

The first USCPFPA delegation to China in front of the village in which Mao Zedong was born. Back row, center: Bernie Lusher, Claire Hirsch. Front: Jean Kidwell Pestana and Frank Pestana, Georgia Lein.

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Frank Pestana, a founding member of the USCPFPA served as president, co-chair, honorary Board member of the Association, and chairman of the Los Angeles chapter. In 1983 he was given the Koji Ariyoshi Award for distinguished service in friendship work.

Interview with Frank Pestana

Beginnings, struggle, growth

I had been the lawyer representing the US-Soviet Friendship Association on the West Coast, so I was aware of what this kind of an organization could do. During the period 1960—70, I attempted to create interest in a US-China Friendship Association in Los Angeles.

I felt the association should be as broad-based as we could make it although at that time, both in Los Angeles and the San Fran-

cisco groups, there were young people who felt that any group interested in China should be committed to a socialist ideology. Internally, we had a left-oriented faction and a larger, "middle" group of members. In 1971 our LA group invited the Sidels (Victor & Ruth) to come to the West Coast. Then we sent them to Stanford to speak about their experiences in China. We also sent our publicity material to the San Francisco

chapter, to use or adopt as they saw fit. In this way, we got on the map. At that time, the Revolutionary Union (RU), who were among our members, were very helpful to us, although there would be a later split between the Association at large and this RU group.

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Interview cont'd

Seattle had organized a chapter on their own and we broached the idea of a regional conference to them, which would enable us to begin to do more work and organize on a larger scale. Los Angeles invited Seattle to come down and we ended up having a great meeting. We had mature people who had a lot of experience.

There were budding New York and Philadelphia chapters, and a small group in Washington, DC. I went to the East Coast to talk about a bi-regional structure for the Association. Just prior to this, however, I was invited to China to discuss a tour program which would help raise revenues for us, since this was a major problem.

A first delegation went to China in November 1972, and a tour program was discussed. When I went to the East Coast, it was with this idea that tours could be sent to China.

At that time, the DC Chapter was considering involvement in a local strike issue, and we again discussed the fact that a Friendship Association could not afford the time, energy or effort to deal with local political issues but would have to be broad-based in membership but limited in its objectives. The Eastern groups agreed and we had a bi-regional organization in its beginnings.

In the Midwest, Chicago had a chapter that followed the San Francisco model and everyone interested in China was attracted to it—which brought another confrontation of unmixables . . . an impossible situation. Again we moved to leave the left organizations alone, although the RU was still helpful at this point. Then came Detroit and Minneapolis chapters, followed by very small (five or six-member) chapters on various campuses, and so we had a Midwest region. By 1974 we had our first convention, bringing together a tri-regional representation.

The RU began to change its perspective leaning toward socialism, and began denouncing the Association. The old approach broke down and some vicious battles took place between the RU and the "middle" group.

At one point, the USIA (US Information Agency) asked Jean (Kidwell—Mrs. Pestana) to speak on China at Pierce College in the San Fernando Valley and then at USC. It turned out that this was a number of CIA



people on loan to the USIA, but they allowed her to speak freely, since the Nixon visit was in the offing. I continued to work as an organizer, going to Portland and then to Seattle, which broke apart twice and had to be reformed.

In the South, the Atlanta chapter had similar problems; left-oriented group and non-acceptance by the community at large. When I spoke to them, I was the only one sitting in a chair. They all sat on the floor and were dressed like hippies. I reminded them that they wanted acceptance and would have to meet the community on its terms. They bought it and we got three locals going beyond Atlanta. When the South resolved the issue between left or middle-ground, they brought some 14 chapters into the association and at our 1975 Convention we had our four regions.

The confrontations with left-groups who actually had a plan to take over the organization, came to a head at the San Francisco Convention. We took them on and kicked them out.

At the outset we had a rapid growth in membership, fueled by interest in China as an exotic, forbidden place. After all, no one could go there. We began with a virtual monopoly on travel, since only we and the State Dept. could offer visas. We got very choosy about who we would send.

At that time too, when someone went on our tours, we built in a charge that gave them a year's membership in the USCPFA and a subscription to our magazine. We made an exception for people in govern-

ment, at any level, who might have been compromised by this but we did ask them to talk about their experience to others when they returned, hoping they would be realistic.

In 1979 when visas became generally available, we found we had competition for tours which was far more experienced and competent than we were (in the sense of conducting a travel business operation—ed.). We were out of our milieu. So the Chinese said they would deal with us and help us organize tours, although we continued to experience a precipitous decline in the number of tours we were sending.

When Normalization took place we did have a feeling of "what are we supposed to do now?" I felt and still feel that the Association needs to function on national, regional and local levels because time change and conditions change. We know that there are people still pursuing a two-Chinas policy in our government. Who knows what may happen in the future? An example: at one point there were charges made publicly that China had been involved in massive narcotics shipments, and we went to the State Department and asked for sources and evidence. They admitted that the charges were totally unfounded. So we need a voice here in the US to represent the Chinese and their positions . . . from a perspective interested in truth and a clear understanding of what one fourth of the world's population is doing.

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At one time, after Normalization, I thought we could be instrumental in promoting trade and other contacts with China, but these things have developed so rapidly through the business community and other organizations that I see I was wrong.

I also feel there is no realistic way to expect us to promote a broad popular movement for friendship with China since this is not a burning issue with the American people.

I feel the Chinese can help us function in a specialized way, in quiet, helpful cooperation with the aid of YOUXIE, to introduce people to China. We must keep a national organization so that we have a good, solid, interested group of people who will work and another group of people who will come to meetings and remain interested in China.

I would be satisfied if we keep the interest and numbers that we have and who knows, perhaps we will have new growth in time. □

On friendship

By William Hinton

The relationship between the American and Chinese peoples, and by extension between our two countries, is surely, to borrow a phrase from Mao Zedong, "one of the ten major relationships" in the world today.

Around this axis, vast and vital global affairs revolve. The relationship is obviously too important to be left to the oft-warped judgment of statesmen, diplomats, bankers, traders and investors, not to mention military men. It requires cultivation by activists from every level and sphere of human endeavor.

Only multi-layered, popular interaction can realize the rich potential of two such unlike, yet sympathetic civilizations, and insure their peaceful, mutual development. That is why the Friendship Association came into being a decade ago and will surely continue to flourish for decades to come. □



An early meeting of the San Francisco group.

San Francisco's experience

—excerpted from a speech given at the Tenth Anniversary of the SF chapter written by local members.

The San Francisco USCPFA was founded in San Francisco in June, 1971, and launched at an event at Glide Memorial Church. The original founders came from diverse backgrounds—from the academic community, the Chinese community, the progressive movement, as well as other interested individuals. From their diverse backgrounds, they brought differing views on how the Association should work to build friendship on a people-to-people level. Because the San Francisco local was the first to be established, there was little to give our founders guidance in what working to build friendship meant.

From the outset, concern focused on establishing an overall direction for the Association. During initial discussions, several important questions emerged. One question was: who could be a friend of China? In responding, one segment felt that the Association could count as friends of China only those Americans who supported socialism. The other segment, which included socialists as well as those with other political beliefs, felt that the Association should be broad-based. The struggle over which of these roads to follow had the benefit of giving us a deeper understanding of what it meant to be a Friendship Association. Friendship does not spring forth spontaneously but must be developed. People-to-people friendship can bring together people of different political beliefs, as well as those of different ages, nationalities, social and economic backgrounds, all of whom share a common interest in and respect for the Chinese people and their accomplishments.

An initial evaluation and examination of the Association's work led to our first attempts at community outreach programs. A series of slide shows and talks were held at the San Francisco Public Libraries. In 1973, the Association worked with other individuals and groups to sponsor a highly successful "Friendship Week" at the Kabuki Theatre, drawing over 3000 people to the various events.

Soon after the San Francisco local was set up, we began receiving inquiries from other parts of the country requesting information on how to set up an Association. After Nixon's visit, more locals were formed. The developments in our own Association were being paralleled by developments in locals across the US. By 1974, the numerous independent Associations had accumulated enough experience so as to put the founding of a National Association on the agenda.

San Francisco Association members played a helpful role in the founding of the National USCPFA. The 1974 convention, in turn, helped our local realize the importance of the work we had been doing and how much more work we could do. This realization was emphasized by the visit of the Archaeological Exhibition from China in the summer of 1975, where over 800,000 people viewed the Exhibit at the De Young Museum, more than any single other exhibition in the history of the United States. We distributed thousands of magazines from China to a very favorable response and helped organize activities around the Exhibition. From these many activities, new and different people joined the Association.

As a result of this growth in membership,

our local began to reexamine our structure to see how we could make it more democratic and easier for members to get involved. The result of this reexamination was a change to monthly general membership meetings and an elected Coordinating Committee.

Our outreach activities were also improving. But what served to be an important turning point in this regard was the 1975 National USCPFA Convention. There, an evaluation of chapters' work across the United States led to the adoption of two priorities in Association work nationally: a campaign for the establishment of full diplomatic relations with China, and special efforts to improve outreach to working class and minority Americans.

The 1975 convention and its passage of the two national priorities provided our local with further direction on how to expand our activities. In line with the priorities, we

established an outreach committee which has initially focused on programming in the Mission District of San Francisco, a multi-ethnic, working class community. The Outreach Committee made beginning efforts to work with trade unionists. Our US-China relations committee made use of President Ford's visit to China and the summer Olympic Games to spotlight the demand for diplomatic relations, particularly by extensive use of the media. A schools committee was established, further expanding outreach to all segments of the American people. Our publications committee distributed *New China* magazine and other literature from and about China, enabling our members and audiences to continuously deepen their understanding. Members of our newsletter committee worked with the other Northern California Association locals to publish our bi-monthly *Friendship Journal*. □

Plotting a course

By Ellen Brotsky Williams

If I would say anything about the San Francisco chapter, it would be that it embodies much of the essence of USCPFA through the years. It started with a diverse group of founders; from the Chinese community, the academic community, the church community and the left movement. Next it struggled in the early period over whether to be a broad-based friendship organization or a thinly disguised attempt at a pro-socialist political party, which fortunately was resolved in favor of the former.

The attempts to reach out, with a variety of events in the community, to broader audiences than its membership; the many programs—press conferences, petition campaigns, free speech messages, etc., that were held to promote normalization. (Oops, I forgot something important which was pre-normalization: the fact that SF chapter gave assistance and leadership to the starting of the other chapters in the Bay Area, and also the fact that with the shrinking of active membership since normalization the chapter has regrouped, including former Marin, Sonoma, and East Bay chapter members.)

The next step was the successful attempt at making the painful transition from pre-normalization to post-normalization activities, with the chapter now being actively involved in the San Francisco/Shanghai and Oakland/Dalian sister city relationships, and also with the hospitality for Chinese scholars and visiting delegations.

By tracing the history and looking at the present of the SF chapter, one can see the USCPFA in a microcosm. And the chapter now is healthy, and once again growing, which hopefully will be the future of the entire organization! □

A 1979 YOUXIE delegation in San Francisco.



A unique role by Jan Masaoka

To me, there is no question that we were a small but significant voice for normalized relations. We can't take credit for normalization, but we did help crack open the door. And, although we don't realize it, many people's first impressions of China were formed by us—they may have come to one of our programs—because there was nothing in the papers in those days.

Today, I think the USCPFA has a unique role to play. We are a constant watchdog on

US-China relations. For many people, we are also the only way to learn about China without being in an academic setting. Recently, I talked with a Black health care worker from the East Bay who tutors visiting Chinese scholars. "How else could someone like me meet people from China?" she asked. She feels the experience is valuable to both her and the scholars. To me, this illustrates the unique role of the USCPFA. □