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- Simmons College revives Chinese treasure
- Midwinter report



Project Emperor I, Simmons College

Simmons project tracks treasures of Qin dynasty with new technology

"We needed visual images that would capture and communicate the archaeological grandeur of the era of China's first emperor," said Ching-chih Chen, professor and associate dean of the Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science and director of Project Emperor I. "That's why we chose interactive videodisc technology to make this period of history come alive for both scholars and the public," she said.

Project Emperor I records and interprets on videodisc the period of 221-206 B.C., when Qin Shi Huang Di ruled China.

The project was funded in October 1984 by a \$270,000 grant to the Simmons library school from the Humanities Project in Libraries, National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Additional funding came from Simmons College.

The interactive videodisc, "The First Emperor of China," premiered at Boston Public Dec. 13 before more than 200 people.

At the showing, Arthur Curley, BPL director, hailed the project as "a combination of humanism and technology" and an example of the tremendous opportunities videodisc technology offers librarians. Chen and Robert Stueart, dean of Simmons' library school and research director for the project, provided a history of Emperor I, and Rus Gant, technical director, demonstrated the use of the videodisc.

Among several reasons Chen cited for having chosen videodisc technology for the project was its high-density storage capacity and multi-media integration. "Each side of our

12-inch analog videodisc can hold 54,000 frames of visual images and 30 minutes of sound in double soundtracks—English and Chinese—with a musical background," Chen said.

The videodisc shows, among other archaeological finds, three-dimensional photographs of Qin's magnificent burial tomb in Xian. More than 7,000 life-size terra-cotta figures, including soldiers and horses, were buried with him (see cover). Qin was known as the great unifier, standardizing weights and measures and codifying laws.

On-site filming was conducted with the cooperation of the Ministry of Culture and the Shansi Provincial Bureau of Museum Affairs and Relics, the People's Republic of China, last March-April. In the group that traveled

to China were Chen and Stueart, who has an academic background in cultural anthropology. Accompanying them were artistic consultant Wu Tung of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, Paul Poon of Hong Kong Polytechnic Institute, and three technical staff.

They spent a week in Beijing collecting data and visiting museums to identify the objects they needed to film. "Some of the time was spent negotiating with museum directors to obtain permission to document and photograph artifacts we had selected," Stueart said. They then spent two weeks in Xian, the site of The Terra Cotta Museum. "Xian is one of the oldest cities in China and was the seat of 11 dynasties, so we needed to record many things of historical interest there for the database," Stueart said.



From left, Arthur Curley, Ching-chih Chen, and Robert Stueart at the premiere of "The First Emperor of China."