

EARLY CHINESE STUDENTS at MAINE COLLEGES

Yung Wing was the first Chinese person to earn a degree from an American university graduating from Yale in 1854. After graduation he returned to China and served in the Imperial Government. He recommended that China send students to study in the United States to learn western science and technology in order to help modernize China. His recommendation led to the establishment of the Chinese Education Mission in 1871. The first group of thirty students arrived in Connecticut in 1872. The Chinese government abandoned the Mission in 1881 because the American government refused to allow its students to study at West Point in violation of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868.

The Chinese Education Mission was revived after the Boxer Rebellion. In 1908 Congress voted to use its share of the Three Hundred Thirty-three Million Dollar Boxer Rebellion Indemnity Fund, demanded by the Eight Power Allied Expeditionary Forces as compensation for losses caused by the Rebellion, to establish the China Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Culture which, in turn, founded the Tsinghua Xuetaang, the predecessor of Tsinghua University, the first preparatory school for students selected by the Chinese government to study in the United States, and to fund the studies of those students in the United States.

The students funded by the Indemnity began to arrive in the United States in 1909 to study at major universities. After a few years, the Chinese Education Mission, concerned that its students tended to cling together at the universities they were attending and, therefore, did not experience American culture, began sending individual students to smaller liberal arts colleges where they would have the opportunity for closer contact with real college life as experienced by American students and more fully to participate in American culture.

University of Maine, Orono

In 1909, the Mission sent Tse Sheng Linn to the University of Maine at Orono where he studied economics. According to the entry in the 1911 yearbook, "The Prism," he went by the American name of "Mike," wore a pink shirt and a pompadour hair style, and hadn't been able to fit in with co-eds. While there, however, he became enamored of Christine Shaw, a 1909 University of Maine graduate, who had tutored him in Latin. After she discouraged his advances and stopped tutoring him, Mr. Linn began to send her long letters and to come to her home in hopes of seeing her. On June 9, 1911, Mr. Linn shot her in the head as she and her brother were returning home from a dance. He was convicted of attempted murder after a jury trial and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment at the Maine State Prison at Thomaston. He was later given a pardon on the condition that he return to China and never re-enter the United States.

Yuen-foo Leong, from Sun Dong, Canton Province, China, began his college education at Tufts College in 1906. He later transferred to the University of Maine where he graduated in 1910 with a B. S. degree in electrical engineering. His thesis title was "The Design of a Power Transmission System from Ellsworth to Veazie." He was listed among the "lost alumni" in the March, 1916, issue of the Maine Bulletin's Alumni Bulletin.

Maen Chang Wu, of Canton, China, was a special student in 1911.

There are arrival records from San Francisco which document two students whose final destination was listed as Orono, Maine. Hung-Hsiang Chang arrived on the SS Shanghai on March 20, 1915. He was almost 27 years old and married. His permanent residence in China was Shanghai. Pu Sungyu Fung arrived in San Francisco, California, aboard the SS Persia from Shanghai on August 6, 1915. He was a single twenty-year-old from Peking, China, who gave his occupation as “student” and final destination in the United States as Orono. Both of these students matriculated at the University of Maine in the fall semester of 1915 as juniors in the department of economics where they concentrated their studies in banking and business administration. Prior to arriving in Maine, they both had studied at Tsing Una College in Peking. They were sent by the Chinese government under the direction of the Chinese Educational Mission in Washington, D. C.

When Eng Hon Wah registered for the World War I draft he declared himself to be a 23-year-old student residing in Bangor. Presumably, he was a student at the University of Maine.

Tsung Chi Jen, of Kiang Su, China, was a special student in 1922. Lieh Hsui Chen graduated from the University of Maine in 1922 with a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering with general honors. He was a member of the Phi Kappa Phi academic fraternity. The university’s yearbook, “The Prism,” listed his hometown as Hangchow, China.

Chan Kong Chuang, of Fukien, China, earned a master’s degree in 1924.

Henry U. Kong Chung, of Hong Kong, China, earned a Bachelor of Science degree in chemical engineering. Also, in 1925 three Chinese students earned master’s degrees from the University of Maine. Tao Yuan Tang, who was from Peking, China, earned his degree in chemistry. He lived at the Bangor Y. M. C. A. while studying there. He had earned his bachelor’s degree at the University of Wisconsin in 1923. Pao Chen Liu was from Canton, China, and had earned his bachelor’s degree at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1923. He earned a master’s degree in chemical engineering at the University of Maine. He lived in Stillwater while studying there. Pei Yeung Chan, of Wu Chow, China, had earned his bachelor’s degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1923 before coming to Orono and earning his master’s degree in chemical engineering degree in 1924. He also lived in Stillwater.

Ching-yuin Hsu, who was born in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, China, October 6, 1922, graduated from the University of Nanking (which was then temporarily relocated to Chengdu, China, due to World War II) with a Bachelor of Science degree in chemical engineering in 1945. Each year, at that time, the United States government provide scholarship aid to graduates of Nanking University so that they could do graduate work in the United States. Mr. Hsu won one of those scholarships and came to attend the University of Maine in August, 1948, to pursue a Master of Science degree in chemical engineering with a concentration in pulp and paper technology. In an oral history interview, he said that he decided to come to Maine because it was one of three centers of paper industry in the United States and that “A lot of paper mills in China had people who were trained in Maine.”

He said that he had not experienced racial discrimination here and even said that during the spring vacation in 1949 the parents of one of his fellow students invited him to stay with them at their home in Bar Harbor which he found to be very beautiful. He also enjoyed eating lobster during his stay there. According to him, the University’s cafeteria served one or two “Chinese”

dishes, usually including chop suey, every week.

He said that there were two or three other Chinese graduate students in his dorm. He noted that there weren't many Chinese people in the Bangor area although he said that there were two families, one of which ran a small grocery store.

After earning his M. S. degree, he accepted a job in Taiwan at the Long Do paper mill where he eventually became a manager. When he retired, he returned to his home town of Wuxi, China.

University of Maine School of Law

Yil Cuing Chien, was the first Chinese student to matriculate at Bates College in 1909. He then attended the University of Maine School of Law beginning in 1910 until he graduated in 1913. The 1913 issue of "The Prism," the University of Maine yearbook, said that he was nicknamed "Doc," and that "he came into the limelight as a medical expert at a mock trial and made further claim to fame by his heroic conduct as a member of a militia at the time of the Bangor fire" of 1913. By 1915, he had returned to his hometown of Changchow, China.

Bates College

Yih Cuing Chien, who was mentioned just above, was born in Changchow, China, October 29, 1888. He was the first Chinese student to matriculate at Bates College in 1909. He only stayed through the 1909-1910 academic year and then attended the University of Maine School of Law from 1910 to 1913. By 1915 he had returned to his home town.

Carl Chang-Tse Teso, who was born in Wuchang, China, January 26, 1888, became Bates College's first Chinese graduate as a member of the Class of 1919. Prior to entering Bates in October, 1918, he had graduated from Boone University in Wuchang, China. His entry in the Bates yearbook described him as industrious, steady, cheerful and courteous. He was also a Bates Chapel attendant.

George Taing Tse Yeh, born October 12, 1904, in Canton, China, attended Bates during the 1921-1922 academic year.

Reginald Q. Wong may have been the first Chinese American to attend a Maine college when he matriculated at Bates for the 1926-1927 school year. He was born in China and immigrated to America about 1918. He lived in Boston and graduated from Boston English High School. He later attended Wentworth Institute. He died in Boston in 1956 where many of his family still live.

Kam Tok Chung was born in Canton, China, June 7, 1905. He graduated from Canton Christian College in 1923. While at Bates he was a member of the tennis team as a junior and senior. He was also a skillful ping pong and bridge player. He drove a Mercer automobile which his Bates yearbook entry described as "capacious as Noah's Ark." He graduated from Bates College in 1927. He was employed by Berlin Wall Paper Co., Shanghai, China, from 1928 to 1929.

Laap-Pan Chan was born in Hong Kong December 25, 1907. He graduated from Canton Christian College in 1925. His nickname was "Roby." He belonged to the Outing Club and the Y.M.C.A. as a senior. He graduated from Bates College in 1929. In 1931 he was a student at Columbia University in New York City.

Bowdoin College

The first Chinese student to attend Bowdoin College was Huan Shang Tang, of Canton, China, who matriculated in the fall of 1916. He was one of fifty students sent to study in the United States that year. Although he had been in this country for less than a month, he had arrived at the height of the election season. Even though both the Republicans and Democrats campaigned for his support, he chose to support the Socialists. He joined the Bowdoin Club upon his arrival on campus. In 1918, Tang was required to register for the draft preceding America's entry into World War I. His yearbook inscription suggested that he had assimilated at least one aspect of American culture: "Kuan (sic) has been greatly captivated by our American young ladies, and in spite of his modest, bashful appearance has managed to get away with a whole lot during his brief sojourn with us."

The next Chinese student to study at Bowdoin was Ch'en Pe'ng Chin a native of Hankow. He was described as a brilliant tennis player and was the first Chinese student to win an athletic letter at Bowdoin. He joined Delta Upsilon Fraternity. He roomed with Huan Shang Tang in Appleton Hall and also registered for the World War I draft.

William Tsah-Ming Kwouk spent the 1921-1922 academic year at Bowdoin. He was born in Kwangtung, China, September 15, 1902, and came to America as a high school student doing his college preparatory work at Riverdale Country Day School in Riverdale-on-Hudson, New York. He graduated from Cornell University in 1926 with a Bachelor of Chemistry degree. In 1949 he was a chemical engineer in Shanghai, China. His son, Herbert Tun-Tse Kwouk, participated in the so-called "Bowdoin Plan," which the college initiated in 1947. The Bowdoin Plan offered scholarships to foreign students selected by Bowdoin's fraternities which provided room and board for those students. He belonged to the Beta Theta Pi fraternity and graduated from Bowdoin in 1953.

Arthur Tsu-Kuang Linn attended Harvard before spending a year as a member of Bowdoin's Class of 1922. He was a member of Alpha Delta Phi Fraternity.

Chi-Hai Fong, was the son of a Chinese foreign service officer who did his college preparatory work at the American High School of Mexico City. His wife's father, Chi Ling Hsuing, was Prime Minister of China during World War I. Although he was a member of Delta Upsilon Fraternity, the Fongs lived off campus in a small McKean Street apartment furnished with fine Chinese decorations. Their baby daughter, named Kien Mae Fong, was born in Brunswick in April, 1925. He specialized in languages, majoring in German and studying French, Greek, Spanish, and Italian. His fluent English allowed him to excel in debate. He was one of four students selected to deliver addresses on Commencement Day in 1927

Quincy Queen Shan Sheh, of Tientsin, China, also graduated in the Bowdoin Class of

1927. He participated in cross country and track. He was a member of the Quill Board from his freshman through his junior years. He returned to China and spent a long career teaching English at several Chinese universities.

Colby College

Vi Tsu Sun, a native of Shanghai who did his preparatory work at Wayland Academy in Hangchow, China, a religious school founded by W. S. Sweet, a Baptist missionary from America, was Colby College's first Chinese student. He only spent two years at Colby graduating in 1920. While there, he was a member of Pi Delta Phi fraternity and won the Hallowell Prize Speaking Contest. Pi Delta Phi was founded at Colby in 1917 to give the large number of non-fraternity men the privileges of fraternity life. His entry in the Oracle yearbook read: "A's are the only mark that will satisfy his ambition."

He was closely followed by Tun Fu Dzen and Chin Foh Song who both graduated in 1921. Mr. Dzen, called "Tunnie," also did his preparatory work at Wayland Academy in Hangchow, China. He was a member of the debating society. His entry in the Oracle said: "Next year the College will seem gloomy without your ever-bright smile."

Mr. Song as born March 9, 1897, at Hangchow. He was also a graduate of Wayland Academy in 1916. He was a devout Baptist and was active in the Y.M.C.A. serving on its publicity committee. He was a member of Pi Delta Phi fraternity. He played on the class basketball team and in the band. While at Colby he registered for the World War I draft. His Oracle entry noted that "We all admire the courage and ambition of this lad coming to us from the Far East to get an education." After graduating from Colby, he attended the Springfield, Massachusetts, Y.M.C.A. College and then returned to Hangchow taking a position teaching physical education at Wayland Academy. During the Chinese civil war in October, 1926, he defended the Academy from looters retreating from a battlefield. He also saved a prisoner of war from an angry mob and took him to a hospital. He became a trusted assistant to missionary Edward Hyers Clayton and frequently appears in Clayton's autobiography Heaven Below. He was a liaison between American missionaries and the local population. He was a four-time member of China's Olympic basketball team.

Arthur Robinson, a 1906 Colby College graduate who taught at a mission school in China, sent two men, Li Fu Chi and Li Su, from Tientsin to Colby in 1923. They arrived, unexpected, in the November snow wearing Chinese clothing and cloth sandals. President Roberts provided them with clothing appropriate for a Maine winter, found them a place to stay, and provided them some cash. Li Fu Chi contracted tuberculosis within weeks of arriving at Colby and had to be confined to the sanitarium in Fairfield at Colby's expense. He died in August, 1925. His funeral was held at President Roberts' home on August 20, 1925. He was buried in the college plot at the Pine Grove Cemetery in Waterville.

Li Su, a/k/a Su Jan Lee, did his preparatory work at Tientsin Anglo-China College and Peking College of Commerce and Finance. His uncle, Yuan Shih-k'ai, was President of China. He was given credit for his prior education in China and only spent three semesters at Colby before graduating with an economics degree in 1924. His entry in the Oracle yearbook said: "Su came to us from China as a Christmas present." He earned a master's degree from Clark University in 1925 and an LL.D. degree from Sinkiang University in 1946. He returned to China where he became Educational Secretary and then Director of the Peking Y.M.C.A. He was Dean and a professor at the Peking College of Commerce and Finance from 1926 to 1928, then Dean and professor of the National Customs College from 1928 to 1930. He left academia becoming a Certified Public Accountant, entering the banking field in 1930. He became a confidant of Chiang Kai-shek. Following the Communist victory in 1949 he returned to the United States and worked at the Bank of China in New York City. He became an American citizen. In 1953 he spent some time as a guest of Colby giving lectures at the college and in the surrounding towns. He also spoke at the annual banquet of the Maine Savings and Loan League. He then moved to Seattle, Washington. In 1959 he and his wife, who was a ceramicist and painter, established an Academy of Oriental Arts in Seattle, Washington. He left banking and earned a PhD in sociology and certification as a psychiatric sociologist. He took a job as a counselor to the inmates at the Washington State Reformatory at Monroe. He gave a collection of 544 hand stitched Chinese books to Colby, including forty books of block prints, nine books of calligraphy, and one manuscript that ranged from the Ming, Ching, and Republic periods sometime after his graduation in 1924. He later gave a set of four Imperial tze-tan lanterns with Chienlung decorations to Colby where they were placed in the Roberts Memorial Union. Those lanterns were later moved to the East Asian Studies Department. In 1962 he wrote The Fine Art of Chinese Cooking.

Gong Shu Chin came to Colby in the early 1940s. Unlike the earlier Chinese students who excelled academically, Gong was given repeated warnings to raise his grades during his only year at Colby. He was unable to do so, perhaps in part due to mental illness, and was expelled.

John Lee, who graduated in 1953, was the only Chinese student to graduate during the 1950s.

Westbrook Junior College

Westbrook Junior College, located in Portland, began as Westbrook Seminary in 1831. It ceased being co-educational in 1925 and, as an all-female institution, changed its name to Westbrook Junior College in 1933. It became Westbrook College again a co-educational institution, in 1970. Finally, it merged into the University of New England in 1996.

During its Westbrook Junior College days, it graduated two local Chinese American students. The first was Josephine Goon, a daughter of the late Dogan Goon and his wife, Toy Len Goon. That family owned a family hand laundry in Woodfords Corner only a few miles from the college's campus. She graduated with an Associate of Art's degree in business. While there she worked in the library and bursar's office.

Maryland Tuck Wong, whose family-owned Portland's Oriental Restaurant, graduated from Westbrook Junior College the next year in 1951 with an Associate of Art's degree in Journalism. Perhaps because of her family's finances, Maryland was much more involved in college activities than Josephine Goon. She acquired the nickname "Bub," was a cartoonist for the campus newspaper, and a staff artist for the college yearbook both years. She was also a member of the science club and participated in the badminton tournament and softball both years. During her first year she made the Dean's List, participated in the Masque and Candle, the Spanish Club, and the field hockey team. She also participated in the May Festival pageant. During her second year she played house volleyball.

Early Public High School Students

In addition to these college and university students, at least two students who registered for the World War I draft appeared to be public school students. On Yee Long was an eighteen-year-old student at Lewiston's Dingley School. He lived with Yee Chin Hing, a laundryman, at 18 Lisbon Street, Lewiston. Chin Hor Yee was a 20-year-old student in Portland.