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Academic bridge to China planned

By JAMES SUN

A leading university in America has decided to set up an institute of Chinese studies with a focus on Hongkong experience.

An office is planned in Hongkong, possibly at the Chinese University, to attract Chinese scholars and provide a bridge to American scholarly communities.

Plans include inviting academic and civic leaders in Hongkong to set up an advisory board for the institute to ensure those with experience of Hongkong are given a voice in determining the future direction of the studies.

The plan was recently disclosed by a team of two scholars from the University of Pittsburgh, who have been in Hongkong planning for the establishment of the institute.

The Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), with its headquarters at the university in Pennsylvania, is hoped to be founded within the next year, provided it is supported by China and Hongkong universities.

In an interview with the SCM Post, the Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, Dr Wesley W. Posvar, said Hongkong has been selected as a primary focus of research for China studies because it could provide a good wealth of knowledge about the transformations that affect Chinese culture.

Hongkong is seen as a significant source of information about how the transformation process has been taking place in China with the move from the cultural revolution to its open policy of



Dr Holzner

four modernisation programmes, he added.

The chancellor said, the ICS will be an "interactive" institute where American, Chinese, and Hongkong scholars and practitioners would work together and benefit each other.

It aims to provide a useful basis for thoughtful discussion on many issues arising as China and Hongkong face the future.

A primary goal would be to understand the rationale behind major policy decisions in the realm of economic, population and education policies, and to analyse their outcome and consequences.

An office at Hongkong's



Dr Posvar

Chinese University could coordinate local research activities.

Dr Posvar said the ICS, to be set up in the framework of its University Centre for International Studies (UCIS), would be a focal point for the interaction of scholars from America, China and Hongkong.

It would be a neutral place for the co-operation of scholars and expert practitioners concerned with the future of China and dedicated to the study of the transformation of Chinese society and culture, he said.

The universities have been holding talks with universities in China over the

issue and have so far received overwhelming support.

The director of the UCIS, Dr Burkart Holzner, said Pittsburgh will be the first to study China with a primary focus from Hongkong experience, although there are a handful of outstanding institutes of Chinese studies located in major universities.

However, the others have an American approach and are usually composed of only American-based scholars.

Only a small number of Chinese and Hongkong academics are invited so that their influence is thereby diluted.

Pittsburgh is qualified to start the ambitious project because the university has for many years maintained close relations with Chinese institutes.

It now has formal exchange agreements with 17 universities in China, as well as relations with several research institutes in Taiwan.

About 200 students from China are now studying at Pittsburgh.

Meanwhile, in China, the university is presently co-operating in a programme of instruction and research with the Sociology and Anthology Departments of Zhongshan University in Guangzhou.

It also administers a co-operation scheme in the field of Library and Information Science with Shanghai Jiaotong University.

Joint projects are also in progress with many Chinese institutions such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Wuhan Municipal Government, and several universities.