

APHAFIC annual meeting on June 4, 2016

The 14th annual meeting was held in La Jolla/Riford Branch Library, 7555 Draper Ave, La Jolla, CA 92037 from 1:30-3:30pm, June 4, Saturday, 2016. Around 35 people attended. The meeting started with the annual report from Nancy Lo on all activities during May 2015 to May 2016 (<http://aphafic.org>), followed by a speech on “Eyewitness testimonies 10000 cries for justice – Tong Zeng (童增)’s collection” by Dr. David Chai: the project of translating roughly 10,000 Chinese letters into English to form a database.

Dr. Chai, born in China in 1937, spent seven years in Japan (occupation movement) before coming to the US in 1955. With a Ph.D. in computer science, he worked for IBM and other companies, and was the Mayor of Holmdel, NJ in 1999.

Dr. Chai talked about Tong Zeng, one of nominates for the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize, who collected approximately 10,000 victim letters over 20 years before 2014, when the issue was brought to the media. These letters are like the diary of Anne Frank: eyewitness to the Japanese Army's “Kill all, burn all, loot all (三光政策)” in China during WWII. Tong was born in Chongqing, a master degree in law. He serves as the director of Soong Ching-ling (宋庆龄) Foundation. He was the first Chinese civilian to ask for reparation from Japan (中国民间对日索赔第一人). He also served as the president of the Association to protect the Diaoyuislands(中国民间保钓联合会会长).

When he heard about Tong’s letters, Dr. Chai’s decided to scan them in high quality and preserve the originals, to build two websites (US and China) for public access to provide an index for searches, to translate a subset into English, and to build three-way teamwork: 1) Beijing – scan and index (essence of the letters); 2) Jiansu company – transcribe and digitize from hand-written, translate 10% into English, develop website; and 3) US – funding and project management, registered as non-profit.

Both Republic of China in 1952 and PRC in 1972 gave up on asking for government compensation from Japan, while East Germany’s Honecker offered 10M marks to Jewish survivors in 1988. After the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, more lawsuits were brought to the united Germany. This fact made Tong realize the separation of government and individuals' rights to compensation. (Tong was asked to leave Beijing whenever there was a Japanese visitor.)

Tong wrote his manifesto (万言书) in 1990, requesting compensation from Japan. He distributed it in 1991 to the People's Congress. It was accepted as an Assembly bill in 1992. Suing in Japan failed quickly (2001). Suits were brought in China in 2005.

Light at the end of the tunnel: 1987 PRC Civil Law was promulgated in 1986 and came into force in 1987 to deal with statute of limitations, a foreign civil laws. The case dates from 1936, when a Japanese company leased two Shanghai ships and neither paid for them nor returned them. The Chinese company finally got its day in court in 1991, when the Shanghai Maritime Court opened the case on Mitsui OSK Lines. Justice worked slowly, until in 2007 when the Court ruled in favor of the Chinese company. Mitsui OSK Lines did not pay initially. Finally in 2014, the Boasteel Emotion ship outside Hangzhou was seized by the order of Shanghai Maritime Court to put pressure on Mitsui OSK Lines, which days later finally paid the 2.9B JY plus 2.4M RMB penalty. This long legal action went through three generations of the Chinese owner.

(<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-china-lawsuit-idUSBREA3N0A920140424>)

In 2014, Beijing #1 Intermediate Court accepted a slave compensation lawsuit. The latest news is that on Jun 2, 2016 Mitsubishi accepted the responsibility (with only 3 survivors agreeing to settle).

In the website: <http://www.10000cfj.org/> (in Chinese, English, and traditional Chinese to come), one can search based on various attributes of the letters (sequence number, writer, date, location, type – rape, slave labor, comfort women, etc).

3,780 letters were scanned (12,976 images) plus 905 form letters. All were transcribed, most were also transcribed into traditional Chinese, and 400 were transcribed into English. The actual count of letters was well short of 10,000, but undoubtedly there originally were more than 3,780 because sample letters were "loaned" to the media and were not returned.

The future plan is to get web traffic to connect the data base as a resource for researchers, educators, museums and foundations. We need fund raising. We need additional translations.

Q&A session

Most questions from the audience were related to the ship lawsuit.

Q: Judy Lu: Apart from the financial settlement of a Chinese ship being destroyed during the Japanese invasion by withholding a Japanese ship which happened to dock in a Chinese harbor, what other settlements of other Chinese damages occurred so far?

A: So far, there was none.

Q: Dennis Benjamin: Would the mainland Chinese government allow their people to sue the Japanese government in Chinese courts for atrocities committed by the Japanese Army in WWII? Many countries, such as the U.S., do not ordinarily allow their citizens to use domestic courts to sue foreign governments. This prohibition is in law so that diplomatic relations are not disrupted by private lawsuits.

A: I am not sure.

Q: Shioh-Hwa Lin: Was the Baosteel registered under the company that was the successor to the original company charged in the case?

A: Yes

Board of APHAFIC presented Dr. Chai with a plaque, a T-shirt (do not forget 918 event) and a video tape: 'From the land of bitter tears' by Kana Tomoko in appreciation for his talk.



Nancy Lo gave the annual report from May 2015-May 2016



Dr. David Chia describes 10000-cries- for-justice project (<http://10000cfj.org>)



Dr. David Chia with APHAFIC current and past board members with the two posters of five letters edited by APHAFIC five members.



Dr. Chai (second from left) with three of the five APHAFIC members who did editing of 23 letters : Howard Chang, Nancy Lo and Judy Lu (not in the pictures are Claudia Chan-Schaffer and Grace Chan), and Jack Meng, vp of APHAFIC.