

WANG FOUNDATION LOOKS TO BUILD BRIDGES

By David B. Woodward

A CENTRAL FIGURE IN THE RAPID EXPANSION of China's interest in recruiting American students, Dr. Peter C.C. Wang, CEO of the Wang Foundation, gave a presentation at the 2005 NAFSA conference entitled "Strategic Initiatives to Increase Enrollment of American Students Studying in China." Several days earlier, 35 Chinese university presidents, including senior administrators from the Chinese delegation, visited the Wang Center for International Programs at Pacific Lutheran University and met with Wang for two hours in intensive discussions about how to engage U.S. institutions and their students. The Wang Center was established through a pledge of \$4 million from Wang and his wife, Dr. Grace Wang.

The meeting with the Chinese delegation followed on a series of earlier discussions Peter C.C. Wang has had with officials in the Chinese Ministry of Education over the past several years in which he has urged the Chinese government to significantly increase its funding for education, especially among the 400 million rural poor of China. Additionally, he has pressed the government to further engage with the United States through international academic exchange by increasing the volume of American students studying in China. The Chinese government has responded by pledging its support and expressing willingness to cover the cost of supporting American students in China on service-learning programs and the costs of sending Chinese

teachers in large numbers to the United States to teach Chinese at the K-12 level and to promote study in China downstream.

New Legislation May Support Stronger U.S-China Ties

Potentially augmenting the commitment of the Chinese government to help the U.S. promote the study of Chinese is the Lieberman-Alexander "United States-China Cultural Engagement Act" introduced May 26, 2005. This proposed legislation "authorizes \$1.3 billion in federal funds over five years to provide for Chinese language instruction in American schools, increase American consular activity supporting American commercial activity in China and provide for physical and virtual exchanges among a broad spectrum of individuals in the two nations." If this bill is enacted, a comprehensive basis will be in place for preparing young Americans in very large numbers to study in China.

Additionally, in December of this year the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program is expected to recommend a program that will greatly expand the opportunity for students at institutions of higher education in the United States to study abroad. Given the imminent prominence of China on the global stage, it is hoped that the Commission will place significant emphasis on sending American students to China. This would go a long way to making academic study in China a fixture, initiating a much larger flow of students.



Dr. Peter C.C. Wang (center, left) meets with Madame Chen Zhi Li (center right), the state councilor of China, who was at one time the minister of education.

Important Factors Must Still be Considered

The key question of how to get more American students to go to China for serious academic study remains open. Universities do not want to expend a great deal of effort launching China programs if the demand isn't there yet. Wang's plan is (1) to assist the Wang Center and a coalition of 48 U.S. colleges and universities in a pilot program with Sichuan University and to assist Wayne State University's pilot program with the University of International Business and Economics, (2) to solicit Chinese government to provide scholarships to U.S. college students to study in China, (3) to recruit Chinese universities to participate in work-study program and annually send American students to study in China with life-time service objectives, and (4) to seek job opportunities for U.S. students while studying in China to gain supplemental income.

It was in part Wang's encouragement to the Ministry of Education of China which led to the major increase in Chinese efforts to recruit American students at NAFSA. Wang advocates the concept of recruiting large numbers of American students to go to China on service-learning scholarships funded largely by the Chinese government in order to learn Chinese and teach English at the same time.

Wang believes passionately that Americans must do what they can to help China educate its rural poor, or else face a future where China will become volatile and plunge the world into crisis. He has strongly urged the government of China to make education of the rural poor a top priority for this reason, and they are responding affirmatively to his recommendations. The latest indication is that the Chinese government has made the decision to increase their education budget from 2.5 percent to 4 percent of China's GDP for year 2006.

But the question the Chinese government is asking is "Where are the American students?" In their mind, if China is so important on a global level and is making such tremendous efforts to welcome foreign students, why don't Americans learn Chinese and study in China in much greater numbers? Certainly reciprocating China's interest in the U.S. could go a long way to improve Sino-U.S. relations in the future.

Moving Forward

The next phase is to get pilot projects up and running in 2006. Several lead institutions planning to work with the Wang Foundation on a pilot project include Tsinghua University in Beijing, Southwest National University in Zhongqing, Sichuan University in Chengdu, and Yang-Zhou Polytechnic College. In the near future Wang is planning to assist American universities in setting up scholarship exchanges as well. For further information on the Wang Foundation and its programs, contact Dr. Peter C.C. Wang, Petercwang@aol.com.

DAVID B. WOODWARD is president, Associates in Cultural Exchange.