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THE CHANCELLOR'S BIG TEST CAN CHANG-LIN TIEN ACHIEVE WHAT HE CALLS 'EXCELLENCE THROUGH DIVERSITY' AT THE FRACTIOUS UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY?

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At the start of the third week of Operation Desert Storm, an anti-war teach-out dominated Sproul Plaza, near the main gate of the University of California at Berkeley. Chang-Lin Tien used the occasion to work the place like a maitre d' -- shaking hands, chatting and mingling with students, sharing felicitations on the basketball team's recent upset of national powerhouse Arizona.

Since he became Berkeley's seventh chancellor last July, part of Tien's stated mission has been to make his intimidating campus seem friendlier and less bureaucratic, and at 5 feet, 6 inches tall, with horn-rimmed glasses, a youthful cowlick and a hearty Kiwanis Club guffaw, he plays the part well. On this day he wore a dark business suit with a tie decked in the Cal colors of blue and gold, but when the occasion demands it, he can promote old-fashioned school spirit with a self-consciousness bordering on corn pone. During freshman orientation week last summer, donning a Cal Bears sweatshirt and manning an information booth, Tien could have been mistaken for an amiable postdoctoral student with a part-time job in the office of the dean for student life, rather than the \$165,100-a-year chief of the world's premier public institution of higher learning.

For another generation of students, Sproul Plaza is sacred ground -- the spot where Mario Savio launched the Free Speech Movement in 1964, the touchstone of contemporary campus protest. But whether because hostilities broke out during the semester break, when most students were away, or because this time there was no draft, or simply because the war enjoyed broad public support, the Gulf conflict failed to galvanize Cal's 22,000 undergraduates, 9,000 graduate students and 1,700 faculty members at anything approaching Vietnam-era levels. This teach-out, consisting of a series of simultaneous discussion circles, followed by a general rally and march, attracted a hardcore crowd in the hundreds; for most of the rest, bustling to and from the classes that Chancellor Tien refused to suspend, it was a curiosity, differing little from the parade of soapbox orators, performance artists and pamphleteers for religious cults that punctuates the campus' daily rhythms.

Tien's own take on the unexpected calm at Berkeley was characteristically breezy and upbeat. "I'm the new chancellor," he joked to one group of students, "so I guess I'll claim all the credit for creating a new atmosphere." On a more serious note, he said, "I'm pleased that we've had many forums and discussions and so on, but also that everything has been very constructive, very positive, very civil."

By the time the first speaker took the podium at the main rally, the chancellor had already hiked to the Faculty Club for a lunch date with the Japanese consul general; that official was bearing a message from Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu, with whom Tien had an audience last November in Tokyo. Next up: a fence-mending meeting with black community leaders and clergy, who were still upset with Tien -- the first Asian American, and indeed the first person of color, to head a major research university in this country -- over his decision to send the Cal football team to the Copper Bowl in Tucson on New Year's Eve, the month after Arizona voters rejected a state holiday in honor of Martin Luther King's birthday.

That evening, having disposed of the last piece of paper on the immaculate oak desktop in his seventh-floor office overlooking the western edge of the campus, Tien decided to drop in on the student government senate on his way home (and before his daily drive through the south campus area to inspect the progress of clean-up efforts at People's Park).

During a half-hour question-and-answer session, it was apparent that uppermost on the minds of student leaders was not the Gulf crisis but the current state budget crunch, which had already mandated across-the-board program cutbacks at Cal this year and will force an unprecedented 40 percent tuition hike next year.

Asked later if he had staked out a position on the war, the Chinese-born, Taiwanese-educated Tien -- whose English is serviceable, if somewhat spare and epigrammatic -- demurred. "I don't want to get into that," he said. "There are many aspects. It's not black and white ..."

The same could be said of his university and his state. Sometime around the turn of the century, a mere 40 years after four out of five of its residents were white, California will become the first state on the mainland without a racial majority. This demographic earthquake is largely attributable to the influx of Asians -- predominantly of Chinese background, but also including Japanese, Koreans, Indochinese, Filipinos, Polynesians, Iranians, Indians and others.

A parallel and perhaps even more rapid transformation is taking place at Chang-Lin Tien's Berkeley, where the cyclotron was developed, the human polio virus was isolated and the world's largest collection of Mark Twain materials resides. Alone among the nation's citadels of elite learning, Cal -- which operates under a vague legislative mandate to make the ethnic composition of its student body reflect that of the state at large -- is no longer a predominantly white institution. As recently as 1981, the percentage of whites in Berkeley's fall freshman class stood at 60 percent. But whites now comprise a mere 34

percent of incoming freshmen; Asians, 31 percent; Hispanics, 21 percent; and African Americans, 7 percent. (The latter is a declining figure that alarms black leaders and others, especially since high dropout rates really mean that fewer than 3 percent of Berkeley graduates are black.)

Among the major challenges for the new chancellor, whose official inauguration was held on March 22, are expansion of an aging physical plant on campus and the struggle to alleviate urban crime and homelessness off campus, all within the constraints of historic budget cuts. Governor Pete Wilson has already projected a state budget shortfall of \$10 billion, and the UC system, which was originally earmarked for \$295 million in cuts (about a fifth of which would be accounted for on the Berkeley campus), now faces even more severe sacrifices.

But the issue certain to be the barometer of Tien's success will be his effectiveness at brokering the often conflicting claims of California's array of racial groups. "If the 21st century is going to work anywhere, it will have to work here," says Sally Fairfax, a Cal professor of forestry who formerly coordinated the university's compliance with the Federal Title IX regulations regarding civil rights for women.

The complexities of a multiracial campus were the subject of a recent survey directed by sociologist Troy Duster of Berkeley's Institute for the Study of Social Change. Duster concluded that, although university life has been made more vibrant by the undergraduate student body's metamorphosis from a lily to a rainbow, the campus needs novel approaches to discourage students from "balkanizing" into ethnic enclaves, which perpetuate gaps of language and background.

One obvious target is the comparatively homogeneous Cal faculty, still 89 percent white and 84 percent male, with a mean age during the 1980s that rose from 45 to 49. University faculties are generally self-reproducing, and Berkeley's, with its tradition of strong participation in university governance, is especially so. But thanks to a large number of pending retirements, professorates will turn over by nearly half during the 1990s, offering Tien a margin to reallocate resources in ways that foster diversity. The first key test here will be his review later this spring of the annual recommendations on the disposition of tenure cases, submitted by the Academic Senate's powerful Committee on Budget and Interdepartmental Relations.

The course of the Tien administration will also influence the national debate on the future of affirmative action, which was fueled late last year by contradictory rulings by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights on the legality of scholarships based on racial preferences. At Berkeley, that debate long ago moved from abstraction to confrontation. Prodded by Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher of Long Beach, who represents a district with large conservative and Asian constituencies, the department is investigating charges of anti-Asian bias in Berkeley's undergraduate and law school admissions.

And last November, protesters invaded a classroom and interrupted a lecture by an anthropology professor who propounds unorthodox racial theories and is a strident critic of Cal's diversity policies. Tien, however, seems to have survived the often volatile spring semester without the more conventional protests that marked the last months of his predecessor, Chancellor Ira Michael Heyman: the occupation of two administration buildings for parts of two days last March, and the first wide-scale strikes of classes in 21 years last April.

Among the patrons of Berkeley's legendary coffeehouses, a favorite parlor game these days is sifting Tien's lean early statements in an effort to glean just how aggressively he intends to extend to the graduate student and faculty levels Heyman's affirmative action record on undergraduate admissions. So far Tien has chosen to concentrate on redrawing administrative flow charts, keeping a clean desk and demonstrating a commitment to staying in touch through continued supervision of a lab of grad students and through occasional guest lectures to undergrads. Despite an unfavorable student-to-faculty ratio of 17.6 to 1 (at most Ivy League universities, it hovers around 8 to 1), he vows to make the improvement of the undergraduate experience a priority.

Tien's most visible displays, like his full-throated presence at Memorial Stadium and Harmon Gym athletic events, seem dedicated to pacifying nervous constituents of the California moneyed establishment. (Tien himself, who comes from a prominent Chinese banking family, is now on the board of directors of the parent company of Wells Fargo Bank.) Dealing almost exclusively in symbols, he has scrambled images of his office -- cultural, geographical and intellectual -- that have accrued throughout Berkeley's 123-year history, while keeping his options open.

In 30 years as a faculty member, department chairman and vice-chancellor, Tien earned liberal bona fides: He mentored the first female professor in Cal's mechanical engineering department and was the first administrator to endorse the American Cultures requirement (a curriculum reform, designed to expose students to a variety of ethnic perspectives, that is scheduled to take effect this fall). Yet today the reviews from the same quarters are quietly critical.

Deep within Tien the sports nut and Tien the indefatigable hand-shaker, some fear, beats the heart of a calculating technocrat -- someone who cites as one of his proudest moments an order last fall, in response to student sentiment, to turn the fountain back on in Sproul Plaza and find water savings elsewhere. For all his considerable personal charm, he refuses to meet with ad hoc student groups, insisting that they go through the channels of student government. The volcanic Heyman, a former New York lawyer, delighted in dispensing favors with the freewheeling paternalism of a ward boss; the cautious Tien, a renowned mechanical engineer, plays strictly by the book.

But others believe Tien has struck the right note, reversing a dangerous tendency of the contemporary academy to bend to the will of dogmatic, "politically correct" special interests. In this view, Berkeley needs efficiency and clearly defined hierarchies, as well as a communal spirit, and all are fostered by Tien's controlled management style. "You

get the feeling that the chancellor here now realizes he's running a university, not UNESCO," says political science professor Kenneth Jowitt.

Tien brings to the task a rich personal history, grounded in the serial saga of American race relations and packaged with resonant anecdotes. When he arrived in the United States as a graduate student at the University of Louisville in 1956, he likes to recall, he observed at close range the treatment of blacks in the Jim Crow South; riding once in the "Whites Only" section of a municipal bus, he was so disconcerted that he opted thereafter to walk 45 minutes from his apartment to campus. At the time of his move to Berkeley three years later, he points out, racial covenants would have prevented his purchasing the house he now occupies high in the hills near the Lawrence Hall of Science.

"I look at what happened and say we shouldn't tolerate any injustice," Tien says. "But in 30 years we've made tremendous progress. I'm very realistic in that sense. I've tried to push as hard as I can many of the affirmative actions, but at the same time I feel you have to be constructive, positive, or we are not doing the minorities a service."

Tien's signature slogan, "excellence through diversity," has mystified observers across the spectrum. Like other major American universities, Berkeley is engaged in a delicate balancing act in its admissions and hiring practices between conventional measures of quality (such as Scholastic Aptitude Test scores) and heterogeneity (defined along racial and ethnic lines). Opponents of what they call reverse discrimination believe the former should be controlling; on the whole, even advocates of affirmative action, while subscribing to a more fluid vision of excellence, acknowledge that in individual cases, trade-offs in quality are necessary to redress the historic underrepresentation of minorities and women.

But Tien insists that excellence-through-diversity doesn't merely split the difference between these warring factions. "When we open up the resources for minorities and women, you are creating a big pool," he explains. "So you actually can attract a lot of new talent into the widening pool.... I don't see in the future how you can reach the highest level of excellence without first tackling the diversity question. We have to educate the future leaders who will need the background to handle the multicultural and multiethnic world. Excellence and diversity are not mutually exclusive; they are extremely interdependent."

In the meantime, however, top schools like Berkeley must select most of their new faculty from a national Ph.D. pool that is less than 7 percent black and Hispanic.

The delicacy of the diminishing presence of blacks at Berkeley was highlighted last fall by the football team's appearance in the Copper Bowl. The politicization of a college football game was widely ridiculed by national commentators and even wound up playing poorly at Berkeley, which has a flair for immoderation. But the San Francisco chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People called for Tien's resignation. And the Campus-Community Council on African American Affairs, angry over the way the decision to play the game was clumsily sold to the public through

the statements of black football players -- who were in turn ostracized by other outraged black students -- issued a statement saying, "No one expected this type of duplicity from a Chang-Lin Tien administration."

After the controversy died down, I asked Tien if the Copper Bowl affair had caused him any personal anguish. His answer revealed the austere detachment that other administrators say is his essence. "Not really," he said evenly, then recapitulated the benefits to the athletic department of national television exposure, and the votes of the County of Pima in Arizona and the city of Tucson in favor of a King holiday. There was no time, he insisted, to consult widely or even to solicit the input of his top aides (both Daniel Boggan, the vice-chancellor for business and administrative services, and W. Russell Ellis, the vice-chancellor for undergraduate affairs, are black).

But if Tien's handling of the Copper Bowl was a political fumble, to use a sports metaphor, it was a rare one. A pan-Asian hero whose appointment last year made the front pages from Singapore to Seoul, he combines one-on-one skills with deftness as a storyteller, making him as comfortable in front of neighborhood groups in San Francisco's Chinatown (many of whose residents are recent immigrants from China who distrust the Taiwanese banking class) as he is rubbing elbows with CEOs in Silicon Valley (who share Tien's brimful confidence and upward mobility). The reverence toward scholars in the Chinese heritage, as well as the special relationship of Chinese immigrants with Cal (analogous to that of an earlier generation of Eastern European Jews with City College of New York), gives him an especially sanctified status in his own community.

"A naturalized citizen can't run for president of the United States," says Henry Der, the executive director of the San Francisco-based Chinese for Affirmative Action, himself a graduate of Cal's regional rival, Stanford. "But as far as a lot of Chinese Americans are concerned, chancellor of Berkeley is the next best thing."

Tien was born in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in 1935. His father, who studied physics at Beijing University and taught at a university in Wuhan, served as a finance commissioner at both the local and national levels in various incarnations of the Chiang Kai-shek regime. The Tiens were dislocated twice: first by the Japanese occupation during World War II, which forced the family to flee from Wuhan to Shanghai, and then by the Communist takeover after the war, which drove all high-ranking officials of the Kuomintang from the mainland to Taiwan.

At National Taiwan University, Tien was one of the thousands of progeny of Chiang loyalists who hewed to the American bootstrap model. Between classes, he consumed enough American popular culture to qualify as a Hollywood trivia buff; he also played semipro basketball and daydreamed of a career in the national Basketball Association. "But it didn't take an engineering genius to calculate that 5-foot-6 was not a prime number for an American basketball team," he says. "I like a challenge, but that was a little too much."

Ultimately, Tien became part of the "brain drain" of young scholars in the 1950s who left behind the intellectual repression of Taiwan for the comparative openness of the United States (a group that would also include Tien's future close friend at Berkeley, the Nobel Prize-winning chemist Yuan K. Lee). After earning his master's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Louisville and his Ph.D. from Princeton, he joined the Berkeley faculty at age 24, becoming a naturalized American citizen 10 years later. He and his wife, Di-Hwa, the daughter of a general in Chiang Kai-shek's army, have three children, all Berkeley graduates: Norman, a graduate student in microelectronics at UC San Diego; Phyllis, who is in medical school at UC San Diego; and Kristine, a graduate student at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

Tien's career path made him "always the most meteoric -- the youngest, the fastest, the quickest," in the words of the current chairman of Cal's mechanical engineering department, C.D. Mote Jr. An authority on thermal radiation and other aspects of heat transfer ("a good definition of my current job," he says dryly), Tien was the first person elected to the National Academy of Engineering, the highest recognition in the field, before his 41st birthday.

The crossroads of Tien's administrative career came in 1987 -- following a successful stint as vice-chancellor for research -- when Chancellor Heyman bypassed him for the high administrative post of provost of the professional schools. Tien confirms that he was bitter; friends add the tableau of a subsequent meeting with Heyman over drinks at the Faculty Club, in which Tien lectured him on the nature of anti-Asian discrimination at Berkeley.

But his failure to be named provost turned out to be a huge break, freeing him in 1988 to accept the executive vice-chancellorship at UC Irvine. Tien's experience in Orange County, the antithesis of what some have nicknamed "The People's Republic of Berkeley," broadened his scope, established him as a systemwide team player and brought him to the attention of UC President David Gardner, the one-time chairman of President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education.

When Heyman stepped down at Berkeley, Gardner -- whose conservative temperament has made him a favorite of the predominantly Republican Board of Regents -- selected Tien to succeed him, and the Regents ratified the choice in February of 1990. The president calls the new chancellor's access to the leaders of government and industry in both Chinas and throughout East Asia an "extra dividend" underscoring the importance of the Pacific Rim in the next stage of Cal's development.

An equally compelling qualification may have been Tien's ongoing role in mediating disputes between the Berkeley administration and the Asian American community over alleged quotas in freshman admissions. Currently, 32 percent of Asian American high school graduates in California qualify as "UC-eligible" by virtue of ranking in the top eighth of the academic index, a synthesis of high school grades and SAT scores; the comparable figures for whites, Hispanics and blacks are, respectively, 16, 5 and 4.6 percent. Following a mysterious, and temporary, mid-'80s drop in the percentage of

newly enrolled undergraduates with Chinese backgrounds, Heyman apologized to the Asian American community and reorganized the admissions office.

In 1989, the Academic Senate adopted the report of a committee chaired by sociology professor Jerome Karabel, which called for increasing the proportion of admissions based solely on grades and tests scores, while at the same time adding a category of the socioeconomically disadvantaged to the list of groups (among them athletes, the disabled, rural students and historically underrepresented minorities) already enjoying preferential treatment. But since then, conservative attacks on Berkeley's diversity policies, coupled with a legal climate increasingly hostile to affirmative action, have at least temporarily kept Tien from fully embracing the Karabel recommendations. He now calls the report "a general principle" whose implementation needs further study.

On November 7, 400 students gathered at Wheeler Auditorium for a lecture by anthropology professor Vincent Sarich, a lively polemicist whose discourses on the genetics of blacks, women and homosexuals outrage an overwhelming portion of students and faculty members. Sarich is also the author of a right-wing critique of the Karabel report in a letter last year to the late regent and former Reagan attorney general William French Smith. That essay, adapted into an article for the alumni publication California Monthly, attacked "the institutionalization of racism at Berkeley." Citing discrepancies in the standardized test scores of different groups, Sarich concluded, "Unfortunately, the levels of qualification, preparation, or motivation are not randomly distributed with respect to race and ethnicity." In a subsequent letter to English professor David Lloyd, who rebutted Sarich's article, Sarich wrote, "I really wonder if you, and those who think and act as you do, are as oblivious as you seem to be to how much the appellation 'white male' has become equivalent to the now-banned 'nigger.'"

On this day, approximately 75 students who were not enrolled in his class, but who represented a group called Direct Action Against Racism, burst into the room, shouted "No more racist bull---- in the name of academic freedom!" and interrupted Sarich's efforts to speak for close to half an hour before the professor finally gave up and canceled the class. It was believed to be the first such classroom invasion at Berkeley since a similar furor in the early '70s over the racial views of education professor Arthur Jensen.

An angry Chancellor Tien immediately denounced the "serious violation of the rights of both faculty and students." Cal, he said in a statement circulated throughout the campus, had a long tradition of accommodating individuals and groups who wished to make complaints, "but the disruption of classes ... can never be tolerated."

Various subsequent investigations ordered by Tien have so far failed to develop sufficient evidence to prosecute the students, who were informally warned not to let it happen again. Meanwhile, Sarich went on leave for the spring semester, rendering momentarily moot the question of whether he should be allowed to deliver his eccentric lectures on race and gender as part of a prerequisite lower-division survey course.

Like the Copper Bowl controversy, the Sarich affair exposed the raw nerves of racial tension at Cal. Still, the voices were muted. Tien enjoyed a public bond with students that was forged in the crucible of a pair of off-campus tragedies in September -- a fraternity house fire and an all-night siege by a crazed gunman in a hotel bar -- which together claimed the lives of four students and left the community in a state of numb grief. His frequent visits to organized functions and his regular campus strolls helped the atmosphere; so did his good relationship with Bonaparte Liu, the president of Berkeley's Associated Students of the University of California.

"On the whole, students are pretty positive about Chancellor Tien," says Liu, who is the third consecutive Asian American elected to that office but was recently defeated for reelection by Ukrainian-born Mark Yablonovich. "He presents himself as approachable and accessible. He's also very smart about understanding different views and how they might translate into organizing or lobbying. He plays with the flow of things."

Tien's early initiatives mostly chew at the margins of the diversity issue and buy him time. For example, he is conducting a comprehensive review of FTE (full-time equivalent faculty) management so that as older professors retire, positions can be shifted to emerging disciplines such as international studies and women's studies. He has earmarked 10 FTE as an incentive for all departments to offer "extraordinary opportunities" to minorities and women. And he has instructed his affirmative-action officers to be more pro-active.

"But I will not be the person who tries to build diversity at the expense of quality," Tien says. "That will be the worst thing. You do that, you hurt the same groups you are trying to help, you create a second-class citizenship." So far he has refused to intervene in the celebrated cases of Marcy Li Wang, Joel Garcia and Jenny Harrison, whose dismissals have raised charges of bias in Berkeley's tenure process.

As Berkeley's No. 1 cheerleader knows all too well, its most famous sport will always be the intramural one of fractious debate over cutting social issues. In his droll way, he admitted as much last summer at his first convocation, a ceremony celebrating the opening of classes. For those who want the first Asian American chancellor to succeed, watching him share the stage of the Hearst Greek Theatre with the keynote speaker, New York Mayor David Dinkins -- the first black elected to lead the nation's largest city -- was a moving spectacle.

Introducing Dinkins, Tien noted that his guest's job was often described as the second most difficult in the country. "I'm glad," he quipped, "that even the mayor of New York acknowledges that the hardest job in the world is chancellor of Berkeley."

PHOTO (5), GRAPHIC

(1) Berkeley Fire Department paramedic Kathy Voelker stands watch after the Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity house fire/BY STEVE GERMAN/THE CHRONICLE, (2) Tien scans a copy of a university publication while waiting for an elevator at UC Berkeley's Barrows

