

Visiting chemist decries Chinese revolution's toll

By JOHN JENKS
Daily Texan Staff

China's Cultural Revolution that lasted from 1966 until Mao tse-Tung's death in 1976 destroyed the scientific and educational institutions of the country and has severely hampered China's ongoing drive for modernization, Professor Chou Kuo-Chen, a visiting Chinese chemist, said Thursday.

At the onset of the Cultural Revolution radical elements within the Communist Party led by the "Gang of Four" attacked universities and research institutes for holding "bourgeois world views" instead of "proletarian attitudes."

"I don't know that much about their (the radicals') philosophies," Chou said. "But they said that the existing institutions were capitalist, feudalist and revisionist" and that these characteristics would have to be "rooted out."

As a result all higher education and research stopped until 1971. The institutions that did remain open were flooded with "working-class propaganda teams," chosen by factory workers and peasants. Chou said these teams "did nothing but criticize the institutions and argue politics eight hours a day."

During this time most professors, researchers and other intellectuals were sent to rural communes or factories to be "re-educated" by the peasants and workers. The results of this policy, Chou said, were disastrous.

However, in 1971 a power shift modified the radical policies enough to permit some research in applied science and some academic testing. But the effects of five years of neglected education were hard to overcome.

Chou illustrated some of the problems with the story of "The Hero of the Blank Examination Paper."

A student was given an exam but couldn't answer any of the questions so he left it blank. On the other side of the paper he explained that since he was working "night and day" at a rural commune, he didn't have time to study. The local radicals interpreted this as an attack on the educational institute, proclaimed the man a hero and gave him a high-level national post.

With the death of Mao in 1976 and the subsequent fall of the Gang of Four, education and scientific progress once again became the high priority they were before the Cultural Revolution, Chou said.

"The present authorities know that to realize full modernization the country must educate the people," he added.

The authorities restored academic standards, order and professorial control in the universities. They gave a nationwide examination for university admission and abolished the previously required political recommendation from re-education committees.

Chou, who is a member of the Chinese Academy of Science, is a visiting professor at Cornell University for a year. The Center for Asian Studies and the Department of Chemistry are sponsoring his speaking trip to Austin.

He will speak 2 p.m. Friday at Welch Hall 2.122 about science in China before, during and after the Cultural Revolution.