

LSE and China

LSE currently has around 300 Chinese students at the School, about two thirds studying master's programmes, the remainder undergraduate degrees. But LSE's long association with China dates back almost to its foundation. **Nien Cheng** is the author of *Life and Death in Shanghai* (Grafton, 1986). She studied at LSE from 1935-38.

For my generation of Chinese women, getting an education was not for getting a job. Job opportunities for women were limited to nursing sick people and teaching little children. When I graduated from Nankai Girls High School in 1933, only a few girls of my class sat for university entrance examination. However, compared with my mother's generation, when there was no school for girls at all, my generation had already made progress.

I passed the entrance examination and entered the American endowed Yenching University in Beijing, a wonderful school with a beautiful campus. But the political situation was deteriorating. Fearing the outbreak of war with Japan, my father decided to send me to England. Being a naval man, he believed in Britain's political system and its orderly society. During our last conversation before I left home to board a ship for Europe, he said to me: 'If you need to buy anything, go to the Army and Navy store in London. They will not cheat you.'

When I left home in the summer of 1935, I had already finished my second year at Yenching. When I came to LSE in October that year, I was the only Chinese woman student. There were a number of Chinese men students. I saw them generally at lunchtime in the refectory. That was how I met my future husband, K'ang Chi Cheng. He came to LSE on a government scholarship in 1934 and was working for a PhD in international relations under Professor Manning. We soon became friends and got into the habit of going to the country on a Greenline bus to walk and have lunch in a pub. Sometimes we would go to a movie and eat at a Chinese restaurant or read Chinese newspapers in the Reading Room of the China Institute on Gower Street.

For the next two years, I was very happy at LSE. To this day, I have vivid memories of the School and some of the distinguished professors whose lectures shaped my thinking. One of the first courses I took was Professor Eileen Powell's Industrial Revolution. I remember her as tall and

elegant. I made my first British friend, a girl seated next to me. When the lecture concluded and we stood up to leave, I asked her how I could improve my English. She loaned me one of Agatha Christie's detective stories. I became addicted to her writing and took a collection of her books back to China.

I also attended Professor Laski's course on British Constitution. When he started to lecture, one knew he was brilliant. Without notes and sitting there in a relaxed manner, he would comment on Britain's political system and make sarcastic remarks about the British nobility, but never directly criticise the royal family. The students would roar with laughter. The whole thing was more like a performance than a classroom lecture. However, the course of study I liked best of all and which made a big difference to my later life was Logic. I regret I no longer remember the name of the professor. But I can see him in my mind's eye walking into the classroom with measured steps, going straight to the blackboard where he drew the outline of a big apple. He then turned to face the class and said: 'An apple is red but not all red things are apples.' Ever since then, I tried to think logically. When I suffered persecution during the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and was put in prison for six and a half years in solitary confinement, I had to fight for my life. Being able to think logically was most important. It enabled me to analyse the dire situation in which I found myself and keep a cool head and calm mind. The Maoist revolutionaries never succeeded in getting me confused.

Before I came to LSE I had hardly any interest in politics. But in my second year, I had a political awakening. It might have something to do with my practical work with the children of the poor unemployed in Bethnal Green in London's East End. I made friends with the left wing students at LSE and helped them with some of their activities. One day, I stood at the street corner near the Strand with a British girl to collect money from the pedestrians for the Spanish revolutionaries. The

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Shanghai streets 1935 and today



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'I attended Professor Laski's course on British Constitution. When he started to lecture, one knew he was brilliant.'



traffic lights turned red. An official looking black car stopped right in front of us. It turned out to be the car of the Chinese ambassador. Soon after, he and his wife invited me to one of their official luncheons. After all the British guests had left, the ambassador took me to his study and warned me not to associate with the Communists at the School.

On 7 July 1937, Japanese troops poured into Beijing through the Marco Polo Bridge. The Nationalist government declared war on Japan and called on the Chinese people to resist Japanese aggression. Some Chinese left the School to go home. All of us were deeply worried about our families and our homeland. The Reading Room at the China Institute was jammed. We couldn't wait to finish our studies and go back to China.

In the summer of 1938, I passed my final examination and a little later K'ang Chi got his PhD. We were married and returned to China on a French ship from Marseilles. There were many Chinese students on board, coming from all over Europe. We had to travel via Vietnam but finally K'ang Chi and I got to Chongqing, the wartime capital of China, where he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We were not to see our families again for years. ■



Nien Cheng

studied at LSE from 1935-38.



LSE and China now

Professor Henrietta Moore, deputy director

LSE has a very strong reputation and profile in China, reflected in the increasing numbers of students applying to LSE's undergraduate and graduate programmes. By March 2003, LSE had received over 3,500 applications from China, a more than 150 per cent increase on the 2002 figure. The average increase for all UK universities in the same time period was around 50 per cent, underlining the profile of LSE in China,

as well as the enthusiasm of Chinese students wishing to study abroad.

The School is actively seeking more strategic alliances with Chinese universities, and more exchange activities, as well as furthering ongoing research work in departments and research centres. In the coming year, the School will develop a strategic plan for its activities in China to ensure that LSE remains at the forefront of the social sciences in what will be the largest democracy in the world. These are likely to include joint research projects across a number of areas and a short course teaching programme delivered in China. The School signed an agreement of academic cooperation with the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) in April 1999 and hopes to pursue similar arrangements with a number of leading Chinese universities in Beijing and other cities. Primarily, these links will be used to develop common research projects but in time we do hope that an element of LSE teaching will be delivered in mainland China.

LSE's most important opportunity is to teach and train the future social scientists of the most populated country in the world. Leading Chinese academics are already alumni. We certainly hope there will be more in the future.