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Chinese officials' visit to Oklahoma puts focus on energy

BY JAY F. MARKS

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More than a dozen professors from China University of Petroleum in Beijing were in Oklahoma over the weekend to learn about natural gas production.

They were guests of the Harding Shelton Group, a team of experts in extracting gas from shale formations.

The company, which has offices in Oklahoma City and Dallas, is hoping to establish a foothold in China, a country thought to have significant natural gas resources.

"Collaborative efforts like these help all of us globally address the demands for new energy sources," company Chairman John Shelton said. "The opportunities to produce shale gas in China are similar to what has taken place in the United States in highly productive areas like the Barnett Shale."

The two-day visit by 14 Chinese professors is part of an ongoing series of talks aimed at forming a research institute in China to study shale basins for gas exploration.

"We are looking forward to working with the energy laboratories at China's academic settings," company President Michael D. Burnaman said. "Our HSG team has international oil and gas experience that spans decades,"

The company is comprised of Dallas-based Harding Energy Partners LLC and Oklahoma City-based Harding and Shelton Inc., two companies experienced in exploring and developing oil and gas reserves.

Wenwu Xia, executive vice president of the Oklahoma City company, is a native of China, a petroleum engineer who went to school with many of the country's oil executives.

Company spokesman Jason Dunnington said Xia's contacts in China have been crucial to efforts to secure a share of their natural gas future.

Producers in China have relied on conventional drilling practices, rather than successful techniques pioneered elsewhere.

Dunnington said the visit to the University of Oklahoma's Mewbourne College of Earth and Energy showed the Chinese professors what kind of equipment and technology that could be put into play if a full-scale partnership is established.

There already is a memorandum of understanding with PetroChina's Research Institute for Petroleum Exploration and Development, which officials said is an important first step in evaluating natural gas as an alternative for the coal-dependent country.

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Harding Shenton Group Executive Vice President Wenwu Xia offers a gift to Zhang Laibin, president of China University of Petroleum in Beijing in May. Photo provided

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