

TERRACOTTA ARMY INVADERS WAGGA

They stand in military formation, row on row, clad in mailed battle dress — 7000 lifesize terracotta figures whose solemn duty consists of guarding the tomb of Qin Shi Huang Di, the first emperor of China who ruled from 221 to 206 BC.

Two thousand years after the army began its vigil, the unearthed figures have become a prime tourist attraction in China.

And two years ago an American college initiated a bold project by which videodisc technology could be applied to record and interpret the archaeological find.

Dr Ching-chi Chen, professor and associate dean of library science at Simmons College, is principal investigator and director of Project Emperor-1: China's Treas-

ure Revealed Through Videodisc Technology. She is in Australia at the invitation of the Library Association of Australia as keynote speaker at the LAA Biennial Conference in Darwin, and yesterday, armed with videodisc and compact disc, called in to the DA to explain her mission.

So far Dr Chen and her team of specialist consultants have completed Phase One of the project — production of two double-sided analog videodiscs containing a staggering quantity of visual images and sound-track material. Each disc, believe it or not, is capable of storing the information equivalent of twenty 20 volume sets of encyclopedias.

Dr Chen explained that the videodisc contains 108,000 frames of visual images, each frame retrievable in from one to three seconds, while the compact disc houses one million Library of Congress catalogue card entries.

Unfortunately, only one video disc player is available for the LAA in NSW, and that machine has gone to Darwin in readiness for Dr Chen's address on June 30. So the stunning spectacle of China's terracotta army remains for the moment encased in a silver disc.

Information management rather than archaeology is Dr Chen's specialisation. "In this new information age, we're looking for better ways of storing information," she says. "You're faced with more material, a greater variety of sources. That's a real challenge for information specialists. We look to technology as a tool to solve these problems."

The marrying of micro computer and video disc applied to the field of humanities represents a pioneering approach. "People have said the use of high-tech equipment in

an artistic area can't be done," says Dr Chen. "It has been a real challenge producing a disc embodying the most comprehensive data bank available, useful to scholars and yet interesting to non-specialists."

"This kind of technology is being used by science, industry, education, business and travel — and now humanities."

Dr Chen first saw the terracotta army in 1979. "I saw the site simply as a regular tourist," she says. "I never dreamed then I'd be doing a project on it. It's awesome, fascinating — the most important archaeological find in China this century."

An indication of the success of her mission lies in the fact that already,

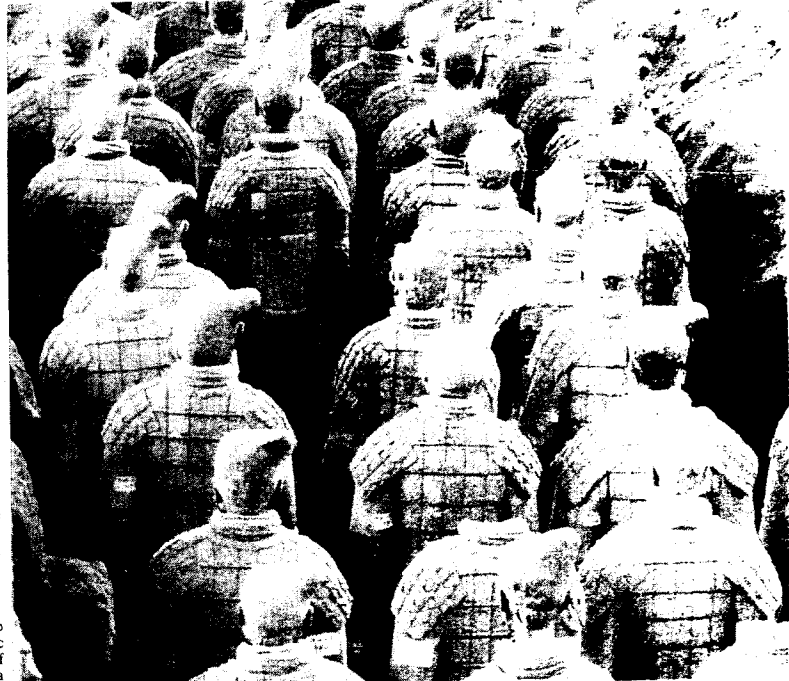
with Phase One completed, the Yale School of Graduate Studies is incorporating Project Emperor-1 as course material for its graduate students.

Dr Chen arrived in Australia on Sunday direct from China. On Monday she gave a three-hour seminar in Sydney, arrived in Wagga yesterday and goes to Canberra tomorrow, followed by visits to Adelaide, Perth and Darwin. Since July last year she has visited 40 countries talking about information technology developments in relation to Project Emperor-1.

"In some countries frankly they don't believe me," she says. "In Australia it's like the US — you do believe me."



• Director of Project Emperor-1, Dr Ching-chi Chen, with the videodisc containing 108,000 visual images and, in her right hand, a compact disc containing one million catalogue card entries.



• Some of the terracotta army of 7000 soldiers guarding the tomb of Qin Shi Huang Di, who ruled China 221-206 BC — part of Project Emperor 1.

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