

HAMILTON BRANCH NZCF SOCIETY - WUXI VISIT Sept/Oct 2005

Delegation:

Leader: Stan Boyle – President

Members: Ian Howat – vice-President

Muriel Adams exec.committee member

Nina Kolotilina exec.committee member

Tuesday 27 September.

Arrived Hong Kong 5.50p.m. and caught 8.25 p.m. flight to Guangzhou.

Met at Guangzhou Airport at 9.10 p.m. and welcomed and taken to the Guangzhou Hotel

Guangzhou airport is enormous – opened last year, but still under construction - we were told it is the largest airport in Asia.

Wednesday 28 September.

After breakfast at the hotel, we visited Yuexiu Park with our host "Tommy" to view the Sculpture of the 5 Rams – the symbol of Guangzhou. On to the Guangzhou City Museum or Zhenhai Tower or Five Storey Pagoda - an ancient building that historically used to be used for "military purposes" – it is the only remaining part of the ancient city wall. Each floor dedicated to a different era of Guangzhou City history. A very interesting feature was an ancient water clock. Access to floors is only by ancient stairs. Very good views overlooking parts of Guangzhou from the top balcony. Right in front across the road is a large sports stadium that seats 40,000 people. Just outside the Museum were twelve cannon from the Opium wars, some in remarkably good condition considering they are outside weathering the elements. Five of the cannon were foreign (Krupp) and the rest made nearby at Foshan.

Lunch in one of many dining rooms of a very large and famous restaurant with it's own garden. We had been looking forward to Yum Cha in Guangzhou but found it not as good as in New Zealand! The Xian Ya Bang (conch) was very good. We had a most unusual tea here – did not taste very fresh – we wondered where the water had come from.

Visit to the Museum of the Mausoleum of the Nanyue King (137 BC – 122BC) discovered in 1983 (while excavating for foundations for a new hotel) – the largest king's tomb of the Western Han Dynasty ever found in the southern part of China. The Museum was opened in 1988. Display of many artefacts from the tombs including jade funerary shroud made of small plates of jade sewn

together with silk thread. Incidentally, every need of the deceased emperor after death was catered for – literally. There was a kitchen complete with utensils, foods, and the chef! Of particular interest was some rock carving of what appeared to be Maya or Inca design. Our museum guide spoke very good English with a strong USA accent.

After lunch we visited the Chen Clan Academy – some very interesting displays in particular the Chouzhou embroidery exhibition, and an outdoors sculpture exhibition.

Dinner at Yi Du Seafood Restaurant hosted by Mr Yang Yong and Mr Li Langzhou (Director Foreign Affairs Office) from Guangzhou Youxie – seemed to us to be the biggest restaurant possible but we were told that there was a much bigger seafood restaurant elsewhere in Guangzhou. The ground floor was full of tanks and cages: of live fish, turtles, snakes, alligators, grubs, lobsters, crabs, eels, shellfish etc. Alligators are now farmed and we saw cages of them about a metre long – we even saw one cut in $\frac{1}{2}$ with a blow from a large cleaver. The dinner was very good with a great variety of mostly seafood dishes. Emma (very charming young lady), a new recruit to Guangzhou Youxie also attended the dinner and later took us on a boat cruise down and back up the Zhujiang (Pearl) River – very attractive with all the night lights in buildings, on bridges and street lights etc. (supper on the boat was, tea, little tomatoes – long rather than round, and beautiful flavoured melon). Some very modern, large (up to 300m² apartments) apartment buildings with views over the River – we were told these were some of the most expensive apartments in China.

Thursday 29 September.

We left the hotel early next morning (before breakfast) but our hosts kindly provided us with food boxes to eat on the plane to Hangzhou. We had hardly opened our food parcels when the plane staff served us breakfast! Each plane lunch included a small tinfoil pack of new season roasted chestnuts – quite small but very sweet. On arrival in Hangzhou we were met by Danny (quite hard case – never received a name card from him) from the Hangzhou Youxie office and taken to the Hangzhou Friendship Hotel. On the way into the city we passed hectares of streets of wealthy peasants homes, many of them elaborate buildings three storeys. A number of the larger homes had a ball on a spire on the roof – apparently each ball represents one million yuan in assets of the owner – we saw several houses with 3 balls on the spire! Many of the houses looked more western in style than Chinese – some

almost Disneyland inspired. We unpacked and then had lunch in the hotel - egg bean curd (like very light custard – beautiful texture and flavour) with ground pork and chilli sauce, fishball and cun cai soup, ma po doufu, pork and peppers, bai cai, Tianjin cai, peanut chilli and pork dice in sweet sauce, watermelon and fried doufu – (cun cai is a green “water weed” used in soup – slimy but tastes nice). After lunch we headed off to West Lake (Xi Hu) to board a boat to cruise the lake and then a walk through the beautiful surrounding gardens. The boat carried quite a number of tourists including guides with non-stop loud speakers. Quite good visibility now, certainly better than a few years ago, with the water looking much cleaner.

Very interesting vessels on the lake from large ornately carved and decorated dragon boats and tourist “ferries” down to one passenger sampans. Motor boats not allowed (to alleviate pollution) so boats either powered by oars/paddles/sweeps or electric motors (obviously quite powerful for the large boats, but very quiet – just glide along). Many foreign tourists, but mostly Chinese tourists. Xi Hu is famous for it’s fish (West Lake vinegar fish has been famous for centuries) – we were told that the lake is now only open for fishing one day a year. Likewise, lotus harvesting (acres of lotus around parts of the edge of the lake) is sometimes allowed. Some very expensive apartment building overlook parts of the lake – probably the most expensive views in China.

After lunch a trip out to Ma family village to learn all about, and taste, Long Jing tea – we were told how to store and make tea, including the addition of Gou qi (wolfberries) which apparently assist heart conditions. They have three harvest seasons for their tea – the hand picked tea is the most expensive. This village looked quite affluent and obviously caters for the tourist trade. The young lady who told us the story said her father grew tea, her mother picked tea, and she talked about tea! We even tasted cold jasmine tea. For green tea fans Long Jing tea is certainly a superior tea – it is probably the most famous of all China’s teas.

Friday 30 September

After breakfast (the girls raved about the French Toast – the boys concentrated on more traditional Chinese dishes) we visited Liuhe Ta, the ancient 60 metre high ancient Six Harmonies Pagoda (built from timber and originally used as a lighthouse) and learnt about the local hero Liuhe and the monk Zhi Tan and also all had a chance strike the “Calamity” bell. Nina climbed to the top of the

4

Pagoda and reported that from there one could see the six Hangzhou bridges and the beginning of the Grand Canal. Then on to a pearl centre to learn about pearl culture and see the inevitable pearl products shop. Very nice lunch at an hotel (had especially nice shrimp dish served in orange skins, and we tasted rice wine from a traditional pewter heated wine-pot. The pewter wine-pots (which comprise a pot for the hot water and an inner pot to hold the rice wine) were available for sale - Muriel and Nina bought one each. Ian had bought the same model wine-pot in Xian years ago. Visited Ling Yin Si (the Temple of Inspired Seclusion) – very old, very large, very famous, and with a great atmosphere. Originally built in 326 A.D. – devastated and rebuilt 16 times throughout its long history. An incredible new hall has been built housing 100 large scale arhats (Stan said this was for him the cultural highlight of the trip) all different, and recognisable by various characteristics. This is one of the few traditional working temples left in original state– it escaped the ravages of the Red Guard on the personal intervention of local boy Zhou En Lai. Then off to the Hangzhou Silk Factory shop – unfortunately we just missed the end of their live fashion show (much to Stan's disappointment). Dinner at a hotel within walking distance of our own. After dinner we walked to the night market – very interesting. Stan bought some blue calico wall hangings, Ian bought a silk jacket and the girls bought silk cushion covers.

Saturday 1 October – China National Holiday

After breakfast Ricon Lee (from Wuxi Youxie office) had arrived in a mini-van to take us to Wuxi. The route was basically around the side of the lake (Taihu) and we crossed the boundary between Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces.

We arrived at Wuxi late in the morning at the Wuxi Jin Jiang Grand Hotel right in the centre of the city shopping centre.

Welcomed by Zhao Ming (Michael Zhao) and Ding Yu Yang Deputy Secretary-General of Wuxi Youxie, Deputy Mayor Chen Lin Rong, Cai Dagang director of Wuxi Foreign Affairs Office, Zhou Wenjie from the Sister City division of Foreign Affairs and Mr Feng who was to be our (brilliant) guide for the next few days. Mr Feng was a magazine editor, not a City employee, and was a corporate member of Youxie – he had been pressed into service because Youxie was running out of their own guides (there was a very large

– several hundred person friendship delegation from Wuxi's Japanese sister city in town).

Lunch at the Hotel hosted by Michael Zhao, Mr. Feng, with foreign (German) guest (he did not have a business card and could not speak English) and his translator guide Dr. Dongqi Hu (who was a Wuxi businessman).

Afternoon visit to Xue Fucheng's former residence. This gentleman was one of Wuxi's early industrialists (silk manufacturing) and was one of China's early overseas ambassadors. An old style typical wealthy family city home in traditional layout. What was fascinating (remember it was China National Day) was that we could hear bagpipes playing most of the time we were there – but couldn't work out where the sound was coming from.

Visited Xihui Park and saw the famous Ming Dynasty Jichang Garden and the (Tang Dynasty) 2nd Well under Heaven. Lots of family groups enjoying the holiday – listened to young women singing, and chatted to locals (a surprise to find people with excellent English skills). Nina bought some of the famous local clay figurines. Stan showed us how to make a bronze water bowl hum and splash and spout up the water! Just in front of the exit/entrance we used was an enormous dragon – all made out of white porcelain bowls, plates and spoons.

After dinner Rong Lin took Stan out for the evening while Nina and Muriel with Ian tagging along to carry their purchases, went shopping in the streets below our hotel – shops there catering largely for youth – large and varied selection and quite expensive. Rong Lin had been on a Wuxi Friendship exchange trip to Hamilton studying agriculture some years ago and has kept up contact with Stan and has seen him every time Stan has been to Wuxi – he is modest about his job now, but we think he is a rather senior official in the Agriculture Bureau.. Vice Director in fact.

Sunday 2 October

South Temple (Nan Chau Si) market. Enormous (cooked and raw) food market – you name it they had it – scorpion, centipede, seahorse kebabs, and anything else edible you could think of (Nina said she even saw live mice for sale!) including many different dumplings. Most fascinating? Korean “cakes” made from a ball of dough flattened with constant full blows from a huge sledgehammer!

Very interesting traditional type shops around the food market. Nina bought a bamboo tea tray and some cups, and Muriel bought some tea cups. We went through the Street of Birds and Flower Shop Street with huge set displays of flowers used to celebrate the opening of a new shop or business. You do see great flower shops in China with beautiful flowers in a huge range of colours and types in excellent condition.

Lunch at Jin Jiang Hotel as guest of Shi Yu, President of Wuxi Youxie, with Michael Zhao. A rather formal dinner with gold plate etc. but very friendly because of the long relationship we enjoy – Shi Yu was Director of Wuxi Foreign Affairs Office when we first joined as sister cities and Ian and Stan had met Mr Shi several times and he has visited Hamilton. Ian presented a book to Shi Yu as a gift from Anne Sayers in her capacity as former Chairwoman of the Chinese Garden Trust. In turn we were presented with gifts to bring back to Anne Sayers as former Branch President, Sir Ross Jansen, and Margaret Evans both former Hamilton Mayors who are all still held in very high regard in Wuxi. We were reminded that next year is the 20th anniversary of our sister city relationship.

Menu in English: six cold dishes, Liangxi crisp river eel, shark's fin and whitebait soup, white shrimp with salted sauce, stir fried mixed seafood, Wuxi spare ribs, deep fried eggplant with mixed pork, Jinjiang roasted duck, fried vegetable, steamed Duo Bao Fish, pigeon soup with ginseng, steamed pumpkin with mixed taro, fresh fruits. If you ever go to Wuxi, and you like pork, then you just have to try the Wuxi spare-ribs, not fatty and they just melt in your mouth!

After lunch off to see the Great Buddha at Lushan. It is enormous – you can see it from miles away. This is really quite awe-inspiring from the time you arrive there with its enormous car-park and the number of buses parked there. It is a most elaborate set-up on an enormous scale. When you first enter the park you can see the great Buddha as a small figure in the distance. Immediately in front of you is a great fountain with a giant lotus flower on top of a column. At intervals (I think 2 hourly) the great dragon fountains surrounding the base shoot water from their mouths up onto the lotus flower, and to the swell of awesome majestic music the lotus flower opens to reveal the baby Buddha. The whole column is revolving – the jets of water, the music, the size of the bronze sculptures, and the engineering feat that makes this enormous heavy structure all work, the size of the surrounding crowd of visitors, the underlying religious feeling, wonder of the crowds

make the whole thing an incredible experience. We were only there for 2 hours, and we did not even get half way up to the giant Buddha. On the way we did see enormous Tibetan style metal prayer wheels (had difficulty dragging Stan away from these), a giant sculpture of the Maitraya Buddha covered in crawling children (sculptures plus a few live ones), a full scale model of the hand of the giant Buddha (it dwarfed visitors standing along side) and of course the ubiquitous souvenir stalls. We were fascinated by the English translations on the different (recycling) rubbish bins. The Great Buddha is some 80 metres high – 30 metres higher than the Statue of Liberty in USA. The Buddha was apparently built in the same way as the Statute of Liberty – a great concrete pole and then built around it. The site is a popular tourist site as well as a pilgrimage site for Buddhists. If you are going there, you need to allocate the best part of a whole day – well worth the trip.

Monday 3 October

Drizzly rain today in Wuxi and Yixing. Off to Yixing to visit the (new) Pottery Museum. Yixing is famous for its Purple Sand pottery. A collection of beautiful crafted teapots – most made by master craftsmen and very expensive.

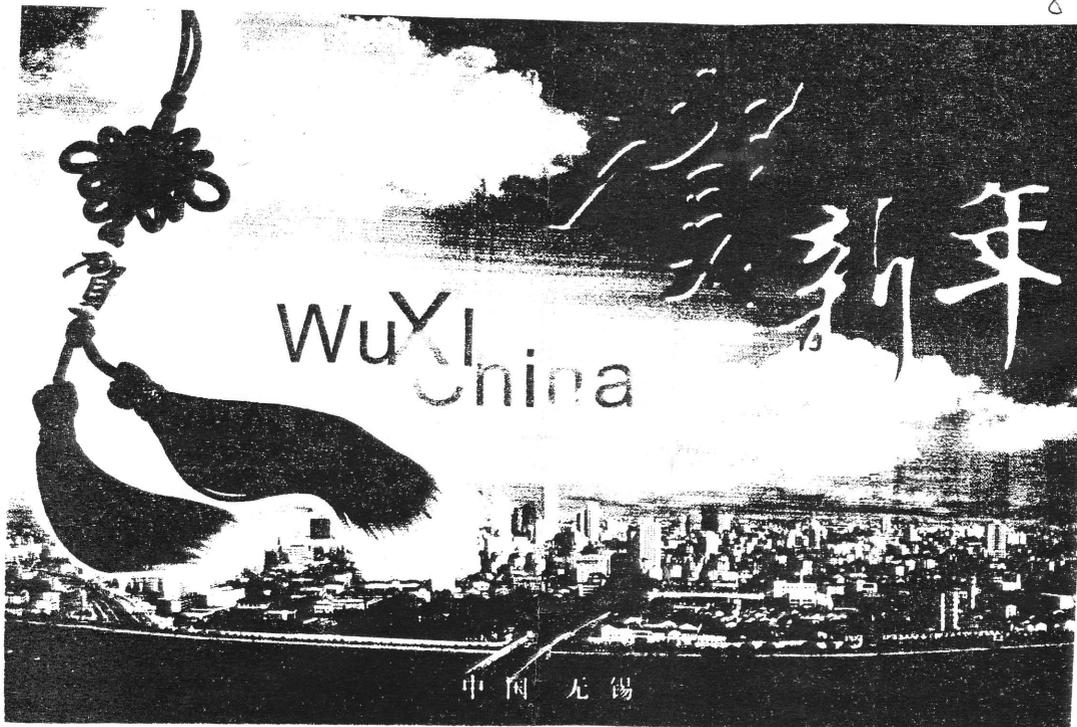
Great lunch at Yixing Grand Hotel. Menu included: bao zai lao gan, shou bo bai guo, shan yu teng (thin green tendrils of sweet potato) pi dan or song hua dan(preserved egg), kebabs, fish and turnip brawn, mushroom and doufu soup – very attentive, friendly and helpful staff.

After lunch ???????????? Sorry, mental block on this afternoon, and no, we did not drink any alcohol with lunch.

After dinner at Jin Jiang Hotel, Mr. Feng took us to train station for evening journey to Shanghai. After a pleasant 2 hour journey we arrived in Shanghai and were met by Cherry Wang from the International Tour Department of Shanghai International Venture & Consulting Corporation. Cherry took us in a mini-van to the Yuping Hotel where we stayed for the night.

Tuesday 4 October

Off to Yu Yuan Garden and surrounding markets – favourite area for tourists (Chinese and foreign), all sorts of shops and eateries including incredible gold shops. Architecture on the buildings looks very traditional.



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FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICE OF WUXI MUNICIPALITY

Lunch at a Department Store in town, shopping in store then off to Shanghai Friendship store for Stan to meet Sophie Yuan, an old friend of his from Changsha, who was off to Germany the next day to get married. While waiting for our van after lunch we saw a beautiful old (cream coloured) luxury vintage car being used for tourist rides about town.

Quick run through part of Shanghai Xiang Yang Road market - many tiny stalls, many, many people including foreign tourists and very good prices. Nina had valuable earring stolen off her ear! Cherry took us to the train station for the trip back to Wuxi. We shared seats with a young couple and their child from Wuxi. The young man spoke excellent English and we found that he worked for the Wuxi Municipal Government on new developments. Nina chatted to his wife in Chinese. The couple and his and her parents and other members of their family were all returning to Wuxi after spending a few days of their National Day holiday in Shanghai. We were met in Wuxi by Mr.Feng who took us back to the Jin Jiang Hotel for dinner and to meet Cynthia Xin (Xin Zhihong) who was to be our guide for the rest of our trip, and then with our bags out to Hubin Hotel (built 1978 but extensively re-furbished) on the shore of Lake Tai (Taihu). This was a very luxurious place. Stan had a room with a spectacular view of the lake.

Dinner at Hubin Hotel hosted by Deputy Director of Foreign Affairs Xu Ruiyu (Ray Xu), also present was Zhao Wei (David Zhao) and Cynthia (all of our hosts have been to Hamilton) . Ray studied and worked in New Zealand and for a time was private secretary to the Chinese Ambassador in Wellington. He has been to New Zealand and Hamilton many times. Ray speaks excellent English and has accompanied many of the key Wuxi figures on their visits to New Zealand – Ray is well known to many members of our Society. At the dinner Ian enquired after Andrew You (You Jiangwei) and was advised that he has been promoted and is now Deputy Director of the General Office of Suzhou Municipal Communist Party – the next moment Ray handed Ian his cellphone – with Andrew on the other end! Andrew asked to be remembered to his Hamilton friends and in particular Jenevere and Robin Foreman who he had hosted on a delegation visit with Ian a few years ago..

Wednesday 5 October

Drizzly day in Wuxi and Yisheng again.
Off to Huaxi Village. Stan, Brian Donkin and I had been there 10 years before. Huaxi is considered a “model village”. An intrepid leader some years ago collected all available cash from the

villagers and borrowed money to start a village enterprise – things grew and grew and now the village owns several huge factories, a tourist hotel, a travel agency and other businesses. When we were last there (1995) the whole village had gone on holiday (chartered three jumbo jets) to Singapore – last year they all went to Japan! Lunch hosted by Wu Xie Ping (son of the original village chief) Chairman of just about everything, Taihu Cuisine Master, and Jiangsu Cuisine Master etc. and Jiang Ming Bo, Director of Jiangyin Municipal Foreign Affairs Office. Mr Wu is talking about bringing the whole village to New Zealand for a trip in a year or two. He was very interested in our “giant” eels (eels seem to be quite small in China) – does anyone have any contacts in the “giant” eel business? Jiangyin is looking for a New Zealand sister city for itself, although Jiangyin (county city) is part of Wuxi Municipality. After lunch we visited one of the villager’s new home – it would have cost about NZ\$1 million to build and fit – very spacious and with all modern appliances and conveniences. We then visited a new serviced apartment building (we think it was run as an adjunct to their hotel) – this was absolute luxury – one huge apartment on each of the three floors – even had own luxury kitchen, his and her separate bathrooms off the master bedroom etc.etc. Stan was told one was his to come back and celebrate his 90th birthday – we think Stan really was serious when he said he would be there!

Then visited local clothing factory and clothing showrooms. This was an incredible place – huge stone and brick buildings around an enormous square – all very traditional European looking – could have been what I imagine the government centre of a small prosperous European state – left a very deep impression, as the Chinese might say. The showrooms were unbelievable – like an enormous hotel foyer – mostly marble with antique furniture – with surrounding tasteful displays of clothes. The clothing (we only visited one floor and mostly saw men’s clothing) – very high standard of material, craftsmanship and design, and accordingly priced. Wholesale prices for men’s suits ranged from about 3 to 14,000 yuan – really top of the line stuff – they bought controlling interests in several European name brands and mostly market there – if you are familiar with the European men’s fashion business you would recognise the names. Do not believe all you hear of poor Chinese quality – we saw many things in China that NZ could not match.

Then visited Yixing Caves getting wet going in and coming out – the rain had not eased. There are several limestone caves open to

tourists in this area and I am not sure which one we visited. Neon lighting all the way through and even a ride along in a boat – similar to Waitomo but we did not see any glow-worms. A little shopping (in the rain) for bargain price purple sand teapots in tiny stalls outside the caves.

We were very generously hosted to dinner that evening by Rong Lin with his wife, daughter, and friends. We had a very nice meal and a lot of fun. Nina very impressive with her Chinese language skills. We squeezed into two cars and raced off into town before the shops closed to buy cabin bags and Ian to buy a bamboo tea tray (with built in drainage tray) and a few Girl Band CDs and DVDs. Rong Lin got a tad lost finding his way out to the Hubin Hotel.

Thursday 6 October

Up for early breakfast. While checking out we met Tu Zhong Liang Deputy-Director of Foreign Affairs (Mr Tu has visited Hamilton as guest of our branch and attended our National conference held in Hamilton and also acted as host and guide to Brian Donkin, Stan Boyle and Ian Howat on an earlier delegation visit to Wuxi) and were farewelled by he and Michael Zhao. We also were introduced to the Hotel Manager Pan Yongkang, whose son is coming to study in New Zealand next year. Cynthia accompanied us in the mini-van by excellent motor-way to Shanghai Airport. There is not much farmland between Wuxi and ever expanding Shanghai. We passed hectare after hectare of multi storey apartment buildings – older smaller buildings being replaced by bigger buildings with larger apartments and more facilities. Solar heating units now compulsory on new buildings.

Notes: Workers in China all have three (separate) weeks holiday each year – National Day holiday, Labour Day and Chinese New Year. We saw weddings everywhere (they have a week off work for their wedding and honeymoon!) – most celebrated in Hotel dining rooms. Everyone dressed up – whole families including the children – lots of food – lots of toasts – lots of singing (even Karaoke) and lots of drink and increasing sounds of merriment. Brides seemed to disappear and come back in complete changes of costumes. Some of these weddings must be incredibly

12

expensive - we saw several where all the (six) bridal cars were all new model Mercedes Benz, another all BMWs – but those were top of the line. Bridal gowns were very lavish, mostly western style, and looked very expensive.

PS. If you go to China, try and steer clear of the three National holiday periods – so many go home to their families or go on holiday – traffic is intense, bookings almost impossible..

STUDENT EXCHANGE

While in Changsha recently, Hamilton Branch Vice –President Stan Boyle arranged the start of an exchange programme for English/Chinese language students. We will be home hosting three Changsha students and their teacher for three weeks in February 2006. The trip is a chance for these students to practice their spoken English and learn first hand about NZ (Hamilton) life and culture and a bit of sight seeing.

We are looking for volunteer hosts to take a student for 1,2,or 3 weeks. Please phone Stan or Ian if you wish to assist. We have the names of the students and teacher who will be coming, but no further details or dates at this point in time.

As part of the reciprocal arrangement, 3 NZ students studying Chinese in Hamilton will be invited to Changsha at a future date.

HASTINGS – GUILIN

Hastings established the first NZ-China Sister City link 25 years ago. This has been a most successful relationship to the benefit of all involved. A major 25th Anniversary celebration is being held in Hastings March 1 – 4 2006.

Harvey World Travel (Freephone: 0800 900 747 Email: gamm@clear.net.nz website: www.travelescorted.co.nz) are arranging an escorted tour.

Some accommodation is reserved until 31 Dec 2005. When booking, please identify yourself as attending the sister city anniversary celebrations:

Portmans Motor Lodge, Railway Road, Hastings. Ph 00800 767862 or fax 06 8788620. Units from \$90-00 per unit per night, double/twin.

Angus Hotel, Railway Road, Hastings. Ph 0800 109595 or fax 06 8787476. Rooms at \$70-00 per unit per night, double/twin.

Ian and Shirley Howat intend attending the celebration.

This report has been compiled by President Ian to acquaint members with what took place during the visit of the Branch delegation to China and Sister City Wuxi, in September / October last year.