

China Society of Indexers, at the Dalian conference of international exchange, 19 October 1999.

Chinese Conference

Foreword by Alan Walker to an article by Mr Ge

The Dalian proceedings opened in the conference room of the Center of International Cultures at Liaoning University. As I sat at the official table, with my interpreter, I faced fifty or sixty Chinese indexers, dressed much like indexers everywhere, except for the occasional well-cut Mao suit, and one female officer in the full uniform of the People's Liberation Army. Behind them, unexpectedly, was an enormous framed photograph of Mount Fuji, all blue and white, with cherry blossoms in the foreground. With me, at the table, were senior officials of the China Society of Indexers, of the university and of the Chinese Communist Party.

That is where I was privileged to hear Mr Ge's speech. I was also grateful for Prof Li Rong's clear interpretation at the time and for her written translation, which has provided the text on the next page.

Mr Ge's speech tells us something of the philosophy and structure of the Chinese indexing society. Some of the features of social organization and the network of relationships which are an important part of the Chinese cultural value system were unfamiliar and particularly interesting to me.

Each of the six indexing associations which are now joined in an international affiliation agreement has distinct methods of operation and administration, reflecting their national cultures and traditions.

For instance, it is interesting to think about how the social and cultural conditions of the Chinese indexer might compare with the situation and needs of the indexer working freelance ("a person without a work group"), which are the basis of many of the concerns of Western indexing societies.

Once again, I express my sincere gratitude to the officers of the China Society of Indexers for their help in making it possible for me to share the experiences of the Dalian conference.

My own personal impressions of the conference, with some details of Chinese indexing software, were published in the last issue of *The Indexer* (Vol. 22 No.1 April 2000 pp.21–22). Mr Ge's speech provides more of the official flavour of the conference and details of the organisation and social consciousness of indexers and indexing in China.

Chinese index science: stepping forward to the new century

Speech by Ge Yong-Qing, Vice-President of the Standing Committee, China Society of Indexers, at the Dalian conference of international exchange, 19 October 1999.

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Mr Alan Walker, and everybody present. This meeting, which is the China Society of Indexers' 4th annual conference for the discussion of indexing science, and the second national contact working meeting, opens today in Dalian, a city located on the Bohai Sea. At

the century's turning point, we are facing a serious issue: how to accept the challenges of the coming century. What should we do to carry on the development of index science to meet the new requirements? I would like to take the opportunity to have a general discussion and exchange of views with everyone here, especially our distinguished guest from Australia. This, I think, is an issue that all people working in this field are concerned about, and must consider. Undoubtedly index science has played an important part in present-day society. We all agree that indexes are tools that we cannot do without, whether in academic studies, or in obtaining information, or in the improvement of working efficiency, or in the promotion of scientific management. As Pan Shuguang, professor at Suzhou University, pointed out, in the past hundred years a great many scholars have devoted themselves to studying and compiling indexes.

We should not forget the role that indexes have played in the past century, when we celebrate our achievements in other areas. We can say, without exaggeration, that if it had not been for indexes, there would have been no such great achievements. The study and compilation of indexes can be traced back a very long time. Take the growth of indexing science in the twentieth century. It has borne noticeable and delightful fruits in the development of science and technology, in the growth of prosperity and the flourishing of the economy and culture, through the efforts taken by scholars and indexing professionals over the past hundred years.

The founding of China's Society of Indexers, in December 1991, marked not only the existence of indexing as a science, and its growing maturity, but also the beginning of a new epoch in our work as indexers. It tells the world that, for the first time, China has a national indexing organisation, with recognised standing and authorisation. For the past eight years, we have aimed at 'sincerity, honesty, opening-up and devotion', and we have worked for the improvement of indexing theory, research and study, for the prosperity of compilers and the success of publications, for the growth of index services and academic exchanges, at home and abroad.

Led by the Standing Committee, the China Society of Indexers has established three sub-committees, devoted to academic research, compilation and publishing, and education and training. At present, there are about 1200 members, including 38 institutional members. Coming from the areas of publishing, colleges and universities, research institutes, and libraries and information centres, most of the members are middle-ranking professionals. At the same time people from organs and enterprises have been accepted as members.

To vitalise the Society and to motivate the members, we have set up organisations across the country, which can be divided into three levels:

- contact departments, within provinces, autonomous regions and cities belonging to this level
- contact stations, within counties or smaller units having substantial numbers of members; and
- contact persons, to liaise with units having no more than ten members .

The contact work meeting being held as part of this conference is for representatives from those organs to sit together and exchange their views and opinions. The efforts made by all of our members in index compilation and indexing research have produced many fruits. Five volumes have been accepted and published as Indexing Research Serials, as well as those articles which have appeared in newspapers and magazines across the country. Nineteen issues of Index Communication have been published. Four annual conferences and about ten meetings and discussions of various types have been held. At the same time we have run fifteen training classes. Many years' practice have proved that persistence with academic

and educational activities in and outside the Society not only boosts theoretical studies, but also enlarges the group of index workers, and vitalises the Society itself.

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With the rapid development of modern information technology and the demands for better indexing work at the beginning of the 21st century, the indexing service field will be greatly widened. Not only will this bring good opportunities for our indexing profession, but it will also confront traditional indexing working methods with many challenges. In view of this, we will propagate and spread modern index technology, and we will train every member in computerised theory and the technology of indexing work. In this way, we can become a group of modern index experts.

The computerisation of indexing work has already been carried out in some developed countries. Although computerised indexing and databases have been put into application in China, much more needs to be done for the overall computerisation of our indexing work. As was said in 'Farewell to the Manual Index Age' by Prof. Zhang Qiyu at this annual conference, we should change our ideas and realise that: modern index experts should be database experts, who have a deep understanding of the computerisation of index work, namely database technology.

In the first one or two decades of the next century, we will make great progress in the field of databases. The computerisation of our index work will be fully realised, as a response to the need to develop our economy, science and culture. In order to make a quick departure from the manual index age and to welcome the new age of indexing, we should transfer our working emphasis and take steps to push forward the task.

Besides, in the new age, we must study and think about topics such as:

- how we can apply the compilation and study of indexes to the needs of society
- how we can bring indexing achievements widely into use
- how to train modern index experts
- how to establish good social identity for index workers

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The China Society of Indexers has been operating for eight years. Although we have some achievements, they are far from our stated objectives, for several reasons. In the early days of the Society, we planned to compile and publish a set of indexing research books at the turn of the century; we planned to establish our own publishing house; we also thought about setting up an Indexing Development Fund for China. However, it seems that these objectives cannot be realised at present. Nevertheless, we have confidence and perseverance to keep up with the trends and to make greater contributions to modern indexing in the areas of information technology and services.

We totally understand that the world is stepping into the next information age, where technology progresses rapidly. The problem of how to enhance international communication between indexing associations has become very important. Recently we made an agreement with indexing societies in Britain, the United States, Australia and Canada, so as to further enhance communication with them.

Alan Walker, the President of the Australian Society of Indexers, has accepted our invitation to attend our annual conference. This is a good beginning, and we warmly welcome his arrival. The Australian Society of Indexers was founded in 1976, fifteen years before ours.

Their experience can be of great value to us. After Mr Walker became President of the Society in 1997, he put great emphasis on indexing standards and quality. He has made effective contributions to personnel training and co-operation with related organisations. This is something we can learn from.

Ladies and gentlemen, the new century is shedding its light on us. Let us stride forward, hand in hand, for the prosperity of our common cause, and the bright future of the field of indexing.