

This issue of *Civil Engineering Practice* originated in the Boston Society of Civil Engineers' 1996 John R. Freeman Lecture. The Society's John R. Freeman Fund, endowed by John R. Freeman in 1924, is dedicated to the advancement of Civil Engineering, with emphasis on hydraulics and on the encouragement of young engineers. Freeman Lectures, jointly sponsored by the Parsons Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, are a major activity of the Freeman Fund Committee. The Parsons Laboratory and the Freeman Fund Committee go to great lengths to select subjects and speakers worthy of honoring John R. Freeman's legacy.

The stimulus for the 1996 Freeman Lecture was the article "Property Rights and Bioregionalism" by Patricia Adams, which appeared in the November/December 1994 issue of the *Cato Policy Report*. Adams is the Executive Director of Probe International, a Toronto-based environmental group that has published two books about the Three Gorges dam project — *Damming the Three Gorges: What Dam Builders Don't Want You to Know* (1990, 1993) and *Yangtze! Yangtze!* (1994). The article, which questions the analytical procedures used to justify big dam projects such as the one on the Yangtze River at Three Gorges, called the Freeman Fund Committee's attention to the important subject that led to the 1996 Freeman Lecture and to this issue of *Civil Engineering Practice*.

However, this volume does not mark the first time that the Society has reported on engineering in modern China. In 1989, George Hecker, President of Alden Research Laboratory in Holden, Massachusetts, with financial support from the Freeman Fund, made an information-gathering trip to China. Hecker's paper reporting on his trip, "Hydraulic Engineering in China," was published in the Spring 1991 issue of *Civil Engineering Practice*, with following acknowledgment:

"By their gracious hospitality, the four [Chinese engineering] institutes visited by the author made this journey both pleasant and technically interesting. All travel arrangements were made by the Department of International Cooperation of the Institute of Water Conservancy and Hydroelectric Power Research in Beijing, and their extensive help in many areas is sincerely appreciated. Field trips arranged by the Yellow River Conservancy Commission and the Yangtze River Scientific Research Institute were especially impressive. The extensive downtown and suburban facilities of the Nanjing Hydraulic Research Institute were demonstrated with great efficiency and friendliness. The author extends thanks to the many people at these institutes who made this trip to China so enjoyable. A talk based on these observations was presented by the author at a meeting of the BSCES Hydraulics and Water Resources Technical Group at Tufts University on February 5, 1990."

The 1996 Freeman Lecture took place on the evening of April 16 at the Bartos Theater in the Weisner Building at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It was attended by a large and enthusiastic audience numbering approximately 150 and was followed by a lively bilingual (Chinese and English) question and answer session.

The Freeman Fund Committee has always aimed to publish products of its activities in *Civil Engineering Practice* and has gone to greater than usual lengths to elaborate on the material presented at the 1996 lecture for this issue. The committee is particularly grateful to Susan Murcott for having made most of the difficult arrangements for the lecture, selecting and communicating with the speakers and coordinating their presentations, for moderating the lecture and then for putting together all of the presentations, and other additional materials, into a form suitable for publishing. Readying this volume for publication was her major responsibility and achievement.

The Freeman Fund Committee and the *Civil Engineering Practice* Editorial Board hope that readers will find the information contained herein on these scarcely publicized but important, politically sensitive and technically controversial issues interesting and provocative. We invite comments and discussion to enlighten the debate.



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