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From left: LAGSCA Chairman Irving Karp, Steven Cheung— representing Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, LAGSCA President Jeffrey Cheung

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Annual Banquet Festivities

By Peter H. Antoniou

The Year of the Ox was ushered in with the traditional Lion Dance at the Los Angeles Guangzhou Sister City annual New Year's dinner. Well over 100 members and guests crowded the Empress Pavilion Restaurant in Chinatown to exchange greetings and hear a report on the activities of the organization for 2008 from President Jeffrey Cheung. Unbeknownst to him the Board of Directors had selected Jeffrey as our Member of the Year for his many years of dedicated service to the organization.

After dinner Steven Cheung, representing Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, presented a Certificate of Congratulations to LAGSCA. Xu Chaoyou, Deputy Consul General of China, extended New Year greetings on behalf of the Chinese Consulate General. Los Angeles City Councilman Tom LaBonge who is also the President of International Sister Cities Committee of Los Angeles was presented with a special award for his outstanding service to the sister city movement. Councilman LaBonge has been a supporter of

LAGSCA for many years and has had many of our Lawrence Liu scholars as interns in his office. With Councilman LaBonge's support our 2008 scholar participated in the Hollywood Christmas Parade.

Vice President Katherine Whitman gave a presentation about her recent visit to Yunnan Province and Shangri-La. Her photographs of the towering snow-capped mountains had many of the guests exclaiming. Yunnan is home to many of China minority people among them the Tibetans in the northwest of the province.

Mismatches – Why Can't We Get It Right?

By Nancy Pine

Soft chalk dust slid down the smooth blackboard while I wrote a few key words for a seminar. Ms. Wang, a graduate student assistant who would help me for the week, came into the empty classroom carrying a red plastic thermos and a paper cup with tea leaves in the bottom. She poured steaming water into the cup for me.

"The students will be here in 10 minutes," she said. We were at a Hebei Province engineering university, a five-hour drive southwest of Beijing, and I was beginning a series of seminars about hidden rules in our cultures. We would spend several days unearthing the nearly unconscious rules that govern our lives. Such rules as what we should wear to a banquet versus a picnic. How we would greet a professor versus a good friend.

She and I chatted a bit about the stu-



Group work during university seminar, Hebei Province

dents, and I returned to my notebook to go over my plans and add a few more words to the board to aid the students' comprehension. It was a complicated topic for them to discuss in their second language. When I turned back, Ms. Wang was sitting on a stool reading my notebook and flipping through pages to see what was there.

Instant fury coursed through me. 'Give that back to me,' my mind yelled. I took a deep breath trying not to show my feelings and told her I needed to check something in my plans. She handed it back and went to open the curtains, telling me about her current courses. I busied myself arranging some books and calming down. I was amazed at how strong my reaction had been, but I also knew that at home no student would consider looking through my



A light lunch.

notebook.

"Here they come," Ms. Wang announced. Taking a sip of tea, I greeted the students entering the room ever so shyly. I'd have to process the notebook incident later. As I logged trip after trip to China, cultural puzzles like this one began to add up, including more situations when people looked at my things in ways I found intrusive. I finally had the courage to admit them to a Chinese colleague who was spending a year in Los Angeles. He laughed with relief. He was having plenty of uncomfortable moments himself. Skeletons looking over his shoulder in a restaurant at Halloween; wreaths on front doors that we considered a sign of merriment rather than a symbol of grief; chaotic children's events that, from his perspective, were completely devoid of order and discipline.

He and I began to meet once a month to compare experiences and understand the roots of uncomfortable moments in our cross-cultural experiences. We called them "cultural mismatches" and began to realize that when we became angry in the other's country it was usually because we'd stumbled into a mismatch. We also became more honest in admitting what bothered us in each other's cultures.

I didn't know how to turn off the tea and food spigot ever-present at meetings in China. I'd say 'no thank you' ever so many times and they kept coming.

Yafei chuckled. "Just let it sit. You don't

have to drink the tea or eat the food. Your hosts are just being polite. They don't mind if you don't take it." He then told me of a time when he visited a British couple at his Chinese university on a very hot day. They asked if he would like a cold drink. He said, "No, thank you," expecting they would offer the drink several more times and

give it to him no matter whether he said yes or no. But they didn't. They assumed he meant 'no,' poured themselves delicious-looking glasses of juice, and proceeded with a conversation while he grew thirstier by the minute.

When his year was up and he returned to China, we were both wiser. I continued my trips, and became increasingly aware of people's curiosity to look at new things openly. One day while writing notes while I sat near the Huangpu River promenade in Shanghai, person after person came up to stare at what I was doing—not with just a glance, but for a minute or two. I finally realized that from childhood I had been taught never to stare. Sneaking a quick look at something unusual about a person was okay, but never should I stare. I began to recognize how ingrained my early training is, and no matter how much I try to edge away from it, it's still there.

Recently in a Nanjing internet bar, a friend pulled me close to a woman to watch how she was using a video cam. I stood back timidly, looking from several feet away. "Come on," she said, urging me nearer. "Just look. She isn't going to bite you!"

No, I thought and moved up against the woman's chair. But as I stepped forward I could hear my mother's words across the decades. "Don't stare. It's not polite."

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George O. Totten, III (1922-2009): A Remembrance



George O. Totten, III (1922-2009)

By Paul Chow

When the 20-year-old student's education was interrupted by the Second World War and he was drafted into the Army in 1942, he was sent to the University of Michigan to study language. The language chosen for him to study was the Japanese because of his interest in the Chi-

nese language. "Japanese, Chinese, they are all the same," reasoned the officers at the induction camp. "They are all written in chicken scratch."

His first job was to interrogate the Japanese POWs in the Philippines. Instead of using tiger cages and water-boards, the young interrogating officer treated the prisoners, most of them of his own age, as his friends and "fellow-soldiers" instead of his enemies. He told them about his family back home and encouraged them to talk about theirs. He urged them to write home and tell their parents that they were all right. Many of them were illiterate. So the young language officer would ask them to dictate the letters while he wrote them in "Chicken scratch". The consequence was that he did not have to interrogate. His prisoners volunteered to tell him anything he wanted to know.

George O. Totten, III (1922-2009), Professor Emeritus and former chair of the Political Science Department at University of Southern California, passed away on May 22, 2009. He joined the Los Angeles Guangzhou Sister City in 1981 because

of his lifelong belief that world peace could only be achieved through friendship and brotherhood. In 1989 he was asked to join its Board of Directors.

When the Communists came to power in China and implemented the Romanization of the Chinese language, the young linguist immediately embraced it and thought that it was a right thing to do to facilitate communication between different peoples in the world. He pioneered a movement in Romanizing the Japanese language. After that he went to Korea and started the same thing there. He did not live long enough to realize this dream.

Besides Chinese and Japanese, George spoke Swedish and French. "Are you a linguist?" asked one of his neighbors at Green Valley Village. His response was, "No, I just love languages. If everyone in the world could speak two or three languages, they would be able to understand each other much better. We would have a peaceful world."

Rest in peace, George.



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