

A tribute to Liping Ni



One more time we have come together to share our results and discuss our concerns on what we all consider important topics for future neutron sources, to enjoy the company of people we have known for a while as well as of that of newcomers. The Spallation Materials Community is a relatively small one, and over the years most of us have come to know each other quite well and some have even become rather close friends. So, if suddenly a member of this community is missing, this cannot not go unnoticed. This is particularly true for the person we will now never see again at any one of our meetings: *Liping Ni*. We all remember her as a friendly, competent and welcoming person whose regular contributions to our topics were as diverse as they were important. Ranging from pressure wave mitigation via the interpretation of ASTE results and temperature distributions in the STIP-target capsules all the way to safety issues of the MEGAPIE target, Liping Ni worked on all kinds of problems in the fields of fluid mechanics, thermal hydraulics and structural mechanics. During the course of this meeting we encountered several examples of her work, in particular her share in the STIP programme and her contribution to the optimisation of the LISOR irradiation parameters.

Liping joined my division at PSI in 1995, and, practically from her first day on, made a difference to the group. She had no problems getting integrated and went to work with exceptional ambitions and competence. Her job was not easy in the beginning: about a year or so earlier we had become aware of the problem of pressure waves in liquid metal spallation targets under pulsed beam input. The person who was then working with me, Karel Skala is a gifted engineer and an enthusiastic FORTRAN programmer. He understood every detail of the problems he was working on and thoroughly distrusted all software he had not written himself. So he set out to write a big code which would allow him to calculate every aspect of the pressure wave problem he was interested in. Obviously, this meant continuously adding more subroutines and not having time to generate a good documentation of his code. Having worked on oil hydraulics before, Karel knew about the effect of gas bubbles in a pressurized liquid system and proposed this as a solution to mitigate the stress on the walls. Since Karel was about to retire, it fell to Liping's part to take over from him and help to improve our understanding of the problem. With unbelievable patience she extracted all the necessary information from Karel to understand his code and to apply it to new questions that came up, in particular the ASTE experiments. It was her who named this code KASKA from KAREL SKALA. While she fully appreciated the flexibility of being able to modify one's own computer programme, she came to me one day, worried that progress was a bit slow and she asked

me whether she might acquire and use a commercial code as a complement. So we obtained a license for ANSYS and she familiarized herself with this tool. It didn't take long until her ambitions had outgrown the then straight forward capabilities of ANSYS and she started interacting with the owners of the code, trying to get certain new features implemented. This quickly made her a highly esteemed member of the ANSYS user group and she was even invited to lecture on advanced uses of ANSYS at the annual user meetings.

While very successful in her professional work, Liping always remained the modest and friendly person who liked to share her feelings with her colleagues and who went to great length to be an integral part of the group. Whenever we had a group party she would happily contribute specialities from her Chinese home cooking and it went without saying that on the Chinese New Year we had moon cake and that a box of cookies would sit on a little table in front of her office around Christmas time. Liping really liked the environment she was working in and everyone liked her.

Hearing Liping converse and joke in perfect German, it was hard to believe that in 1988, when she first moved to Karlsruhe from China, she did not speak a word of this language. However she told me later on that she always felt how important it was to be able to communicate well with one's environment in order to get integrated. This desire was particularly strong in her after the shock of changing from the Chinese system where everything was regulated and predetermined to the Western civilization, where you had to make your own decisions and look after your own interests all the time. While she mastered this transition extremely well, she was honest enough to admit that off and on she missed that sense of togetherness that resulted from living so close with family and relatives in her home country. Perhaps it was this mix or even synthesis of Eastern background and appreciation for Western values that made her such a unique person.

When at the age of 34 she expected her first baby she was a bit worried at times because the doctor had told her she was a 'late' mother and that things might not go as smoothly as for younger women. They did, however, and she proudly presented her daughter when she came back to work. Her second pregnancy occurred four years later after I had left from PSI and gone back to Jülich. Each time I returned for a visit she would not only talk about the progress she made with her work; she also was so much looking forward to having another baby, a thing that would have been extremely difficult in the China she had left behind. We often talked about the consequences the one child per family policy in China would have on the society of her home country and, while she fully understood the reasoning behind it, she was concerned about the drastic changes in social life it would bring about.

When, in the morning of October 24th of last year I went to visit there again, I found my former colleagues and collaborators standing in the corridor, stunned by the news they had just received: Liping Ni had not survived the birth of her second child. She had passed away during the night. Although I was not a formal member of this team any more, I immediately knew that this meant a big change. Not only had the group lost an important resource for its work – never again would her cheerful laughing be heard in this corridor or would there be her home made Christmas cookies sitting in front of her office. Fortunately her little son was well, although he would have to grow up without his caring mother.

Rather than standing up for a minute of silence in her commemoration, which to me is like closing a door, I ask all of you who have known her, to engrave the memories of this exceptional person in your hearts and remember the days when she was among us.

Liping Ni passed away on October 23, 2002. With her all of us lost a highly esteemed member of our community, some of us even lost a dear friend.

G.S. Bauer
Forschungszentrum Jülich, Germany
Institut Laue-Langevin Grenoble, France
E-mail address: gbauer@ill.fr