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## Report from China, Illinois Wesleyan Math Professor Visits Homeland; Reports Sweeping Changes in the People's Republic of China

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Report from China

## **Illinois Wesleyan Math Professor Visits Homeland; Reports Sweeping Changes in the People's Republic of China**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--"The economy has changed very fast. I couldn't recognize some of the cities."

That's the conclusion of Tian-Xiao He, associate professor of mathematics at Illinois Wesleyan University, after visiting his homeland, the People's Republic of China (PRC), last summer for the first time in a decade.

He was in the PRC from late May to the end of July, visiting about 10 universities and an eclectic group of cities, ranging from Beijing, the political capital, to Shanghai, a great international trade center, to Hefei and Dalian, where he attended university.

When He last visited the PRC, it was taking tentative first steps in a sweeping economic overhaul, encouraging capitalism and entrepreneurship rather than a sluggish Soviet-style centrally planned economy. The driving force behind the PRC's fast-track economic growth was Chinese Communist Party leader Deng Xiao-ping, who died earlier this year at age 92.

"The Chinese economy looks more like capitalism," He said. "There are some companies and individual owners and a stock market. China looks like it's in the initial stages of capitalism. China and the West, economically, are getting closer."

He added: "There is much more freedom than 10 years ago and the middle class is developing, but it will take a long time. That's progress."

For example, China's gross domestic product routinely has grown at more than 10 percent annually, and agricultural output doubled in the 1980s, amazing statistics considering the Chinese economy supports a population of 1.2 billion.

He's alma maters--Hefei University of Technology and Dalian University of Technology--initially invited him to visit the PRC. As word spread of his visit, He was invited to other campuses.

He ended up delivering 16 lectures, including one at the Academy of

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Science's Central Institute of Mathematics, a national organization in Beijing. Lecture topics included He's research in fields like wavelet analysis, approximation theory, and computer-aided geometric design; trends in mathematical research outside of the PRC; and the U.S. higher education system.

"Some days were 12 hours long," He said, "and I spoke for six hours. I answered a lot of questions and saw a lot of visitors. Some days I ate at two banquets--lunch and supper."

He is a famous mathematician in China, where he published five books and 30 papers. Since coming to the United States, He has published 30 more papers.

"People still remember that I was the first Ph.D. student in approximation theory in China," He said. "Many people remember me and that surprises me."

During his visit to the PRC, Hefei and Dalian honored He with the honorific position of Guest Chair Professor. Dalian has conferred this honor on only four other scholars, including mathematicians at Harvard and the University of Tokyo. In recognition of this honor, He hopes in the future to lecture at these campuses and help direct doctoral students with their theses, as well as participate in international conferences.

The higher education systems in China and the United States differ greatly, according to He.

"Education is lecture centered in China," He explained. "We don't have as many discussions in class and students don't work on many projects. Students have few opportunities to work off campus. Chinese students after graduation often find they don't have a bridge from college to society."

He is a teacher very much in the "Mr. Chips" mold.

"I want to help students open their minds--get a brainstorm and address problems. What's most important is how you teach students to study and how to raise questions--this is very important.

"You must teach students how to 'fish,'" He explained, "rather than 'fishing' for them."

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