



**The Brookings Institution and Center for Strategic and International Studies
Vying for Talent Podcast**

**“Strengths and weaknesses of China’s national human capital development”
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Guest:

YINGYI MA
Professor and Director of Graduate Studies
Sociology Department
Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

Hosts:

JUDE BLANCHETTE
Freeman Chair in China Studies
Center for Strategic and International Studies

RYAN HASS
Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Center for East Asia Policy Studies,
John L. Thornton China Center
The Michael H. Armacost Chair
Chen-Fu and Cecilia Yen Koo Chair in Taiwan Studies
The Brookings Institution

Episode Summary:

In the fourth episode of “Vying for Talent,” Dr. Yingyi Ma, a professor of sociology at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, shares her perspective on how China’s talent base is shaped by the nation’s educational landscape as well as social and political challenges. In discussion with hosts Ryan Hass and Jude Blanchette, Dr. Ma lays out strengths and weaknesses of China’s human talent development pipeline and shares why she remains confident in the competitive advantages of America’s higher education system.

BLANCHETTE: China, with its massive population of 1.4 billion, has a seemingly inexorable human capital advantage over the United States. One recent report from Georgetown University’s Center for Security and Emerging Technology finds that by 2025, China will be graduating nearly twice the number of STEM Ph.D.s as the United States. On the other hand, polling data from the Pew Research Center shows that nearly 60% of global respondents believe that the United States has the best universities in the world, a fact borne out by the more than 1 million foreign-born students currently enrolled in the U.S. educational system. Which country then holds the advantage? Hi, my name is Jude Blanchette and I’m from the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

HASS: And I’m Ryan Hass from the Brookings Institution. And we are the co-hosts of *Vying for Talent*, a podcast exploring the role of human talent in the unfolding competition between the United States and China. Our guest today is Dr. Yingyi Ma. She’s a professor of sociology at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. At Syracuse she also serves as the director of graduate studies in the Department of Sociology and the director of Asia and Asian-American Studies. She received her Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University and is the author of “Ambitious and Anxious: How Chinese College Students Succeed and Struggle in American Higher Education,” among many other publications.

BLANCHETTE: In our conversation today, Dr. Ma helps unpack the strengths and weaknesses in the U.S. and the Chinese educational systems. For all their significant strengths, both countries are facing pronounced yet distinct challenges to creating a 21st century workforce. And with that, let’s dive into the conversation.

HASS: Dr. Ma, to start off, can you tell us about your own background? Where are you from and what led you to become a professor? What drew your research focus to education and migration?

MA: Sure. So, I was born and raised in China, actually, coming from an educators’ family. Both my father and my grandfather are Chinese teachers. I grew up on the on the high school campus where my dad was teaching. It sounds not at all fun or something admirable, but this is actually really one of the most important, probably, reasons that led to me becoming a professor, largely because of my dad. He is really one of its own kind. It’s very unlike his generation. He taught—he spent a lot of time talking with me as an equal person, and he very much encouraged me to challenge him. So, that really made me very intellectually curious.

Growing up in the campus environments also make me very attuned to various kinds of issues about education in China. And then when I came to the United States to study at Johns Hopkins University in the year of 2000—that was 22 years ago—I was just bringing that kind of comparative analytical mindset to approach everything in my own life, academic life, and things around me. The differences between the U.S. and China educational systems and some people maybe approach it academically, and I certainly did as well. But I think I, I was living it from my formative years in China as well as my academic and professional life in the United States. My dad plays a very important role. I think nobody has actually even—I was not even aware that I wanted to be a professor when somehow I just, you know, becoming it’s, fate has it. And now in hindsight I think everything is reasonable, making sense.

HASS: Well, America is richer for your decision to become a professor at Syracuse University. So, thank you.

MA: Oh, that's very nice.

HASS: A key aspect of this podcast series is, you know, Vying for Talent is to explore how human capital impacts national competitiveness. The last two guests that we've had on our show, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks, as well as Secretary Steven Chu, have spent a lot of time talking about the ways in which the United States can strengthen its national competitiveness. But we would love to use our time with you to talk a bit about China's national human capital profile. What do you see as some of China's important human capital strengths and weaknesses? And what issues in China's human capital landscape do you believe are underappreciated or under-discussed?

MA: I believe the strengths of China's human capital development is what educators have long described as this effort-based learning mindset. So, comparative education researchers have actually made a distinction after they compare not just the China and the U.S., but they actually compare China, Japan, Taiwan—I think the research was initially conducted in Taiwan—compared to what happened in the U.S. classroom. So, they have identified this key distinction between the effort-based learning mindset and the ability-based learning mindset.

So, what the U.S. has been practicing and oftentimes believing in—it's really a core part of U.S. education philosophy—is that every child is born with these unique and fixed abilities and those unique, very individualized sort of talent that is unique to everyone, really set everyone on the path of achievement and choice. So that's the U.S. to some extent, how they really organize their education. As we can see, the tracking system really starts relatively early. Oftentimes, if not the elementary school in middle school and high school. But in China and other East Asian societies, there is a lot more focus on effort. There is a lot more belief that there is a common standard of achievement in education.

So, this effort-based learning in East Asia and in China in particular has made most of their Chinese students very focused and dedicated to math and science learning from K through 12, the pre-college education, which I think is actually one of the major strengths in China's human capital development. As you can see, the STEM not only in terms of math and science test scores, you can see that China has been long excelling, but also in terms of the amount of their graduates at both undergraduate and graduate level. It is not just about the population size. Definitely China's population size is much bigger. But if you're looking at the percentage of Chinese college graduates in STEM, so just the percentage of Chinese college students majoring in STEM, compared to the ratio of American STEM majors, that's really—disregard the population size, right?—so, the percentage is much, much higher. And actually, half of the Chinese undergraduate students major in engineering alone. Whereas in the United States, only 20% of STEM majors in first degree, bachelor's degrees are in STEM. So that's includes biology, which is a huge chunk of STEM majors in the United States. So, engineering is really less than 10%.

So, that's really, I think, the strength of China's human capital development. People are now zeroing in a lot on the technological prowess of Chinese national competitiveness and how technology has played such a important role.

The flip side is that I think the weakness of China's human capital development is social-emotional learning. The education system there is too much focus on the skill development, such as literacy, such as math and science. Everything can be quantified. What's the problem of that? You know, we all know that in the education development, people are talking about

whole child development. And if we put it in the layperson's term, the implications or the damage that the education system is so much focused on the skill development and ignoring or neglecting social-emotional development. And that really is behind a lot of social ills that we have seen in Chinese society right now. So, for example, anxiety and depression, Chinese society is very anxious. And if you're talking to the younger generation, that part of anxiety is going through the roof. So, so I think that's the weakness of it. It's very intangible, but it's really you can feel the super hyped competition, very stressful.

BLANCHETTE: Yingyi, can I ask about the geographic distribution of some of this educational resources available for Chinese? So, I think many of us here in the United States will know of a few elite Chinese universities: Tsinghua, Beida, Fudan, and of course there's a lot of intense pressure to get into those schools. Once you start moving out the distribution curve, what is the quality of education, educational resources look like? And to put it in the American context, I don't think most students feel that it's make or break that if you don't get into Harvard, your life is over. A lot of us, myself included, went to some fairly, you know, mid-level universities and that you're still able to pursue, at least for now, in my case, a somewhat rich life. So, it seems like the distribution of educational quality is fairly evenly distributed outside of that peak of elite universities. My sense in China is that it might be somewhat different, and that once you get out of the sort of top one or two tiers, the quality of education might drop off or the perception that the opportunity set drastically decreases is there. That may be incorrect. So, I wanted to ask if you could just give our listeners a lay of the land of access to high quality education outside of those, you know, small grouping of elite schools.

MA: Absolutely Jude, thanks so much for this question. And this question has actually reminded me of one point that I did not mention, which is also part of the weaknesses of China's human capital development. That is the urban-rural, rural-urban disparity. There is a very good book called *Invisible China*. That book has definitely addressed this issue spot on. So, in terms of the geographical disparities, rural China is definitely the "invisible China," This this part of China that is very much left behind. And children growing up in rural China do not really have nearly as much resources in terms of education, nutrition. I think that book has talked so much about how the lack of nutrition and the health problem for the children growing up in rural China has really prevented them or could be the bottleneck issue for China from escaping this middle-income trap.

But back to, Jude, your question about this quality of China's education. That's especially in terms of higher education resources. And we have been aware that there is a 985 Project in China. Chinese colleges and universities, there is close to 40 universities that are part of this 985 Project that has received a disproportionate amount of funding from the national government, matching with the resources at the provincial government. And then there is this 211 Project, which is about 100 universities that are deemed as high quality with favorable funding structure or investment from the national government. So, in other words, really, outside of that 100 universities, there's a big overlap between 985 Projects and 211 Project. But outside of that league, you're right, those universities do not nearly receive enough resources. And so, the quality of instruction, research is definitely much lower. That amount of resources are highly corresponding with geography as well.

So, China is unlike the United States, China has *hukou* system, the household registration system. In other words, you can't just move to Beijing or Shanghai. Even if you choose to live there like migrant worker, they can live there, but they cannot have access to benefits.

And part of it is health and education benefits. So, so all of that infrastructure in terms of *hukou* and access to welfare and all kinds of education and health benefits, has made talent mobility actually very unlikely compared to the mobility of talent—within China, even domestically is much more limited compared to talent mobility in the United States, largely because of the registration system, *hukou* policy.

So, you can imagine that, you know, in some of the small-town America in Idaho, for example, in Iowa, you can have first rate researchers and professors working at University of Iowa or South Dakota. But it is very hard to imagine you have that kind of a professor choose to work in inland China compared to Beijing or Shanghai.

That's why I can give you one example. Henan Province, Henan Province has the population size is more than 100 million, but they don't really have a single 985 university. Certain cities such as Beijing and Shanghai has a concentration of those major universities. So, so because of those kinds of geographical concentration of resources, especially education resources, you can see that will just create the cycle of advantages and disadvantages, right? So, I would say talent mobility in China is much more limited within China compared to the United States.

BLANCHETTE: Just to follow up on that a bit, it's interesting or it's a bit of a puzzle to me, Xi Jinping seems to be focused at least, you know, in terms of top-line narrative on this idea of national rejuvenation. And yet you describe an area where if I were Xi Jinping and I were so focused on sort of rejuvenating, aggregating, building all of China's strengths, I would be laser focused on some of these institutional challenges about the distribution of talent. Right? So, like you said, I think it's a great example, if you go to Iowa, you can see some of the best researchers in the field. But if you go to the Chinese equivalent of Iowa, you wouldn't. What do you think is acting as a barrier to the government making more forward progress on moving resources to some of these rural areas to sort of even the gap, which even if you're a sort of a hard power, geopolitical competition sort of leader, that would still seem to be the smart step. Right? Better utilization of of, you know, natural born talent. I'm just curious, why do you think that the government hasn't been able to make more progress on this or prioritize this to the extent that they are prioritizing other issues.

MA: I think *hukou* system is one of the major bottleneck barriers for the government really to make it happen. I think as, you know, you're perfectly right that the Chinese government has been aware of this phenomenon, these regional disparities and trying to develop the west compared to the very wealthy and developed eastern areas. And they have various kinds of policies, "Kaifadaxibu," right. The whole "go to the west." They have various kinds of policies trying to attract foreign direct investment. For example, in Henan, I would want to raise the Henan Province again as the example. Zhengzhou is the provincial city of Henan Province. Zhengzhou has been pretty successful in attracting a lot of business. For example, iPhone, the Apple manufacturing center is in Zhengzhou has produced a lot of job opportunities for local population and Zhengzhou economy has taken off, but not higher education.

Colleges and universities, really, we know that they depend on professors, right. You can if you're you if you are not able to recruit top rate professors and researchers, you're not able to build up the world class universities. And why professors don't want to move to Henan if they have opportunities in Beijing? And I think I've explained that because of *hukou* system. Right? So, professors they would want their children grew up in Beijing or Shanghai if they

have opportunities to and they don't really want to go to inland areas where their next generation, they would think, have a much more limited opportunities for development.

HASS: Yingyi, you've developed deep expertise on China's human talents, but you also sit at a renowned American university. So, how has this research and your experience examining China's human talent profile affected your perspectives on America's human capital strengths and weaknesses?

MA: I have done— actually I started my career studying America, utilizing the national education statistics, and their longitudinal surveys and trying to understand gender and racial disparities in college major choices. As I've said, even though I study America, I have this building comparative perspectives. So two things that really was quite striking to me, either empirically from my data as well as substantively. One is structurally, American education system, especially in terms of STEM learning, math and science learning, American education system is marked by inequality and segregation, especially segregation in curriculum.

So, I talked about tracking before. So, in China, tracking usually does not start until 11th grade. So that's really two years before high school students take college entrance examination. Why do they have to track? Because the college entrance examinations are designed to have different subjects for people who are going to study STEM and people who are going to study humanities and social science. So, high school students have to choose just two tracks. You know, if you want to specialize in math and science, you're going to take more advanced math and science courses. And certain college majors such as engineering will be open to you in college. But then you have another track, which is humanities and social science.

But in the United States, oftentimes that kind of tracking starts as early as fifth grade, sixth grade, and very normally in seventh grade and eighth grade. So, students can take different, especially math classes. The situation is, you know, people can graduate from high school with a huge disparity in terms of course-taking patterns. Okay. So, some people can, for example, graduate from high school in calculus. Some people can graduate without algebra or pre-algebra. Right? Such a huge disparity is not going to be possible in Chinese education system. So, so there is definitely, you know, pluses and minuses. People believe that American systems serve the gifted really well. That's why, you know, currently there is a has been a while there is a movement going against gifted education and parents protest against it, especially upper middle-class parents. But the end result is, if you can see, there is a huge racial disparity, especially in math and science learning.

There has been a lot of talk in terms of racial disparity in college attendance. And, you know, I work in American higher education. There is a tremendous amount of resources and energy. I believe in every chancellor and president's mind that they want to prioritize the enrollment and graduation of underrepresented racial minorities. You know, they put that as part of their achievement "bucket list." But the problem is really dating back to K through 12. And structurally, I believe this very unequal curriculum, these very segregated schools, are really the structural roots of the problem. And that you can also see that there is a huge racial disparity in terms of who really graduated with a STEM degree. Right? If we're talking about there are a lot of job opportunities in STEM degrees. And I, for one, have studied this. And actually if you're looking at racial minorities in STEM it's actually a lot of immigrants and children of immigrants who are really buttressing this gap. But, you know, the for example,

the American African-Americans and Latinos and Native Americans, the gap is huge. So, so I believe the structural barriers in STEM learning and math and science learning K through 12 is actually one of the major impediments, structural impediments for addressing the racial inequity, inequity in math and science learning.

And then there is a cultural barrier as well. The cultural barriers is what I would call this “legitimacy of disliking math.” Right? So, how many times have we heard about, you know, people are just very confidently and comfortably claiming that, “oh, I’m not a math person.”

So, I think go, going back to my previous point that I think the strength of the Chinese human capital development is their effort-based learning that they don’t really believe, you know, these kinds of statements, even if people believe in it, they will not really feel so comfortable in claiming. But in the United States, because we have this culture that permit people to acknowledge and or even embrace that, you know, I’m not good at math. And I would argue that there is a popular culture even sanctioning that, you know, sort of legitimizing dislike of math. So, so that has a serious damage, especially for women. So, I have so many female students telling me that they’re perfectly good at math and science in high school. But because of the social construction of femininity in United States, there are kind of, you know, shepherded away from this path of doing that. So, so I think that really is the problem right now with American human capital development, especially in terms of STEM education.

HASS: That’s fascinating. And it’s a it’s a very important point that if we’re going to realize the full potential of America’s population, we need to unlock opportunities for all and not just for the gifted and those from a higher strata of uh, of society. Listening to you talk about the comparative analysis of China’s higher education system and America’s higher education system, leads me to want to ask you a question about a book that recently came out by Harvard Professor Bill Kirby titled *Empire of Ideas*. And the basic premise of the book, as I understand it, is that in the 19th century, Germany really had top notch universities, world class universities, and that contributed to Germany’s global competitiveness. In the 20th century, the United States had many of the top global universities, and it had a multiplying effect on America’s national progress and national strength. And the question then is, in the 21st century, are Chinese universities going to rival or surpass America’s universities in their ability to churn out top talents that will propel the country forward? How are you thinking about this?

MA: Thank you, Ryan. I know of Bill’s book, I have not yet got a chance to read it. I think that’s actually a very interesting speculation. You know, in 21st century, which country’s higher education system will be the best? I still believe the U.S. will remain this crown jewel position here. And empirically, it’s still hot water because I just published a book two years ago studying Chinese international students and trying to understand why they want to come here, what kind of experience they’ve had once they have come here. So, I focused on the undergraduate population.

One of the fascinating experiences I’ve had is trying to understand their parents’ backgrounds. It is my one of my motivations in trying to demystify that this generation is just coming from the wealthy and the privileged. And yes, they are relatively privileged, but they’re also very diverse, represented by a very diverse set of occupational backgrounds of their parents. So, in the media, oftentimes they are portrayed as coming from families of CEOs and billionaires. But in my study, a lot of their parents are actually teachers and

professors. This is one of the fascinating findings from the occupational data, being a professor entering top five occupations for both father and mother in my in my sample.

So, then I brought this pattern of finding to interviews when I was asking this professors, children, why do they choose to study in the American college if their parents are already working in some of the top Chinese colleges? The answer is their parents were telling them that American higher education have a higher quality. So this is coming from the insider of Chinese higher education. Some of these institutions are one of the best. So the 985 projects in Beijing and Shanghai. And then their parents are feeling like Chinese universities, even though on paper, especially in terms of the research indices, publish a lot of papers, a lot of discoveries. But instruction, undergraduate instruction, has been sidelined for years as research has been prioritized. So they, you know, they they decide to send their kids to the United States.

I am still optimistic about the environment that I'm working in right now. American higher education is still going to be the best, but definitely I think the lead is going to be eroded. It's not just China. It's the rise of the rest. It's Japan, South Korea. It's Singapore. It's, you know, countries in Europe.

BLANCHETTE: Yeah, Yingyi, maybe following on from that, one of the things that, you know, we've been looking at is number of foreign student enrollments in the university. And we saw, you know, the full data set for I think it was the 2020–2021 academic year showed that there was a year-on-year decrease of about 15% of incoming or enrolling Chinese students. But you also saw bigger decreases for South Korean students coming to the United States. You saw approximately similar number decrease in Indian students coming. Last couple of years have been weird with COVID and travel restrictions. But I'm curious, do you look at these decreases in enrollment as, you know, just weird anomalies of COVID or do you see these as more structural changes? You just mentioned one of them, which is increasing level of educational quality outside of the United States. I'm curious, though, if there are other factors shaping the attractiveness of the United States: perceptions of safety, racism—we've seen a spate of attacks on Asian-Americans over the past several years. Can you just summarize all of this in terms of what you think this means for the United States as a magnet for for foreign talent?

MA: Absolutely. I think there are at least two additional forces that are beyond the control of higher education for American college and university attractiveness to Chinese students. Number one is, Jude, as you just mentioned, this anti-Asian hate. Definitely during COVID and and after, there is a spike of those incidents that are not going to make America look good and definitely make a lot of Chinese parents very worried about their children's safety issues, concerns. So that's number one.

Number two is we haven't really talk about the deteriorating U.S.-China relations. That's definitely, one of the other major forces that make Chinese students very, they look away from America when they're saying think about their study abroad destinations. And the data shows. Right? So, 2022, for example, other countries such as UK, Japan has picked up the numbers from China in terms of international students. But the United States continue to witness the decline of Chinese students as other international students start to rebound, such as students from India. So, I don't really see this as a one-off thing. I think this is the trend. And I do believe that the Chinese students enrollment, the heyday's already passed, even though China will probably continue to be the largest—still the largest number just because of

the sheer size of the population and the sheer size of the middle class who, we haven't really talk about the intense competition in China, who still desperately need to exit the system in China. There is an internet buzz word called "involution," *neijuan*. That involution is very much apparently felt in education sphere, even though it's also felt in occupation in other arenas as well. But education, this intense competition has continued to push Chinese students to leave the system, to leave the education system in China, and they're seeking elsewhere. But they're looking past the United States, even though some of them still come here. But the heyday's already passed because of the two main major reasons. One is anti-Asian hate the racism and associated safety concerns. The other is the escalating U.S.-China relations. People are worried about the conflict and the war, and they don't really want their children to be caught in that kind of circumstance.

BLANCHETTE: What steps do you recommend the United States take to address some of these issues? I realize you've just laid out some deeply entrenched issues around xenophobia, racism, structural issues around security in the United States. So, many of these are not easy fixes. But if you had the ear of the U.S. government and you could offer some initial suggestions on any of the issues we've talked about today, what would you suggest?

MA: Sure. I think, you know, I can talk about from two levels of influence. The one, the first one is the national government. The second is a local university. So, let me start from the easier the easier level, which is the local, uh local university community.

I just gave a talk yesterday to the U.S. Heartland Association, which is the association of universities in the Midwest. And they're asking me the same question. So, my suggestion for them is to continue to go back to China in terms of recruitment rather than relying on agents and for-profit brokerage. They need to establish relationship with Chinese universities and Chinese high schools, even, if they are trying to continue to recruit Chinese students. And actually, that is actually, I believe, the most effective way to recruit the best and brightest, because, you know, the heartland universities in the Midwest, they're concerned that, you know, Chinese parents don't really consider them as good choices. They're looking at the Ivies, the brand name universities, the top 20, the top 30. They asked me, how can we change Chinese parents, their perceptions or their attachment to the prestige? And I said, you cannot really change their culture. What you can change is to influence them in terms of making them aware of your existence, sort of making them more familiar with University of Iowa or Iowa State University by establishing more partnership with their local high schools, making them understand more about U.S. colleges. It's not just ranking or it's not just institutional ranking, but specific programs matter a lot. You know, what you need to care is about the better fit with your students, not just in terms of the ranking. So. that's what the local university can do, is doing more direct outreach, direct partnership with the local, local schools.

And in terms of the federal government, I think the most effective way is to change immigration policy. Still, there are a lot of Chinese students, especially in STEM, after they're trained in U.S. higher education, getting a degree in computer science, for example. Most of them want to study want want want to stay for employment. And that's not really to say that most of the Chinese students overall want to stay after graduation. But certain fields, especially in computer science, in engineering, in artificial intelligence, those fields that actually the CHIPS in Science Act have prioritized. I've actually made the argument that the CHIPS Act has put in a lot of money, but the STEM workforce development in the United

States has a long way to go because of the problem I just talked about in terms of the STEM education issues domestically in the United States.

So, what really comes as a quick fix, I would say, is international students, not just from China, but from all over the world, from Turkey, from India, from Iran. You know, those students, if you're looking at U.S. graduate school, almost every major graduate school, STEM programs, international students, if not the mainstay, there are a sizable share of international students populating the STEM labs in the United States. And I know that there has been some bills and legislative initiatives in Congress trying to give them green cards. I think that's actually the best solution, because it is not just for the talent, the high skilled, you know, immigrants talent in United States, which is in and of itself very important. But also, this is going to be a very good recruitment strategy. Talking to every university leader, they're going to tell you that if you have that bill in place in Congress passed, they're going to have a much better chance of recruiting international students to their colleges.

BLANCHETTE: Yeah, Yingyi, those are excellent suggestions and something that keeps coming up in all the discussions Ryan and I have over this issue is the United States right now has a lot of tools that it's just not utilizing, and we have mechanisms to facilitate this still robust demand of individuals who would like to come to the United States. And we're treating this as if this is a "nice to have," but actually it's a "must have" for the United States to remain competitive, and I should say for America to remain uniquely American, facilitating people from all over the world coming here is not nice to have, but essential. Ryan, before I close this off, didn't know if you had any final questions or thoughts for Yingyi.

HASS: No, I just want to thank you, Yingyi. It's been a great conversation. I've learned a ton listening to it and really enjoyed it.

BLANCHETTE: Yingyi thanks a lot. Thank you for this really excellent conversation. Some very, very sensible suggestions that I, I'm sure will be listened to. And on behalf of Ryan, want to say we look forward to future research on these and other important issues. So, thank you.

MA: Sure. Thank you so much for this opportunity, really allowing me to reflect a lot of my research I've done over the past more than a decade or so, different pieces and trying to connect them together. Thank you for the opportunity. I appreciate that.

HASS: Jude. I thought that was a really interesting conversation with Dr. Yingyi Ma. I was I was really struck by the clear-eyed nature of her perception of China's strengths and shortcomings in its higher education system and how that is affecting China's talent pipeline for its 21st century workforce. You know, in a way, the way that she framed this with both abundant strengths and significant shortcomings is, in a sense, a bit of a parable for China in the world today.

BLANCHETTE: Yeah. The other thing that that stands out to me and something we discussed at some length is I think a really excellent point on the geographic distribution of talent and how China is still has significant headroom for making reforms to more evenly distribute that.

You know, the United States here, I think we perceive that we have a much more even distribution of educational resources across the, you know, across the bell curve. So, if you don't get into Harvard or Yale or Princeton, and I think both neither you or I did, you still can take advantage of really excellent excellent you know, second, third, fourth tier universities in the United States. But it feels like the the path in China is narrower once you get outside of a Beida or East China Normal University or a Fudan, that the educational quality can drop off.

And this to me gets to something of a paradox I mentioned that I've seen in other areas as well. You know, we have a leader in Xi Jinping who talks so frequently about fundamentally transforming the country. And you see there are areas, you know, putting money through industrial policy into developing, you know, hard technologies, military modernization. Yet it feels like there's some pretty critical gaps where Xi Jinping is either unwilling or unable to make substantive reforms. *Hukou* reform comes up again and again and again when you really dig into some of the structural, you know, human capital headwinds and some of the self-imposed restraints that China has put on itself through policies which inhibit the growth of human capital.

And so, it's something of a puzzle to me. Is it that Xi Jinping has a sort of blindness to areas where if he fundamentally wants to rejuvenate China, unlocking the full human capital potential of China outside of the narrow clusters of, you know, developed coastal cities and really, you know, capitalizing on that massive pool of inland talent. Is it that he doesn't see that, prioritize that? Or, you also get the sense that for all the power he has, there are areas where he's just unwilling to touch because, you know, these are multistakeholder, multidimensional reforms he would have to pursue. Tax reform is another one of these which again, gets to, you know, human capital.

So, I have no answer to that. It's just one of these I continually think of as, you know, for a guy so powerful, why is he not addressing the fundamental reforms?

HASS: It's a really good point. And, you know, it's it's hard not to argue that that the rhetoric is front running the reforms on these critical issues like *hukou* reform and tax reform. But on on the American side of the ledger, I was also heartened by Yingyi Ma's optimism about the United States' capacity to have its higher education system remain the envy of the world in this coming century. I thought that her her comments on immigration reform for STEM graduates were sound and her point about how such a step would not only help fill a critical skill shortfall in the United States now, but also serve as a magnet for recruiting top talent in the future , was was a really important point.

BLANCHETTE: Yeah. Maybe it ended on a pessimistic note, however, I was struck by her comments on some of the eroding advantages the United States has in attractiveness of our educational system. So, these are driven by the sort of "rise of the rest," which is if you're contemplating where to go in the global education market, you now have lots of options: Canada, the United, the United Kingdom, Australia, many places throughout Europe. And so, I think to some extent, the United States still acts in a unipolar, you know, sort of mindset, which is we're the only game in town and we don't have to be continually articulating the value proposition and backing up the value proposition.

And the second note, and this is one that I think just bears repeating often, is how the perception and reality of the United States as a safe harbor for foreign-born students is eroding. And that's tragic, both because of the actual lived experience of those who are

suffering from discrimination and violence here in the United States, but also because from a perspective of national competitiveness, you are now starting to hear about new conversations going on among parents overseas who are looking out at where do they want to send their kids for these formative education years. And even if, you know the United States has a marginal advantage, a perception of, well, they'll be 100% safe in another, you know, in another country, that's going to that's going to get sticky, if the United States doesn't take drastic steps to really confront this first and foremost and then begin to address this.

So, I think we're this is one of those you hear people say, yeah, we know this is a problem, but you don't get the sense of urgency across the spectrum that if you're focusing on, you know, hard U.S. power and national competitiveness, these are not nice to address, these must address issues.

HASS: I think that's very well said. And I hope that, you know, the healthy competition that we're experiencing, not just from China but around the world, will compel us to up our national game.

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