of Psychology  
Chair of the Department of Psychology

## IV. Reflections on the Current US-China Relations *by Dr. Steve Macho*

Fifty years ago (when I was five years old) my understanding of China was based on an old children's book: *The Five Chinese Brothers* (1938). I recall how clever they were in acting as a family and that it was an ordered society (with a judge). Being raised in the rural mid-west, the word “Communist” always proceeded the name China (perhaps to remind me there was a supposed enemy). I was a freshman college student (1984) when I first met a “real-live” person from China: an 18-year-old from Beijing. His father had attended North Dakota State University decades earlier as a cultural exchange student, and he choose to send his son to study where he had been a student.

While at 18 years old I was aware of some basic history, geography, location of a few rivers & cities, that China had a large population and was Communist. I was not prepared for who I met, or what I heard. I was replete with misconceptions. I had thought as an American, I had some sort of divinely granted superiority. As a farm-boy, I had no proper perception of this refined urbanite. With an open mind, a shared love of playing pool, and cheap beer (not much else to do in North Dakota) I made a friend and became aware the notions I had of China did not match the person I met from China. In the decades to follow, I met many others from main-land-China as classmates, friends, employees, colleges, and eventually students. As education and experience in life began to replace prescribed ideas common from where & when I was raised, I found myself often challenging mis-conceived motions.

Now, I live in rural Western New York and will verify misconceptions of China (still) exist. I have facilitated the introductions of many Chinese and Americans to my (rural) neighbors. I've had the pleasure to observe misconceived ideas melt, and watch friendships grow. In the past years at Buffalo State I have met, hosted, taught, and learned from hundreds of visiting Chinese scholars. I have hosted them in my home, and visited their homes in Jiaxing, Beijing,



Shanghai, Hangzhou, Nanjing ... too many to list.

The winds of politics change much faster than the goodness and warmth of old friends. I believe real understandings based upon the experience of people getting-to-know each other are more valuable than maintaining loyalties based in falseness.

Global supply chains, trade, commerce, and development appear to be defining features of our moment in time. In a much longer view – our species is more apt to propel our descendants beyond our dreams if we continue to foster collaboration.

Steve Macho, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Technology & Engineering Education  
Chair of Department of Career & Technical Education

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