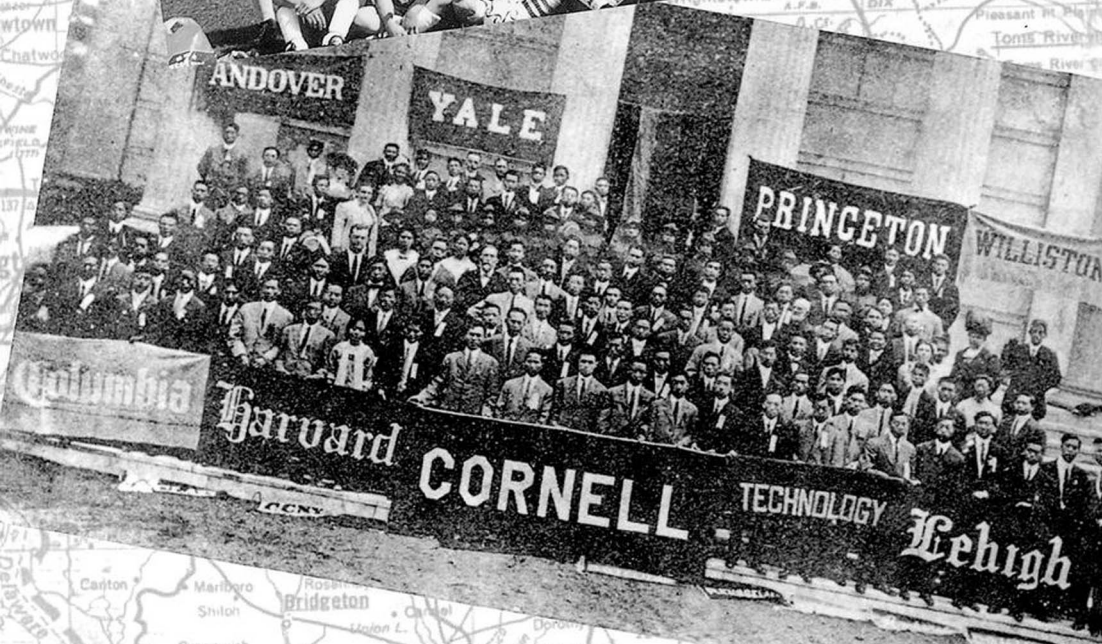


CHINESE Students Encounter AMERICA



QIAN NING

Translated by T. K. Chu

*Chinese Students
Encounter America*

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

On January 1, 1979, the United States and the People's Republic of China established diplomatic relations, three decades after the founding of the People's Republic. Five days before the diplomatic exchange, fifty Chinese students arrived in America to begin their studies in its universities. By 1995 more than 220,000 Chinese students had gone abroad, mostly to America, to study. In 1999 about 40,000 Chinese students were enrolled in American colleges and universities, and Chinese students were the highest percentage of international students on many American campuses.¹ Given these students' sheer numbers, their acquired skills, and the social consequences of their immersion in the American environment, the question of how America has influenced these students is of enormous importance to China and, to a lesser degree, to America as well.

Qian Ning attended People's University in Beijing, studying classical Chinese literature in his undergraduate years and Song dynasty poetry in his graduate program before joining *People's Daily* as a cultural reporter in 1986. In September 1989 Qian enrolled in the Journalism Fellowship Program at the University of Michigan and the following year began teaching Chinese literature there. After five years of teaching and interviewing Chinese students about their American experiences, he returned to China in May 1995, and his book about these experiences, *Liuxue Meiguo* (literally, *Studying in America*), was published in August 1996.²

Since China began its intense interaction with the West as European

and American religion, trade, and military power entered China in the mid-nineteenth century, America—known in Chinese as Meiguo, the “Beautiful Country”—has loomed large in the Chinese people’s consciousness of the foreign world. But the juxtaposition of the century-long humiliation dealt to China by foreign powers and the even longer period of China’s self-designation as the “Central Kingdom”³ has led some Chinese to view the West with arrogant ignorance or an inferiority complex, or both. In the summer of 1996 the best-selling book *China Can Say No* (Zhongguo keyi shuo bu), by five writers who had not been to America, denounced America and promoted China as a giant among nations.

Qian Ning’s book, released at about the same time, became an instant bestseller. Its authorized and five pirated editions have together sold more than three hundred thousand copies, not counting separate editions in Taiwan and Hong Kong. After the book was published, the public learned that the author’s father was Qian Qichen, then China’s foreign minister (currently a deputy premier), and that the book was recommended reading for senior Chinese officials.⁴

This English edition allows American readers to see America through a Chinese lens and to reflect on their own society while learning about China. The author’s approach is empirical, rather than the black-and-white, moralistic one often found in Chinese publications. America is portrayed as a country with many niceties as well as flaws, and Americans as real people who lead lives quite different from those of Chinese.

In describing China, the book discusses the basis for Chinese views of the West, the confines and harms brought to the Chinese people by the “work unit” system in China’s socialistic economy, the hardships and injuries suffered by the people during the violent campaigns in China’s three decades of isolation following the Communist revolution in 1949, and other issues.⁵ This frankness is exemplified in the death-bed lamentation of a student’s father: “I have kept faith with the Communist Party, but the Communist Party has let me down.” But life’s brutality is exposed always with deep feeling for the victim and never with condescension toward the perpetrator, who, in turn, is recognized as a victim.

Chinese Students Encounter America describes changes in the social behavior of people transplanted to an alien cultural environment. The interviews, though fragmented and without follow-up, include stories of the joys and sorrows of a struggling life in a new land. Present in many

episodes are both dark shadows of China's three decades of destruction of human emotional bonds following 1949 and, at times, the sweetness of forgiveness and reconciliation.⁶

EARLIER CHINESE STUDENTS IN AMERICA

The First Dispatch, 1872

In 1872, the year that the Qing court sent its first dispatch of thirty teenage students to America, China had been left behind by the Industrial Revolution by more than a century. Its population had been increasing and the Chinese had become steadily poorer; China's per capita cultivated land, hence real wages, had declined slowly since the twelfth century and rapidly since the mid-seventeenth century.⁷ For millennia, China's political and social system had used hierarchical human relations emphasizing benevolence and loyalty to promote social harmony; benevolence was expected from superiors, and loyalty was demanded from subordinates. This institutionalized Confucianism offered no practical means, except execution, for the removal of a ruler (or his power) when he had "outraged his proper benevolence."⁸

It was China's defeats by Great Britain in the First Opium War (1839–42) and by Britain and France in the Second Opium War (1857–60)—wars that also concerned America because of U.S. merchants' interest in the opium trade—that stimulated China's quest for modern knowledge from the West. Two people channeled that quest mostly to America, in spite of a vastly stronger British economic presence in China at that time and Britain's willingness to accept Chinese students. The first was Yung Wing, who went to America to study in 1847 at the age of eighteen and returned to China in 1854 after graduating from Yale University. While still at Yale, he concluded that the way to revitalize China was to send its youth abroad for a Western education such as the one he was receiving. After his return, he tried repeatedly to find supporters of this idea. Yung Wing was the first Chinese to recognize that China was the country lacking in knowledge: it had been ignorant of the outside world and had an unrealistic view of itself.⁹

On the American side, Anson Burlingame (U.S. minister to China from 1861 to 1867) opened the doors of American schools to Chinese students. Following the Second Opium War, there appeared a window of opportunity for a more open China and for more equal trade and

state-to-state relations between China and the West.¹⁰ After leaving his ministerial post, Burlingame became China's ambassador-at-large, lobbying in the West (and Russia) for China. In America, through his effort, the two countries signed the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, Article 7 of which stated, "Chinese subjects shall enjoy all the privileges of the public educational institutions under the control of the government of the United States" and provided reciprocal privileges for American citizens.¹¹ In 1871 Viceroy Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang memorialized to Emperor Tongzhi, "Article 7 of the new peace treaty with America states that from now on Chinese who wish to study in [American] government-controlled schools and colleges will be treated the same as citizens from the most favored nation. . . . For these reasons, your ministers are seeking approval to establish a bureau in Shanghai, to recruit bright young boys from coastal provinces, at the rate of thirty per year, and a total of 120 in four years."¹² Thus China launched its first-ever study-abroad project. Yung Wing became the deputy commissioner of the Chinese Educational Commission. He chose Hartford, Connecticut, as the city for its headquarters.¹³ The average age of the students was twelve and a half.

The project met an extraordinary reception in America. The decade that followed the ending of the Civil War in 1865 saw legislations of healing between North and South and tolerance toward minorities. Hartford, besides being in a state experiencing frenzied postwar business expansion, was also an intellectual center in New England. Immigrants were accepted, if not embraced. The project was supported with conviction by clergymen, political leaders, intellectuals, and activists and policy makers in education. The call by Birdsey Northrop, secretary of the Connecticut State Board of Education, for homes to care for the first thirty Chinese students, at two to three per home, drew responses from 122 families in Connecticut and Massachusetts.¹⁴ But the project, slated to continue for twenty years, lasted only nine.

The political climate began to change in the late 1870s. On the Chinese side, the new commissioner and his predecessor, both traditional Chinese scholars, asked Li Hongzhang to disband the commission because they believed the students had abandoned Chinese traditions, acquired foreign (bad) habits, and learned nothing useful to China. Yung Wing wrote to Li in defense of the commission. In America, he tried to secure admission for several Chinese students to the military academies at West Point and Annapolis, so as to meet China's practical

needs and win the Qing court's support for the commission. In December 1880 Ulysses S. Grant, urged by Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) and the Reverend Joseph Twichell of Asylum Hill Congregational Church in Hartford, both supporters of the commission, also wrote to Viceroy Li, advising continuance of the commission.¹⁵

But the project had also begun to lose its timeliness in America. In 1876 Rutherford Hayes was nominated as the presidential candidate of the Republican Party, thus making Grant a lame-duck president. The sudden drop of the labor market after the completion of the trans-continental railroad led American workers to revolt against immigrant Chinese mining and railroad laborers in Western states. An anti-Chinese sentiment, exploited by both Democrats and Republicans, then swept the nation.¹⁶ The subsequent erosion of liberal disposition toward foreigners and minorities led to the military academies' refusal to admit the Chinese students.¹⁷ The refusal was taken by Li as a violation of the Burlingame Treaty, and the students were recalled in 1881.

American educators protested strongly to the Chinese government. In a letter to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yale president Noah Porter and several others wrote about educators' anguish, love, and hope:

The undersigned . . . exceedingly regret that these young men have been withdrawn from the country, and that the Educational Commission has been dissolved. . . . The studies of which they have been deprived by their removal, would have been the bright flower and the ripened fruit of the roots and stems which have been slowly reared under patient watering and tillage. We have given to them the same knowledge and culture that we give to our own children and citizens. . . . In view of . . . the injury and loss which have fallen upon the young men whom we have learned to respect and love, we would respectfully urge that the reason for this sudden decision should be reconsidered.¹⁸

At the time of the recall, only two students had graduated from Yale. Twenty others were studying at Yale, four at Columbia, seven at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and five at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; and about sixty students were in preparatory schools.¹⁹ Not until 1909, after China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and Beijing's occupation by the Eight-Country Allied Force in 1900 (amid other defeats and territorial losses), did the Qing court again send students to America.

China, after its earlier defeats by both the individual and the joint forces of Britain and France, had retained its traditional contemptuous attitude toward Japan, but its devastating defeat by Japan shocked the nation into an awareness of the need to learn from the modern world, both West and East.²⁰ Because of restrictive U.S. immigration laws and the expenses involved, few Chinese students went to America.²¹ Japan, however, besides using Chinese characters as a basis for its written language and thus being easier to adjust to linguistically, was closer geographically and was eager to receive Chinese students.²² By 1906 the number of Chinese students in Japan had exceeded twelve thousand.²³

The Boxer Indemnity's Educational Legacy

The event that both enabled and forced China to send students again to America was the United States' agreement in 1908, upon China's prodding, to remit the part of the indemnity resulting from the Boxer Rebellion that was in excess of America's actual incurred losses.²⁴ The indemnity had been fixed by the Boxer Protocol of 1901 which ended the occupation of Beijing begun in 1900 by the foreign powers.²⁵

Before the negotiation among the powers on the indemnity began, Secretary of State John Hay had instructed the American delegation to submit a claim of \$25 million against China and to negotiate with the treaty powers for a combined total claim not to exceed \$150 million. Hay had inflated the American claim by a factor of two over the country's actual incurred losses, intending to use a reduction of the claim as a bargaining chip to ask that other treaty powers scale down their claims and to secure trade privileges from China. The bargaining with the treaty powers, however, failed, and China was left holding the debt.

The remission was preceded by two related events in U.S.-China relations: initiation of the American Open Door policy toward China in 1899–1901 and the anti-American boycott in China in 1905. William Rockhill, a diplomat and China scholar, formulated the Open Door policy and the response to the boycott. Rockhill had studied Chinese in France, served at the U.S. legations in Beijing and Korea, and resigned from diplomatic service to travel in Tibet and Mongolia before returning to the service in 1893. He was also a special assistant in the American delegation during the Beijing talks on indemnity, and was among the first to question the validity of Hay's claim.

In the 1890s each of the European powers and Japan had carved out

its "sphere of influence" in China.²⁶ In 1899, the year before the siege of the Legation Quarter in Beijing by the Boxers, Hay, urged by Rockhill, asked other treaty powers to adhere to a policy of equal tariff, collected by the Chinese government, on vessels of other nationalities at port cities under each power's sphere of influence.²⁷ During the siege, sensing that the powers would soon divide China, he expanded this policy to include the preservation of China's territorial and administrative integrity.²⁸ But the powers' replies were evasive, and the policy was eventually abandoned.²⁹ Rockhill was disgusted by the stance of the powers, concluded that the policy was poorly thought out, and felt pessimistic about China's ability to reform.³⁰

In 1905 Rockhill was named the U.S. minister to China. The pressing issue that awaited him upon his arrival in May was the Chinese boycott of American goods in port cities—the first ever by China of foreign goods. The boycott was a protest against the U.S. policy on Chinese immigrants, the violence against the Chinese in America, and U.S. courts' and state governments' condoning of the violence.³¹ Immediately after he assumed his post, Rockhill met with the Chinese merchant guilds in Shanghai that organized the boycott and then warned the Chinese government that it would be held responsible for all losses incurred from disrupted trade and other causes. To the American government, he reported that beneath the boycott he sensed important changes in China for the first time: the voicing of public opinion, the emergence of a native press, and the budding of a patriotic spirit.³²

In both his advocacy of the Open Door policy and his response to the Chinese boycott, Rockhill was guided by a belief that an orderly society in China was necessary to American interests in that country.³³ It was against these background events that Liang Cheng, China's minister to Washington (1903–7), prodded the American government to return a part of the Boxer indemnity.

Back in 1875, Liang Cheng, an eleven-year old, was a fourth (and last)—dispatch student of the Chinese Educational Commission. He was tutored in Greek by professors at Amherst College before he attended Phillips Andover Academy, where he was a star slugger and pitcher on the school baseball team. The recall of the students in 1881 by the Qing court dashed his plans of attending Yale or Amherst in another year. After returning to China (and introducing baseball to the country), he worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In Europe he won recognition for his diplomatic skills.³⁴ During his tenure in Washington, he

appeared to be received warmly by John Hay (who was known as an avowed friend of China) and President Theodore Roosevelt (who held the prevailing contemptuous attitude toward the Chinese).³⁵

Liang, recognizing the United States as the legal owner of the money under the protocol, buttressed his negotiating position by trumpeting the justice of the remission in newspaper interviews, civic speeches, and discussions with high-level officials. He suggested to Hay that "perhaps a revision of the figures could be made by which the president would be enabled to obtain a clearer sense of the justice of the request my Government had made."³⁶ By degree, he arrived at a plan for a possible reduction, and Hay agreed to recommend the plan to the president. But the fulfillment of the plan was frustrated by the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 over Russia's demands and claims on China's Manchuria and on Korea, Roosevelt's involvement in the mediation of that war, and later, the death of Hay.

On May 13, 1905, shortly before Rockhill arrived in China to assume his ministerial post, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a letter from Liang in which he stated that the prospect of a reduction of the indemnity payment to America had improved considerably and he had met with Rockhill to draw up an outline of the reduction. But during the meeting, Rockhill claimed that the president wished to know how the Chinese government would spend the money if it were returned. Liang answered that China would not make an advance declaration on a subject that was its internal affair. Sensing an intention on the American side to interfere, and fearful that the money would elude China's grasp, he advised the ministry to have an answer to Roosevelt's question ready when Rockhill called on the ministry as America's new minister. Liang also proposed an answer: the money would be used to establish schools and send students abroad. In his judgment this declaration would win the support of both America's government and its citizens, and the educational plan, if carried out, would be beneficial to China.³⁷

On July 12, 1905, two months after his arrival in China and at the peak of the Chinese boycott, Rockhill wrote to Roosevelt, proposing remission of the Boxer Indemnity. He stated that the Chinese government had indicated to him that the money, if returned by the United States, would be used for education. Roosevelt's reply was strong on the issue of justice and ambiguous about what he intended to do.³⁸ Although the boycott was over by September 1905, he did not act on the remission in the next year and a half. A possible reason for the inaction

was that Elihu Root, who succeeded Hay, wanted to postpone implementation until the United States had collected a "sufficient" amount.³⁹

In early 1907 Liang Cheng revived his request to the president through Secretary of Interior James Garfield and Secretary of Commerce and Labor Oscar Straus, and Roosevelt agreed to act.⁴⁰ On June 15, 1907, Root notified Liang of the planned remission.⁴¹ On December 3, 1907, the president asked Congress for authority to remit and cancel all claims upon China in excess of actual incurred losses. After the House of Representatives cut the president's request by \$2 million, Congress authorized the \$12 million remission on May 25, 1908.⁴²

But the debate and the plot and counterplot on the use of the money had begun long before Congress authorized the remission, and lasted until 1909. Although Liang had first asked the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to make a declaration to Rockhill that the money would be used for education, both he and his successor, Wu Tingfang (who assumed the post early in the fall of 1907), and the Chinese government in Beijing resisted the interference of the American government in the use of the money. Yuan Shikai, the powerful commissioner of northern ports, wanted to use the money to build railways in Manchuria for defense against Japan and Russia, with the profit from the railway operation to be spent on education. But Rockhill thwarted all of China's diplomatic maneuvers to free the money from the educational plan.⁴³ In the end Rockhill prevailed on account of the strength of his ultimatum: accept the American proposal or risk losing the money. In the final agreement, the plan was included as an attachment and made no reference to the remission; the United States did not appear coercive, nor China subjugated. The remission won lavish public and private praise.⁴⁴ Thus China began sending students to America for the second time, with funding assured for thirty-one years. The remitted fund was also used to establish the Tsinghua School, which eventually would supply the students for study abroad. The first dispatch of fifty students began their studies in America in 1909.

American and Chinese Perspectives

In 1872 and in 1909 both Americans and Chinese viewed the issue of Chinese students in America from their own culture perspective. America's earnestness in accepting and educating the Chinese students was based on Christian missionary ideals and zeal: a Western education was

considered necessary for China to become a civilized society, so that the Chinese could become patriotic, courageous, altruistic, intellectually clear-headed, and sincere—Christian attributes that they found lacking in the Chinese. Anson Burlingame, when serving as China's ambassador-at-large, promoted China by claiming that China was ripe for conversion to Christianity. Many of Yung Wing's supporters in Hartford were members of the Asylum Hill Congregational Church, and Yung Wing had as a teenager been taught in China and brought over to America by the Reverend Samuel Brown.

In 1890, a decade before the siege at Beijing, Arthur Smith, dean of the American missionary educators in China and one of the few China experts of his time, summarized his diagnosis of and cure for China:

What they [the Chinese] do lack is Character and Conscience. . . . The forces which have developed character and conscience in the Anglo-Saxon race . . . came with Christianity, and they grew with Christianity. . . . What China needs is righteousness, and in order to attain it, it is absolutely necessary that she have a knowledge of God and a new conception of man, as well as of the relation of man to God. . . . The manifold needs of China . . . will be met permanently, completely, only by Christian civilization.⁴⁵

Smith met with Roosevelt on March 6, 1906, to press for the remission and the American educational plan, although he considered that the money was rightfully America's because it was a "*punitive* indemnity for a great criminal act" of the Chinese government against the American government. In the same year, Edwin James, the president of the University of Illinois, wrote to Roosevelt,

The nation which succeeds in educating the young Chinese of the present generation will be the nation which for a given expenditure of effort will reap the largest possible returns in moral, intellectual, and commercial influence. . . . The extension of such moral influence . . . would mean a larger return for a given outlay than could be obtained in any other manner. Trade follows moral and spiritual domination far more inevitably than it follows the flag.⁴⁶

On China's side, the purpose of sending students to America was to acquire knowledge of machinery. With strong battleships at sea

and powerful cannons in its forts, China could then ward off “ocean people’s” invasion of its territory and treasury and their encroachment on its cultural ideal of benevolence. Two millennia ago a similar need to ward off land invaders had led to construction of the first segments of the Great Wall. In the late 1870s the commissioner of the Chinese Educational Commission and his predecessor, both of whom had been nurtured as classics scholars in China, were the most resolute opponents of the commission; they perceived that American education had eroded in the students China’s cultural ideals, which they believed the students must retain. The influential viceroy Zhang Zhidong had defined the acceptable use of Western knowledge: Chinese learning was the essence, and Western learning was for practical development. In 1901 he and Viceroy Liu Kunyi advised the throne to send students to Japan because “there is no school in Europe and America that does not teach Western religion concurrently, and no school in Japan that does not teach harmonious human relations concurrently.”⁴⁷ Western religion was seen as spearheading the threat to Chinese learning. (Zhang succeeded in preventing the State Department’s appointment of an American as superintendent of the remission educational plan.)

The American side also viewed the recall in 1881 as a missed opportunity for exerting its influence and wanted a second chance. In the same letter to Roosevelt on the American educational plan in 1906, James wrote, “If the United States had succeeded thirty five years ago, as it looked at one time as if it might, in turning the current of Chinese students to this country, and had succeeded in keep[ing] that current large, we should to-day be controlling the development of China in that most satisfactory and subtle of all ways,—through the intellectual and spiritual domination of its leaders.”⁴⁸ America wanted the Chinese students to acquire its moral, spiritual, and intellectual learning. China wanted the students to learn America’s technological know-how. Education as a means to understand the cause of poverty and seek deliverance from it was not a stated goal. China had felt pain and humiliation in the stranglehold of foreign powers, but it had remained ignorant as to the Chinese people’s progressive impoverishment.

The Republic Years between 1911–1949

Between 1909 and 1911, the last years of the Qing’s reign, three detachments totaling 179 students were sent to America.⁴⁹ After the founding

of the Republic of China, the students supported by the remission money were selected from the Tsinghua School. Between 1912 and 1925 a total of 852 students, including forty-three women, were sent to America.⁵⁰ In 1928 the Tsinghua School became a full-curriculum university and the remission fund became available to a nationwide pool of students. Although in subsequent years the fund supported an increasingly smaller percentage of students studying in America when other avenues opened, it continued to attract the brightest students in China.⁵¹ In 1936, the year before China's War of Resistance against Japan began, 1,002 Chinese students went to America to study. During the war years, 1937–1945, the number dropped to less than a hundred per year. After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, no students from mainland China went to America for thirty years. After the breakout of the Korean War in June 1950, the United States blocked Chinese students from returning to China, a subject that Qian Ning addresses in this book.

THE INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN-EDUCATED STUDENTS IN CHINA

What did the American education of these students accomplish? Many of the teenage students who returned to China in 1881, in spite of the abrupt termination of their studies in America, later became outstanding achievers in engineering, industry, banking, the military, and civil services. Very few became revolutionaries.⁵² This was also true, as Qian Ning discusses in this book, in the twentieth century of those who were supported by the remitted Boxer Indemnity Fund. It was the work of the largest group of returned students—those from America—that formed the foundation of China's progress. By comparison, many of the students who went to Japan at the turn of the century returned to China to participate in overthrowing the Qing dynasty, and many who went to France in the decade around World War I became prominent Communist revolutionaries.

Numerous factors contributed to these distinctions, such as the age of the students at their return and their fields of study while abroad. But the most important factor was the stability of the educational experience. The students who went to America, England, and Germany (and to the Soviet Union in the 1950s) experienced structured study and few distractions. The studies of many of those who went to Japan and France,

however, were frequently interrupted by lack of funds and by distractions such as upheavals back home and difficulties in state-to-state relations between China and the host country. Becoming a revolutionary requires accepting a belief in a doctrine. After years of education in an environment conducive to learning, a student quite naturally becomes a builder.

The history of education in Taiwan illustrates the effect of stable education. At the end of World War II, Taiwan was more prosperous than mainland China because of the five decades of warless development it had enjoyed as a colony of Japan.⁵³ But, like mainland China, it had a rapidly rising population and an agrarian economy (which, by itself, would send ever more people into ever deeper poverty), no systematic legislation that would encourage wealth creation through commercial and industrial expansion, and was under rigid, one-party rule by the Nationalists (Guomindang). On February 28, 1947, two years before the full retreat of the Nationalists to the island, a protest by citizens against corruption and authoritarian rule broke out into antigovernment riots. The government reacted by arresting and executing thousands of prominent intellectuals and civilian leaders. The pattern of development and suppression evident in the February 28 Incident was to be repeated forty-two years later in Tiananmen Square. These convulsions resulted from the clash between the twin legacies of China's millennia-old civilization: the unyielding reality of national poverty and weakness, and the undying desire for prosperity at home and equality with other nations.

Taiwan held its first study-abroad examination in 1953, and 233 students passed. By 1975 the number had increased to 1,514; in the intervening twenty-two years a total of 23,540 students had passed.⁵⁴ Within some four decades following 1949, guardians of the old ideology died off one by one, the new generation was raised in an evolving new ideology, the economy changed from agrarian to commercial, and the political system from authoritarian to democratic. The younger generation that had received a stable education at home and abroad and had grown up in an environment without blood-spilling, social turmoil, and war brought about a transformation from ignorance to knowledge.⁵⁵

Education itself is a millennia-old Confucian tradition. The cherished thought of study in America, although a recent development, is rooted in the Chinese people's respect and trust in the quality and openness of

American education. This respect and trust—which began when Yung Wing started his study in America in 1847 and can be neither enforced by treaties nor destroyed by legislation or war—remain intact today.

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T. K. CHU
Princeton, New Jersey
June 30, 2000

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

On an April morning in 1988, I boarded a No. 320 express bus in the vicinity of Muxidi, Beijing, destined for Yiheyuan. I was going to the western district to do some errands whose precise nature I can no longer recall. It was early spring. The sun shone warmly, and the boughs of the trees lining both sides of the street had just begun to wear a new green. The fresh air seemed to purify my mind and body. I rested my head on the windowpane during the rickety ride and began to day-dream. At that moment the idea of writing a book leaped out: "I'll go overseas to interview the students who have gone abroad to study, and I'll write down their experiences and feelings . . ."

I was then a reporter in the literature department of *People's Daily*: youthful, passionate, and full of dreams. My initial idea was quite romantic. First, I would go to America. With a knapsack on my back, I would walk, hitchhike, or, better yet, cycle. I would travel on the majestic highways of Walt Whitman's poems. Along the way, between interviewing students, I would work at odd jobs. I would go to Europe, Japan, Australia . . . And finally I would produce a kind of journalistic writing rich in feeling, overflowing with wisdom, and laden with tales of adventure. It would begin, "In the year nineteen hundred and . . ."

In August 1989 I arrived in America.

Four years later, also on an April morning, sitting in the quiet graduate reading lounge at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and listening to the chimes of the campus bell, I began to write this book. But by then many of my original ideas had changed. It dawned on me

that four years before, the psychological distance between me and the topics I chose had been as great as the physical distance between me and America. In today's America, the sight of a traveler with a knapsack walking jauntily along an expressway is hard to imagine. The image would be far from romantic; perhaps it would be farcical, or even a little sad.

In fact, it was not only my ideas about writing the book that had changed. In the summer of 1993 I returned to China for a short visit. My mother, seeing her son apparently more or less the same after four years in America, was relieved, even elated. But I knew that deep in my heart I had changed. To change after studying abroad was perhaps quite natural. Had there been no change, the study would have been a wasted effort.

Obviously I was not the exception. In the last two decades, several hundred thousand Chinese students walked out the nation's "front door," which had been closed for a long, long time, and voyaged to more than seventy countries around the globe. Bombarded by alien cultures, their lives underwent a transformation that would not have been possible had they remained in China. Like their predecessors, they brought back science and technology as well as thoughts, ideas, and lifestyles that were radically different from those in China.

What were the changes that took place in a student? What were the implications of those changes for China? These were the questions I asked myself constantly while writing this book.

In my years in the United States, I studied and worked at the University of Michigan and traveled widely to interview Chinese students. In this book, I have attempted to sketch the historical and political background of China's study-abroad program and the magnitude of this tidal wave of Chinese students. In addition, a principal goal of the book was to reflect on the enormous impact of the rapid changes in cultural environment and in the social system on this generation of China's youth. I did so by recording their personal experiences, as they were vivid examples of how these changes had occurred.

This book is hence based on personal experiences—those of the people I interviewed and my own. Nowadays, although noteworthy scholarly research is usually based on statistical data, it is still individual experience that tells the poignancy of the story behind the data.

All of the people and events in this book are real. But in respect for their privacy, I have changed the names of the people interviewed and

occasionally place names as well. Sources of information other than the interviews are given.

First, I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Kenneth DeWoskin of the Department of East Asia Studies at the University of Michigan. Without his initial enthusiasm and his continuous support, I could not have completed the project so smoothly or presented the results in their present form. I also thank Prof. Charles Eisendrath and the Asia Foundation of America. Prof. Eisendrath, director of the Journalism Fellowship Program at the University of Michigan, not only helped me to gain an initial understanding of American society but also left me with many fond memories of my first year of student life in America. The Asia Foundation's grant in my first year made it financially possible for me to participate in the Michigan program and to conduct research for this book. In addition, my friends Yuhong, Jianhua, Wenhua, and Alice H. have given me their selfless help in conceptualizing the interview project and in writing this book. I thank them sincerely.

I also thank my wife, whom I have been able to count on for the most candid criticism.

Finally, I especially wish to thank those who took part in my interviews, engaged me in thoughtful discussions, and related to me their joys and sufferings. They have brought pride and honor to this fellow traveler.

QIAN NING
Ann Arbor, Michigan
May 6, 1995

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*Chinese Students
Encounter America*

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CHAPTER I

The Intermittent History

CHINA'S "FRONT DOOR"

China's door to the outside world is narrow.

In the early eighties, this statement was not only figurative, but also literal.

There is a street in the southern end of the Wangfu district in Beijing called Dongjiaomin Alley. In those days it was quiet and obscure. However, that little street had been anything but obscure in China's history; there, the Boxer rioters attacked the foreign establishments in 1900, an incident that led to the invasion of Beijing by the Eight-Country Allied Force.¹ At the western end of the street were two small, undistinguished doors covered with peeling red paint. A plate that hung on one of the doors read, "Visa Department, Bureau of Public Safety, City of Beijing." This was one of China's "front doors" at that time.

When I first saw this "front door," I was incredulous. How could it be? In a single decade, tens of thousands of Chinese students had managed to squeeze their way through these two narrow doors and walk into the world outside.

The door on the west side was the entrance to the First Visa Division, which accepted passport applications for travel to Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia. The door on the east side was the entrance to the Second Visa Division—the route to Hong Kong, Macao, and Japan.

The morning of January 5, 1989, was cold. A light snow was falling.

I arrived sometime after eight o'clock to find out how to get an exit visa and passport. The office was not yet open, but already about thirty people were waiting in the street.

The doors opened promptly at nine o'clock. Moving with the throng, I entered the western "front door" for the first time.

The office consisted of two rooms. The anteroom was about twenty square meters. Numerous sheets of rules and regulations governing studying and visits abroad were posted on the right-hand wall. A registration book was placed on a table against the back wall that separated the two rooms.

The small room filled quickly. People came to pick up blank forms, to turn in completed forms, or to inquire about procedures. They elbowed their way to the table to register. Although it was cold and damp outside, a tense air of excitement and anxiety welled up in the room.

The door to the back room was shut, and nobody knew what the public-safety officers were doing behind the door. Someone impetuously walked up and knocked. Immediately, an officer came out, lectured the knocker on his rashness, returned to the back room, and slammed the door.

Everybody waited patiently now. Some were pacing, and some bowed their heads in thought. Still others rested with their eyes closed or asked every conceivable question of their neighbors.

It has been said that a prerequisite for studying abroad is patience. This wisdom was acquired from experience; the process of applying for an exit visa and passport was the training ground for that patience.

As the waiting continued, an "information-exchange center for studying abroad" quickly formed. Encouraging and discouraging information was exchanged, freely and quickly:

"The new policy from the Education Commission no longer allows graduate students to go abroad."

"The 300 or so students applying for an American visa just before Christmas had expected it to be easy. But no one got a visa."

"Canadian visas are much easier to get these days. That's the reason for the huge crowd outside the Canadian Embassy every day."

There, freedom of speech was practiced liberally. The speakers would not be held responsible for what they said, and the listeners would not take seriously what they heard. The multitude of people, although from different social backgrounds, shared a common aspiration. There they would say freely what they would not say to their supervisors, colleagues, friends, or relatives, since they would not be investigated for their remarks.²

Finally there was a stir in the inner room. Public-safety officers called names. Each time, they admitted two or three people and then slammed the door. Witnessing that the bureaucratic machinery of the state had begun to grind, everybody settled down again with even greater patience.

"A classmate of mine left yesterday. She did not take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), but they gave her a visa. It looked impossible at first, but it turned out all right. You just have to be bold," said a girl in her twenties. She wanted to study education in America, although her major in college was history. She, too, had not taken the GRE or TOEFL. She listed on her application form an American as her financial guarantor and claimed the American was her cousin, but she was concerned about convincing the public-safety officer of their relationship.

An hour passed, then two hours. The wait seemed interminable. The air in the room became suffocating.

"This is like torture," someone complained.

Most of the people came for their own visas, but a middle-aged man who looked like a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cadre came to get a passport for the secretary-general of the Party branch of his work unit.³ His patience was wearing thin.

"Next time, let the secretary-general come himself so he will know how it feels to wait like this," he grumbled.

At that time, an old man walked in and signed the registration book. He came to air grievances to an official of the Supreme Court. Someone good-naturedly told him that this was the bureau issuing exit visas and passports for studying abroad. The old man exploded, "You can go to whichever country you wish! It has nothing to do with me! All that's needed is for them to receive me. You can go your own way!"⁴

Everybody was silent. The reception center for people presenting grievances to the Supreme Court was in another building on the same street, and that place was connected to another facet of China.⁵

When I was finally called into the back room, it was past noon. In contrast to the air of boredom in the anteroom, the back room was alive and busy. It was smaller and held three desks, behind each of which sat an officer. In any given morning they interviewed about fifty applicants; they had no idle moments. The officers reviewed the applications expertly. Their answers to the applicants' questions were crisp, and delivered in a manner not unlike judges announcing sentencing in a trial. But if an applicant took too long asking a question or seemed unconvinced by their answers, the officers would immediately begin a lecture that was not delivered with the same precision.

Some of those who returned from the inner room were excited, some were dejected, and still others could hardly hide their anger. But most just left quietly. An exception was a middle-aged man who came to turn in his forms. As we left the room together, he commented, "There's been some improvement in their manners."

That simple statement gave hope to those who still waited.

"I've heard that a passport can be issued in just a month and a half."

"Some people have received theirs in twenty days."

The hoped-for ease of getting a passport, however, did not materialize. Six months later, the June Fourth Incident erupted at Tiananmen Square.⁶ It shook Beijing, made the rest of China tremble, and sent shock waves throughout the world. Immediately, people began to suspect that the narrow, recently opened "front door" would be shut again. For a brief period, Beijing's Bureau of Public Safety rejected all passport applications. On July 10, 1989, it began accepting them again but with new rules. One was that people who already had a passport were required to procure a new exit visa. There were also changes in the Visa Department: the First Division issued forms and the Second Division processed them.

A year later the processing center for passport applications moved to a place near Yuanen Temple. The issuance of application forms and passports, however, remained in the Dongjiaomin Alley office. The requirement of a new exit visa was abolished soon afterward.

Four years later, when I returned to Beijing in the summer of 1993, I could no longer find the two narrow doors. The Visa Department of Beijing's Bureau of Public Safety had become the Office of Non-Official Entry and Exit Visas for Chinese Citizens, processing civilian applications only. Its modern service hall was spacious, clean, and comfortable. The application process had also been standardized.