

## VIEWPOINTS

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Chinese citizens walk past a mass of red lanterns during the annual temple fair at Badachu Park in Beijing in February, on the first day of the Chinese Lunar New Year.

## U.S. NEEDS NEW VIEW OF CHINA

*Leaders must scrap outdated policies and adopt a clear, proactive agenda*



President Obama and China's President Xi Jinping drink a toast in Beijing after announcing a landmark agreement that includes new targets for carbon emissions reductions.

By DANTE PARADISO

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

There is the old notion, attributed to Lu Xun, perhaps China's most celebrated modern writer, that the Chinese consider foreigners to be either superior or inferior, but never equal. It is fair to say that however China's leaders assessed their country's relative capabilities during its long economic and military overhaul, they do not now lack for confidence.

U.S. policies toward China over the past 40 years have largely been predicated on the theory that if we help China unlock its vast economic potential, China will eventually look more like us: capitalist and republican. In fact, China's leadership took the opposite lesson from China's success: the People's Republic became wealthy and strong by not tilting westward.

It is time for us as a country, public and private sector alike, to respect China fully for the global political,

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*What concerns me here is the assumption that we all need to be a part of this.*

## Is Jenner the best face for transgender struggle?

It wasn't quite "Call me Ishmael," but "Call me Caitlyn" made a whale of a splash. One could hardly find a news channel that wasn't touting the former Bruce Jenner for her courageous transgender metamorphosis or admiring her "gorgeous" new look.

Within moments of the release of Vanity Fair's July cover featuring Caitlyn Jenner, Twitter was "trending" that she looks a little like, OMG, Jessica Lange!

In the brightest moment of the day, Lange, when asked over the phone for comment on her trending, said, "What does that mean?" Upon being tutored by the caller, the Internet-free Lange graciously said, "That's so wonderful."

Before proceeding, let's pause, shall we, to stipulate that we wish Jenner the best in her new life. It must be terribly difficult to find oneself not at home in one's own physical and societally recognized self. Obviously, no one would go through such a doubtless trying process to become entirely another – or rather to make the skin fit – if this weren't a real and devastating situation that many feel requires remedy.

What concerns me here is the cultural,

primarily media, treatment of the Jenner case in particular – and the assumption that we all need to be a part of this. From the interview in April with Diane Sawyer, to the Vanity Fair cover, to the breathless media coverage, one's overwhelming sense is that Caitlyn Jenner – and only incidentally, transgen-derism – is the next new thing!

Every movement needs a celebrity, we've come to accept, and Jenner is the self-appointed transgender community's poster girl. But is Jenner really the best face for such a profound experience, no offense to her plastic surgeon?

Though many of us remember Jenner as the stunning 1976 Olympic decathlon gold medalist, the erstwhile Wheaties model is best-known to a younger generation as Dad in the reality television series "Keeping Up with the Kardashians."

I can't speak to the appeal of the show, having never watched it, but few could have escaped exposure to the Kardashian name and the



Kathleen Parker

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family's most infamous daughter, Kim, who lurched to notoriety owing to a sex tape, her robust derriere and her friendship with fellow exhibitionist Paris Hilton.

To put it bluntly, the former Bruce and the latter Caitlyn have been media personalities-for-hire for most of their existence. Is it really appropriate to elevate Jenner to such heroic and adjectival heights as "bold" and "courageous," when many transgender people will conduct their own struggles privately, and indeed, courageously?

Caitlyn, like Bruce, seems to need the applause of an audience as much as she needs the transformation itself. This is not to suggest that Jenner's transgender identity is anything but heartfelt and necessary. As we learn more about transgender issues – and presumably education is the nobler intention driving media attention – it becomes less easy to ignore such people or deny them equal protections under the law.

But I've learned more about transgender individuals and their families from the tender poetry of Sue Ellen Thompson than from magazine displays and televised hype. In her latest collection, "They," Thompson writes lovingly of her own transgender daughter's journey and the challenges her evolution poses for three generations of family. I commend her book to those interested in insight over titillation.

In stark contrast, seeing Jenner all gussied up like some 1940s Vargas girl (part Madonna, part Kardashian?) – wearing long tresses and corset-inspired lingerie – seems a mockery of her new womanhood, as well as the human dignity her public outing purportedly is intended to inspire.

All of the above suggests much psychological and emotional work left to do, for which Jenner surely deserves privacy rather than spectacle. She has averred that with the Vanity Fair cover, she is "finally free." One would hope the same for the rest of us, but, alas. A new E! reality show following Jenner's progress as a woman is in the works. Cue the audience.

— Washington Post Writers Group