

Educators Worry That Anti-American Mood in China May Harm Research Projects and Academic Exchanges

Wary of U.S. geopolitical motives, students still say 'America is the best place to study'

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BY TED PLAFKER

BEIJING

AFTER THE TUMULT of student-led demonstrations against the United States in May, and the tension surrounding the 10th anniversary of the bloody June 4 crackdown on student protesters at Tiananmen Square, Chinese universities have returned to their normal routines. Classes are ending, graduates are looking for work, and the campuses are winding down for the summer.

What is not yet clear, though, is the extent to which recent tensions between China and the United States will affect the rich academic-exchange relationship that has blossomed over the past 20 years.

The vast majority of cooperative educational and research programs continue to operate as scheduled, but some academics fear that the political tension is taking a toll.

"It negatively affects attitudes, on both sides, of scientists, the public, institutional administrators, and the government toward bilateral-collaboration efforts," said Xiangzhong (Jerry) Yang, an associate professor of animal science at the University of Connecticut.

"In the mix of all these events, it is hard for institutions in the U.S. or China to place bilateral-collaboration projects on their priority list," said Mr. Yang, who is president of the American Association for Chinese Professors.

The downward turn in Sino-U.S. relations began in March, when NATO began bombing Yugoslavia. China, concerned about what it considered to be a precedent-setting violation of sovereignty, harshly opposed the operation from the beginning.

RAGE AT AN ACCIDENTAL BOMBING

Anger turned to fury on May 7, when U.S. bombers destroyed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. With government approval, tens of thousands of students staged violent anti-American demonstrations at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing and at U.S. installations across China.



A recent cartoon captured Chinese students' mixed views of the United States. One student, in line for a U.S. visa, said, "Of course I am angry."

Washington promptly apologized for what it called an accidental bombing, but the Chinese government—and most Chinese people—continue to say the bombing must have been intentional.

China's wrath was further stoked with the May 25 release of a Congressional report accusing it of stealing U.S. nuclear and missile technology through a variety of channels, including academic exchanges.

Denying all charges, Beijing has labeled its accusers as racist for implying that China is incapable of designing its own weaponry.

Yet joint academic projects, including some highly sensitive ones, continue. One is a cooperative research effort between Georgetown University and the China University of Politics and Law, investigating the nexus between politicians and organized-crime groups in China. The first joint meeting, scheduled last year, began in Beijing as planned early this month, and was attended by scholars from both countries as well as officials from the Chinese criminal-justice system.

"What is striking to me is how little Kosovo and the rest of it has affected the project," said Murray Scot Tanner, an associate professor of political science at Western Michigan University who was one of five U.S. participants in the first meeting. "It simply has not become an issue."

Many Chinese students, meanwhile, remain wary of America's long-term geopolitical motives, and are indignant over the embassy bombing in Belgrade.

But student-led efforts to boycott American goods have fizzled, and the United States remains a prime destination for students seeking to do academic work abroad.

"Of course I am angry, all Chinese people were angry after America bombed our embassy," said Wang Guohua, an engineering student at Qinghua University, who was visiting the U.S. Embassy in Beijing last week to apply for a visa. "But internationalism is the new trend in the world. China must also take part in this, and America is still the best place to study."

In what must have come as a great relief to Beijing, the emotional response to the events in May did not carry over into any organized attempt by students or other activists to commemorate the Tiananmen Square anniversary. No incidents were reported at any universities, although one unidentified student scattered leaflets at the edge of Tiananmen Square that criticized corruption. He was quickly taken away by police officers, as was an older man near the square who opened an umbrella bearing political slogans, including "Remember the 10th anniversary of the student movement."

TRYING TO 'SAVE' CHINA

According to Jeffrey R. Wasserstrom, an associate professor of history at Indiana University at Bloomington and the author of *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View From Shanghai* (Stanford University Press, 1991), this year's anti-American protests bore striking similarities to the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations. In both cases, he said, students played a traditional role by trying to "save" China.

In 1989, the students saw the threat as corruption, and this year they were determined not to let the world regard China as too weak to stand up to foreign bullying. In both cases, Beijing stressed stability above all. But a vital difference, Mr. Wasserstrom said, was that, in the decade between the two episodes, the Soviet Union had collapsed.

"Both times, China was saying, 'We can't afford to be in chaos.' But in 1989 the referent was the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, with people saying we don't want to return to Red Guardism," explained Mr. Wasserstrom. "In 1999, when the Chinese government places an emphasis on the need to maintain stability, it resonates better for this student generation. They know that a lot of places in the former Soviet empire are experiencing very tough times right now."