

**NZ CHINA FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY  
HAMILTON BRANCH**

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2006

**Important - Note change of date and venue!**

**GENERAL MEETING**

**Venue:** Victoria Theatre

**Time:** 6pm

**Topic:** Film – “Banana in a Nutshell:

This is a special screening being held for us by the Victoria Theatre although it will be open to the public so please book. Come early and enjoy a cup of coffee or a wine before the movie.

Cost is \$10 for Seniors and students and \$13 for others but you must say you are part of NZCFS to receive the discounted price. Please ring the theatre direct by 17 July to reserve your seat.

This moving documentary made by first generation New Zealander of Chinese parents, Roseanne Liang tells the story of her white boyfriend as he prepares to ask her parents for their daughter's hand and explores the cultural generation gap between them. It has received very good reviews so don't miss it.

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Last month's meeting we enjoyed a very interesting evening hearing of Fan Miao's experiences growing up during the Cultural Revolution and also learnt about her home province of Shanxi.

Visit to Consulate: This has been postponed and will now be held at a venue in Hamilton at a date still to be advised. Further particulars when we have more details.

Conference 2006. Five members of the committee attended the conference which was this year held in Hastings. We did finally arrive there after a slight delay in Taupo because of a small amount of snow! Robin Brown, past president of Nelson branch and also past National President was made a Life Member. Next year conference will be held in Nelson.

Changsha Students: We are still awaiting dates regarding the arrival of these students. We hope it will be in the last three weeks of August as many of the committee are going to be away in the next few weeks. If you can help in any way please contact Ian Ph. 839-2341.

Stan leaves on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> July for Changsha for three months, Meryl and Diane leave a week later for three weeks in Canada, Muriel is away from 3<sup>rd</sup> August for three weeks visiting family in Perth and Ian goes on holiday for 10 days from 8<sup>th</sup> August. Jenevere is away at present but will be back on the 17<sup>th</sup> July and Peter will be back 9<sup>th</sup> August. Must be everyone getting away from the cold weather.

Members will remember Garth Smith talking to us a year or so ago about his Chinese venture. This is an article which was in the Herald recently.

### Kiwis take another Asian fruit to market.

Taking an oversized berry of Chinese origin to the international stage isn't exactly an original idea – the billion dollar kiwifruit industry is one of New Zealand's greatest marketing triumphs. But while BioVittoria of Hamilton has similar-sized ambitions for the Chinese fruit *luo han*, it is following a very different recipe for global success. For one thing the *luo han* doesn't make good eating in its natural state. But dried and made into tea it has been used as a natural sweetener in parts of China for centuries. The other difference is that it can only be grown in China.

“What we are doing is taking a cottage industry and applying the technology to create a large-scale commercial industry.” Says horticulturalist Dr Garth Smith. Smith – one of the BioVittoria founders – is a former HortResearch scientist who played a key role in the development of the kiwifruit industry. His co-founder is Stephen LeFebvre, a US citizen and marketing veteran of the nutraceutical industry. Based in Hamilton he is managing director of BioVittoria. He believes there is an enormous world-wide market for the powdered version of the ancient sweetener.

BioVittoria has developed a product called PureLo, which is completely natural, 300 times sweeter than sugar and contains no calories. Last week, the company got the green light from the US Food and Drug Administration to sell PureLo as a food ingredient, a huge step which will allow access to the multibillion-dollar calorie-free sweetener market.

Right now the other major sugar alternatives are either synthetic or are not approved for sale as food ingredients, LeFebvre said. The costs of producing the natural sweetener mean it is destined to be a niche product aimed at premium food products for several years at least but that should translate to millions of dollars in revenue.

Smith says that unlike artificial sweeteners you can't just build more factories and churn the stuff out. Smith is based in China where the fruit is exclusively grown. Unlike the kiwifruit, the Chinese Government holds overall rights to the luohan itself and it cannot be legally grown anywhere but China. BioVittoria has cultivated a strong relationship with the local Chinese authorities and set up a joint venture to oversee the commercialisation of the fruit.

Although there is a thriving cottage industry of growers who sell the dried fruit, making the step up to a commercial industry is a big one, Smith says. Despite being in its infancy as a commercial crop Despite being in its infancy as a commercial crop BioVittoria will still look to produce between 15 and 25 tonnes of the finished product in the next year. That equates to about 100 times that volume in raw fruit.

BioVittoria does have intellectual property rights to certain hybrid strains of the fruit which have been bred to make it more disease resistant and also enable it to produce fruit in its first year of planting. The company also has proprietary rights to the process to turn the sweetener into a powder and removing the liquorice-like flavour which is a strong feature of the original version.

It is the large seeds in the fruit that make it undesirable to eat but dried, sliced and made into a tea it is used as a sweetener and as a medicinal drink for sore throats and colds.



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