

Alumni in China: the 1970s **Golden Group**

A remarkable number of Chinese alumni who studied at LSE during the 1970s are now serving their country in prominent government roles. **Brendan Smith** reports on this 'golden group'.

In April 2007, Yang Jie Chi became the foreign minister of the People's Republic of China.

Yang joined the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 1971, before studying at LSE from 1974-75. He then returned to the ministry, where he went on to focus on American affairs, twice holding the post of vice minister (1998-2001 and 2005-07), while acting as China's ambassador to the USA in the intervening years. Yang Jie Chi was part of a young group of Chinese who came to LSE in the 1970s before returning to make their mark on China's reform and opening up.

At a time when China was just coming out of the Cultural Revolution, young and upcoming Chinese officials, and future officials, were availing themselves of a scholarship scheme to study in the UK, run by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The scholarship scheme ran from the mid to late 1970s. For LSE, the programme was remarkable given the number of officials, during the short years of the scheme's existence, who came to the School and went on to serve their country in senior government positions. Minister Yang's

Class of 1975

Mr Yang Jie Chi – Minister of foreign affairs

Mr Wang Guang Ya – Permanent representative (ambassador) to the United Nations, New York (former vice minister of foreign affairs)

Ms Le Ai Mei – Counselor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr Zhou Wen Zhong – Chinese ambassador to the USA (former vice minister of foreign affairs)

Ms Cong Jun – Minister counselor at China's Mission to the UN, New York (former ambassador to Estonia)

Class of 1976

Mr Zhang Ye Sui – Vice minister of foreign affairs

Ms Zhang Xiao Kang – Chinese ambassador to Singapore

Ms Chen Nai Qing – Special envoy on Korean Affairs (former ambassador to Norway)

Mr Tang Guo Qiang – Ambassador to the United Nations and other international organisations in Vienna

Class of 1974

Mr Long Yong Tu – Secretary-general, Boao Forum for Asia (former assistant minister, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations)

Class of 1979

Mr Sun Yu Xi – Chinese ambassador to India (former ambassador to Afghanistan)

class of '75 also includes, a counselor at the MFA in Beijing; current minister counselor at China's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York, and former ambassador to Estonia; and two former vice ministers of foreign affairs, now current ambassadors to the USA and the United Nations. Indeed, it has often been a case of one LSE alumnus replacing another in a senior posting. In 2005, Vice Minister Zhou Wen Zhong took over the mantle of China's ambassador to the USA from Yang Jie Chi, who returned to his vice minister position.

As well as the foreign minister being an alumnus of the School, the current vice minister for foreign affairs with responsibility for policy research, Zhang Ye Sui, studied at the School from 1975-76. The class of '76 also includes the current Chinese ambassador to Singapore, China's special envoy on Korean Affairs and former ambassador to Norway; and China's ambassador to the United Nations and other international organisations in Vienna. The current Chinese ambassador to India, Sun Yu Xi, who represents the world's most populist nation in the world's second most populist, studied at LSE from 1978-79. He was also ambassador to Afghanistan from 2002-04.

While the majority of officials from the mid to late 1970s would go on to develop their careers with the MFA, other ministries and their affiliated institutes also participated in the scholarship programme. Several officials from the Ministry of Education studied at LSE in the late 1970s. However, it was from what is now termed the Ministry of Commerce that LSE alumni also flourished. Long Yong Tu studied at the School from 1973-74, before returning to what was then called the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations. He rose to the position of assistant minister at the then Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC), and worked on China's entry to the World Trade Organization. In 2003 he became secretary-general of the Boao Forum for Asia, a non-governmental organisation promoting regional economic integration. By the

late 1970s China's third level education system continued to be highly specialised, along similar lines to the former Soviet Union. Government ministries had affiliated universities and research institutes, and the Ministry of Foreign Trade's Institute of Foreign Trade (today, the University of International Business and Economics under the direct administration of the Chinese Ministry of Education) was also active in sending their young academics to LSE for further study.

A new generation

The 1970s tradition continues today. Under the FCO's current Chevening Programme, in 2007 LSE continues to be the most popular choice of study among Chinese government officials, and the number of requests to study at LSE continues to rise. A new generation of LSE alumni from the late 1980s and 1990s work at the Chinese MFA as country desk directors, deputy director-generals, director-generals and in Chinese embassies around the world. However, while traditions continue, there has been a greater diversification in the profile of Chinese officials coming to LSE for further study. Students now come from the whole range of central ministries in Beijing, state commissions, and an increasing number from provincial and municipal level government, state owned enterprises and state banks. Equally, China's economic opening up means greater opportunities for LSE alumni in the private sector, with multinationals, fast growing Chinese companies, and new and innovative start-ups. Thirty years from now as we reflect on Chinese alumni from the first decade at the turn of the 21st century, the future 'golden group' is as likely to include successful business leaders and entrepreneurs as senior government officials.



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