

ASIA NEWS  
JULY 18, 2010

## Chinese Debate Allegations of Fraudulent Credentials

By LORETTA CHAO

BEIJING—Accusations that a prominent former Microsoft Corp. executive in China distorted his academic credentials have triggered a heated public discussion in the country over what experts say is pervasive academic fraud.



Jun Tang, speaks after being appointed a professor at Jilin University, in Changchun, Jilin province, in December.

The controversy began earlier this month after Fang Shimin, a science writer known for his vocal criticism of plagiarism and academic fraud, claimed that Jun Tang, who was president of Microsoft's China operation from 2002 to 2004, had falsely claimed to have earned a doctorate from the California Institute of Technology. Mr. Fang said he had tried to check the claim, which he said was made in one edition of Mr. Tang's popular book "My Success Can Be Copied," by calling the university but that he couldn't find records of Mr. Tang having graduated. A representative for Caltech, reached Thursday, said Mr. Tang didn't graduate from the school.

Mr. Tang has denied making the claim about Caltech, telling Chinese media that he graduated from another university. A July 8 statement by the book's publishers, Citic Publishing House and Blue Lion Financial Planning Center, said Mr. Tang's co-author was responsible for the error and that Mr. Tang—who is now chief executive of a company called New Huadu Industrial Group Co. that invests in retail, real estate and other companies—personally requested that the reference to the school be removed. The co-author couldn't be reached to comment.

Mr. Tang couldn't be reached for comment Thursday. He didn't answer his cellphone. A receptionist at his company said he was traveling.

The controversy has become one of the hottest topics of discussion among Chinese Internet users, spurring a whirlwind of local media coverage. Some Internet users have dubbed the incident "Fake Diploma-Gate." It follows other high-profile cases in recent years of alleged academic fraud that have called attention to what experts say is a pervasive problem in China, not least for businesses trying to confirm the background of potential hires.

Tad Kageyama, a Hong Kong-based senior managing director at Kroll, a New York-based risk consulting subsidiary of Marsh & McLennan Cos., said part of the reason for falsified résumés is a fixation among employers in China, as elsewhere in Asia, on the prestige of schools that candidates attend rather than valuing candidates' experiences. That emphasis, combined with the relative ease of acquiring illegitimate diplomas in China, is part of the reason that résumé fraud is more common in China than elsewhere.

Kevin Zhao, chief human-resources consultant at Beijing-based Finder Hunter, said a lack of readily available public information has led to lower rates of background checks by employers in China, providing further incentive for fraud. Most companies in China don't check references while hiring employees because of the difficulty, he said. The phenomenon of fake diplomas is indicative of a wider social problem in China, he added. Companies shouldn't "simply emphasize diplomas [prestigious in name] and neglect quality-oriented education."

Mr. Fang, who uses the pen name Fang Zhouzi when blogging, said résumé fraud rates are much higher in China than elsewhere. In an e-mail to The Wall Street Journal, he said he targeted Mr. Tang because "Mr. Tang is not an ordinary businessman. He is an 'idol of young people.'" As a result of his allegations, he said, "There are a lot of discussions about the lacking of integrity in Chinese society....Isn't this a good trend toward a healthier society?"

Mr. Tang told the state-run China Daily newspaper he had never said he graduated from Caltech. "I only said I had done some research there," the newspaper quoted him as saying. "Instead, I got my doctor's degree at the California-based Pacific Western University."

Caltech said it was unable to comment on whether Mr. Tang had done research there. Pacific Western later changed its name; its records office wasn't immediately reachable for comment.

Mr. Tang's publishers said in their statement that Mr. Tang had "explicitly requested a deletion of the sentence" that said he earned the Caltech degree, but that the revision wasn't made in time for the book's first edition, published in December 2008, because of "a lag in communication during the proofreading process." The correction was made a month later. The publishers' statement expressed "sincere apologies" to readers and to Mr. Tang.

But Mr. Fang and Chinese media have continued to target Mr. Tang, raising questions about the authenticity of other credentials. Pacific Western University was labeled a "diploma mill" by the U.S. government in a report published by the U.S. Government Accountability Office in 2004, which listed the school as an unaccredited institution that awarded degrees for a flat fee and required no classroom instruction. The report said a doctorate from Pacific Western cost \$2,595 at the time.

Pacific Western University later changed its name to California Miramar University. California Miramar's student services office said it is under new management and considers itself a separate entity. California Miramar said it now is accredited .

Mr. Tang, in a message dated July 6 on his blog, said he plans to print his doctorate credentials beside his name on his business cards, and said "I am still me, and nothing has changed."

—Kersten Zhang and Gao Sen in Beijing and Bai Lin in Shanghai contributed to this article.

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