

Chinese are now the largest group of foreign students at UC Davis

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On a recent Sunday, more than 500 Chinese students at UC Davis filled Freeborn Hall and sang both the U.S. and Chinese national anthems at their Mid-Autumn Moon Festival.

They staged a variety show featuring Chinese musicians, dancers, singers and comics performing under seven red Chinese lanterns. Eyes went moist at Chinese ballads about heartbreak and love's mistakes.

A choir of undergraduates sang "The Chinese Heart of Mine," declaring "the blood that runs through my veins, roaring China that's the name!"

More than 560 students from the People's Republic of China now attend the University of California, Davis; 225 of them are freshmen paying nonresident tuition of \$38,001 apiece – \$22,878 more than the \$15,123 a year for California residents.

They reflect China's new middle class, increased competition for slots at China's top universities and the growing interconnectedness between the two superpowers.

The globalization of the University of California, Davis, flows from Chancellor Linda Katehi's plan to add 5,000 more undergraduates – both California residents and nonresidents – by 2020.

The expansion of foreign students paying top dollar will provide millions in new revenue, stave off further cuts and help the university hire 300 new professors.

This fall UC Davis enrolled 1,662 foreign students, 720 of them undergraduates, generating about \$16.5 million in nonresident tuition. They include 181 South Koreans, 121 from Hong Kong and 101 Taiwanese.

It's a trend playing out across the UC system and at colleges nationwide. In 2010, there were 671,616 foreign students studying at American universities. Students from China were the biggest group at 127,628, a 30 percent rise over 2009, according to the Institute of International Education.

Katehi, a Greek immigrant, sees the more than 1.3 billion Chinese as a natural target for what she calls "educational diplomacy." By trading ideas in dorm rooms, classes and cafeterias, U.S. and foreign students will be better prepared to become "leaders in an increasingly global world," Katehi said.

That includes exporting American values of freedom, justice and democracy.

"There's no better way of influencing a country that's growing than providing an American education," Katehi said. "When you taste democracy it's hard to forget the flavor. If we educate as many of them as possible they come to understand and embrace our culture instead of fighting

it."

The largest group of foreign undergraduates is 225 Chinese – a more than tenfold increase since 2007 – who relish their newfound freedom and the chance to explain and defend China.

Davis has become a destination for highly motivated Chinese students coming to study economics, engineering, biological sciences, agriculture, pre-med, pre-vet and pre-law, said director of undergraduate admissions Walter Robinson.

They're drawn by the school's reputation as a friendly university with a range of professional schools in a safe city, Robinson said.

The newcomers meet the same admissions criteria as other students, and so far their dismissal rate is the same as resident students, said Robinson, noting that UC Davis has expanded its advising and orientation programs for foreign students.

"We have one of the biggest programs in UC sending students abroad, and now we're bringing more of the world to campus," he said. "The world is shrinking and we want all of our students to be comfortable with students of all backgrounds."

New wealth funds tuition

As word spreads that UC Davis ranks among the top public universities in the United States, it's becoming an attractive option for students facing intense competition to get into China's best schools.

Freshman Lei Xue didn't get into Beijing University, considered China's premier school. Xue, 18, went online and researched American universities gaining prestige in China as springboards to careers on either side of the Pacific.

"More and more Chinese students are thinking about studying abroad because the quality of education here is better," Xue said. "In China, there are big lectures with too many students, and it's much easier to pass."

Xue, an economics major who whips around campus in green camouflage flip-flops on her neon-yellow bike, studies six hours a day. She said she does far more work than her friends in China.

"China's grading policy depends on the finals," she said. "Here our grades include attendance, midterms, finals and class work."

Beijing University is much cheaper – about \$950 a year – but after a month in Davis, Xue believes she's better off, even at a cost of about \$54,000 a year, including room, board, health insurance and other expenses.

That would have been unthinkable for many Chinese five years ago, but as the country's economy and population grow, city and coastal properties are soaring in value and more Chinese are cashing in to send their kids to U.S. schools.

Xue said that is how her family is paying.

"We sold our old house in Changsha," a city of 6.5 million in Hunan province. "It's not easy; it's based on our savings," she said during a break between her four Monday classes. "My father's a research scientist; my mother's a CPA."

Salaries are also going up in China, said Xue's statistics classmate Yanan Hu, an international relations major. His father works as a government inspector and his mother runs transportation services and an electronics business.

"I plan to work for the Chinese foreign service," said Hu, 19, who moved to San Francisco as a high school exchange student to prepare himself for college in the United States.

English proficiency required

After statistics, Xue threw her purple knapsack on her back, jumped on her bike and raced over to her Introduction to College Writing course.

The class was analyzing propaganda, a key component of daily life in China – where much of the media are subject to government control – but not a topic that's freely discussed.

The class went over examples of propaganda, including name-calling, glittering generalizations, testimonials and getting people on the bandwagon.

"I think about a lot of examples of propaganda in China, where the majority agrees with what they're told," Xue said. "In America, people like to be outsiders, they like to be special."

"In China, it's the opposite," said Mingye Cai, a Chinese student who has been in the United States for three years.

Xue and Cai smiled when professor Angela Akin gave an example of name-calling playing on hate and fear: "Obama's a communist; his health care plan is socialist."

Chinese students can't get into UC Davis without scoring at least 80 percent on their English proficiency exam, and are placed in dorms with non-Chinese students. Xue's roommates have roots in El Salvador, India and Marin County.

Saberi Khan, a biomedical major from Novato, said Lei is a pleasure to room with.

"She's a hard worker who's dedicated to doing what she needs to do here," Khan said. "We never see her – she's always in the library."

Before her economics class, Xue joined several Chinese friends for a meal of polenta lasagna and salad with tofu. They chewed over her propaganda class.

"There was a time when capitalism was a bad word in China – we overused it," she said.

They enjoy the chance to teach their classmates about China.

"If Americans study more Chinese history, they'll know why China implemented the one-child policy and why Chinese people have pride," added Ahao Jiang, a business major whose father, a contractor, spent 10 years of savings "to send me to one of the most developed places in the world."

One can hear Chinese spoken throughout downtown Davis – the newcomers are having no trouble fitting in. The university's Chinese Students and Scholars Association eases their transition, picking up newly arrived Chinese at the airport and helping them open bank accounts, get cellphones and go food shopping.

"We try to solve all their problems," said Oscar Wang, a computer science graduate student who directed the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival.

Xue didn't get into UC Berkeley, but now prefers UC Davis.

"This isn't a noisy big city," she said. "It's the perfect place to study."

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