

The 25th Anniversary of Guizhou-New Zealand Cooperation and Academic Seminar on Pastoral Animal Husbandry, Guizhou, 22-24 October 2008

A response to ‘old and new friends’ in Guizhou by Mr Lindsay Watt, New Zealand Ambassador to China 1985-89, following his visit for the anniversary

On revisiting Guizhou after 20 years

I have been privileged to return to Guizhou after 20 years, to observe its progress, and especially to see how the Dushan pastoral demonstration farm and grass seed production unit has developed into a showcase for pastoral farming in south-western China. The foundation upon which Dushan has advanced over its 25 years through several phases of cooperation, came from the early interest on the Chinese and New Zealand sides in pastoral and environmental development, and from strong commitments made then at the highest political levels. This has been a fine example of cooperation, which has been underpinned by personal relationships and individual commitments.

So much has changed over these 20 years! On the way to Dushan from Guiyang, one sees evidence of striking improvement in the economic welfare of the countryside, villages and cities. Duyun for example is now a bustling city. One sees evidence of extraordinary infrastructure development and of new road and rail connections to Guangzhou.

Arriving at the Dushan farm, I saw new buildings that made the facilities there unrecognisable from what I had seen in the 1980s. They underline also the magnitude of the farm’s role as a centre for training and the extension of technologies – the brass plaque at the gateway calling it the Agriculture School No. 3. A significant human resource in the form of technicians, for Guizhou, and now some other parts of China, has been built up.

With pastoral farming being expanded in 33 of its counties, and given the Dushan farm’s training role, Guizhou is becoming a centre for pastoral farming in south-western China. The Dushan environment is stable and well managed and has been transformed into a much more productive area, with which 350 small farmers have become involved.

The career and contribution of one of the first technicians, Xie Jishi, testifies to the value of the human resource focus. All 12 technicians who started at the farm in the 1980s are now in leadership roles in Guizhou. The benefits of the cooperation are demonstrated further by the fact that a tractor driver in my days, Mr Ding, now runs his own New Zealand style dairy farm, and that he is the major fresh milk supplier to Duyun.

Follow-up on return to New Zealand

Since my return I have sought to add to the insight that I obtained from the academic seminar in Guiyang and from the farm visit. I have talked further to two of the key New Zealanders who were present for the anniversary, Mr Tim Harvey and Dr Phil

Rolston. I have also had a good discussion with Professor Alex Chu, who much regretted that he had been unable to take up his invitation.

Talking to Professor Chu took me back to the fruitful exchanges we had during my term as Ambassador in Beijing (mid-1985 to the end of 1989). It also took me back to one of the themes explored in my book *New Zealand and China Towards 2000* published in 1992: that of technology transfer as the basis for development, and how this concept can be applied to the best benefit of both China and New Zealand.

Technology transfer is what lay behind China's original decision in the early 1980s to establish and fund model farms in Guizhou, Shanxi and Guanxi. As Long Ao put it in his paper to the academic seminar, and taking account of then Vice Premier Li Xiannian's findings from his visit to New Zealand, China needs to "borrow experience from New Zealand to develop these mountainous and hill areas".

Looking ahead: some thoughts

Long Ao, concluding his paper, said "Together with New Zealand, we are ready to put our cooperation to a new stage".

My visit has set me thinking afresh around two closely connected themes which are not new. The first involves a judgment: how successful has been this technology transfer programme in Guizhou? The second is: can the cooperation of the past 25 years be sustained into the future, and particularly, can it survive in the environment of today. Both are about the relationship between New Zealand and Guizhou, but at different levels. The first is primarily at the technical or agricultural specialist level, which over the period has involved actively in Guizhou more than 30 New Zealand personnel. The second is more at the political level. Here there are questions such as: for the New Zealand Government, what needs to be done as aid funding is phased out; and for Guizhou and relevant national institutes, what changes are needed to keep cooperation growing and wealth generation sustained for rural people.

Both the seminar presentations in October 2008, and a subsequent review by Mr Harvey, leave no doubt as to the success of this technology transfer in Guizhou. One of several factors that stand out is the way in which successive cooperative programmes with external partners involving technology transfer have adapted to changing needs or opportunities on the ground through the 25 years.

Dr Rolston has this succinct summary of what has been achieved:

Today, a pastoral farming base for Guizhou is well and truly in place, with the focus very much on animal raising within the land, environment and culture of Guizhou. Under this programme, most farmers will cut and carry, have small herds, integrating current cropping practices into animal raising by the use of crop residues and growing winter forages on land currently used for rice and maize in summer and left unused in winter.

How then might one assess this concept, of a new stage of cooperation? As described above, *to put our cooperation to a new stage*. Or it could be presented as *constructing a broader framework of cooperation*.

Recent developments affecting the dairy industry in China highlight the importance of good standards and the dissemination of technology.

There have been serious and well publicised concerns over milk powder safety for infants, and evidently a renewed national level focus on dairy industry safety and regulation. It is interesting that no milk processing plants in Guizhou had problems in this area. A recent speech by the Chairman of the Dairy Association of China, Liu Chenguo, which Professor Chu has told me about, is focused on trying to restore consumer confidence, and on moving forward, and invigorating, the dairy industry across China.

There is an indication in Mr Liu's speech that Guizhou's dairy production potential is now nationally recognised: that is, his recommendation to develop dairy farming in south China. Here then is recognition of what Guizhou already has achieved in developing and promoting its pastoral farming capacity.

Mr Harvey tells me he can envisage under current circumstances a doubling of Guizhou's dairy production over the next 10 years. One third of that total might come from small farmer operations, and another third from one or two large collectives based around a milk processing plant. The remaining third could comprise a mix of 10 to 20 larger scale dairy cooperatives with 20 to 30 farmers using one shed run by a manager, and perhaps were commercial opportunities to be taken up, 5 to 10 New Zealand style grazing units.

What I am learning from him, and from Dr Rolston and Professor Chu, is that technology transfer is as relevant and needed today as it was in the Dushan farm's earlier years. Remembering that in Guizhou's dairy sector, farmers, processors and regulators will be required to meet and administer stricter standards along the whole production chain through processing to sale and consumer protection.

The following paragraph from Mr Harvey's latest review highlights how well Guizhou already has been served in one vital production area, that of milk hygiene, through cooperative approaches:

At the end of the International Standards for Pastoral Systems project, the small farmers and New Zealand and Chinese technical specialists identified a number of key areas which were limiting increased uptake of the technology and therefore have a detrimental effect on profitability for small farmers. The first of these was poor standards of milk hygiene. This was considered the most urgent issue as milk quality was so low that it provided a serious health risk to young children and the elderly. The next New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Asian Development Assistance Facility funded project was developed to address this serious issue, and the milk hygiene project was introduced as a catalyst to the introduction of "Best-on-farm Practice" and the improvement of milk quality. This project introduced the "Rapid Mastitis Test" into Guizhou and for the first time allowed farmers to monitor milk quality.

As Guizhou responds to new dairy industry requirements in the wake of the contaminated milk affair, and more generally as it continues to strengthen its pastoral animal husbandry, it can be seen that it has not only some particular strengths, but that there are also some helpful factors upon which it can build. For example:

The likelihood that Guizhou could have an easier adjustment to these new regulatory and other requirements given that it is a small and still new player on the national dairy scene. That is, as compared with the long established northern production centres, where the task of implementing and policing new laws and procedures would be larger and more challenging.

The availability of an experienced external partner fully familiar with pastoral farming in Guizhou is an advantage, as is the necessary focus by leaders on animal husbandry and sustainability of land, environment and the culture of the province.

It is important to remember that Guizhou is the province with the lowest per capita income, and needs continued support at a national level in China, and beyond. It needs a well focused plan or programme with the clear purpose of raising farmer incomes – that is, of creating wealth – through developing the province’s grassland hills. This may include international investment. A well focused plan or programme could also stimulate renewed high level political commitments. Long Ao mentioned the inspection visits made to the Dushan farm in 1986 and 1987 by the then General Secretary of Guizhou Provincial Party Committee, Hu Jintao. The importance Hu Jintao attached to the Dushan project, and Guizhou’s animal husbandry potential, came through clearly in my meetings with him at the time, and equally from Governor Wang Chaowen. Their interest encouraged me in recommending Guizhou’s inclusion in Prime Minister David Lange’s 1986 China visit itinerary. Moving to this decade, we have direct signs that China’s President remembers positively this Guizhou background, and the New Zealand role there. This was seen when I met President Hu Jintao at a Government House Dinner when he visited New Zealand in 2003, and in 2004 when he spoke to Mr Harvey of the strong involvement of New Zealanders in Guizhou’s farming programme. (Mr Harvey, as a recipient of the Chinese National Friendship Award for long-term cooperation and commitment to the region, was among guests at China’s 55th National Day celebrations.)

Professor Chu adds that we must remember this. “The bigger picture for a grassland-based industry covers a lot more than raising livestock. The industry should range from eco-tourism in its ‘native’ state to extracting genetic materials from biologically diverse ‘herbal remedies’, as well as the many different ways of utilising the grassland resources for livestock and agricultural operations. All of these operations should aim to add value and create wealth along the entire chain”.

The ongoing value of a now notable 25 year record of inter-action between technical or agricultural specialists on both sides. This is a positive factor in terms of maintaining momentum, for example following the completion of the present NZAID project. There is continued scope for building cooperation in

the form of joint teaching, short term training, staff exchange and joint research between Massey University and Guizhou University. Other openings can be anticipated for continuing contact and participation in activities. For example, possibilities, including in training (and scholarships), could arise within the context of decision making on both sides in regard to any future investment by New Zealand companies in Guizhou agriculture.

May the 25th anniversary celebration prompt new thinking and ideas for a cooperative approach, building on the strong foundation already in place, and focusing on emerging needs and opportunities in 2009 and onwards?

Lindsay Watt, December 2008