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**REPORT ON A TRIP TO CHINA SPONSORED IN PART BY
THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE**

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Barry A. J. Fisher
President
15th Meeting of the International Association of Forensic Sciences

August 9, 2001

Abstract

In November 2000, a small delegation of U. S. forensic scientists visited the People's Republic of China and lectured to approximately 130 Chinese forensic scientists. The delegation was lead by Barry Fisher, Crime Laboratory Director, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and included Dr. Patricia McFeeley, Assistant Chief Medical Examiner, Office of the Medical Investigator, New Mexico, Dr. Roger Kahn, Crime Laboratory Director, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation, and Dr. Richard Rau, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. Lai Chwa, Supervising Criminalist, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department served as the delegations official U.S. interpreter.

The delegates lectured on a variety of topics including: crime laboratory management, quality assurance, laboratory accreditation, forensic pathology, forensic DNA testing, advances in forensic science, and the role of the NIJ in supporting state and local forensic science in the United States. They also toured several institutes in Beijing and Shanghai and met with forensic science colleagues from other regions.

The Chinese expressed a keen interest in promoting cooperation and exchanges of information between the China and the U.S. and which to host joint meetings

and other cooperative ventures. Chinese forensic science is modern and future exchanges would be beneficial to both countries.

Forensic science may well provide a vehicle to promote better understanding and increased cooperation between our countries.

**Report on a Trip to China Sponsored in part by
the National Institute of Justice**

The U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, partially funded the 15th triennial meeting of the International Association of Forensic Sciences (IAFS) meeting held on the campus of University of California, Los Angeles in August 1999. The meeting attracted approximately 1250 forensic scientists from around the world, including a large delegation of forensic scientists from the People's Republic of China.

Barry A. J. Fisher, president of the 15th meeting of the IAFS had made the acquaintance of a few Chinese forensic scientists in the early 1980's. Dr. Li Bo Ling, former director of the Institute of Forensic Science, Ministry of Public Security, People's Republic of China and Dr. Liu Yao, Deputy Director (who became Director following Li Bo Ling's retirement) of the Institute of Forensic Science, spent a year training at the Los Angeles County Department of Coroner and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Crime Laboratory during that period. Dr. Li spent much of that time studying forensic serology and the Sheriff's crime laboratory and Dr. Liu studied post mortem forensic toxicology at the Department of Coroner. During the years since that initial visit, Mr. Fisher remained in occasional contact and saw Prof. Liu Yao or Dr. Li Bo Ling at various international forensic science conferences.

The 15th meeting of the International Association Forensic Science presented an unusual problem for the meeting's organizers. The Chinese delegation from the *People's Republic of China* made specific demands about the use of the name *Republic of China*. The People's Republic of China delegation stated that their delegation could not attend the conference should the IAFS organizers use the terms *ROC* or *Republic of China* in the meeting documents to designate the place of origin of forensic scientists from Taipei.

In fact ,1500 copies of the printed program had already been printed. Mr. Fisher and the People's Republic of China Consulate in Los Angeles agreed that covering over the offensive term, *Republic of China*, printed in the conference proceedings would be acceptable. Days before the meeting, Mr. Fisher and a group of six volunteers pasted printed labels over the offensive portions of 1500 programs.

Besides the numerous faxes and e-mails between Fisher, Beijing, the People's Republic of China's Embassy in Washington and the Los Angeles People's Republic of China Consulate needed to resolve the "other China" issue, dozens of letters had to be written to assist People's Republic of China forensic scientists in obtaining visas to come to the United States for the IAFS meeting.

A few month's prior to the IAFS meeting, Mr. Fisher also hosted a small delegation of a dozen forensic scientists from the People's Republic of China who visited Los Angeles. He arranged visits to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's crime laboratory, the Los Angeles County Department of Coroner and the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner's crime laboratory. During that visit, Mr. Fisher met Dr. Liu Lu. Dr. Liu is the Director, Department of International Affairs Institute of Forensic Science, Ministry of Public Security. She also works for Dr. Liu Yao, now retired as Director of the Institute of Forensic Science and the current president of the Forensic Medical Association of China. During this visit and the later IAFS, Southern California forensic scientists did their best to accommodate the delegations from the People's Republic of China.

In the summer of 2000, Dr. Liu Lu e-mailed Mr. Fisher to inquire if he could come to the People's Republic of China to lecture and to bring a small delegation with him. She told Mr. Fisher that the Forensic Medical Association of China would fund all expenses within China. However, American forensic scientists would have to fund their travel between the U.S. to the People's Republic of China. Over the next few months a delegation was assembled, lecture topics were chosen and an itinerary was agreed on. Dr. Liu asked Mr. Fisher if an American forensic biologist knowledgeable on DNA testing and a forensic pathologist could be included in the delegation.

For a forensic biologist, Mr. Fisher first contacted Dr. Lisa Forman, a well-regarded DNA expert employed by the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, to be part of the American Delegation. Dr. Forman reluctantly declined the invitation. She did however suggest that NIJ might be able to fund the international travel portion of the visit. Dr. Forman also asked if one of her NIJ colleagues could shadow the visit. Thus, Dr. Richard Rau, National Institute of Justice was invited to join the delegation. The National Institute of Justice provided a small grant to fund travel between the United States and China.

Mr. Fisher also wished to bring a Chinese-American forensic scientist as part of the delegation to assist in translating. Supervising Criminalist Lai Chwa and her husband David Chwa, a chemist with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power traveled with the delegation and both provided invaluable translation services for the delegation.

The American delegation consisted of:

- **Barry A. J. Fisher**, Director, Scientific Services Bureau, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Los Angeles, California; past president of the International Association of Forensic Scientists; past president of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences; past president of the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors; past chairman of the American

Society of Crime Laboratory Directors – Laboratory Accreditation Board;
Chairman of the Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations.

- **Dr. Patricia McFeeley**, Assistant Chief Medical Investigator, Office of the Medical Investigator, State of New Mexico, and the University of New Mexico, School of Medicine, Albuquerque, New Mexico; past president of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences; former member, Board of Directors, National Association of Medical Examiners; Consultant, Center for Disease Control, Medical Examiner/Coroner Information Sharing Project; Inspector, College of American Pathologists Inspection and Accreditation Program, Rocky Mountain Region
- **Dr. Roger Kahn**, Deputy Superintendent of Laboratories, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, London, Ohio; Adjunct Assistant Professor of Anthropology Department of Anthropology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
- **Dr. Richard Rau**, Senior Investigative and Forensic Science Program Manager, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, Office of Science and Technology
- **Lai Chwa**, Supervising Criminalist, Scientific Services Bureau, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Dr. Liu asked each delegate to provide a copy of his/her curriculum vitae. Based upon past presentations, publications and research interests, Dr. Liu asked each delegate to speak on a variety of forensic science related topics. In addition to

the lectures, the delegation was invited to visit several Chinese forensic science institutes in different cities and meet with representatives from those institutes.

Approximately 130 mid-level Chinese forensic scientists attended a series of lectures, November 3 – 7, 2000, in Beijing provided by the delegation.

The following is an outline of the topics covered by the delegation.

Barry Fisher spoke on:

- Forensic Science in the 21st Century
- Crime Scene Investigation
- Forensic Science Laboratory Management
- Maximizing Crime Laboratory Resources
- The O.J. Simpson Case
- Forensic Science Laboratory Quality Control Programs
- The ASCLD/LAB Accreditation Program

Dr. Roger Kahn discussed:

- DNA in the United States
- Statistics associated with DNA mixtures
- Future advances in forensic DNA technology

Dr. Patricia McFeeley lectured on:

- Death investigation and child death investigation in the United States
- Firearm/gunshot injuries
- Child abuse
- SIDS

Dr. Richard Rau spoke about:

- The role of the National Institute of Justice to assist public forensic science at the state and local level in the United States.
- Various R&D programs funded through NIJ

Lai Chwa with the assistance of her husband, David, served as the delegation's interpreters.

The delegation was invited to visit facilities and meet with officials and their respective professional staffs at the following organizations:

- **Forensic Medical Examination Identification Center** of Beijing City Public Security Bureau. The institute serves the Medical Examiner – Coroner's function for greater Beijing. As the delegation members learned, most of the public safety and forensic science functions with the country are under the

Ministry of Public Security, which has regional offices throughout China.

However, policy decisions appear to all come from Beijing.

- **Beijing Institute of Forensic Medicine and Science (People's Court).** We learned that the court system also has a forensic medicine and science institute which is not connected to the Ministry of Public Security. Some of the work done at this institute as workman compensation related rather than criminal. For example, if a worker were injured on the job, this institute would assess the extent of the injury for the purpose of awarding damages. They are engaged heavily in clinical forensic medicine for civil cases.
- **Institute of Forensic Science, Ministry of Public Security (Beijing and Shanghai).** Traditional full service forensic science labs are operated by the Ministry of Public Security. The equipment found in these labs is up to date and the staffs (as far as we could tell – English skills were somewhat limited) were knowledgeable and capable.

Conclusions

The delegation made a number of observations and came away with impressions from meeting our professional counterparts in China. The following are some of our observations:

- All the forensic scientists we met exhibited a keen interest for future Sino-US forensic science cooperation and collaboration. We were asked about possibilities of hosting joint forensic science meetings as well as visiting scientist programs at labs in the United States. Of particular interest were updates in the latest, emerging forensic science technologies and how the Chinese could get more information on these areas.
- Chinese forensic scientists have the perception that U.S. forensic science is well ahead of them. Our delegation came away with the notion that we are at a comparable level, at least in the area of DNA, forensic medicine and general forensic science. In fact, the Chinese have been able to introduce some forensic science testing methodologies in DNA, for example, more quickly than us. It should be noted that we only observed those areas open to us. In the areas we observed (DNA, toxicology, solid dose drug testing, trace evidence, etc.) we appear to be using similar technologies, although we were unable to determine the extent to which these technologies are used; how many DNA cases are completed per year, for example. The Chinese were very interested to hear what we believed to be the emerging trends and technologies in forensic science in the United States.
- Our visit was one of openness, candor and good humor. Naturally, the visit took place before the spy plane incident. Our hosts showed every civility and worked hard to make our visit a memorable one. While public remarks were as anticipated, private ones were frank. For example, one person admitted

that male children kidnapping was a problem and that female babies suffered from a higher infant mortality than males did. We also had some unusually forthright discussions on forensic science conclusions issued in reports, which will be discussed later in this report.

- We found the Chinese to be surprisingly up to date in most areas of forensic science. The equipment we observed was typical of the instrumentation found in most American crime labs. We noted that while American labs tended to purchase equipment from one vendor or a limited number, the Chinese seemed to purchase a variety of equipment. We suspect that this may be due to vendor servicing difficulties in China.
 - Almost without exception, the Chinese forensic scientists we met were highly motivated and eager to improve. They have chosen to try to emulate the American model. As noted earlier, the Chinese almost idealized American forensic science capabilities.
 - Chinese forensic science is highly centralized. Policies flow from Beijing on how forensic science operates in the PRC. There is a degree of disdain that was occasionally expressed by a few of the forensic scientists outside of Beijing, however, any comments like these were made privately.
- Along with a high degree of centralization, their system is, by U.S. standards, paternalistic. Age and gender play important themes – senior women

scientists often served tea and among the senior managers ranks, men were generally in charge.

- Forensic scientists appeared unable or unwilling to question authority. Some of the questions and comments made during the lectures suggested that there was a degree of pressure in some cases to "come up with the right answer." In cases with inconclusive results, scientists felt they had to report a definitive result. They believed that this was expected of them and inconclusive lab results might be a loss of face.
- The Chinese justice system is a system in transition. Public safety personnel were eager to report that Chinese legal system was changed to mirror more closely the American system, including, presumption of innocence and rules of law. However, in discussions with a Beijing jurist, we learned that there is little trust on the Government. When asked, "How do you determine if a particular scientific discipline is reliable (thinking about Daubert, etc.), the judge simply responded that he asked the Ministry of Public Security Forensic Science Institute. If they say it's okay then it is okay."

Opportunities and Future Directions

Crime is an international problem that transcends political systems. Nations throughout the world use science and technology to assist the police to solve

crimes and the courts to dispense justice. Forensic science provides one of many types of links to build trust and confidence between our two governments.

Although the present political climate may not be appropriate to take any action at the present time, two possible cooperative programs are worthy of consideration for the future:

- Forensic science exchange programs with China forensic science professionals placed in state and local forensic labs
- Joint meetings between American and Chinese forensic science professional organizations

Finally, the members of the delegation wish to express our appreciation to the United States Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice for its financial support of this project.

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