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AAAS Board Visits China

Several members of the AAAS Board of Directors visited China late last summer, at the invitation of Professor Zhou Peiyuan, chairman of the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST). This was the first Board visit to China since 1978—shortly before the normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China—and the delegation noted many significant changes.

President-elect Lawrence Bogorad headed the delegation which also included William T. Golden, Donald N. Langenberg, Dorothy Nelkin, Sheila E. Widnall, and Linda S. Wilson. J. Thomas Ratchford, associate executive officer and head, Office of International Science, was also in the delegation as was Lisbeth A. Levey, coordinator of the AAAS China Exchange Program. Accompanying the delegation were Rosalyn Bogorad, Patricia Langenberg, and William Widnall. The group visited Beijing, Xian, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. In addition to meeting with government officials, researchers, and administrators, delegation members gave lectures in Beijing and Shanghai.

One of the highlights of the trip was a meeting with Premier Zhao Ziyang in Beijing. Premier Zhao received the delegation in the Zhongnanhai Compound, which he explained is sometimes called "the heart of power in China" because the offices of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee are located on one side and those of the State Council are on the other. He said that he believes it is essential to establish the importance of science and technology (S&T) in the minds of the population and to effect a closer integration between S&T and economic development.

The first task, Zhao noted, was in large part accomplished at the 1978 National Science Congress; the second is now being addressed in the current S&T reforms and he delineated three types of S&T development: high technology, es-

pecially the development of information industries, appropriate technology for small and medium-size industries, and the introduction of technology reforms into the agricultural sector.

China's S&T reforms were the subject of a 2-hour meeting with Teng Teng, vice chairman of the State Science and Technology Commission. In outlining different types of programs to promote technology transfer, Teng contrasted "spark" programs, those aimed at developing appropriate technologies especially suited to the needs of small and medium-size firms in counties or townships with "torch" programs, those based on high technology at the national level. Teng also described China's S&T administrative funding processes, methods for supporting basic research, and procedures for employing Chinese students and scholars when they return to China from their studies abroad.

The delegation discussed recent reforms in higher education when they visited Qinghua University in Beijing, Fudan University in Shanghai, and Zhongshan University in Guangzhou (Canton). Many universities, such as Qinghua and Fudan, have opened consulting offices of their own and have begun a contract system for their staff. Qinghua was one of the first universities to institute teaching contracts. In the past, promotions were very difficult to arrange, in part because faculty members were reluctant to resign or retire and also because Ministry of Education approval was necessary at every level. Now Qinghua administrators have the autonomy to give promotions themselves and room to maneuver as well, for between 300 and 400 teachers from Qinghua have retired or moved to other positions since 1984.

Staff at the Shanghai Biochemistry Research Institute, affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), were able to give the delegation an idea of how S&T reforms will affect research institutes. The major change will be in the funding process. Until now, the CAS has supported its institutes entirely. This year, as part of an effort to reduce the number of unproductive institutes, their support dropped overall by 14.6 percent and the institutes were required to apply for grants and contracts to make up the difference.

Even on the basis of such a short visit, it is obvious that China is undergoing extraordinary changes that are transforming the rural and urban sectors and the bureaucracy at every level. One of the most striking differences, Board members observed, is one of attitude.

Egalitarianism and the concept of "everyone eating from one big pot" are being replaced by a policy that rewards productivity and entrepreneurial behavior, whether it be from manual labor or brainpower. Although it is too soon to tell how successful the S&T management reforms will be, members of the delegation noted that it appears as if the country's leadership is moving ahead in a systematic and realistic manner. The sheer variety of these activities is noteworthy; contracts for university personnel, consulting, science foundations, technology transfer at different levels of sophistication, and special economic zones are but a few of the experiments the delegation encountered.

Nevertheless the success of the above-mentioned programs will depend on the government's ability to resolve possible conflicts between basic and applied research priorities, enhance cooperation between research institutes and universities on the one hand and between research units and production enterprises on the other, ensure that funds (especially foreign currency) are not misused, and overcome popular and cadre distrust of scientists and other intellectuals. None of this will be easy, but Board members generally expressed the belief that the Chinese appear to recognize the complexity of the problems that confront them and what must be successfully solved if they are to achieve their goals.

A full trip report is available, free, by writing Lisbeth A. Levey, Executive Office, AAAS, 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005.

LISBETH A. LEVEY
China Exchange Program

AAAS Participates in Tour of Central American Universities

This past August the Consejo Superior de Universidades Centroamericanas (Executive Council of Central American Universities) (CSUCA), an umbrella academic group based in San Jose, Costa Rica, hosted a tour of Central American public universities for U.S. academics and representatives of scientific and research groups. Among participants were Helen Safa, director, Center for Latin American Studies, University of Florida, and former president, Latin American Studies Association (LASA); and Kathie McCleskey, senior program associate, AAAS Committee of Scientific Freedom

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