

# Chinese Scholars Learn U.S. Ways: CHINESE: 120 Scholars Learn ...

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CASSY COHEN / *Los Angeles Times*

Chinese nuclear physics scholars Wang Long, Qian Shangjie, Shu Yantai and Chang Wenwei talk shop near equipment they use in the Plasma Research Lab at UCLA.

## 120 at UCLA

# Chinese Scholars Learn U.S. Ways

By DAVID HOLLEY, *Times Staff Writer*

Chang Yiwei, a Red Guard in China's Cultural Revolution, spent the late 1960s "making revolution" and drawing "big character posters" at her junior high school in Xian. She even traveled to Peking for massive rallies called by the late Chairman Mao Zedong to purge so-called Capitalist Roaders from the Chinese Community Party.

Today Chang, 31, has a different mission. She is a student at UCLA, one of about 120 students and scholars from the People's Republic of China studying there as part of a Chinese modernization drive.

"After the Cultural Revolution, there was this realization that it's still very necessary for China to acquire the most advanced technology and science in a hurry," said Lucie Cheng Hirata, director of UCLA's China Exchange Program. "(The late Premier) Zhou Enlai set the goal of basic modernization by the year 2000. It's in that context that they're sending people out."

### U.S. Viewed in Mythical Terms

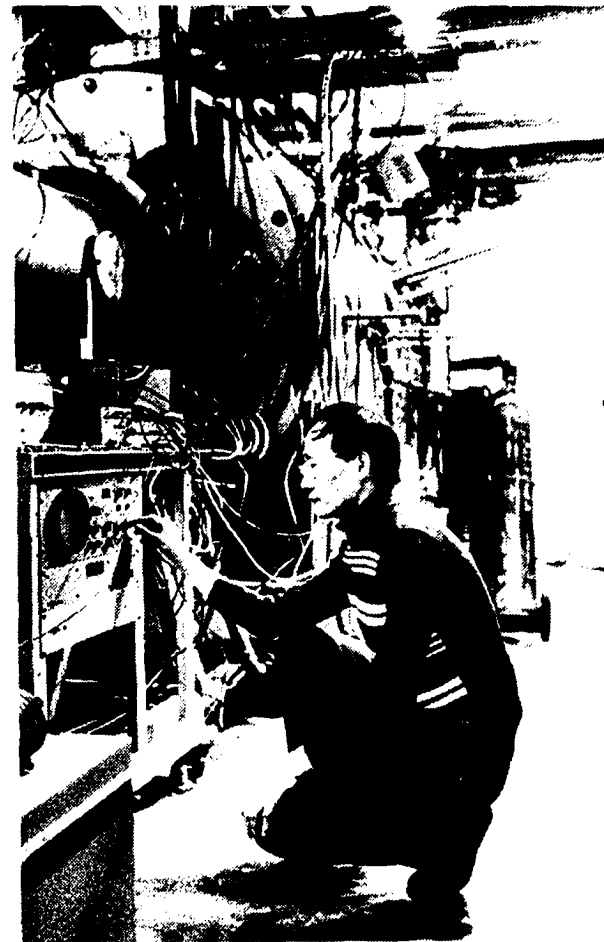
The burgeoning exchange program—which has grown from a handful of students and scholars on American campuses in late 1978 to more than 7,000 now—also is seen as laying the foundations for closer Chinese-American relations.

"Probably the principal benefit to the United States is to make a greater number of Chinese simply more familiar with the United States," said Keith Powell, a U.S. State Department China exchange program officer. "You have an entire generation that considers the United States in rather mythical terms—good terms or bad terms, it's still rather mythical."

When they return home, the Chinese not only will share the technical knowledge they gain here but also will spread their perceptions of American life.

Thankful for the chance to study here, excited by their access to first-class equipment and pleased by what is universally described as very friendly treatment from Americans, the Chinese are generally polite

Please see CHINESE, Page 8



Wang Long, 42, adjusts machine used in plasma physics research. His countrymen, he says, can learn to work as hard as Americans do.

# CHINESE: 120 Scholars Learn American Ways

Continued from First Page

and unwilling to offend their hosts. But they see weaknesses as well as strengths in American society.

Their general view of Los Angeles is in some ways similar to that of many newcomers: It has impressive freeways but too many cars, terrible public transportation, nice weather, a serious crime problem and high housing costs.

But these reactions are stronger in the Chinese, who at home typically ride bicycles or buses to work, pay \$2 a month in rent and seldom worry about street crime.

## 'Americans Waste Everything Except Time'

"Americans waste everything except time," said Qian Shangjie, 43, a scholar at UCLA, when asked what impressed him most about the United States. "When they are working, they work very hard to make money. Then they spend their money and enjoy their life. It's a different philosophy of life. Earn money to waste money."

Although the students and scholars themselves—the cream of the Chinese intellectual elite—have generally studied or worked diligently most of their lives, the perception that typical Americans work harder than typical Chinese is widespread among them.

"If a person works very hard, like people in our lab, and gets a rich life, I think that's correct," said Wang Long, 42, a nuclear physics scholar at UCLA. "What we should learn from America is we should work hard if we want to get rich."

"Transportation in China" is very convenient and very cheap," said Zhao Yin, a scholar doing laser research at UCLA. "Here it's one car, one person. It wastes gasoline. America is so modern, but I think many problems are caused by modern scientific research."

Shu Yantai, 40, a nuclear physics scholar at UCLA, said Americans would be better off abandoning their cars and switching to bicycles.

"The bicycle is OK," Shu said. "For the body it's OK. For health it's much better than cars. I think some Americans have this idea like us, because it's true.

## Bicycles Unlikely to Replace Cars

"But I think it is very difficult to change the situation now. If everyone uses bicycles, the car companies can't sell cars. The oil companies don't like people to save oil. The government doesn't own the companies. It's very hard to change—and I think American people like to do everything by themselves, they like to be left alone. An American wants to drive a car by himself—it's very convenient. He likes his way."

About half of the Chinese students and scholars live with other Chinese, usually because that is the simplest way for them to make living arrangements. Some say that living with other Chinese helps them devote all their energies to their studies or research, while others say they would prefer to live with Americans to improve their English and understanding of American society.

Qiao Xin, 53, an associate professor at the Nanjing Aeronautics Institute who is studying mechanics and structural design at UCLA, is fairly typical of the visiting scholars.

Qiao lives with an American family, eats American breakfasts and carpools to campus with a Chinese-Korean friend. Like the families of almost all the scholars, his wife and children have remained in China for his two-year stay in the United States.

## An Engineer's Typical Day

On a recent day, he spent four hours in the morning at his office and five in the afternoon writing a computer program, interrupted by a 90-minute English lesson and a rice-and-vegetable lunch he had brought with him.

That evening he cooked his own dinner, watched television, read and visited with the young couple he lives with.

The husband—the father of a 1-year-old baby—had been laid off from his job as an electrical technician two days earlier.

"They were very sad," Qiao said. "At first I could not understand, because in China, usually as for a technician, they haven't got a chance of being laid off. Maybe a youngster who just graduated from high school or college hasn't got a job."

Qiao said he had understood intellectually that unemployment was a problem in the United States, but that is was different to have a friend lose his job.

"It made a deep impression," he said.

## Appalled by Treatment of Elderly

Chen Zhunmin, 30, a graduate student at UCLA, said one of the aspects of American life that he finds most disturbing is "the attitude to old people."

"In China, old people are very, very respected," he said.

Chen's reaction is common. Many Chinese are appalled by treatment of the elderly in America, according to John Jamieson, a Chinese language professor at UC Berkeley.

"They're impressed by the casual way we treat our older generation—the way we discard them, tend to leave them on their own," Jamieson said. "This is something that's so alien to Chinese thought, it strikes them."

Crime is generally seen as one of the worst aspects of American life.

"Crime is really terrible," Chang said. "We haven't met anything, but I have a friend who studies computer science at USC. She's really scared. Several Chinese at USC were robbed."

Chang said she has taken advice given to her to always carry \$20 to give to anyone who tries to rob her.

"If you don't have any money, you will be in danger," she said.

Chinese students and scholars appear isolated from campus drug use and uncomfortable with American attitudes toward sex.

"I have only read about the use of drugs in the newspaper," Chang said. "I have never heard of my American friends using drugs. Maybe I just don't know about it."

Chang said she and other students were surprised to read in the newspaper about demonstrations by homosexuals.

"I thought it was very strange," Chang said. "How can the government allow that?"

Chinese students and scholars often discover, however, that some American social problems are not as severe as they had envisioned, according to Sue Fan, coordinator of UCLA's China Exchange Program.

Discrimination against blacks appears to many Chinese to be less severe than they had expected.

## Racial Bias 'Not So Serious'

"We read books that told us about the racial discrimination in the 1930s," said Wang Yinglong, 42, who is earning a master's degree at UCLA in the teaching of English as a second language. "Now I think it's not so serious."

Chang said she was surprised to find that "white people are very polite to blacks."

Chang also said Americans are generally more helpful to each other than she had expected.

"In China somehow I got the impression that in America everyone minds their own business," Chang said. "In China it's a society where you expect people to look after one another and help each other. But I felt I was wrong when I came here. I felt people were kind and helpful."

"If I didn't know my way, people would help me. I was surprised. When I rode the bus, passengers would greet the bus driver and say, 'Thank you, have a good day.' I didn't expect that."

Some, however, say they believe friendship between Americans is often superficial.

## Friendships 'Not Very Deep'

"American people generally speaking are friendly," Shu said, "but the relation between friends is not very deep, like in China. When I come here, if my wife and children meet with difficulty, my neighbors and colleagues will help her a lot. Here I think it would be less."

The direct knowledge of the United States gained by the Chinese constitutes "a very good investment for the United States," Chang said, adding:

"In the next 10 or 20 years, these students will be in leading positions in science and social science fields. They have been exposed to the United States and have an understanding of American society that can't be learned from books."

Most of the students and scholars are in engineering, mathematics or physical sciences, with a smaller number in the life sciences and few in the humanities or social sciences.

The active role of American universities in helping China improve its technical abilities, even in such areas as nuclear physics, has not provoked controversy.

"The United States feels that it is in its interests (to have) a strong, stable China and we think the exchange



CASSY COHEN / Los Angeles Times

Qian Shangjie, 43, poses by plasma physics machine. Americans, he says, waste everything except time.

program contributes to this goal," the State Department's Powell said when asked if there is any concern that the United States may regret helping China build its potential economic and military strength.

About 40% of the Chinese on American campuses are officially sponsored by the Chinese government, according to the U.S.-China Education Clearinghouse in Washington. Most are older scholars sent to catch up with technical advances in their fields.

American institutions sponsor roughly 10% of the students and scholars. The remaining 50% are private students, usually sponsored by relatives or friends in the United States.

Scholars and students supported by the Chinese government are generally selected after rigorous examinations by their home institutions. Private students with their own funds can come to American campuses like any other foreign students, although the Chinese government is reported to have placed increasingly strict restrictions on who may qualify for private study abroad.

It is too soon to measure how many of the students and scholars will try to stay permanently in the United States, but it appears that very few of the government-sponsored individuals will fail to return to China.

Sue Fan, coordinator of UCLA's China Exchange Program, said she believes some private students may wish to stay permanently in the United States, but all the government-sponsored students and scholars at UCLA will return to China.

"They have a very strong feeling of obligation toward their home institution," Fan said. "They can foresee themselves being promoted and secure, with a fairly respected position there. Another reason is the cultural difference makes a lot of them uncomfortable. Their home is back there. That's where their roots are. Also, their close family members are back there. Professionally they may see a better chance to grow in their own institutions rather than have to move into a completely different environment."

Chinese officials "recognize that in the future they're

Please see CHINESE, Page 9

# CHINESE: Scholars Attend UCLA and Learn About the American Way

Continued from 8th Page

bound to lose a certain percentage of the younger group," said Barbara Chan, the head of foreign scholar programs at Berkeley, which with a total of 448 Chinese scholars and students since 1978 has had more than any other university.

Chan said that during talks with Chinese officials in Peking, she predicted that in five years perhaps as many as 25% of the graduate students coming from China might choose to stay in the United States.

"But of the older scholars (at Berkeley), all of them have gone back or plan to go back," she said.

Given the current political and social ferment in China and the leading roles many American-trained specialists can expect to play in China, the effect of their American experience on their thinking could influence China's future.

"Many will go back with impressions that a society structured the way ours is is chaotic," Jamieson said. "Others may go back with the idea that aspects of our society are admirable."

Some of those involved in the exchange program express concern whether individual scholars will be able to make efficient use of their new knowledge back in China.

"So much depends on the sociopolitical context," Hirata said. "How much of the things people learn here can be used in China some way? It's a big question."

## Taking New Approaches Home

If only one individual in a Chinese research team has studied abroad, he or she may have difficulty promoting new approaches to research, Hirata said.

"Already there's a lot of envy, and (the returned scholar) says, 'Let's do this, let's do that,'" Hirata said. "My feeling is it's unlikely to have much effect."

Scholars visiting American universities "can dial a number, call a company and say, 'I need 500 grams of such and such; and it will be delivered very quickly,'" she said. In China, however, researchers often go through a long process of filling out forms and waiting to get needed materials, she said.

Steps are being taken to deal with these problems by attempting to train sets of scholars from specific institutes who can complement each others' research back in China, Hirata said.

Neighbors as well as colleagues sometimes feel envious of the returned students and scholars, especially if they bring back consumer items in scarce supply in China, Chang said.

## Sharing Color TV With Neighbors

"You have a big color television and maybe a big tape recorder, and the neighbors feel you are different," Chang said.

Those who return with television sets "have to invite the neighbors to come every night to see the programs, or else they feel you are selfish. I've heard people say that."

Chinese students and scholars also may return home with new political and social ideas.

Some of those studying here "might gradually change their ideology," said a Chinese scholar who asked not to be named. "I think our leaders perceive such a danger. They might find capitalism is still full of vitality and not as bad as we have learned. That kind of thing might have influence in the future development of China."

"If in the long run we cannot catch up and we remain in a backward condition with a poor living standard, I think people will get disillusioned with socialism and it is hard to tell what will happen."



CASSY COHEN / Los Angeles Times

Wang Long, seated, and Shu Yantai, 40, inspect research data at desk in Plasma Physics Building.

"I still believe socialism should be better than capitalism because it's a fair society—there is no class struggle and no class oppression. But how to build such an ideal society remains to be seen, and there is not a single example from which we can copy."

Although Chinese students and scholars are frequently reluctant to comment about internal Chinese politics, such fears are not evident when they discuss relations with students from Taiwan.

"We have a lot of contact with people from Taiwan," Wang said. "We just exchange our ideas. We don't argue. We ask, 'How are things in Taiwan?' and they ask, 'How are things in the mainland?' We promote mutual understanding. When they go back they can tell their folks and their friends about things in the mainland."

Wang said he believed such mutual understanding contributes to efforts to reunify China and Taiwan and thus is looked upon favorably by the Chinese government.

On the whole, contacts between people from China

and Taiwan tend to be somewhat superficial, with few close friendships.

"There was a period—when people first started arriving (from China)—when faculty members from Taiwan could pretend these people didn't even exist," said Neville Luhmann, a UCLA physicist and adviser to several Chinese scholars. "(But) I've had people from Taiwan and China working side by side with no overt problems."

The vast majority of students and scholars appear to be strong supporters of Vice Chairman Deng Xiaoping and the changes he has brought to Chinese intellectual life since his return to power in 1977 after the overthrow of the radical "Gang of Four" led by Mao Zedong's widow, Jiang Qing.

While most express confidence that Deng's liberal policies will prevail, some are still nervous about the strength of the Maoist faction in China.

"I think in the future the government will expand the foreign exchanges, but there is opposition within the party to this," a scholar said. "In China, most scholars still dare not speak the truth."

"The government is trying to encourage the scholars by saying, 'If you speak the truth, these kinds of political movements (like the Cultural Revolution) will not be repeated again.' The elite—Deng Xiaoping and some of his more open colleagues—really mean that, that scholars should speak openly and with freedom of speech. But the middle-level cadres still suspect the intellectuals."

## Compromise to Maintain Stability

"It is a huge job for Deng to stabilize his position and not stir up great turmoil. So sometimes he submits to the demands of the other faction. To unify the party and maintain stability, he must compromise."

Others express more confidence that China is set on a path of openness and moderation.

"The recent policy in China is decided by the whole party and the whole country, not one man," said Gu Biao, 43, a physicist researching plasma physics at UCLA. "It's not very easy to change it. It's the people's will."

"I don't feel any nervousness among my friends," Chang said. "I don't think a second Cultural Revolution will ever come again. In the 1950s and 1960s people were naive. They felt, 'If Mao says something we will rise and support him.' I was one of them. I think it will not happen again. Things will change more and more in this good direction."