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Chinese Tax Officials Spending Year In Sacramento



Aired 11/26/2007 on Morning Edition

(Sacramento, CA)

Students from China are nothing new at the university. But what makes this group different is its large size: 18 men and women...and length of stay: one full year.

They're learning more than just American accounting. They're also getting a first hand look at American culture.

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Sacramento State Professor Kent Meyer is teaching an international accounting class to about 15 Chinese students. He starts out with a discussion of current events.

Meyer: "Any news...anything going on in the world? Yes."

Student: "I have news about Toyota. It's overseas sales drove quarterly profits up 11%."

Students bring up stories about how a fuel efficient car maker is benefiting from soaring gas prices and how gold is a safe haven in a time of uncertainty.

Student: "The price of gold futures has reached a high level."

A little bit later, the class gets into more cerebral ideas covered in their textbook – comparing international accounting standards with domestic principles.

Meyer: "For those of you that read it, do you agree it's a little difficult to understand sometimes? Why don't you take a short break."

Professor Meyer says the class is covering complex material...and these are students who've only been speaking English for a few years.

"Challenges? One of the biggest ones is language. Accounting concepts are not that difficult but when you get down to the actual implementation, they don't have the background in the technical language."

All of the students are in their 20s and 30s. They're professionals who work for the Hubei Province Local Taxation Bureau in Central China. Jenny Luo is one of them. She's casually dressed in jeans and a polo shirt. She says China is opening up more to Western businesses. That's why her government sent her here.

"I think you may see more foreigners working on the street in our city than before. I mean a lot of foreign companies come to China and invest in our city. So we need both language and business rules."

Luo says they're also learning things not in a textbook...like how to socialize with Americans.

"In China, seldom there are strangers say 'hello' to me. But in America, usually you meet strangers in the street they will say 'hello' to you. Maybe the Chinese people seem not so open. Maybe it's because of our culture I think."

Meng Yaning is another student. He's worked for the taxation bureau for 10 years.

"Actually, it's my first time going abroad...a very nice experience."

Yaning says Sacramento has more trees and less people than Hubei Province.

"You know in China there are very many people in the streets but here it's more peaceful. I like the fresh air and the big trees."

Meng and the other Hubei students are living in newly constructed lofts close to Sac State. The building is also home to American students. As a way to break the ice, the Hubei students threw a mid-autumn Chinese festival and made food for the whole building. Their American neighbors returned the favor.

"They had discovered brownies with walnuts and they just thought that was the coolest thing in the world."

Bernadette Halbrook is with Sac State's College of Continuing Education. Halbrook spent a week in South Central China last summer. She says the students are coming from an area that's rapidly changing.

"You still see people on bicycles carrying all their goods with them. But right next to it you've got Toyota Camrys zooming by. It is a combination of the old China still hanging on but very rapid growth."

Something else that's changing – China's willingness to let its citizens come to the U-S and be exposed to Western styles of conducting business.

A group of accountants and tax collectors from China are in Sacramento to learn about the US tax system. They're taking classes at Sacramento State.

By:

[Steve Milne](#)



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Although, Halbrook says, before Chinese officials granted the visas, the students had to vow their commitment to Hubei province and promise they would return to China after finishing their studies.

At Sac State, it's not uncommon to see an occasional protest rally aimed at China's controversial human rights policies. The Hubei students were recently invited to such an event. Halbrook says she spoke with the rally organizers.

"I had to be very clear – these students are here to study. They are not here as official representatives of their government and I would not want them to be put in a situation where they had to answer any questions about government policy."

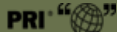
But Fei Wang, another Chinese student, says her conversations with American students have been respectful.

"They have many curious questions about China and I'm very glad to tell them about something I know, good or bad it doesn't matter because they will understand that whatever will exist in the world, it's the same situation."

Wang says she misses her family and friends back in China. But a little homesickness isn't so bad she says...considering this is a rare opportunity to study in the US. She says it's been a great experience living in Sacramento but she has a nagging question about local nightlife.

"We are curious about what American people doing in evening (laughs) because we don't see many people outside. Maybe they are staying at home. You can see people everywhere in China at anytime (laughs)."

Over the Thanksgiving break, half of the students will celebrate the holiday with American hosts the other half will go to Disneyland. The students go back to China in July.



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