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Chinese president's visit historic

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NEW HAVEN — Today's historic visit by President Hu Jintao of China to Yale University on the final leg of his four-day trip to the United States will build closer ties between the university, the city, and two of the world's great economic powers, experts say.

However, many will be watching to see if Hu's gracious words will be followed by actions that show an interest in political freedom for his 1.3 billion people.

Yale scholars hope that the visit will foster a relationship beyond the economic ties.

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"China's economy is the among the most open in the world right now. But I'd like to see more openness politically and legally. I'd like to see more free speech," said Zhiwu Chen, a finance professor at the Yale School of Management from Hunan, China. Chen said he has been encouraged because some of his writings critical of China have been printed in the Chinese newspapers and magazines with no government reprisals against the publications.

American business has made peace with China's politics because of the tremendous economic force the single-party country exerts.

"China today, in terms of economics, is clearly a superpower," said Don Klepper-Smith, chief economist for DataCore Partners in New Haven. "China's economy is growing three times faster than the U.S. economy and the goods we purchase from China keep us afloat."

China may have enormous economic significance, but Chen disagrees that China has reached superpower status.

Although China has the world's second largest economy after the United States based on purchasing power, and a gross domestic product of \$1.8 trillion in 2005, one-tenth of the Chinese face poverty and 150 million Chinese fall below international poverty levels.

China has also made little progress in developing an independent legal and judicial system, critics say, and many see the China's current crackdown on press freedoms as a step backward.

But Yale, acting in the same spirit in which it enrolled a Taliban member in hopes that kindness, education and

enlightenment could change his hardline views, is trying to do the same kind of outreach with China.

The ties between Yale and China go back more than a century. Three of the first four presidents of Tsinghua University, Hu Jintao's alma mater, graduated from Yale.

There are more than 600 Chinese nationals at Yale, including 300 students and 336 scholars. They make up the largest foreign group at Yale.

China, for its part, has given Yale the privilege of becoming the first foreign university permitted to buy securities in the Chinese market.

Harvard University had the distinction of being the first American university to play host to a Chinese president, Hu's predecessor Jiang Zemin, in 1997.

Hu's visit will put Yale in the same spotlight throughout Asia. About 100 journalists will be on hand to hear him speak at Yale's Sprague Hall today — about one-sixth of the invitation-only audience — university officials said.

Hundreds of journalists or more will join protesters, well-wishers and curious bystanders filling downtown for a glimpse of the historic occasion.

Falun Gong practitioners will also be on hand by the hundreds to protest the black market for human organs in China — organs they claim are harvested from executed prisoners, including those imprisoned for their spiritual beliefs, such as Falun Gong.

"Hu Jintao is a suave and personable politician, but he is also one of the most ruthless Chinese leaders," said Usha Haley, a finance professor at the University of New Haven and author of several books on Chinese business. She notes that the U.S. State Department last year reported human rights abuses in China have escalated to the highest levels ever under Hu.

The Yale Falun Gong Club gathered 2,400 signatures on petitions that ask Yale President Richard C. Levin to address the human rights issue with Hu.

and to ask Hu to open China's labor camps to independent international investigations.

Some China scholars believe it unlikely that Hu will agree.

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