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June 17, 2013: Chen Guangcheng to Leave NYU

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Title: Chen Guangcheng to Leave NYU

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6/17/2013—The New York Times reported Sunday that Chen Guangcheng will be leaving NYU. In the story, Chen claims that NYU is responding to pressure from China based on NYU's new campus in Shanghai. NYU denies this and some persons close to the situation point out that the Fellowship Chen received when he came to the United States, was only to last for one year. The New York Post reported this story last Thursday. In that story, the same controversy and dispute emerged over why Chen was being asked leave. But someone in that story made the point that during Chen's time at NYU, he was not visible in terms of the University's programs, or those of the law school. He was not asked to teach classes or deliver lectures. In other words that story suggested that NYU all along was worried about the implications of Chen's presence in terms of the reaction of the Chinese government. The same tensions are present, if one looks carefully, in the New York Times article. There are reports there about attempts to discourage Chen from speaking out or traveling. Even if those reports are exaggerated or subject to another interpretation, it is still clear that NYU never did promote Chen in any way. I am not criticizing NYU really because they were there for Chen when he needed it. He certainly will be fine now. The real story, and this is clear also in the Post and the Times, is the influence of the Chinese government in American academia and in the world generally. I have seen this personally. When I have attempted to raise the issue of Chen's treatment and the treatment of Chen's family still in China with the deans of law schools in the United States that have programs in China, I have received some response but mostly nothing from most schools. Of course, I was going outside channels, as people at my law school, Duquesne, have pointed out. When the matter is raised more formally in the fall, the reaction may be very different. This is possible, but I wonder. If it is the case that large institutions in America, academic and otherwise, from universities to auto companies to Hollywood, must temper what they say and do for fear of losing the Chinese market, then it is up to smaller institutions, perhaps like Duquesne Law School, which also has a program in China, to take a stand for principle. We would have less to lose than a NYU.