

Normalization Brings First Exchange of U.S. and Mainland Chinese Scholars



Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences, with Chinese guests.

Photos by Eric Poggenpohl



Chinese meet Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D.-Mass.), who visited China last year.



Less than three weeks after the historic New Year's Day resumption of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China, the first Chinese to visit this country and the first Americans to go there under official auspices met at a reception at the National Academy of Sciences. The gathering had its own mini-historic value, for only then would the two groups—of which the Chinese are but the first wave of a planned Western influx of 10,000—meet under one roof.

But the party also illustrated the asymmetry of each side's contribution to the exchange: the Americans were mostly students in their twenties, studying Chinese history, art, politics, and the like. The Chinese are older professionals, specializing in practical technical subjects such as polymer chemistry and oil extraction technology.

A permanent science and technology agreement is expected to be unveiled at the upcoming summit in Washington. It is expected to establish a joint commission, co-chaired by the chief science official of each country, which will serve as an umbrella group for administering the student exchanges and the programs of cooperation in agriculture and space.

One concern in U.S. inner circles, however, is whether the Soviets will take umbrage at the forthcoming Chinese accords. For one thing, Chinese visitors stand a better chance of being allowed to visit U.S. laboratories and campuses where no Soviet visitor has been allowed, due to the long-standing U.S.-Soviet game of denying each other's scientists permission to travel to specific places on a tit-for-tat, individual basis. "The Chinese seem much more relaxed and pragmatic than the Soviets," says one official. "I don't think we'll be playing those games with them."

—D.S.

