Editorial

A report in *Journal of Medical Genetics* one year ago described some aspects of medical genetics in China, based on the visit of a group of British clinical geneticists earlier in 1986. That report concentrated particularly on the clinical and service aspects of the subject, but noted the original research encountered in the units visited. Readers now have the opportunity of appreciating some of this work at first hand, with the appearance in this issue of a number of papers from China.

These contributions, submitted independently from different centres, cover several of the major areas that are receiving attention world wide, including the haemoglobinopathies, fragile chromosomal sites, and first trimester DNA diagnosis. The surveys of inherited eye disorders and congenital deafness provide more 'classical' genetic studies that are currently perhaps less often seen. While a small group of papers cannot be regarded as in any way representative of current medical genetics research in China, there are some valuable lessons to be learned from them, apart from the clear indication that they show high quality research in progress including the use of new molecular genetic techniques.

The most striking feature to emerge from several papers is the remarkable sample size achieved, both in the laboratory studies of haemoglobinopathies and in the clinical and population surveys of eye disorders and deafness. Studies on this scale would be extremely difficult in most other countries, and, even allowing for the populous nature of China, the work and organisation involved are remarkable. A counterpart to this is the heterogeneity seen in different population groups within China, again illustrated by the variation seen in the study of haemoglobins. A no less important aspect, shown particularly by the study of genetic eye disease in China, is the remarkable degree of collaboration between centres, obtained in an analysis of data from more than 500 ophthalmologists and the testing of 700 000 people.

Readers will notice in the references a number of Chinese publications that are probably unknown and relatively inaccessible to scientists outside China. It is to be hoped that these will increasingly become available, even if only in summary, in English and that Chinese scientists will feel encouraged to publish at least a proportion of their work in international journals, such as *Journal of Medical Genetics*. The present series of papers should make a modest contribution to ensuring that valuable research is not ignored.

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