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CDB (English) ([www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn](http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn)) was started in the spring of 2011 as a program to provide English-language translations of CDB's reporting. Its mission is to improve understanding and cooperation between the international community and China's growing civil society sector. Its goals are twofold. One is to provide the international community with authoritative, independent information related to civil society and development in China. The other is to provide a platform for internationalizing China's civil society by giving it more visibility and making it aware of important developments in civil society outside of China. CDB (English) staff achieve these goals by providing translations of Chinese-language reporting, and contributing to original research and reports on Chinese and international civil society.

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# INTERVIEW WITH MELISSA BERMAN: “CHINA IS PART OF GLOBAL PHILANTHROPY NOW, NO QUESTION”

*Interview by Chen Yimei, Executive Director of CDB*



*In a recent interview, Melissa Berman, President and CEO of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) discusses Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors' history and philosophy of giving with China Development Brief Executive Director Chen Yimei. Berman situates RPA within the world of philanthropic consulting for foundations and NGOs and reflects on the recent growth of philanthropic foundations in China and the future role of Chinese foundations in the international philanthropic community.*

**Chen: RPA (Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors) by its name, is associated with the Rockefeller family. How is it related to the Rockefeller Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the other charitable organizations in the Rockefeller nonprofit family? What is RPA's unique role?**

Berman: The Rockefeller family has been active in philanthropy and public service for more than 100 years. During that time they've created around 100 organizations around the world, several focused on philanthropy, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, which was founded in 1913 and operates largely independent of the family. There is only one family member on the board. Many years ago, the founders of the Rockefeller Foundation decided board members should be experts and not just family members. In the 1950s, the Rockefeller Family created the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and most of its board members are

family members. In the 1970s, they created the Rockefeller Family Fund and all of its board members are family members.

The roots of our organization go back to the Rockefeller family office, which managed their business affairs and philanthropic operations. About a dozen years ago, the Rockefeller family thought it would be good to launch an NGO to help more people, foundations and corporations do philanthropy well, and established Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors in 2002. RPA represents the heritage and values of the Rockefeller family, but we operate as a social enterprise that is independent, self-sustaining and nonprofit and thus have no owners. We are in close contact with the Rockefeller group of organizations but are not tied together in any formal way. The Rockefeller family has always felt that each organization it founded should have its independence and not be tied together in a formal way that might

**“ Our role is to help donors around the world create thoughtful, effective philanthropy. ”**

reduce the potential of each organization. Our role is to help donors around the world create thoughtful, effective philanthropy. We work with all kinds of donors – individuals, families, corporations, trusts. It's not our job to tell philanthropists what they should fund, but rather to help them achieve their philanthropic goals as effectively as possible. We do represent some core values of the Rockefeller family over the last hundred years in philanthropy and public service: taking a long-term view; respecting diverse opinions; trusting the nonprofit sector; and valuing independence both for the donors and for NGOs. We think it's best if organizations can avoid becoming overly dependent on any one funder. J.D. Rockefeller, for example, recognized early on that the University of

Chicago would become a much more important institution if it had other funders besides him. In addition, Rockefeller University was spun out of the Rockefeller Foundation and became a much more important institution than if it had been entirely funded by Rockefeller. So independence is a core principle for the Rockefeller family in helping organizations achieve their full potential.

**Chen: According to RPA’s website, “Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors currently serves more than 160 donors giving to more than 70 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America and North America.” Over the last 14 years, you have traveled around the world on behalf of RPA to attend board meetings and give talks. What do you see as the most significant changes in global philanthropy over the last 10-15 years? Over the last five years?**

Berman: We’ve seen a great deal of change in philanthropy over the last decade or so. We’ve seen the emergence of a global culture of giving not just in the wealthiest countries, but also in Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and even parts of Africa. All societies and cultures value charitable giving.

But especially among those with the greatest resources, something of a global community is beginning to emerge through the World Economic Forum, which began to feature speakers on philanthropy in 2001, and the Clinton Global Initiative in the mid-2000s, as well as through interactions between global businesses and business leaders. Increasingly, they talk about their philanthropy and social involvement and so ideas spread that way. I think there is a growing conviction among wealth holders that philanthropy is an important part of their life and their involvement can go well beyond generosity. They are looking to understanding the core issues that they are funding and are providing other kinds of capital, not just donated capital but also human resources, networks, technical knowledge, and investment capital. I also think it’s important for many funders to think about how their philanthropy reflects their heritage and builds a legacy.

In terms of more recent changes over the last few years, we’ve see more interest in solutions-based philanthropy, in identifying ways to have leverage in solving problems rather than just providing immediate relief from suffering.

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As people recognize they want to be part of a solution to a large, complicated problem, they can’t do it all themselves. They need to have partnerships with other philanthropists, and with the private and public sectors. The work of foundations such as Gates in exploring malaria vaccines, Hewlett in promoting deeper learning in education, and Ford in protecting the rights of women, come to mind as examples of solution-based philanthropy.

**Chen: Can you explain the purpose of RPA’s newly launched program Philanthropy Roadmap? How do you explain its long-term goal of creating “a new culture of great giving” ?**

Berman: The Philanthropy Roadmap was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Its purpose is to give people just starting out on a serious philanthropy program a set of tools to shape their own program. It presents a framework, of a series of questions for each person or foundation to answer – what’s my focus going to be, how long do I want this program to exist, how do I want my family to be involved, how do I fund locally, how do I think about assessing impact. We’re not telling people how to do things but offering a framework for them to use to answer these questions themselves, and providing real world examples. We’ve presented these materials as a set of short guides that are available both online and in print. One has been rewritten in Chinese, and is available with local Chinese cases, and we hope to get more translated.

**Chen: Why does RPA emphasize “thoughtful, effective” philanthropy? What are the major indicators of success in giving?**

Berman: We worked very hard as an organization, with the board and staff, to choose this phrase. By



thoughtful, we mean respecting a wide range of approaches to philanthropy, from traditional philanthropy to the newest tools. We believe all of these approaches have a place, but one's decision should be a conscious one made after some reflection. By effective, we mean philanthropy that doesn't just focus on strategy, but also on results. But everyone defines "effectiveness" differently and it's important to respect those differences. Some philanthropists, like Ford, are institution builders. For them, it's effective to build an institution that can carry out its purpose for a long period of time. Others define effectiveness in more quantitative terms such as, how many acres of land have been preserved, how many children have been fed. For still others, it has to do with how public attitudes or policy have been changed. All of these approaches are valid, but it's important for funders to think about what will success look like.

In terms of indicators for success in giving, we were part of a working group supported by the Hewlett Foundation that developed a set of indicators to assess the thoughtfulness of a grant-making program. They included questions such as: Do you have a clear mission and strategy? Have you developed your program based on knowledge about a problem in the field? Are you aware of what other philanthropists are doing? Do you look for indicators of progress with your strategy? Do you review and adjust regularly? If you can say yes to all of these questions, then I think you can say you have a thoughtful program, and the chances for effectiveness will likely be greater.

**Chen: In the U.S., there are many organizations and companies like RPA who provide consulting services to foundations and/or NGOs. How did they emerge and develop? What role do they play in the development of philanthropy in the U.S.? What do you think about the potential for the development of similar Chinese organizations or companies?**

Berman: In the U.S., consulting organizations (also known as professional service organizations), both profit and nonprofit, have developed to help foundations and philanthropists and they succeed because they meet a market test. That test is that more and more funders want to make knowledge-based decisions, and need expertise that isn't available to them personally or through their staff. Consulting organizations in philanthropy like RPA play an important role in spreading ideas and making connections among donors, and explaining

philanthropy to the general public and stakeholders. We are an important source of information to people who advise wealth holders, to media, and sometimes to academic researchers who want to talk to practitioners.

I think the demand for consulting organizations will emerge in China and become part of the landscape of giving and philanthropy in China.

**Chen: In recent years, RPA has received many visits from Chinese foundations and philanthropists and explored working with quite a few of them to help with strategic planning, grant-making, and other issues. How would you assess China's philanthropy development and what do you see are the gaps or challenges?**

Berman: We've been very impressed by the philanthropists and foundations we've met in China, and how fast philanthropy has developed, especially given the short amount of time they have had to develop, given that the legislation governing philanthropy is only about 10 years old. There are already regular conferences and publications on philanthropy in China, a high level of interest, and many of the Chinese foundations have significant resources and are addressing difficult challenges.

In terms of gaps and challenges in China, I would say that the NGO sector here isn't as well developed as in other countries, and so many philanthropists operate their own programs rather than fund NGOs to carry them out, but I believe, over time, NGOs will develop and will start to have more capacity to work with donors. That's a natural evolution. We saw this pattern in the U.S. when philanthropy began to operate at scale and big foundations had to operate their own programs but eventually they were able to put their funds into the hands of NGOs. I think it took a few decades for this change to happen in the U.S. The U.S. has always had a lot of nonprofits, but national NGOs only began to develop in the early 20th century.

I also think there is also more opportunity for more communication and exchange among Chinese philanthropists to coordinate their efforts, and share their knowledge.

**Chen: Where do you see China in the dynamic global philanthropy landscape? What does the international community look for or expect from Chinese philanthropic organizations and NGOs? For example, what do they look for or expect in**

**terms of their development? In terms of working with the international philanthropic community? What impact do you think Chinese philanthropy will have on global philanthropy?**

Berman: China is part of global philanthropy now, no question. Most people in the international community would understand and expect that most Chinese philanthropists are more interested in helping their own country and that is very common everywhere in the world. It's also common and expected that people who emigrate from their home country want to direct donations back to their home country. China and overseas Chinese are part of that process. Because China is such a large country, and has a scale and magnitude that is very hard for people outside of China to comprehend, some of the very big undertakings in China will be very influential.

**“ I think it’s always helpful to hear examples from other countries, but ultimately, philanthropy in China has to be developed by China for China.”**

**Chen: Social impact investment is a popular word in China also. What do you see as the potential (both positive and negative) for SII compared with conventional philanthropy globally?**

Berman: I think social impact investing is an important tool for solving social problems. But it's only one of many tools and can often be used together with more traditional philanthropy. Some social impact bonds that have been launched in the U.S. and United Kingdom have components that are investment and components that are philanthropy. For social impact investment, the investment capital is generally the bigger component, but without the philanthropic capital, the deal doesn't get done. So it's not a question of either/or. It's a question of what is the best financial tool to use in a particular situation. Sometimes it's one tool, sometimes it's the other, and other times, it's both.

**Chen: RPA serves donors by steering, educating and helping donors give. What advice would you give about working with Chinese donors who are getting more interested in philanthropy but have very little experience with giving and the idea of philanthropy? What do you think can be done to encourage Chinese to become engaged in philanthropy and to make more effective donations?**

Berman: I think Chinese donors have a growing number of opportunities to work with one another, and with organizations that have developed in China, to think through their plans for philanthropy. I think it's always helpful to hear examples from other countries, but ultimately, philanthropy in China has to be developed by China for China. In terms of encouraging more people to be more engaged in philanthropy, the more stories people read and get exposed to about philanthropy that has made a real difference, the more inspired they become. The more transparency among foundations and NGOs, the more trust gets built. This combination of inspiration and trust really helps philanthropy. Most people want to be generous, and inspiration and trust can help them act on that generosity.

**Chen: How do you engage NGOs in your work? Do you experience any conflict between serving donors and the NGOs or communities who need the support? Based on RPA's experience, what advice would you offer to Chinese NGOs in terms of attracting more support from donors, particularly donors that have limited experience with giving and little understanding of philanthropy?**

Berman: In terms of serving NGOs, and the conflict between serving donors or NGOs, we made a conscious decision early on to work for donors, not for NGOs looking for grants. That way we don't have a conflict of interest. We are happy to refer NGOs to organizations that could help them.

We do think it's important for donors to treat NGOs with respect. The NGOs on the ground have an enormous amount of knowledge and expertise. Donors have knowledge and expertise too but each side should respect the other.

To attract support, NGOs need to be transparent about finances but also to be clear about how they're helping to solve the problem. Too many NGOs try to

raise funds by describing how terrible a problem is and how it's getting worse. For donors interested in solving problems, that's not a good way to put it. You're essentially telling them there's no solution. If there's no solution, then why would donors want to fund the NGO's work? So my advice to NGOs would be, don't just present the problem, present the solution.

There is also often a gap between donors and NGOs in terms of culture, background, and even the language they use. It's important for both sides to listen and respond to what people are saying, and not just giving prepared statements. I've been in a situation where an NGO came into talk to us and said, "We want to talk to you about how your foundation can help us." I told him, we are not a foundation, but he went on anyway with his presentation, so he really wasted his own time and his time is valuable. So being willing to understand the framework, perspective and vocabulary of people with different backgrounds is very important.

**Chen: What areas of work come up most when you advise philanthropists about giving?**

Berman: In recent years, areas that our donors have expressed an interest in include poverty reduction, environment and climate change. There is also a growing interest in place-based philanthropy which means the funder looks at a certain geographic region which is very poor, and looks at it as a complete system and says, I want to help deal with health, education, environment and economic challenges in this region because they are all interconnected.



# THE CHENGDU NGO SERVICE PARK: AN INTERVIEW WITH XU QIZHI

*Interview by Fu Tao, CDB Senior Researcher*

*Translated by Feng Zhiying*

*Reviewed by Mark Lee*



## 成都公益组织服务园 CHENGDU CIVIL ORGANIZATION SERVICE PARK

*In an interview with Chengdu NGO Service Park Advisor Xu Qizhi, CDB discusses the Service Park's origins and mission, and the Non-Profit Incubator model. Xu considers the Chengdu-specific context of this initiative compared to comparable efforts in bigger Chinese coastal cities and the varying degrees of governmental involvement and support for the growing NGO sectors in different parts of China. Xu ends by looking ahead, discussing potential new projects for the Service Park in the future.*

On June 29, 2012, the Chengdu NGO Service Park (成都公益组织服务园) was launched. Initiated by the government, the Service Park introduced the Non-Profit Incubator (NPI) (恩派) model, and acts as an integrated support network for NGOs, social workers and public welfare projects. It provides incubation, capacity building and community outreach services for NGOs at different developmental stages. At present, the Service Park has recruited an initial group of 15 organizations, and is providing project promotion and community outreach services to meet the needs of 14 more mature organizations (in mid-November, the

Service Park announced a second round of recruitment). During the opening ceremony, many NGOs put up displays, and experts and scholars involved in the study and promotion of non-profit organizations from Mainland China and Taiwan in attendance affirmed and expressed their hopes for the Service Park's innovative model. In addition, as part of the package, the Chengdu municipal government has provided 380 million yuan to set up the Chengdu Social Organization Development Foundation (成都市社会组织发展基金会), which will provide financial support to the organizations in the Service Park. As an entity initiated by the government and planned by academics and the community, and backed by the government's resolute and innovative thinking, what are the similarities and differences of the Service Park compared with the previous NPI incubator model? What new problems will its operation encounter?

On October 29, China Development Brief interviewed the Service Park's Advisor Xu Qizhi. Xu, who comes from Taiwan, studied under the well-known public sector authority and founder of the Third Sector Research Center at the National Chengchi University of Taiwan (台湾政治大学), Professor Mingxiu Jiang, in 1996. In 2006, Xu began his Ph.D. at Shanghai Jiaotong University's School of International and Public Affairs. Outside of his academic background, Xu's diverse experience also includes establishing an NGO incubation enterprise with Jiang and others in Taiwan in 2001. His affinity for NPI began as a result of his research on social enterprises. Xu helped to develop training courses and set up the Social Entrepreneurs College (社会创业家学院) in Shanghai's NPI in 2010. He left in September 2011 upon its completion. As part of Chengdu's planning to promote social organization, Xu became the "designer" of the Service Park, and led its implementation. With his Taiwanese background and diverse perspectives, this outsider "sage" had a good grasp of the local situation. He has observed the implementation of the NGO incubator concept in Chengdu, and shared his thoughts on the structure,

positioning and rationale behind the Service Park, as well as his experiences in working with the government.

**CDB: What was the context under which the Service Park was established? How did you get involved in the framework design and preparation process?**

Xu: NGO incubators have been popping up all over the country in recent years, and Chengdu's exploration in this area was also relatively early. In 2010, the Jinjiang District set up an NGO incubator (the Jinjiang Citizen Service Center, 锦江区市民服务中心), resulting in Chengdu having two incubators at the district level [Editor's Note: The other incubator is NPI's Chengdu office.] In 2011, Chengdu wanted to expand the incubator pilot, so they began searching for people with relevant experience across the country. In September 2011, I had just left NPI and traveling around the country giving lectures. The current Director of the Service Park and a few others contacted me, and after much discussion, I formally joined in for its preparation in February of this year. I provided them with proposals, ideas and advice. Since helping to create the Social Entrepreneurs College, I had begun to summarize my experiences with NPI, which came into play with the implementation of the preparations for the Service Park.

**CDB: What are the profiles of the organizations in the Service Park currently? What are the similarities and differences between the NPI model in terms of the positioning, framework design and specific operations of the Service Park?**

Xu: There are a total of 15 organizations in the first group. They are involved in psychological counseling, book clubs, education and Youth leadership development, elderly people, people with disabilities and other fields. The standard of Chengdu's NGOs is not considered high, so we had to consider our capabilities and resources in preparation for completing incubation within the year to bring Chengdu's level up to standard. Many of the organizations in the Service Park are already registered. With high-tech zones doing the same (inviting NGOs to their zones to register and provide services), we were easily able to get on board. Out of the 15 organizations, eight are from other provinces, and the remaining seven are from within the province. Four of the organizations from outside the province were

involved in the relief and reconstruction efforts in Sichuan after the 2008 earthquake. They are now facing the challenge of transitioning from reliance on foreign resources to local resources, and usually have a relatively higher starting point. The remaining four organizations are those that I felt were outstanding, and I asked them to apply to join us.

One example is Shanghai's World of Art Brut Culture (WABC), which can raise funds by itself. They see Chengdu as a research and development center for organizational innovation where we provide intellectual resources. These organizations will eventually be introduced into the community. Another organization is "Dialogue in the Dark (China)". I did a good deal of cajoling to bring them in, hoping that these more experienced organizations will help promote the development of Chengdu's social organizations.

In addition, we also have 14 community service partner organizations. The park does not provide incubation services to them, but rather community initiation. An example is the first public welfare project promotion event (Shuangliu session), which was very successful. In the future, more exchange activities will be held, as well as efforts to bring in more organizations from other provinces into Chengdu. Of course, the second and third groups of organizations may not be as well-known as the first, so we'll need to strengthen our role. To put it realistically, the Service Park is a GONGO, linking up grassroots organizations with community, street committee and other government resources so that they can enter the community to work.

The Service Park has positioned itself as an incubator, capacity builder and community initiator. The aspect that is purely based on the NPI model is the incubator. However, we have our own innovations. The NPI incubator is project-based, thus focusing on more detailed examinations of those projects. Our area of focus is on building the abilities of the team, hoping that the team will have the ability to bring in resources for professional and sustainable operations after their incubation period. Even though the processes and models are based on NPI, the orientation is different. The Service Park's operations include recruiting 15 organizations every three months, with the goal of incubating 60 organizations a year, which corresponds to the total number of organizations incubated by the Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Chengdu offices of NPI. We provide integrated administrative support,

including venues, office space, funding, capacity building and policy support. Similar to businesses, each organization receives a startup fund (up to a maximum of 50,000 yuan), which they can use autonomously in cooperation with us. Each organization receives a subsidy of 5,000 yuan a month, which is mainly to support staff salaries, and up to 100,000 yuan of project funds at the end of incubation.

## “ The Service Park has positioned itself as an incubator, capacity builder and community initiator. ”

The incubation period was originally planned to be from three months to a year, depending on the stage of development and the organization's needs. However, there were some who felt that the three-month period was too difficult to achieve, and thus, the first group were all approved for a one-year incubation period. Registered and unregistered institutions are both welcome. An example is a mature institution like the Shenzhen Canyou (残友), which we hope can replicate its model from Shenzhen headquarters to the China's western areas. [Editor's Note: Canyou is an IT company staffed by people with disabilities. It is seen by many to be one of China's most successful social enterprises. See "Friends of the Disabled: A High-tech Enterprise for People with Disabilities".] Canyou's purpose in coming to Chengdu was not for team support, but to establish good ties with the local government and other resources in the city. Our appeal for this organization lies in our research and training resources such as our international and domestic experts, scholars and trainers.

Actually, NPI currently faces a number of challenges in its development direction and continued innovation. There is quite a bit of internal disagreement on whether they should do more longer-term incubation, or to withdraw support once the results are seen. Through the Service Park's operations, I hope to deepen the level of incubation, and to explore other possibilities for the development of incubators in China.

The framework we designed is quite stringent. Originally, Chengdu allocated 500 million yuan to set up the Service Park. External consultants and experts recommended that there should be a separate fund set up to manage the money. As a non-governmental, intermediary, support organization, the Service Park takes into account both government policy and community needs, coming up with projects with partners and applying for funding for annual projects. Since the Service Park has assumed the responsibility of reviewing project applications, the Chengdu Social Organization Development Foundation can focus on the management of funds. At present, the Foundation supports the following areas: projects in the Service Park, incubation projects targeting youth in the District Communist Youth League's Innovation Centre, and the Jinjiang District Social Organization Development Foundation.

**CDB: Are there any differences in the development space and policy environment for NGOs in interior regions such as Chengdu, compared to coastal areas such as Shanghai? What are the challenges and difficulties faced in implementing the incubation model here?**

Xu: An incubator plays the role of of a resource platform, bringing together the resources from the government, private enterprises and NGOs, and coordinating the interests of all the parties involved. We need to convert the concepts of capable grassroots NGOs into language and practices accepted by the government and private enterprises. We also need to translate the corporate lingo into language accepted by grassroots NGOs, and ensure that everyone is satisfied. This is very challenging.

In my academic work, I've done a few comparisons of Chengdu and Shanghai. The advantage of Chengdu is that due to the earthquake in 2008, all parties have established a consensus regarding public benefit work. Local businesses and government are as supportive of public benefit work as grassroots organizations. This change is very obvious. Like the September 21, 1999 earthquake in Taiwan which brought about a number of social changes in Taiwan, similar changes have occurred in Chengdu.

In the process of setting up the Service Park, the majority of the problems appeared in working with the local government and party offices (specifically the municipal Propaganda Department which is under the local Party Committee). NGOs in Taiwan have been



developing at least 30 years longer than in Shanghai. Comparing Chengdu and Shanghai, the understanding of the public benefit in Chengdu lags by at least five years, and this includes the government, community and private enterprises. Objectively, the government lags behind slightly more. When proposing an idea to the governments in Shanghai and Beijing, I don't need to put in much effort. However, in Chengdu, I have to put in a great deal. Shanghai is more relaxed, so even if they don't agree, they may let you try. Although the Service Park is registered as a NGO, the government's influence is still very large. This is unimaginable in Shanghai, Beijing or Shenzhen. The difference in the extent of [government] control between these areas is similar to the difference in their geographical distance. Of course, the Service Park concept, from a framework and design perspective, is already considered quite open-minded.

**“ The difference in the extent of [government] control between these areas is similar to the difference in their geographical distance. ”**

During its launching ceremony, many experts mentioned that it is ahead of its time by 5-10 years. This poses a huge challenge to the Chengdu municipal government. Despite appearing to be very innovative, their awareness and understanding is still lower than governments in coastal areas. Shanghai has a more open system but less awareness, whereas Chengdu is the exact opposite.

**CDB: NPI operates its incubator independently as a NGO, while the Service Park is government-led. Are there any shortcomings in the Service Park's development when compared with your original expectations? Can you evaluate your role in the Service Park?**

Xu: It's not so easy to grade I think. But if I must, I definitely didn't pass. Within the government system, I have to go around in circles whenever I want to do something. Even though my opinions are implemented more than 90% of the time, and quite smoothly I must

say, it takes a lot of energy and time. I must acknowledge that they are supportive, but there is still a large gap between my expectations and the reality, which may be because my expectations were too high. After leaving NPI in September, the Chengdu government contacted me but I refused them. In October, I came to Chengdu to teach. I arrived the day before and we talked all evening, and then next day, they tried to convince me all day. Finally, I proposed certain requirements, foremost of which was autonomy, hoping to get them to give up. Of course, I fully understand that they are part of the [government] system, and so no individual can make decisions by themselves. Privately, they are very supportive and acknowledging of me.

In terms of staffing, I asked three people from Taiwan, Shanghai and Chengdu grassroots organizations to join me when I came over. Including myself, we totaled four. The ones from Taiwan and Chengdu have already left, leaving the one from Shanghai. The original plan was to take the standard route to recruiting, advertising to attract talented people from all over the country. However, the current situation is that the support is in place, and the staff has been allocated to us. The Director of the Service Park is the Director of the City Youth Palace (青少年宫), and the staff comes from the city's Social Construction Office (社会建设办公室) and the Youth Palace. [Editor's Note: The point Xu is making here is that the Director and other staff are coming from the party-state system and so have little familiarity with NGOs. The Youth Palace is part of the Communist Youth League system and the Social Construction Office is also under the local Party system.] This has brought difficulties, and training and other services are unable to proceed smoothly. Some of the recruited institutions are very experienced, and thus need to be provided with professional support. However, the staff provided are novices in terms of their knowledge of civil society and working capabilities, and we need to start from the very basics.

**CDB: As a resource support platform, does the Service Park have plans for other programs and activities?**

Xu: We hope do something to catalyze the linking up of grassroots organizations. Two weeks ago, there were already 17 hub institutions involved in the preparation and they had reached a consensus to hold a public benefit CEOs salon every month. There will

be no fixed theme, and everyone will meet to communicate, share ideas and support each other. In order to recommend reliable NGOs to the government and private enterprises, and to have third party supervision, we have to start from the linking up of social networks. At the same time, we also want to use this platform to understand the needs of the government, private enterprises and the media. Currently, the public benefit CEO salon has decided to hold a Joint Annual Meeting of Chengdu NGOs on January 11, 2013. In addition to being a landmark event to show unity, this also paves the way for future cooperation.

# HAN HONGMEI: EXPANDING THE SPACE ON THE MARGINS

*Interview by Guo Ting, Associate Editor of CDB*

*Translated by Lauren Gloudeman*

*Reviewed by Zaichen Lu*



*During her time with Green Web (绿网) and the China WTO Network (中国世贸网), Han Hongmei (韩红梅, formerly known as Han Qi, 韩祺) has worked in development education (发展教育), trade, community film and theater, and advancing the rights of marginalized groups. In 2006, Han participated in the preparations for Beijing's first people's theatre group, called Tanghulu Theatrical Troupe (糖葫芦剧团). In 2011, Han completed a community film project on domestic workers called "Us" (我们), and in July of that year she helped launch an organization called the One Yuan Commune (一元公社), which is devoted to social mobilization and spreading the ideals of civil society. Later that year, in September, she also helped to establish the 'Lei Min Image Workshop' (雷民影像工作室), using film as an agent for empowering marginalized groups. After her involvement in all of these projects she was chosen as a Ginkgo Partner in 2012. This profile explores Han Hongmei's story and her various projects that have helped and advocated for those at the margins.*

## A Deep Interest in Public Welfare

When Han Hongmei graduated from college, she could easily have chosen to return to her hometown and live a normal life. However, she decided to escape from the strict social ties of family life and go to Beijing alone. As she went about looking for work, she

found that most companies required employees with work experience, so she set about finding ways to accumulate experience piece by piece. One day, she discovered that a volunteer organization called Guizhouren (贵州人) was recruiting a volunteer newsletter editor, and figured that the volunteer position was a good way to gain experience. It was this position that allowed her to take her first small step into the world of public welfare.

In this position, Han became acquainted with many like-minded friends with whom she discussed public welfare and their hopes and dreams. Six months flew by, and Han found that another institution, Green Web [绿网, a now defunct NGO], was recruiting for a full-time newsletter editor position focused on development education projects. As the work was similar, Han decided to switch jobs and work for Green Web.

Green Web is a well-established NGO; in its earliest form it served as an online discussion forum for those interested in environmental protection. It was founded by Gao Tian, the current vice-secretary of the SEE Ecological Association Foundation (阿拉善SEE基金会), as well as a group of dedicated volunteers. From 2005 to 2007, Han's role at Green Web quickly expanded from producing newsletters on development education to participating in programs.

At that time, development education had just entered the mainland. When development education became a hot topic, Han and her companions worked tirelessly with university students by giving lectures, providing training, holding theatre workshops, and hosting discussion forums. Within a year Han had held 14 training sessions, and it's impressive to consider how Han trained college students who were only a couple of years younger than herself.

However, problems soon emerged. As an educational system guided by a system of values, development education has an established theoretical framework



and a clear developmental context. But the young Han was not too familiar with these. The training that she received made it difficult for Han to grasp the overall concept of social issues. She recalls how, at that time, she always aspired to reflect and think critically about social problems, but never thought about what critical thinking itself was. About, for example, what the reality of social problems really was, and how these problems actually related to young people.

Looking back, both the group of people involved in development education, and the modes of thinking that were employed, were equally young. Both also faced their own challenging issues. Development education trainers ought to have a degree of experience, otherwise their training loses value. For example, after receiving her own training, Han wanted to teach the college students about how society should be fair. However, how is fairness achieved? Everyone's minds, including Han's, were stuck on the question.

So, how can individuals grow? Han believes that young people must see themselves in relation to social development, and personally connect with it. A teacher could emphasize the importance of personal growth and improvement, but it is more important to emphasize how the individual relates to social

**“A teacher could emphasize the importance of personal growth and improvement, but it is more important to emphasize how the individual relates to social development.”**

development. By doing more than just sitting around and talking about social justice, an individual can develop themselves through creating real change in society.

How can one connect young people with society? The One Yuan Commune, the organization that Han currently manages, organizes lectures and discussions so that more young people pay attention to their community and establish critical perspectives on society. However Han also recognizes that it is even

more important to let young people participate themselves in social movements, because social change can only come from action. For this reason Han began to get involved with actions that went beyond her work with Green Web.

### Using Film to Connect with the Marginalized

In 2006, Han designed a community media activity called ‘Let me come near you’ (让我走近你), which organized groups of young people to film a documentary about those who are marginalized. Han believes that using video demonstrates a kind of supremacy, something is imposed on the group being filmed. If you go to film marginalized groups, why should they let you? Why should they allow you to understand their lives? The process of solving this problem is a process of establishing contact and interaction with these marginalized groups.

Despite receiving 5,000 RMB from Green Web to fund the project, Han still struggled for money. Instead of sitting around worrying, she took action and looked everywhere for free resources. By doing this she managed to stay within the budget. The first resource that she found was Zhou Yu, who was working at Brooks NGO (天下溪). Through Zhou, Han was introduced to DV filmmaking [a film format], and began looking for filmmakers to volunteer their services. She looked to cafes to provide free rental space, and was especially grateful to the supportive Box Café (盒子咖啡馆), which not only provided her with a free venue, but also provided T-shirts as gifts to volunteers. The filming required equipment, and she managed to borrow three cameras from friends. This even included one very expensive camera worth over a hundred thousand yuan, which came from a volunteer who secretly borrowed it from an environmental organization. Han was terrified of handling such equipment, because with such a modest income, if an accident happened she could not repay the amount even if she gave all the money she had.

After a few months, several groups had released films. Protagonists included a young mechanic, and a musician named Wang Xu who busked below underpasses, but ended up hitting the big time and establishing his own singing group called ‘Xu Ri Yang Gang’ (旭日阳刚). The films were screened in Beijing's International Trade Center, and Wang Xu made the visit on a bleak winter day to show his support. Wang Xu always remembered that, though

the program could not afford to pay for transportation, Han paid the fee out of her own pocket. Even after becoming famous Wang still called Han to chat about this experience. There was also a film about the recent closure of Beijing migrant schools, with filmmakers interviewing migrant children. The film had the opportunity to be shown on television, but eventually was not because the technical quality wasn't good enough. However, it attracted the attention of 'Min Jian' (民间) magazine, which in 2006 published an article based on one of the film's interviews.

This project meant a lot to Han. It enabled her to witness how young people can participate in the development of society. The young people, all in their twenties, who took part, had a special sense of justice, passion, and action, and through encountering social problems, they demonstrated their own strength.

**“Workers should be involved in community groups themselves, so as to discover their own strength, and make their own voices heard.”**

However, at that time development education still encountered many difficulties and external controversy, with critics saying that development education had become like a theater workshop. Although Han had her own thoughts and practices, she was still too young to think about the field clearly, and to fight for its rightful recognition.

### **Expanding Horizons**

When the development education program encountered setbacks, Han sometimes felt defeated. Despite feeling that she was dedicated and confident about doing development education, she sometimes felt that she could not continue. At that time, she continuously tried to apply for funding programs. Program officials questioned why they should provide Han with funding. This frustrated her because she thought that funders and partners should come to agreements through collaborative and equal discussion, coming to a consensus rather than the partners get an

idea first and then try to convince the funders by following their thoughts. With this, she believed, there were problems of equality, and also whether each side had a different understanding of the issue at hand.

At the end of 2007, an NGO network concerned with globalization called China WTO Network was recruiting. Han switched jobs and became the organization's coordinator, working there until mid-2012. Her work at the China WTO Network had a great influence on her. Firstly, it helped her to partially solve some of the remaining problems of the development education programs. It also laid the foundations for the One Yuan Commune's work at expanding public space. Established during a time of intensive globalization and just after China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), China WTO Network's work clarified the problems Han encountered while engaged in development education work. She learned how to see the structural logic behind the rise of social problems. For example, intellectual property rights can protect innovation, but sometimes they restrict capital flow to secondary actors who have traditionally benefitted from a product. This can be the case when traditional Chinese medicine recipes are patented. These recipes have often been passed down through many members of a community, only to ultimately be exploited by one individual patent holder. This not only takes money away from communities, but also harms it through increasing the costs of the medicine after it has been patented.

The China WTO Network also had its limitations. Owing to the founder's international background, discussion topics tended to come from the international level, not from the bottom-up, local-level community. Moreover, due to the all-encompassing nature of trade issues, Han found it difficult to do thorough, detailed work by herself, and found that it was hard for some trade issues to take root in the community.

During her time at the China WTO Network, Han continued to use her spare time working with the community theater and community video project. Throughout that time she therefore felt that she remained connected to the community. By 2010, she again sought a change.

### **The Strength of Marginalized Groups**

At the end of 2010, and because Wang Xu's music

group had become popular, Han had the opportunity to film a group of migrant laborers who worked as domestic workers.

With this new project lasting for 9 months Han considered taking the same approach as when she was doing development education, by asking young people to film marginalized groups and encouraging them to enact change. But early in 2011, Han saw a documentary film by the Taiwan Labor Organization Nanyang Sisters Association (台湾劳工组织南洋姐妹会) called 'Sisters sell Winter melon' (姐妹卖冬瓜). Watching this film gave her new insight into the true context of her work: that workers should be involved in community groups themselves, so as to discover their own strength, and make their own voices heard.

Han improved her project strategy by giving filming equipment to the female domestic workers and allowing them to film themselves. This was very difficult at first, because although some worker sisters in the community recognized each other, no one was willing to contact anyone else for the purpose of shooting a film. Two weeks later when the team met up again, nothing had been shot. The process of going from individual to collective required constant engagement. In the initial, introductory stages, they needed help using social work methods. Han had never formally studied social work, but when she discovered that this was the issue, she started studying the methods used by social workers. Afterwards, she attempted to initiate group activities, first getting the workers together for a fun activity like singing or dancing, and then afterwards discussing common issues such as wages, security needs, domestic violence, children, and employer-employee relations. After identifying these common problems, Han introduced community theater to the group, enabling the sisters to tell their stories and identify with one other, acting out a collective story through their performance. In the end, everyone discussed how to solve their collective problems and shared their individual strategies and survival skills.

From this perspective, community video does not tell a tragic story, instead it discovers the strength of marginalized groups by enabling them to demonstrate their own value. After six months of training, the workers had established their own activist group, and began to solve their own problems. Han believed that this type of project provided far more practical benefits to the group, than if, for example, she had just provided them with legal training.

## Public Space Expanding From the Margins

When the domestic workers film project began to evolve, Han searched for a supervisor for each group of workers. She contacted social work expert Qu Ping and gender expert Lv Pin for help. However, the project had not budgeted for a professional supervisor, and after finding them, Han said: "I only have 100 yuan, which you could either split to cover transport costs, or perhaps we could have dinner together?" As Han expected, they got together to share a meal, and during the meal they laid out the plans for the development of the One Yuan Commune.

The idea to build a commune originated from the desire of the domestic workers to have a space for weekend activities. At that time, the China WTO Network and Lv Pin's Gender Watch network (妇女传媒监测网络) were looking for an office, and decided to rent some small offices together. These offices could then also be used as an activity space when not in use by the NGOs. Soon, they found a suitable space near the Liu Fang metro station. The rent was over budget, but they sought donations from some friends and together compiled one year's rent. In July 2011, the One Yuan Commune was opened.

After opening, the domestic workers had their own space, but they were only able to use it on the weekends when they had free time. Because NGOs are not accustomed to waste, Han and Lv began organizing all kinds of activities in the unused Commune space. These ranged from screenings, monthly talks, discussions among women, and advocacy salons that focused on rights and social development issues, to book club meetings that emphasized the development and training of youth, and NGO capacity-building training. After successfully hosting these events for more than a year the Commune had developed a good reputation within Chinese civil society. The activities allowed people from different sectors and areas to gather and meet, which enhanced public awareness of social issues and public interest organizations, whilst promoting exchange between NGOs and greater reflection on social issues.

More than a year after the Commune opened, they were holding regular lectures and seminars on rights and advocacy. In the social environment of the time, many said that public space was a sensitive subject. However, Han believed that in the process of transforming from a collective society to a capitalist

society in which people can experience great losses, there should still be space to conduct public life. Currently, we are in an era where there is an extreme lack of public space, and many people have lost the ability to participate in public affairs as individuals. Public space encourages more people to consciously participate in public discussion, so that more people do not just care about their own lives, but become more concerned with social issues and the lives of marginalized people, and are encouraged to contribute to public welfare. Given the current restrictive social environment, the public space in China is not a suitable platform to assemble opposition parties for confrontation, but a channel to transform society in a positive direction.

When the Commune held events, they also encountered people with misunderstandings, but after sitting down and speaking candidly, the two sides would find that this is just part of the process of mutual understanding. Applying for funding is also like this, in that sometimes the degree of openness of domestic foundations will exceed the original NGO proposition; such was the case of Han's application to Ginkgo Partners.

### Serving As an Advocate for Ginkgo Partners

One day in August 2012, a young man came up to Han after an event and asked: "Are you short on money?" Han, who had been working tirelessly juggling several projects, said: "We are not short on money, but short on people." Han chatted with the young man and eventually agreed that she did indeed lack funding. He flashed his business card: he was Li Yusheng, of the communications department of the Narada Foundation, and he recommended that Han apply to the Ginkgo Partner program. A month later, she began the application procedure. For Han, this was a rare opportunity for reflection, so she sat down to analyze her past experience in the public welfare field, starting from the very beginning with the organization 'Guizhouren'.

Since the overwhelming majority of Ginkgo Partners had been service-oriented organization leaders, Han thought her own application didn't have much of a chance. She was therefore quite surprised when she was eventually chosen. Thinking about it now, she realizes that some domestic foundations are more open than they are originally expected.

Han once heard Xu Yongguang [Chairman of the

Narada Foundation] talk about the role of rights defense organizations. During his talk Xu pointed out that one function of such organizations is preserving stability. In Han's opinion, this shows that Xu is an open-minded public service leader, and has enough insight and tact to effectively connect the resources of domestic foundations with the requirements of grassroots advocacy organizations.

After the Ginkgo Partners nominated Han, she could have heeded the advice of the judges by going to university to study sociology or anthropology, and continuing to participate in the management of the One Yuan Commune. However, with the end of the China WTO Network, the commune had already been relying solely on Gender Watch's rent budget for half a year. It's budget deficit therefore had continued to grow. With the soaring rise of Beijing rental costs, rent was even harder to find. However, this idea of public space with its meaning and value could not be limited to those few square meters. The space provides a unique environment where marginal perspectives and grassroots wisdom combine, and where social criticism and reflection flourish at a time when mainstream points of view dominate society.

**“The space provides a unique environment where marginal perspectives and grassroots wisdom combine, and where social criticism and reflection flourish at a time when mainstream points of view dominate society.”**

To this day they survive, relying on donations and support from friends. Han is also developing a new project, the 'Lei Min Image Workshop', to raise funds in order to ensure this space continues to expand and survive.



# LIFE AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

By Tan Siying

Translated by Jane Luksich

Reviewed by Shawn Shieh, CDB (English) Editor



*Guest contributor Tan Siying reflects on life after the Wenchuan earthquake and explores the lives of volunteers and ordinary local citizens of Mianzhu County as they all strive to rebuild and rebound from the tragic natural disaster.*

Editor's Note: This article was among two articles published in China Development Brief in 2013 on the 5th anniversary of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake.

Mianzhu County was one of the hardest hit areas by the May 12 Sichuan earthquake with a total of 11,117 casualties, 90% of all housing destroyed, and estimated economic losses of 142.3 billion yuan. With assistance from Jiangsu Province, reconstruction in Mianzhu was divided into nine categories and 108 individual projects to the tune of 12.4 billion yuan. I remember that year the whole city was filled with the rich smell of alcohol from the Jiannanchun Distillery. **[Editor's Note: Each county in the earthquake zone was paired with a wealthy coastal province which provided reconstruction assistance.]** As for the reconstruction, with Jiangsu's assistance, Mianzhu was rebuilt in less than three years and the city was changed beyond all recognition. Compared with other hard-hit areas, it was completely rebuilt in a newer, more sophisticated architectural style.

In this emotionally fraught place, the story I want to talk about most is reuniting with old friends. Some of them are volunteers, some of them are stars thanks to

the post-disaster media attention, and some of them are ordinary local citizens. By returning to their stories, we might be able to see the impact and change the earthquake wrought on their lives.

## “Inseparable, Reluctant” Volunteers

The very first volunteers we see are friends, Lao Gao (老高) and Li Jie (李杰).

Lao Gao is from Shenzhen; Li Jie is from Henan. In the year of the earthquake, Lao Gao had just quit his job as a cell phone customer service representative; Li Jie had just been discharged from the army. Because of the earthquake, because of fate, they both came to Zundao. Initially, they volunteered at a “Happy Holidays” event for teachers in Zundao. Prior to August 1, 2008 – before Zundao's teachers and students moved into temporary schoolrooms – a number of NGOs, including the Shenzhen Mountaineering Association (深圳登山协会), China Vanke Civil Society Project Office (万科公民社会项目办公室), Chengdu 512 Voluntary Relief Center (成都5.12民间救助中心), and the China Social Entrepreneur Foundation (友成企业家扶贫基金会), jointly established the “Zundao Volunteer Coordination Office” (遵道志愿者协调办公室). Their first event was the “Happy Holidays” program which established 12 educational centers in 10 villages in Zundao. The objective was to provide a safe and happy learning environment for the children as well as give peace of mind to their working parents. The “Happy Holidays” program attracted over four hundred domestic and international volunteers to Zundao. After the program ended, they volunteered in a livelihood reconstruction program raising rabbits, and later on in Mianzhu's New Year traditional painting program.

These days, Lao Gao and Li Jie can be found in a small teashop they started together on the second floor of a residential street in Mianzhu City called “Lai Bar”. The shop has been open for a year, but it has been a painstaking effort to keep it going; sometimes they cannot even raise the 600 yuan needed for rent. “If it is so difficult, why do you keep on going?” I asked Lao Gao. Lao Gao replied, “I couldn't do this without my

children.” Already called “Great Uncle” by a number of children, the young man from Shenzhen had left about four or five years ago looking for work at charitable foundations. Lao Gao spent less than a year away, discovering the majority of charity organizations were more interested in fundraising than in areas that interested him. So in the fall of 2011, he returned to Zundao. Lao Gao depended on the tea shop to earn a living, so that he could keep an eye on the children of Zundao. This Shenzhen young man was an ideal big brother to kids, just like the German volunteer Eckart Loewe who was seen on Chai Jing’s “One on One” program. While he has stayed the same, his kids have grown up. In 2008, many of his kids were still young students and teenagers. Five long years later, the children have grown up and entered society.

Lao Gao’s partner, Li Jie, is in a similar situation. The teashop has been unable to make ends meet for a few months, leading Li to consider whether it is worth keeping open. Li Jie had also previously left Zundao, spending a year in Beijing as a security guard. Through a curious coincidence he returned, albeit reluctantly. In fact, many volunteers who once struggled and worked here have “reluctant” feelings. Especially in the initial stage of the earthquake relief, when a small office was receiving a continuous flow of millions of yuan worth of supplies and donations every month providing warmth for the victims. They found happiness in helping others, from designing programs to running events. Their self-worth was tied up in their ability to help.

**“They found happiness in helping others, from designing programs to running events. Their self-worth was tied up in their ability to help”.**

The status of a volunteer at that time, with that aura, was really captivating, to the point where some people would ignore their own hunger and eat less so that others could be fed. In Zundao, there was one case we frequently talked about and were unable to understand. On our volunteer team there was a man who had been written about in the Deyang Daily Newspaper. His house in Xi’an had burned down along with 50,000 yuan in cash. His family was not wealthy and he was the only son, and yet the matter had not even been

fully settled when he decided to return to Zundao to continue volunteering.

When I rudely asked, “Do you think that volunteering is a drug?” Lao Gao and Li Jie both denied it. They responded that they “want their own favorite things, to go their own way”. They wished that their chosen path would be enough to keep them adequately provided for, to realize their ideals, and to bring happiness to others as well as themselves. Like Lao Gao and Li Jie, a few volunteers have insisted on staying up until now after the Sichuan Earthquake, but many people who did volunteer found it extremely difficult to get their

**“A collective heroism pervades the volunteer community where their romanticism and idealism are fully realized. Returning to the daily grind of the real world is a great shock, making it difficult to go back.”**

life back on track afterwards. In my personal analysis, a collective heroism pervades the volunteer community where their romanticism and idealism are fully realized. Returning to the daily grind of the real world is a great shock, making it difficult to go back.

#### **She’s Even More Alone After the Quake**

At Lai Bar, I met with another friend that I was very pleased to see – Xiao Qi (小琪). She was my first friend during my year in Zundao. We became close when I taught her English while she taught me embroidery. Xiao Qi became a star during the earthquake aftermath when the news media turned her method for coping into the ideal of self-reliance after a tragedy. So far, every year on the eve of the earthquake’s anniversary, she still receives five or six media interviews by phone; in 2009 she was even invited to a Japanese university to share her story.

The earthquake brought dramatic changes to Xiao Qi’s life. She is from Penghua Village in Zundao and lost



her grandmother in the earthquake. Xiao Qi began to hand embroider things as a way to lessen her grief and calm her mood. Afterwards, she proposed that the Volunteer Office set up a women's embroidery workshop in the village, as a possible way to help the village's young women move on faster from their psychological trauma. Unexpectedly, the very next day she was turned into a "post-quake self-help" hero through China's social media. Since then, an unknown woman with a passion for embroidery has become Penghua Village's biggest celebrity. This celebrity effect has caused several of her Mianzhu New Year's embroidered pictures to sell for 3,000-5,000 yuan and indirectly facilitated an aid program in Changzhou to invest nearly 10 million yuan in a teaching studio in Penghua Village.

When I saw her, Xiao Qi was holding an adorable two-year-old baby girl. After the earthquake, she got married and became a mother. I had not expected so much excitement from our reunion and was unable to hide my unfamiliarity. Her first words to me were in the Sichuan dialect, "Oh, you look so different!" Xiao Qi had experienced many big changes over the past few years, especially once she had gotten married. She was without a close friend to talk to. Once we were extremely close friends, but over the years I had not given the young married woman the least bit of thought. Xiao Qi said, "The year I got married, I called you countless times but without any success. How come you never called back?" When she asked me this question, I became filled with remorse. I think that the past is the past. Along with our different life experiences, friends are sometimes inadvertently forgotten. I asked her with some guilt how her life had gone since then. Xiao Qi said that she was living alone with her daughter. Like many other rural families, she and her child were left at home by her husband. Her in-laws live in Xinjiang Province and her husband went to Hainan for work, and she was only reunited with her distant family during the Spring Festival.

As for the media, this young mother, who is carrying her child around most of the time, no longer welcomes the attention. As for her former role as a volunteer, she is beginning to have doubts. She feels that outsiders who come to Zundao to help are not really motivated, the majority of them only putting in a minimal effort. When the reconstruction effort in Zundao came to an end, all of the volunteers and support staff left, leaving the young people of Zundao in a lurch. This meant that the fresh and vibrant community reverted back into an old-fashioned,

boring, and conservative rural society. As a result of her experience with the earthquake relief, meeting so many people and working with the girls at the embroidery workshop, she has left behind her big dreams inspired by her volunteer friends from around the world, and the conservative rural community. After her horizons were broadened, she could neither move on nor go back to the traditional agricultural society she had been born and raised in. Xiao Qi found herself lonelier after the earthquake.

### From Volunteer to Microfinance Celebrity

Li Jiaying (李加英) and I hit it off the first time we met. Her story is the best reminder that even the smallest person can change the course of the future.

Jiaying was originally a clothing factory worker, but when the factory was destroyed in the earthquake she was laid off. Naturally optimistic, she immediately signed up as a volunteer at Zundao's "Happy Holidays" at Qin Jia Kan School (秦家坎教学点). All that glitters is gold: her enthusiasm, earnestness, and experience allowed her to become a star among the volunteers. Six months of working as a full-time volunteer turned out to be a life-changing experience for the better. In December of 2008, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation's (CFPA, 中国扶贫基金会) Microfinance division was recruiting program officers. Jiaying only had a high school diploma and her volunteering experience, but her enthusiasm and sincerity won over the hiring team and she became the CFPA's number one loan officer recruit. The facts have proven that the recruiter had a good eye for talent. In 2009, during the height of rural reconstruction, Li Jiaying had the best microfinance record in the entire country with only a year of experience. She was invited to Beijing to receive an award from the father of microfinance and founder of Grameen Bank (孟加拉乡村银行), Muhammad Yunus.

When I saw Jiaying, she had already risen to a managerial position. But this manager was still full of her old enthusiasm.

Jiaying invited me to go and see some of the newly rebuilt homes. Her hometown of Qinjiakan did not appear to be as lucky as Penghua Village. Penghua's residents hardly had to pay any money before being the first to move into newly built homes; she received only 20,000 yuan in reconstruction subsidies. When Penghua's residents were already living in their new homes, construction on her home hadn't even started

yet. A 120 square meter home required nearly 70,000-80,000 yuan, and 120,000 yuan in total to renovate and furnish it. This is an astronomically high number for a family of three with only one adult working. When Mr. Zhou, a business man who came to pay a visit and heard about her situation, he offered to give her 100,000 yuan to build her house. She replied, "Thank you. I believe I can build the house on my own."

Jiaying was lucky enough to be employed as a loan officer for CFPA when 2008 ended and she treasured this hard-won opportunity. For a middle-aged woman with only a high school diploma, this job was actually a massive challenge. When she started, she was computer illiterate and did not even know how to type in pinyin. She rode on a motorcycle from house to house during the day, handing out promotional pamphlets and her business card, and studied how to use EXCEL spreadsheets at night, busy until the early hours of the morning before she got up to start a new day. There is no rest for the weary; this computer illiterate peasant woman had the number one performance in Mianzhu County after one business quarter. After a year, she had made 4.8 million yuan in loans on her own, making her CFPA's number one salesperson nationwide. In 2010 she achieved another "first" by having the most "effective clients".

Jiaying has said that so many of her "firsts" are thanks to the six months she spent as a volunteer at the Zundao Volunteer Coordination Office. During those six months, she traveled to each of Zundao's ten villages and searched for their most disadvantaged and marginalized citizens, so she knew the towns inside and out. When she started providing information about microfinance loans to villages in January of 2009, each village leader thought she was still affiliated with the Volunteer Coordination Office. Her microfinance pamphlets were emblazoned with "Zundao Volunteer", and when people needed money to rebuild, they thought of their old friend Jiaying.

"You've already paid off your loans?" I asked? "I paid them off ahead of schedule," she told me proudly. Her family was once 100,000 yuan in debt; now they have a savings account, a small car, and a comparatively well-off standard of living. Jiaying managed to not only improve her career, but change her household into a happier one. Her alcoholic husband cleaned up his act and started work driving a bus between Zundao and Mianzhu; her daughter was admitted into the best high school in Mianzhu and has one of the highest grades

in her class. Jiaying's fifteen-year-old daughter proudly calls her mother a "hero".

# 12 MOMENTS IN CHINA'S WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN 2013: A REVIEW OF THE YEAR'S INNOVATIVE PUBLIC ACTIONS

By *The Women's Network* (女性网)

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Original article written in Mandarin can be found [here](#)

*At the beginning of the new year, we remember the voices of the women who were even braver than in the past. We recall every episode but all are actually connected in the hearts of those who struggle for women's rights. Although all the women who are praised here are pioneers — college students, lesbians, lawyers, workers, rural women — they are working together, and gaining more supporters. Because they do not accept the postponement of their rights, they grasp every moment, for themselves, for strangers, and also for this society. Perhaps the fact they are making history is only now beginning to get recognition. We are glad to be on the scene when we can, and when we are unable to be there in person we can still bring attention to them. The show is just beginning, but the programs and chorus are insufficient, and we await the audience's participation.*

## 1) “I do not want to become a Li Yan”: To quickly provide life-saving care to women suffering from abusive husbands



After the 2013 Spring Festival, the life and death situation of Li Yan [李彦], a Sichuanese woman who was abused by her husband, caught the attention of women's rights supporters across the country. Li Yan was a laid-off worker from the city of Ziyang [资阳]

in Anyue [安岳] county. Because she could not stand being abused, she killed her husband Tan Yong in December of 2010. However, because her abuse was not recognized by the court, Li Yan was charged with murder and sentenced to death. On January 24th, Li Yan's family believed that the Supreme People's Court had already authorized the death sentence and that her death was imminent. People from all walks of life immediately took action to save Li Yan; on January 25th, an open letter signed by 136 people posted on the internet called on people to save her life. On January 28th, volunteers visited the Number Two High People's Court of Sichuan and delivered an urgent letter of appeal with signatures from over 200 women's rights supporters. On February 3rd, volunteers in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Wuhan, Beijing, and Xian held performances of a piece called “I do not want to be the next Li Yan” in front of eight courthouses. Behind the scenes, the Anti-Domestic Violence Network (反对家庭暴力网络) (Beijing Fanbao, 北京帆葆) worked hard to mobilize various departments and individuals connected to the case. On the international front, the well-known human rights group Amnesty International also asked China not to execute victims of domestic violence.

**“The Li Yan case once again causes society to take seriously the tragic phenomenon of abusive husbands. It also illustrates that for cases of this kind the utilization of the death penalty is not in line with public opinion.”**

The Li Yan case once again causes society to take seriously the tragic phenomenon of abusive husbands. It also illustrates that for cases of this kind the utilization of the death penalty is not in line with public opinion. As of March 2013, the Supreme People's Court is reconsidering Li Yan's death penalty. A public interest lawyer is once again investigating the case, and providing new evidence of Li Yan's abuse. The case has been adjourned until now, and every observer hopes that the court will ultimately give a fair sentence.

## 2) "Zero tolerance for domestic violence": The outcome of the Li Yang case recognizes domestic violence

The public announcement of Kim's divorce from Li Yang [李阳] came on February 3, 2013. The founder of "Crazy English," multimillionaire Li Yang, was



found guilty of domestic abuse and was ordered to pay his American wife Kim fifty thousand yuan as compensation for psychological harm. He was also given a restraining order so that he could no longer threaten or harass her.

In September 2011, Kim exposed Li Yang's abuse on the internet; in November she filed for divorce. This has been the most widely publicized case of domestic violence in recent years. Kim's case sets an important precedent because despite undergoing hardship she ultimately achieved a moral victory, a court sentencing, and Beijing's first-ever public restraining order for domestic violence.

Kim has collaborated with women's organizations to spread awareness of domestic violence. In an open letter, she wrote, "Ignoring domestic violence in the name of 'harmonious family' ultimately means that the

next generation of families will suffer the same fate. In the event that the law is insufficient, the most effective tactic is to aggressively campaign against the public's tolerance of domestic violence in order to reach this shared understanding: domestic violence is not a part of culture, it is a crime!"

Grassroots women's organizations and volunteers staunchly supported Kim. From June 2012 to February 2013, volunteers in Beijing, Nanjing, and Guangzhou launched five public demonstrations against Li Yang, stating that they have zero tolerance for domestic violence. Kim said, "The eloquence, poise, and bravery of these volunteers has been incredible."

## 3) "Get a room with me, leave the elementary students alone": Anti-sexual assault protest in Hainan

In early May of 2013, what was called the "Headmaster Hotel Case" was brought to light in Wanning, Hainan. The principal of the No. 2 Elementary School, Chen Moupeng [陈某鹏], and Housing Authority staff member, Feng Mousong [冯某松], took six female boarding students to a hotel, inciting intense resentment from society. However, as the case moved from public charges to the court of law, public interest waned, causing concern as to whether the case would reach a fair outcome.

At this precarious juncture, on May 27th feminist activist Ye Haiyan held up a sign outside of Wanning No.2 Elementary School: "To the principal: get a room with me, let go of those elementary school students!"





The picture went viral on the internet, and netizens also submitted similar photos of themselves. The media followed up on this story, renewing attention to the case at a time when coverage was waning.

However, following this, Ye Haiyan was harassed, taken into custody, and banished. In response, Professor Ai Xiaoming [of Sun Yatsen University] put up a photo of herself holding the sign “Get a room with me, let go of Ye Haiyan.” Feminist volunteers also organized a postcard solidarity campaign. Although Chen Moupeng and Feng Mousong were found guilty of rape, the Department of Education has not yet been held responsible. Meanwhile, the victims have been under enormous pressure, facing many difficulties at school.

Because of this case, the sexual assault of young girls became one of the most widely discussed crimes of 2013. Ye Haiyan protested on behalf of countless people. The victims of this case suffered tremendously, but in the last half of the year the Supreme People’s Court and relevant government bodies officially released guidelines on how to deal with such cases, showing that those in power cannot avoid responding to the voice of the people.

#### 4) “Lesbians proudly give blood”: Publicly commemorating the end of the prohibition of lesbians donating blood



On July 1, 2013, two young women braved the rain to get to the Shenyang blood donation center, each donating 200 cc of blood and probably becoming China’s earliest instance of gay women receiving a blood donation certificate. On this day, to commemorate the first anniversary of the lifting of the prohibition of lesbians donating blood, gay women

also publicly donated blood in Beijing, Guangzhou, Wuhan, and Zhengzhou.

According to the Ministry of Health’s ‘Health Requirements for Blood Donors’ [献血者健康检查要求], prior to July 2012 blood donors had to fill out a form that contained a question about whether the potential donor was gay. Anyone who declared that he or she was gay was prohibited from donating blood. Gay rights groups and experts protested that this policy discriminated against gay people, drawing attention to the lack of scientific basis and pointing out that gay women in particular rarely transmit AIDs and other diseases. On July 1, 2012, the updated Health Requirements were implemented, specifying that only male blood donors were asked whether they have had homosexual intercourse. This lifted the restrictions placed on gay women and rejected the wholesale discrimination against homosexuals.

The ending of the prohibition against lesbians donating blood is an important step in ending discrimination based on sexual orientation. Marking the anniversary of the lifting of the ban, the “lesbians proudly donating” event symbolizes how lesbians are becoming regarded as full citizens. It is also a testament to the organizing capabilities of the volunteers.

#### 5) “Discrimination is not OK just because it is common”: Denouncing discriminatory admissions practices at elite schools

On the first day of school, September 1, 2013, five female students sent a jointly signed letter, denouncing the practice of blatantly discriminating against female applicants at many of the country’s top universities.



On the same day, 11 female lawyers requested that the Ministry of Education publicly release information about gender discrimination practices at elite schools. They also asked the Ministry of Education about the measures they were taking regarding this practice.

The sex discrimination practices were exposed in the 2012 college entrance examination season. Numerous excuses were employed to justify the reduction of opportunities for equal education. From the beginning of that summer, women's rights activists used various tactics to continue public discussion and hold the institutions accountable. Finally, in May 2013 the Ministry of Education responded indirectly through its Provisions of University Admissions Practices of 2013. While excluding the military, national defense, and public security institutions, the new regulations prohibited all other schools from setting sex-based admissions quotas. Nevertheless, the Media Monitor for Women Network's [妇女传媒监测网络] 2013 Report on 'Project 211 Engineering' Schools' Sex-based Discriminatory Admissions Practices [2013年“211工程”学校招生性别歧视报告] illustrates that of the 112 Project 211 engineering schools, 66% practice sex discrimination. Therefore feminist students and lawyers suspect that the Ministry of Education failed to do its job. They hope that denouncing them and pushing them to publicly release their policies will raise awareness of the issues and promote the design of non-discriminatory regulations. The Ministry of Education did not pay attention to the activists' suggestions and had only vague responses to the requests to make their information public. The Ministry of Education, using the Xinhua news agency as their spokesperson, claimed that sex-based admissions quotas were not discriminatory. However, discrimination cannot be rationalized just because it is a common practice. For the sake of equal access to educational opportunities, activists will continue to fight.

#### 6) “This is not just a one-time publicity stunt”: Meili's Feminist March begins



“This march is a very long gamble. It is not just a one-time publicity stunt. When we walk on this earth, the tension between a cruel society's oppression of women and women's resistance is in each step.” On January 15, 2013, Xiao Meili set out on a journey from Beijing's Yiyuan Commune, outside of the northern side of the second ring road wearing the slogan, “Fight sexual assault, girls want freedom,” taking the first step of her 2200 kilometer journey to Guangzhou.

Since 2012, Xiao Meili, a frequent participant in feminist activism, has hoped that the Girls' Long March can push society towards taking sexual assault on school campuses more seriously and creating a basic awareness of gender equality. Additionally, while on the walk, Xiao has been using information disclosure applications and proposals to push local governments to improve their measures for preventing and addressing sexual assault. She hopes to walk with partners from start to finish of her three-month journey through Beijing, Hebei, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, and Guangdong. The march will be funded by small donations from supporters.

By the beginning of January 2014, Xiao Meili had already passed Yueyang, Hunan, having already covered approximately 1,400 kilometers. Along the way, she had already collected close to 2,000 signatures, handed in 100 proposals and information disclosure applications and conducted more than ten public talks. She was met with both doubt and indifference, and she got little attention from local governments. They did not respond to either her applications or proposals. However, the local residents she met on the way gave her a great deal of encouragement and support, and her story has received much media coverage.

Meili's feminist march is both an experimental form of consciousness-raising and advocacy work, as well as a form of self-cultivation for young feminists, as well as a journey that has deepened her conviction, step by step. Xiao Meili plans to arrive in Guangzhou in early March and hold an exhibition on the project.

#### 7) “Do not think of me as a bad word”: Photographs of “What My Vagina Says”

On October 31, 2013, 17 Beijing Foreign Studies University students from the Gender Action Group [北外性别行动小组] posted a series of pictures called ‘My Vagina Says’. These included: “My Vagina Says: I want freedom,” “My Vagina Says: I want respect,” and “My vagina says: do not treat me like a



bad word.” The goal was to advertise the upcoming performance of their play *The Way of the Vagina* (阴道之道) [inspired by "The Vagina Monologues"].



The photos went viral, followed by a deluge of criticism and even abusive insults. Told that they were offending public morals, the female students of BFSU came under enormous pressure. The original creators of *The Way of the Vagina*, Beijing group Bcome and the Women's Voice microblog, quickly responded. Through various methods such as news interviews, discussion, and online discussion they expounded the ideas behind *The Way of the Vagina*—women's autonomy and right to public expression—and criticized the violent culture of controlling and oppressing women.

**“Through various methods such as news interviews, discussion, and online discussion they expounded the ideas behind *The Way of the Vagina*—women's autonomy and right to public expression—and criticized the violent culture of controlling and oppressing women.”**

With the goal of protesting against gender violence and advocating women's sexual liberty and pleasure, the play has already entered its eleventh year in China. The commotion surrounding *My Vagina Says* comes from Chinese society's extreme fear, even now, of women talking about sex. The college students

encountered unexpected obstacles, and have been forced to expend a great deal of energy to defend the project. Professor Ai Xiaoming remarked, “Patriarchal culture has a long history, is extremely unyielding, and has not been challenged nearly enough. *My Vagina Says* allows the patriarchy to realize that behind the vagina is a mind. The fact that the play has been met with so much disgust shows that it has challenged patriarchy successfully.”

## 8 ) “Monitoring sexual harassment”: Shenzhen and Guangdong labor organizations release research reports

On November 21, 2013, the Shenzhen-based Hand in Hand Workers' Activity Space [手牵手工友活动室] released “Monitoring Sexual Harassment: A Public Interest Report on the Sexual Harassment of Female Factory Workers,” revealing that 70% of factory women surveyed had experienced various degrees of sexual harassment. Over 60% of the perpetrators were from the same work group or adjacent work group. Over 65% percent of the interviewees used various measures to resist sexual harassment, but 46% of cases were not clearly resolved. On the 25th, the Guangzhou Sunflower Female Worker's Center [阳花女工中心] also released a report about sexual harassment in the work place in Guangzhou with similar findings.



China's recent dependence on rapid economic growth, driven by its position as the “factory for the world”, deprives numerous people of their rights. This is a reality that everyone is already aware of. However, because the oppression of female workers goes largely unseen, the reports by the two labor organizations offer an important new look at the problem. They give a grassroots prospective of sexual harassment in the factory workplace and provide an important reminder that female workers are doubly vulnerable because of both class and gender. The voices of female workers

for this year's Eradicate Violence Against Women Day formed an important part of their anti-violence advocacy. However, the topics of gender and labor are only starting to be considered in practice.

Because many labor organizations in Guangdong have encountered suppression since 2012, the release of the reports on the sexual harassment of women workers can be considered a strategic breakthrough: striving for the legitimacy of labor organization activities through media exposure. Collective action by male and female workers is deeply feared by industry, and it remains the essential foundation of the struggle for rights.

### 9) "Believing firmly that the world should be equal": Feminist songs echo in the Beijing subway

"Are you and I the same?/I believe the world should be equal/I sing a song of freedom and dignity/a feminist song..."

On November 24, 2013, a group of volunteers rode line 13 of the Beijing subway signing "Do you hear the women singing?" using a flashmob-type activity to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25th.



From November 25th to December 10th every year is a sixteen-day period when women's organizations around the country launch anti-violence advocacy and educational activities. However, no matter if it is a public event or if it is organized by the Women's Federation, universities and colleges, or independent NGOs, activities are usually confined to indoor lectures and discussions. In 2012, five cities including Guangzhou put on 'The wounded new bride', a performance art piece designed to generate publicity. In Beijing, the city with the strictest control over these type of activities, the line 13 subway car was

temporarily established as an open public space, and the Beijing group Bcome staged "My Short Skirt" from their play *My Vagina Says*. In 2013, the play was replaced by choral singing. Borrowing songs from the movie and musical *Le Miserables*, the young volunteers sang their declaration of "A life-long struggle for rights."

Successful advocacy and education activities require creativity and courage. When one step is taken, visibility is sometimes increased by a small degree. For this reason, young people brimming with promise stand on the stage. "Do you hear the women singing?" is the encouragement they give to themselves, as well as a call to arms to others.

### 10) "Give us our share": Rural women form a pyramid in front of government buildings

Volunteers who dressed up as village officials and held loudspeakers that said "village regulations" shouted: "Married daughters are like spilt milk, they cannot get bonuses, land, or real estate, and when they do, it is always less than the man's share." Below the loudspeaker, the women arranged themselves in a pyramid on the ground, with signs such as "Married daughters are like spilt milk," "Men and women are not equal," and "We want to be incorporated in our brothers' hukou." On the morning of December 12, 2013, in front of the Zhejiang People's Government, a group of village women made a pyramid to protest the preference given to men in village regulations.



Because they have been stripped of their land rights and their share of the collective profits, rural women form a group that has not only been victimized but resistant in a unique way. Some villages' de facto regulations blatantly violate state law, which expressly stipulates that men and women have equal land rights. Meanwhile, government branches evoke villages' self-

governance as an excuse to ignore the situation. The courts do not file cases, and attempts to petition higher-ranking government officials are met with no response. The difficulties village women face in defending their legal rights lead them to feel both indignation and despair. But it also pushes some to protest with even more courage in front of the government and the public. New communication techniques, made possible by the internet, also give them the desire and hope to continue.

Rural women's voices are extremely underrepresented in Chinese public opinion and public discourse. While they were previously invisible, publicly protesting the difficulties they face in getting their fair share of land allows them to gain strength. The conscious struggle for power is now expanding to ever more remote communities. The "fair share" that rural women seek is in fact a common language they share with all oppressed peoples.

#### 11) "We support Cao Ju's lawsuit": The curtain closes on the first case against sex discrimination in hiring practices

At noon on December 18, 2013, in front of Beijing's Haidian District People's Court, three girls wearing graduation caps and gowns chanted, "1, 2, 3, we support Cao Ju's lawsuit. We say 'No!' to sex discrimination! As long as she has the ability, sex doesn't matter!" This drew the attention of the people waiting to visit the court. The court session for the first case against sex discrimination in hiring practices finally had begun, after a 17 month wait.



On July 11, 2012, female college graduate Cao Ju (a pseudonym) filed a lawsuit in the Haidian District People's Court against Xinjuren School [新巨人学校], which refused to hire her on the grounds that they

were only hiring men. This made her the first person in China to file a lawsuit against sex discrimination in hiring. After repeated complaints, Cao Ju was finally able to successfully file her case on September 10, 2013.

This court hearing proceeded in an unexpectedly relaxed and smooth manner. The defendant apologized in court and agreed to pay 30,000 RMB toward a "Equal Employment Opportunities for Women Fund" [关爱女性平等就业资金]. Although both parties came to an agreement, it was a major win for Cao Ju.

### **"The victory means that it is finally possible to file a sexual discrimination lawsuit and Cao Ju's persistence paves the way for similar cases seeking legal recourse in the future."**

The victory means that it is finally possible to file a sexual discrimination lawsuit and Cao Ju's persistence paves the way for similar cases seeking legal recourse in the future.

#### 12) "I am in charge of my own uterus": Thousands of people sign a petition protesting against the violent one-child policy

"We are female citizens of the People's Republic of China; our lives are deeply affected by the one-child policy. We have realized that women's rights were not sufficiently considered in the formulation of the one-child policy and that in the course of implementation, women's uteruses are subject to serious harm. Now, we hope that when the government is drawing up and implementing the new policy and related measures, they will put women at the center and listen to their opinions carefully, and ensure women's right to health, and respect women's right to freely select their own methods of contraception."

On December 9, 2013, the 'Recommendations for Respecting Women and Eliminating the Harm Done to Women Through the Implementation of the One-Child Policy' [《关于尊重女性、消除计生政策及其执行过程中对女性子宫伤害的建议信》] was released online. After collecting over one thousand

signatures from women, on December 26th, the letter was sent to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the Family Planning Commission, and the All China Women's Federation.



The recommendations were proposed by thirty well-known female lawyers from ten areas of the country. In the process of getting the signatures, they received a lot of supportive feedback. “Without a doubt, women have absolute authority over their own wombs. Every woman can confidently say, ‘I am in charge of my own womb.’ Fingers have finally been pointed at the extensive middle and long-term violence done to women because of the one-child policy. Furthermore their demands, which have a basis in law, have been expressed through legal channels.



# BEIJING UNIVERSITY CIVIL SOCIETY CENTER'S "TEN MAJOR EVENTS IN CHINA'S SOCIAL SECTOR FOR 2013"

*Translated by Matt Perrement*

*Reviewed by Shawn Shieh, CDB (English) Editor*

*Original article written in Mandarin can be found [here](#)*



On January 15, 2014, the Beijing University Center for Civil Society Studies announced the 10 top events of 2013 selected by a group of experts from 16 events chosen through a multi-stage polling and selection process. While it was put together through an elite-driven process, it is informed by a perspective and spirit very different from the top 10 events selected by the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

## 1. Reform of the dual management system allows four different categories of Social Organizations (SOs) to register direct with the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA)

Published in approximately 1989, the "Regulations for Management and Registration of Social Organizations" established a dual management system for the registration of SOs that has restrained their development and attracted continuous criticism from experts and professionals in the sector. In March 2013, during the first session of the 12th National Peoples' Congress the "Blueprint on the Reform and Transformation of Civil Service Institutions and their Functions" was considered and adopted. In its 23rd clause, the blueprint states that "trade associations, chambers of commerce, scientific and technological organizations, charitable (or public benefit) organizations and urban-rural community service organizations will carry out MOCA's direct registration system," adding that "the system of rule-based management supervision for SOs will be strengthened

and SOs encouraged to improve their internal governance structures." Shortly thereafter, the State Council and MOCA published a series of decisions and policies, with MOCA Deputy Minister, Li Ligu, making numerous speeches to promote and clarify the reforms. In its first year, the new system of direct registration has already helped more than 19,000 SOs register with MOCA at all levels.

Party committees and governments in Yunnan, Anhui, Fujian, Dalian, Ningbo and Xiamen have all published detailed policy documents that promote the reform and innovation of SOs. On August 23, the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee and Yunnan Provincial Government published a paper setting out their "Opinions on Fostering the Development of SOs and Accelerating the Emergence of a Modern SO System" together with a series of accompanying policies, including the withdrawal of government from public fundraising for charities, local tax breaks and government procurement services.

Reasons for inclusion: The dual management system has received extensive criticism on account of its limitations. Government has finally responded to these criticisms with a practical response that is consistent with the governance trend of simplifying registration procedures for CSOs. However, real change has only just begun and the selective loosening of policies does not go anywhere near far enough.

## 2. Tang Hui (唐慧) wins the legal case against Yongzhou re-education through labor committee, prompting the revision of related laws.

On the afternoon of July 15, 2013, under the watchful gaze of several dozen journalists, Hunan Provincial High Court declared the "petitioning mother," Tang Hui, victorious in her case against the Yongzhou Re-education through Labor (RETL) Committee. The presiding judge, whose declaration is final and cannot be appealed, upheld three of the plaintiff's claims: to repeal Yongzhou Intermediate Court's initial judgment, to grant the plaintiff compensation of RMB 1,641.15

for the loss of 9 days freedom (spent in detention) and a further RMB 1,000 for mental stress. In response, the Yongzhou RETL Committee commented that there would be a positive and appropriate outcome to the case.

All cross-sections of society took a great interest in the Tang case, with the NPC, as the legislative body, calling for a positive response. On December 25, the Standing Committee of the NPC, while deliberating over a draft amendment to the “Administrative Procedure Law,” expressed hope that work to revise the current law could progress at a faster rate. The case prompted a widespread debate over the abolition of the half-century-old RETL system which, thanks to the concerted efforts all walks of society, was finally repealed at the end of 2013.

Reasons for inclusion: Looking at this case, we can see a positive adjustment in the relationship between the state and the people, as well as an enormous energy at grass-root level to alter the behavior of government institutions. The relationship between individual citizen rights and the power of government institutions has long been out of balance. Except for individual rights protection actions, the social conscience, public action and rational government, there has been no long-term effective remedy to this imbalance.

### **3. Contentious birth control policy is loosened by allowing “a couple to have a second child if one of the couple is an only child”. Demographic policy shifts away from overall size control to better distribution control.**

With the onward march of time the specter of an aging population marches ever closer into sight, leaving the State’s central policy of birth control facing an unprecedented challenge. Aside from citizens deprived of their reproductive rights, academics have long discussed and tabled reform proposals to address the triple-whammy of a declining fertility rate, a shrinking working-age population and the strain of providing social care to the elderly. On March 1, 2013, at a “Forum on Population Policy Reform” held at Beijing University, leading academic experts from all fields discussed and made proposals to address the most immediate threat to social development, namely uneven population distribution rather than population size, giving momentum to the ultimate goal of population policy reform.

On November 15, 2013, the Third Plenum of the 18th Central Committee approved the “Decision on Important Issues Regarding the Comprehensive Deepening of Reform” which clearly sets out the intention to “launch the implementation of a new policy that will allow couples that are both only children to have a second child.” The following day the Deputy Director of the National Health and Family Planning Commission, Wang Pei’an (王培安), set out further details of the launch and implementation. Meanwhile, even before the end of the year it was reported that work to revise related legislative procedures had already begun in a number of areas, including Beijing and Yunnan, who expect to begin implementation at the beginning of 2014.

Reasons for Inclusion: “Reducing gravestones by cutting the birth rate” is a slogan that demonstrates the level of commitment towards population size control. For the last 30 years, the strict enforcement of family planning policy has led to heart-wrenching pain for a whole generation of Chinese people. Today, as the country is left with the tragic reminder of millions of childless families who have lost their only child (due to illness or misadventure), there is also a need to face up to the demographic crunch of a declining birth rate, an aging population, and the serious issue of tens of millions of bachelors. The state has at last begun to correctly re-orientate the direction and pace of policy, even if it has not yet completely abolished the single child policy.

### **4. Air pollution pushes China’s environmental problems to the limit and citizen action prompts government to take on greater responsibility.**

Severe air pollution impacted heavily on people’s work and lives across most cities in central and eastern areas during 2013, causing psychological anguish and high-level health risks. One by one, provincial governments in many areas began to monitor air quality data, including the PM2.5 index. At the same time, independent environmental monitors, including volunteers and environmental organizations from across a number of cities, coalesced into an online group called “Citizen Air Quality Observers” that collects and publishes PM2.5 data on its website from more than 10 cities. These observers stress the importance of “civic responsibility” in addressing the problem of air pollution and advocate for collective action, such as “cutting down on car usage by one day” and “setting off fewer firecrackers.”



As early as March 1999, experts from Tongji and Fudan universities in Shanghai had already begun to monitor PM 2.5 levels. At the beginning of November 2011, the American Embassy in Beijing began to publish PM 2.5 data on its website which, when re-circulated across the Internet by well-known Weibo personalities, rapidly brought the issue to people's attention and, for a time, even sparked off an international dispute. Membership of the "Citizen Air Quality Observers" group also grew rapidly. In an effort to put citizens at ease, the Chinese government began, in 2012, to monitor and publish real-time PM 2.5 levels in a number of important regions including the Yangtze River Delta, Pearl River Delta, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei sub-region, as well as various municipalities and provincial capitals. As a result, tackling air pollution really has become part of the national consciousness, and a number of local governments have intensified their anti-pollution efforts, much to the approval of the masses.

Reasons for Inclusion: Regardless of our wealth or status, we all breathe the same air meaning that we are all victims of air pollution. The fact that previously, we ignored the capability of certain important technologies, and had divergent views with international partners is no longer important. But survival is in our own enlightened self-interest, which means taking collective action for mutual benefit, raising awareness of previous mistakes and focusing on controlling PM 2.5 as well as other measures as a new multifaceted model for dealing with problems of a collective nature.

### **5. The political and legal basis of the "China Dream" triggers a national debate, and the 3rd Plenum uses a "China ruled by law" to reach a verdict.**

At the beginning of 2013, the media kicked off a wide-ranging debate to explore the political and legal basis of the China Dream. The China Dream is a concept – referred to in Xi Jinping's speeches on the "New path of reinvigoration" and "Constitutional Government", respectively made at a visitors exhibition at the National Museum of China and the 30th anniversary meeting in honor of the publication of the PRC's constitution – that has resonated throughout society. Debate in the domestic and international media, as well as social media channels has been lively, involving academics from all major institutions as well as the general public.

On November 15, 2013, the Third Plenum of the 18th Central Committee approved the "Decision on Important Issues Regarding the Comprehensive Deepening of Reform" which sets out the commitment to build a society built on rule of law. This decision emphasizes the commitment to building an integrated system of rule of law that runs across all of society and government.

Reasons for Inclusion: A China based on the principle of 'rule of law' derives itself from the legal and political consensus of the "China Dream," which was arrived at through debate among thinkers, intellectuals and the media throughout 2013. Using this form of open debate to achieve public consensus for political decisions is, in itself, a mechanism that is illustrative of a modern governance system.

### **6. From a zero-sum game to consultative democracy: the Yunnan PX project puts public reason to the test.**

On April 18, 2013, two local environmental organizations in Yunnan, Green Kunming and Green Watershed, carried out an on-the-spot investigation of Yunnan Petrochemical's one billion ton oil refining project in Anning City (referred to as the Yunnan PX Project). Despite being first discussed in 2004, the project only received feedback from the Ministry of Environmental Protection in July 2012, and was not officially approved by the Yunnan Provincial Government until the end of March 2013.

When the project was announced there was a panicked and concerned reaction from the Kunming public, owing to the omission of certain details, resulting in a peaceful protest by almost 3,000 citizens in Nanping Square on May 4. On the morning of May 10, the Kunming city government held a press conference to publicly respond to rumors about PX due to public feeling towards the project. In a further move aimed at clearing up any misunderstandings and assuaging public concern, the Yunnan Government also invited citizen representatives to meet informally with chemical engineering experts. Towards the end of June China Petrochemical Company finally bowed down to publish pressure and published an "Environmental Impact Assessment of the Yunnan PX Project", bringing closure to this incident.

Reasons for Inclusion: An example of how the public mobilized itself spontaneously to form a group that raised its legitimate concerns and objections to

government. In response, the government – out of respect for public feeling towards the project – organized public consultation meetings to bring together stakeholders from government, industry and the public. When compared to PX projects in Xiamen, Dalian, Ningbo and other places that “stopped as soon as they hit problems”, the handling of the Yunnan PX incident promotes and highlights both the management capability of local government and growing public maturity.

### **7. The apology of Chen Xiaolu (and others) for their behavior during the Cultural Revolution finally addresses a historical issue.**

The Red Guards “belated apology” (during the summer of 2013) for their behavior during the Cultural Revolution attracted a lot of public attention. Liu Boqin from Shandong Province, fast approaching 60, was the first to issue an apology in Yanhuang Chunqiu “炎黄春秋” magazine’s 6th issue of 2013 where he reflected on his actions during the Cultural Revolution that brought pain and distress to teachers and colleagues, made a sincere apology and sought forgiveness for errors of the past. While he believes that his behavior was the result of the coercive influence of the Cultural Revolution he acknowledges that there is no escaping his personal responsibility for acts of individual evil. On August 20, Chen Yizhi’s son Chen Xiaolu published an article “Chen Yizhi reflects on the cultural revolution and makes a sincere apology” which acknowledges “having previously caused hurt to leaders, teachers and classmates at his old school” during the period 1966-1968 and makes a sincere apology to all former alumni. Concurrently, other former Red Guards including Song Jiqiao from Hebei, Zhang Hongbing from Anhui, Wen Qingfu from Hunan, Lu Jiashan from Shandong and Lei Yinglang from Fujian consecutively released their own forms of apology to people they had harmed during the Cultural Revolution. Some academics have pointed out that “the aim of apologizing for historical mistakes is not about victims apportioning blame on the perpetrators but rather a promise to the whole of society that the same mistakes will never be repeated again.”

Reasons for Inclusion: “Belated apologies” are a reflection of society’s need to lay ghosts of the past to rest. It is only after a nation has dealt with the nightmares and distorted truths of the past that it can begin to rise up again and regenerate. We need the courage to own up to our mistakes but also look

forward to sincere forgiveness so that society can, by re-visiting its definition of human morality, create a new atmosphere of acceptance.

### **8. On day one of the Ya’an earthquake the One Foundation, a foundation without any government background, collected more donations than the government-organized Chinese Red Cross, putting pressure on government-run foundations to reform.**

At just after 8 o’clock on the morning of April 20, 2013, an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale erupted in the Lushan County area of Ya’an City in Sichuan Province. In response, the government issued a circular encouraging the public to make donations in support of relief and construction work to a foundation of their choice. By 4 o’clock on the same day, the Chinese Red Cross claimed, via Weibo, to have collected funds worth more than RMB 30,000 from 213 donors. According Yao Yao, the Deputy Director of the Communications Department of the One Foundation, an independent public fundraising foundation, the One Foundation had collected more than RMB 10 million by 8 o’clock the same evening; the contrast [with the Chinese Red Cross] sparked wide public interest and comment.

Exactly one week after the earthquake, data published on the website of the China Foundation Centre showed that RMB 1.49 billion had been raised by 115 foundations, of which more than RMB 170 million had been collected by the One Foundation. On the same day at 5 o’clock, the Chinese Red Cross announced on its website that it had raised RMB 566 million. This shows that although donations to the One Foundation far exceeded those made to The Red Cross on Day One of the earthquake, this trend was ultimately reversed.

Reasons for Inclusion: Being able to compare the fundraising success of organizations is a first in China, and one which essentially came down to a battle of public confidence. The change from an administrative mechanism which directs donations to a few GONGOs to a mechanism which allows individuals to donate to an organization of their choice has put private foundations firmly at the centre of the battle for public trust. In response to this pressure, GONGOs have had no option but to reform.

## 9. The Big V bloggers are sued and there is a powerful but controversial push for internet regulation.

On 20th August 2013 the Public Security Bureau (PSB) announced the closing down of internet design company Beijing Er Ma Interactive Marketing Strategy, Ltd. by the Beijing Police, detaining both the company's legal representative Yang Xiuyu (known as Li er chai si) and former employee Qin Zhihui (known as 'Qin HuoHuo') in the process. Further arrests were made using information from the internet, including those of Zhou Lubao and Fu Xuesheng. During a 3-minute report on 23rd August, 'Network News Broadcast' on CCTV announced the arrest of Xue Manzi on charges of soliciting prostitutes, leading to widespread media controversy.

On the afternoon of 4th September, the State Internet Information Office of the PRC convened a briefing on "Striking down Citizens that Use the Internet to Spread Rumors" that was attended by 11 netizen representatives who held discussions on responsible internet expression. On 9th September the Supreme Peoples' Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate published an article "Legal Remedy in relation to criminal cases that involve, among other, handling cases where online information networks are exploited for the purposes of slander" which states that use of the internet to slander another, posting slanderous information that receives more than 5,000 hits and the onward circulation of such information to more than 500 other users will all, henceforth, constitute criminal offenses.

Reasons for Inclusion: The Internet is the main channel through which citizens exercise their right to access information and their right to expression. Following the publication of the internet supervision and management policy the public expressed concern that charges relating to crimes of expression could be made too easily. In particular, it poses the question of how to screen the internet effectively for slanderous information (or rumor-mongering) while at the same time protecting the public's freedom to post reasonable comments. This remains an open question that needs to be further explored by government and society.

## 10. The Ya'an earthquake once again tests the capability of the disaster emergency response system. At the same time, social organizations and

government finally show that they can cooperate well together.

On 20th April 2013, an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale erupted in the Lushan County area of Ya'an City in Sichuan Province. In response, a rapid relief effort was launched by government, while CSOs were also quick to throw themselves into the rescue operation. On 23rd April, the Charity Foundation came together in an alliance with a number of other foundations to jointly launch a "Joint Relief Effort in response to the Ya'an Earthquake." This not only established a coordination mechanism to deliver relief efforts but also made coordination a basic value for CSOs participating in the relief effort. As a result, CSOs formed a number of alliances to deliver the relief effort, thereby significantly increasing their overall delivery capacity. On 25th April, the government office coordinating the overall relief operation decided to establish a "Social Management Services Group" aimed at guiding and organizing the relief effort in an orderly manner based on law. On 28th April, the "Social Management Services Group" established the "Sichuan Provincial Disaster Relief Volunteer Service Organization and Community Center", which took on the responsibility of registering organizations and volunteers wanting to participate in the relief efforts, disseminating information in relation to need and guiding the overall effectiveness of relief work.

**“Government, in its overall coordination role, established an organization for the specific purpose of coordinating contributions from volunteers and CSOs. Following the Wenchuan earthquake of 2008, this demonstrates the growing maturity of both government and CSOs to work together to coordinate disaster relief efforts.”**

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, CSOs realized the need to work in partnership to deliver an effective relief effort and subsequently did so in an orderly fashion. Meanwhile, government, in its overall coordination role, established an organization for the specific purpose of coordinating contributions from volunteers and CSOs. Following the Wenchuan earthquake of 2008, this demonstrates the growing maturity of both government and CSOs to work together to coordinate disaster relief efforts.

Reasons for Inclusion: CSOs make headway while under great pressure. In the aftermath of the Ya'an earthquake, CSOs have shown that they are capable of joining effective disaster relief and reconstruction efforts, and of cooperating with government in an innovative way. This represents progress for the whole of society and, in addition, shows that if CSOs want to become worthy partners, they first need to show that they are capable of self-organization.



# THE “LEARNING FROM THE WEST SCHOOL” OF CHINESE PHILANTHROPY

By Zhang Xiaoxiang of “The China Philanthropist”

Translated by Lauren Gloudeman, Ming Lee, Yifan Liu, Li Hsieh and Bulong Zai

Reviewed by Shawn Shieh, CDB (English) Editor

Original article written in Mandarin can be found [here](#)



*As Chinese philanthropy modernizes and internationalizes, one group of pioneers is seeking to break through various obstacles, casting an eye toward the world, and looking westward to “master skills for self-strengthening” in their effort to advance Chinese philanthropy. In the process, they seek to realize their ambitions and dreams, while encountering skepticism and frustration.*

## Introduction

On January 2, 2014, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, former U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, former “junk bond king” Mike Milken, and Richard Rockefeller of the Rockefeller family each arrived in Hawaii on their private planes... Afterwards they all piled into a small van and headed off to a hotel where a group of Chinese philanthropists awaited them. Among them were “China’s Most Charitable” Cao Dewang, Niu Gensheng, who fully embraced charity after leaving the business world, and Lu Dezhi, who became known for proposing a 10 billion yuan [about U.S.\$1.6 billion] charitable donation. **[Editor’s Note: Cao Dewang, the chairperson and CEO of the Fujian-based Fuyao Glass Industry Group, made news in the philanthropy world when he donated 300 million of his shares in the company (a reported U.S.\$530 million value) to establish the Heren Charitable Foundation in 2011.]**

This summit meeting represents the most prominent exchange between Chinese and U.S. philanthropists. It was jointly organized by the China Philanthropy Research Institute (CPRI, 中国公益研究院) and the East-West Center [in Hawaii], and jointly funded by the Lao Niu Foundation (老牛基金会), Huamin Charity Foundation (华民慈善基金会), and the Kaifeng Foundation (凯风公益基金会). “On American soil, our Chinese philanthropists having invited U.S. political and business elites and philanthropists to eat and live together. We’ve set aside three days to explore philanthropic cooperation. This is a first,” said Wang Zhenyao, head of Beijing Normal University’s CPRI, to the China Philanthropist magazine.

At first, Michael Bloomberg’s attendance at this forum was seen as his first public appearance after retiring as New York City mayor (though this forum was a private event and closed to the media). He originally planned to stay for half an hour and make a speech, but his interest was so piqued after meeting with Chinese philanthropists that he extended his time to an hour and a half. Henry Paulson participated in the entire three-day discussion. In summing up his career in the U.S. Treasury Department, he said, “I did two things as Treasury Secretary: promote Sino-US relations, and participate in environmental protection.” Mike Milken arrived in Hawaii ahead of time with his grandson, who was diagnosed with cancer this year and expected to only live another 20 months. He never imagined that one day, he would be getting together with Chinese philanthropists. Ray Dalio, founder of the American business investment firm, Bridgewater Associates, also participated. Some philanthropists had just come from ski trips in the U.S., so they brought their ski equipment with them.

“Half of Wall Street’s elite are here,” Chinese philanthropists privately joked. The lineup of the host’s Chinese delegation was equally formidable. The main participants included: Lao Niu Foundation founder Niu Gensheng; Huamin Charity Foundation



founder, Lu Dezhi; Kaifeng Foundation founder and chairperson, Duan Weihong; Fuyao Group chairperson [and founder of the Heren Foundation], Cao Dewang; Dean of CPRI, Wang Zhenyao. They all comprised a group of Chinese entrepreneurs and scholars who became deeply involved with philanthropy relatively early on.

Although China's philanthropic sector that has only been in existence for less than 30 years, it has developed rapidly. Part of this rapid development is a history of Chinese philanthropists going abroad to draw on and learn from the experiences of their foreign counterparts. At the start of [Deng Xiaoping's] "reform and opening," the Ministry of Civil Affairs was established in 1978, becoming the only national mechanism for philanthropy and public welfare; two years later, China's first charitable foundation – the China Children and Teenagers' Fund (中国少年儿童基金会) – was established. China's newly established philanthropy sector urgently needed to borrow from Western experience, and likewise international organizations that had not been allowed in China for 30 years were eager to re-enter. After the establishment of U.S.-China relations in 1979, the Ford Foundation began providing funding to China, thereby opening up a channel for philanthropic exchange between the U.S. and post-reform China.

In the subsequent 30 years, a group of philanthropists advocated for the study of Western approaches to, and experience in, philanthropy. They were all too aware of China's challenges in this area, whether it was throwing off institutional shackles to open up space for citizen action, or seeking to expand the operational space within the system. They saw that the path of philanthropic exchange between East and West would be one of exploration, advances, setbacks, and reassessment. Some called this group of pioneers the "Learning from the West School of Chinese Philanthropy".

### Looking at the World

"There's something to the "Learning from the West School" label, but it isn't very accurate and it sells us short. In fact, Chinese philanthropy does enjoy a long history," said Narada Foundation chairman Xu Yongguang.

The role of Xu's "Learning from the West School of Philanthropy" had already been set when he became the Director of the Communist Youth League's

Organization Department towards the end of the 1980s. **[Editor's Note: Xu's position was an influential one. As Director of the Organization Department, he was responsible for personnel decisions in the Communist Youth League.]** Xu, who was then doing research on system reform, was struck by the fact that although pressing issues with youth development existed, the government treasury was not investing enough. **[Editor's Note: "System reform" refers to efforts during the 1980s and 1990s by more liberal-minded officials and scholars in China to reform the old, centrally-planned system that China had inherited from the Soviet Union.]** From that point on, he studied how other countries tapped into civic resources to address social problems when the government was not doing enough. Having come across the concept of setting up a charitable foundation, he wrote "Establish the China Youth Development Foundation" into the "Plans for System Reform of the Communist Youth League" which was subsequently passed in the Communist Youth League's 12th Congress. "At that time, traveling abroad was not a possibility, and so I read any materials from abroad that I could get my hands on, so I could learn how a foundation raised funds, how it was managed and how project planning worked." When the 12th Congress ended its session in 1988, Xu tendered his resignation and in March, armed with a 100,000 yuan deposit, he set up the China Youth Development Foundation, and assumed the role of Secretary General.



*In December 2011, Bill Gates met with Xu during his visit to Beijing.*

Many years have passed, but Xu still remembered vividly the day when he was first exposed to Western philanthropy.

When the China Youth Development Foundation was founded, its office was located in an old courtyard. It had some funds from the publication of teaching materials for an educational program on taxation for private entrepreneurs around the country that Xu had managed. He used that money to renovate the premises and put up wallpaper. Shortly afterwards, a government leader came to inspect the premises and, on seeing the newly-renovated office, was shocked that “a foundation could carry out such a nice renovation”, and declared that he would never visit again.

Not long after, a delegation from an overseas foundation visited the premises, led by an elderly lady, who during a chat noted her admiration for the tidiness of the office, saying that this reflected the diligence of the organization, which would undoubtedly assure potential donors that their money would be used properly.

“Those two views,” said Xu, “could never have been more different! This was the first lesson I learned from my interaction with the outside world- that how an organization presents itself is essential to its work.”

The West’s emphasis on an organization’s image, as well as the organizational structures, management and outlook of the West, influenced many of China’s philanthropic pioneers profoundly.

The current Secretary General of the Chinese Red Cross Foundation, Liu Xuanguo, joined the Foundation in 2006, and afterwards participated in a number of overseas exchange trips involving the Red Cross system. He visited the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for Human Progress in France at the invitation of its then-chairman Pierre Calame in July 2009, and emerged from the trip deeply affected. “While our foundation was focused on alleviating poverty, this foundation’s mission was to further the development of humans.”

At the start of 2013, Liu led a delegation from the CRCF on visits to the China offices of the Ford and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations and the Southeast Asian offices of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. “From those Foundations’ missions and goals, to their standards of governance, it was obvious that China’s foundations lagged far behind,” Liu sighed. In November 2013, he flew to attend a training workshop organized by the National Foreign Experts Bureau on post-disaster building reconstruction, and on his return he wrote seven entries on his experience.

The numerous overseas trips Liu took gave him a more international perspective and “a more profound understanding of the fundamental mission of social organizations. For a government-sanctioned foundation like ours, concerns about how to better link up with the global community, how to overcome cultural communication barriers, and how to show that we are open-minded and eager to learn were always at the forefront of my mind, and gave me much food for thought,” Liu said.

Shortly after taking over the reins at the China Philanthropy Research Institute in 2010, Wang Zhenyao participated, as a scholar, in a study tour to the U.S. for the first time. On his first trip to the West, he set himself a consistent mantra – “be open-minded, and learn.” During his visit of more than 20 days, Wang visited nearly 20 NGOs and think-tanks. During each visit, he asked the host about their project design, management and review processes, as well as their daily operations and their management and review processes, leaving no stone unturned.



*China Philanthropy Research Institute Director Wang Zhenyao (photo: Zhang Xu)*

In San Francisco, Wang witnessed the professionalism of his American counterparts, and realized the relative backwardness of the organizations back home. “On my return I saw the problems between the government and civic organizations in a more lenient light. It takes two hands to clap, and it would be unfair to point the

finger solely at the government for the unfavorable situation in China.” said Wang.

Xu was deeply impressed by the community foundations in the U.S. In 2010 and 2012, he visited community foundations in the Silicon Valley and Hawaii. The former had only \$100 million in funds of its own, but was the trustee of the funds of several hundred family foundations and not-for-profit organizations with funds totaling \$1.4 billion. It charged a management fee of 1.5 per cent of the assets, and its services included financial management and project implementation. “As a charitable assets management company which takes in more than \$20 million in management fees, the Silicon Valley Community Foundation has built a strong team to manage both funds and projects with high efficiency and professionalism,” said Xu. Taking these foundations as examples, Xu has begun to chart the reform path for China’s public fundraising foundations and the China Charity Federation (慈善会).



*The Narada Foundation chairperson, Xu Yongguang (Photo: Zhang Xu)*

After the first China Private Foundation Forum in 2009, Xu led a delegation of private foundation representatives to the U.S. At the U.S. Foundation

Center, Xu and delegation were left with a deep impression. The Foundation Center has operated for more than 50 years, and created a virtual platform which discloses information about 98,000 foundations in the U.S. In front of a huge screen, Foundation Center employees demonstrated the platform’s operation. On a virtual map of the world, clicking on a foundation’s name showed its donor network, and another click of its recipients brought up the flow of funds and how the funds were used. Taking heart from this, Xu decided to revive an earlier 1998 effort to build a similar information transparency platform for China’s foundations.

Seeing the Chinese philanthropy community turn its outlook outwards, other overseas organizations and philanthropists took the initiative to visit China to provide advice and support.

Peter Geithner headed the Ford Foundation’s representative office in China. He had arrived in China at the start of the 1980s to set up the Ford office. Over the last 30 years, he has remained a steadfast supporter of China’s burgeoning philanthropy community, and has a deep understanding of its development and challenges. He was responsible for arranging the study tour of senior Chinese foundation staff to the U.S. in October of 2010. This tour proved to be a turning point for Chinese philanthropy and led to the creation of the China Foundation Center (CFC, 中国基金会中心网).



*The activation of the Foundation’s new information disclosure platform.*

In 2011, when the CFC’s project preparation team visited the U.S., the U.S. Foundation Center’s director Brad Smith arranged for training by senior staff, giving the team unprecedented insight into his organization’s operations. In an email to Xu, Smith wrote, “Creating



an information disclosure and sharing platform will allow the citizens of both China and the world to gain a greater understanding of Chinese philanthropy, and its vast potential. We are very honored to be the CFC's partner during these early stages, and to witness this great milestone in your history.'

The British Council's "Social Entrepreneurs Skills Programme" has trained more than a thousand Chinese social entrepreneurs since its inception. "It's been very effective in spreading the concepts of social enterprise, impact investing and other new concepts. I think it's very promising," said Xu.

On December 8, 2011, Bill Gates, who was on an unrelated trip to Beijing, visited Xu and Wang in the CFC's Beijing office. During the one-and-a-half-hour discussion, Gates shared his views about the American philanthropic tradition, his experiences in international philanthropic assistance, and the similarities and differences between Chinese and Americans in charitable giving by the wealthy. In return, Xu and Wang shared their unique perspectives about recent developments in Chinese philanthropy, and expressed optimism that with things having reached a turning point the future looked rosy. However, Gates threw out a thought that struck Xu. "Wealthy Americans find it harder to donate to charitable causes, because their wealth is mainly inherited and so comes with restrictions. In contrast, many of the wealthy Chinese are self-made individuals, and are free to decide how to direct their donations." Xu began thinking about the possibilities for giving among China's wealthy.

**“There is huge potential here, but China’s wealthy must consider carefully how to pass on their wealth and effectively manage their charitable assets. They have to think clearly and avoid focusing on short-term results. In this respect, China’s wealthy still have much to learn.”**

“There is huge potential here, but China’s wealthy must consider carefully how to pass on their wealth and effectively manage their charitable assets. They

have to think clearly and avoid focusing on short-term results. In this respect, China’s wealthy still have much to learn.” While China’s philanthropic organizations and individuals continue to “look out into the world,” China’s different levels of government are also venturing out to draw upon the experiences of others. “Many of the officials currently in charge of China’s philanthropy policies have studied overseas or undertaken trips overseas, and are able to bring back many new ideas and use them to form a new vision of governance,” said Liu. “So in recent years, the policy and regulatory environment for China’s social organizations is not that much different from that of Europe or the U.S.”

### Promoting Reform

Inspired by its Western counterparts, the ‘Learning from the West’ School of Chinese Philanthropy has been eager to develop local practices and innovations. But it is bound to be a thorny path. This has become particularly evident over the last decade. According to Xu Yongguang, the 1990s was a period when the government withdrew and citizens stepped forward. But after 2000, the reverse happened. [Editor’s Note: Xu’s observation is striking yet controversial given that grassroots NGOs and private foundations grew particularly rapidly after the early 2000s.]

Creating a platform for exchanges among foundation has always been on Shang Yusheng’s wish list. Ever since 1994, he and Xu as well as Yang Tuan [deputy director of the Social Policy Research Centre at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences] have been working on establishing a China Federation of Foundations, “but we failed eventually because the government wasn’t ready.”

Having studied a number of foreign foundations and worked at the National Committee of the Natural Science Fund (国家自然科学基金委员会), in 1998, Shang Yusheng carried out a major coup in 1998: he facilitated the cooperation between the Ford Foundation and the National Committee in his capacity as the Secretary-General of the China Science Fund’s Research Society (中国科学基金研究会). Sponsored by Ford Foundation, he held a non-governmental organization management conference. Over 200 people attended this four-day conference to discuss topics such as “Foundations, Nonprofit Organizations and the Law”, ‘Fundraising for Foundations’, ‘Foundation Asset Management’ and



'Foundations Facing the 21st Century'. 'It was the first conference in which the development of American foundations was systematically discussed,' said Shang. By the end of 1998, under the support of Yan Mingfu, then the president of the China Charity Federation (中华慈善总会), Shang and Xu founded the China Foundation and NPO Information Network, which was later registered as Beijing Enju Information Consulting Center (后来注册为北京恩玖信息咨询中心).

Xu has a very high acceptance rate for new things. "I can pick out very quickly what is good, and adopt it if it looks useful. Family foundations, community foundations, United Way, charitable trusts, venture philanthropy, mutual funds and the China Foundation Center are some examples. Xu believes that all of the above can take root in China.

In 1998, Xu took a one-month study tour of the U.S. "That trip allowed me to take in the American philanthropy sector. Many of the things I did after that was influenced by that trip. Some things took over 10 years to push through such as the China Foundation Center and charitable trusts," said Xu. When he returned to China, he immediately arranged for Cheng Gang, the CEO of the China Foundation Center, to register four domains for the NPO Information Network, using the key words China NPO, China NGO, NPO and NGO.

When visiting the New York Community foundation, Xu was surprised to discover it was so large, managing 1,500 charitable trust funds. "Community trust funds are very diverse, and are entrusted to spend money for philanthropic purposes based on the donor's request or will." Xu thought that was a brilliant idea. When he got back to China, he tried to establish a 'charitable memorial fund' at China Youth Development Foundation, which allowed a donor to establish a fund in his or her parent's name with a minimum donation of 10,000 yuan. "Our influence is limited and this effort ultimately did not take off," said Xu. Three years later, the Trust Law of the People's Republic of China was introduced with 'charitable trust' on its list. "This year, the first charitable trust in mainland China might be set up in Shenzhen."

Similar actions were taken as a result of years of communication and cooperation between Xu and United Way International. As early as the late 1990s, when Xu Yongguang was visiting United Way

International, the CEO of the organization told him that their next goal was to allow Chinese organizations to join. Ever since, Xu has been planning on cooperation between United Way International and the China Charity Federation (CCF). Although the CCF has become a member of United Way International, the cooperation did not work well. In 2005, Xu became Vice President of the CCF, and hoped to reopen the cooperation with United Way International to explore new pathways for non-governmental charities to engage in collective fundraising. This attempt eventually failed and in less than a year, Xu resigned from the CCF. Before he left, he called the former president Yan Mingfu. Yan expressed concern, but also understanding. He only had one request, "Don't stop helping to advance the credibility of the sector."

For the past 26 years, Xu has been promoting China's philanthropic culture. He's regarded as the 'father of Chinese philanthropy'. In the meantime, his bold actions have been criticized on numerous occasions.

Using funds from the China Youth Development Foundation's Project Hope to invest in keeping the organization running was a necessary evil at the time. In the 1998 Foundation Management Regulations issued by the State Council, Article 9 stated that all foundation staff salaries and administrative costs had to be paid for from the interest income of the fund. This is basically asking foundations to operate at no cost and places a great deal of pressure on the foundation. "Back then, the money used to pay for envelopes to allow students benefiting from scholarships to thank the donor, let alone salaries for staff, could come from the donated funds. Regulations did not allow it and neither would the donor!"

Because the investments are made with donations, and because there are losses from specific investments, Xu was blamed and misunderstood for many years for "misappropriating donations", "making investments in violation of the regulations", and "causing huge losses." In fact, the results so far show that the capital investment of about 120 million yuan for that year was not only recovered but also earned more than 200 million in profit. "At the time, under pressure from different sides, we could only deal with this by taking back the investment. That investment in several courtyard properties in Beijing would by now be worth around several hundred million, but at that time, we were only able to recover about several million from our initial investment." Here, Xu expresses a bit of frustration.

“Twenty years ago, the first time I saw teacher Nan Huaïjin, he told me “defamation comes with growing fame.” As a result, I’m mentally prepared, but also know that I need to adhere to a moral bottom line and be very calm. I’m thinking my next step is to promote family foundations, community foundations, the United Way, charitable trusts, charitable asset management, and social impact investment. Things that represent future trends need to be pushed one step at a time and then they’ll gain momentum” Xu says.

In addition, Xu Yongguang recommends philanthropic organizations seize the opportunities offered by the Internet.” This may mean that the sector will have to go through a restructuring.” He suggested that the government allow some public universities to be run by nonprofit organizations, thereby converting public universities into private ones. “The Rockefeller Foundation established the University of Chicago and Rockefeller University, which together can claim a total of 105 Nobel Prizes. It’s shameful to think about how much the government in China has invested in public universities in China.” He believes that Xiamen University and Shantou University, which were originally established with charitable donations, could be the first to convert to private universities. “Foundations that establish universities are not under pressure to make a return on their investment and can focus on developing talent. Only in this way can China hope to produce universities like America’s private universities that can cultivate innovative talent and produce great scholars.”

Compared to Xu’s challenging quest, Wang Zhenyao’s progress in philanthropic exchanges between East and West has been much smoother. In just three years time, Wang Zhenyao has helped to establish a “China-US Strategic Philanthropy ” (CUSP) platform, a China-US. philanthropy dialogue among wealthy families, the first East-West Charity Forum, have garnered recognition among both Chinese and American philanthropists and widespread praise by the public. “I think there are still too few philanthropic exchanges between China and the U.S., and many Chinese and American philanthropists are hoping to make use of platforms like CPRI to strengthen communication and exchanges,” Wang notes.

After several overseas trips, Liu Xuanguo has proposed some thoughts about the development of foundations. He believes that the foundation is an innovative social

mechanism, and therefore should continue to generate innovations. Leaders of foreign foundation’s generally use the title of “president” or “CEO” so “the titles of foundation staff should be on a par with commercial companies, so as to clarify responsibilities, and make it easier to assess performance.” He put this proposal in a report to the Chinese Red Cross Society’s General Assembly, but received no feedback. He also advocated signing a strategic cooperation agreement with the U.S.-based World’s Children Fund, hoping it would help the Red Cross establish a database for fundraising purposes. “For various reasons, promoting this kind of cooperation did not go smoothly,” Liu admits.

However, his recommendations on “strengthening evaluation of public benefit projects” will soon be implemented by the Red Cross. From 2005 to 2012, during a seven year period, the Red Cross Foundation only completed one project evaluation report, but in 2013 alone, it completed three project evaluation reports. “In the future, we need to put more effort into evaluating public benefit projects, since the evaluation process can help us identify problems, and ways to address them,” Liu said.

In studying Western experiences and approaches, and developing local adaptations, these “Learning from the West School of Chinese Philanthropists” are reflecting on their own roles in promoting the modernization and internationalization of Chinese philanthropy, and assuming a greater sense of mission and responsibility.

### **Building Bridges**

Wang Zhenyao is well aware of his role as an intermediary in philanthropic exchanges between the East and West. “I feel I serve as a bridge or an intermediary. I facilitate communication between Chinese and American philanthropists by organizing various forums,” he said. Wang is highly welcomed by Chinese and American philanthropists, because of his humility and the attention to detail he puts into his professional work. A philanthropist once half-jokingly remarked that “the future Secretary-General must have qualities which Wang Zhenyao possesses.”

“The social good I’ve contributed to pales in comparison to what philanthropists do,” said Wang. He continued, “I’ve learned many new things and ideas while organizing exchanges and facilitating dialogues between Chinese and American philanthropists. I also bring my expertise in China to the table, which is extremely valued by foreign philanthropists.”

Once, an European NGO academic asked Wang if he knew who the first person in the world to donate all his wealth was. Wang cited several Western philanthropists, but was told that the person was in fact “China’s Fan Li, who in a single lifetime went from rags to riches three times, each time donating all his wealth to the wider community.” **[Editor’s Note: Fan Li was an advisor to the state of Yue in the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 B.C.) and later became a wealthy businessman.]** The academic also mentioned that China had an enduring history of charity. Wang Zhenyao later compared charity in China to charity outside of China, and realized that the foreign scholar had a point. “Looking at Chinese charity in that light provided me with more faith, confidence and esteem in international dialogues,” said Wang Zhenyao.

According to Xu Yongguang, both Eastern and Western philanthropists have their own unique strengths. In 2012, he travelled to the United States four times, one time attending a prestigious China-US seminar about philanthropy held in Hawaii. The three day meeting began on a casual note, but on the final day, the host allotted one hour for both the Chinese and US teams to separately summarize the proceedings of the seminar and to present what they learnt on stage. Within an hour the Chinese team had set up a Secretariat, elected a Secretary-General, and split themselves into four discussion groups to discuss public trust, capacity building, social innovation and the legal framework for philanthropy. On stage, the Chinese delegation expressed the possibility of discussing these four areas with the U.S. delegation. The US delegation, however, was still composing their thoughts and engaging in vague discussions. The host then noted that “the Chinese group came out with three days worth of outcomes from an hour of discussion, whereas the US group’s discussion generated about 40 minutes worth.”

“Because we developed relatively late, we had to hit the ground running and learn from everyone else. Through the exchange process, we succeeded as late bloomers,” Cheng Gang said. In the past two years, he has attended numerous forums in the philanthropy sector, and developed a new understanding of East-West philanthropy exchanges.

“Western society did not take long to develop innovative constructs such as social enterprise and impact investing. We should catch up with the West in

these aspects, or even try to better them,” Xu noted. “Chinese philanthropy has to learn from the West and it has to be as innovative as possible. In 2012, when the China Foundation Center introduced the China Foundation Transparency Index, many Western counterparts were impressed. The president of the U.S. Foundation Center praised it as “a contribution to the world.”

A more common reaction among China’s philanthropic pioneers is that the impact of Western philanthropy, such as its “powerful innovations”, “attention to detail” and “lofty missions,” continues to stimulate and inspire their creativity and thought processes.

At the same time, they are considering how the next generation can inherit this nascent platform for East-West philanthropic exchanges. Under current circumstances, only government officials, entrepreneurs, and senior staff of foundations are given the opportunity to go abroad. “This is a problem many philanthropists face. Our consensus is that we should provide young people with more opportunities. The China Philanthropy Research Institute will be exploring this area, and establishing a mechanism for training and exchanges,” said Wang Zhenyao. The Narada Foundation, under Xu Yongguang’s leadership, has already begun working on this area. Its “Gingko Fellows Program” [which gives fellowships to emerging NGO leaders] includes a number of observation and study projects, including one on “Overseas Study”.

As a bridge and intermediary in encouraging Western and Eastern philanthropic exchanges, both Xu and Wang are perceptive enough to identify misunderstandings which occur as the Chinese philanthropy sector learns from the West. “Learning from the West should be uncomplicated, but we tend to beat around the bush and some have adopted this ultra-leftist mindset that “we have to be vigilant against anything Western,” said Xu.

From Wang’s perspective, “cultural barriers” pose huge obstacles to dialogues with the West. “Our system for transmitting knowledge is problematic, and we fail to grasp a basic understanding of some concepts, resulting in certain misunderstandings when we exchange views. Moreover, China’s philanthropic sector needs to pay particular attention to the need for transparency, and must also respect the need for donor anonymity.”



Today, China has become the world's second largest economy, and many of her companies have integrated into the global economic system. "Yet because Chinese philanthropy has not yet internationalized, it remains stunted. If philanthropy does not internationalize, China will not have fully stood up in the world," said Wang.

### International responsibility

On December 16, 2013, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation convened a People's Forum on International Social Responsibility at Beijing University's Yinglie Overseas Exchange Center. Three hundred people attended the forum, including representatives from China's ministries, the UNDP China office, a delegation from Myanmar, Chinese businesses, multinational companies in China, academics, and international and Chinese NGOs. [Editor's Note: For more on this forum, see the CDB report "[Chinese Aid Abroad: The People's Forum on International Social Responsibility](#)."] The forum was also nicknamed He Daofeng's pulpit, since he is the executive chairman of the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation. [Editor's Note: The Chinese term 道场 (dao chang) refers to a place where Daoist or Buddhist rites are performed, or a religious space where someone preaches to influence others, thus a kind of pulpit.]



*The Forum was convened by the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation in Beijing in December 2013.*

The notion that China's NGOs shoulder international responsibility is a controversial one. The Chinese public and media often think that many domestic groups need assistance, and we should solve domestic problems first, before assuming international responsibility.

"If we say we won't or don't care about helping others out because we ourselves are poor, then we will only get poorer," said He. He gave an example: "If our family is poor and can't afford schooling for our children, can we then do nothing for a very sick child whose family is poorer than us?"

**"The notion that China's NGOs shoulder international responsibility is a controversial one. The Chinese public and media often think that many domestic groups need assistance, and we should solve domestic problems first, before assuming international responsibility."**

The philosophy He upholds reflects a position that the "Learning from the West School" of Chinese philanthropists share regarding international responsibility.

On August 16, 2011, the news that several Beijing schools for migrant children had been shut down caused concern among the public. At the same time, the news that the China-Africa Project Hope was going ahead to build 1,000 Hope primary schools in Africa within 10 years at a cost of about 2 billion yuan [over U.S.\$300 million] sparked public debate. The organizers of the project, the World Eminence Chinese Entrepreneurs Association and the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF), came under public criticism, a number of donors dropped out, and the project went into a tailspin. [Editor's Note: On this "scandal" and others that took place in 2011, see the CDB article "[The Year of Scandal](#)".]

"Narrow-minded nationalism and self-contemptuous patriotism undermined the China-Africa Project Hope," Xu Yongguang noted. "Now there are many Chinese companies investing overseas, their image in Africa is very poor, and they are behaving even worse than the previous [European] colonialists in destroying the environment, among other things. Companies carrying out local charity programs could achieve win-win results by improving the investment environment and becoming a part of the local community. Many



foreign companies which have invested in China gave no small amount of support to China's Project Hope." A philanthropist told Wang Zhenyao in private that he earned over a billion yuan in Africa, so he should donate some money to local communities. "A very important reason why Chinese companies in Africa and Europe encountered problems is that their owners have not distributed enough charity," said Wang. At the East-West Philanthropy Forum, when American philanthropists were told that Cao Dewang would increase his investment in the U.S., they suggested he include in his public relations campaign the fact that he had donated nearly U.S.\$1 billion in China. By doing so, he would gain the local community's trust and understanding.

Cheng Gang thinks that conducting charity abroad is an important way to popularize China's mainstream values. "Over the past few decades, the Chinese public's education has been particularly narrow, and we have lost our sense of love and tolerance. This is a failure of our culture and education. It only took a few charity activities to be conducted abroad before some so-called 'patriots' began expressing their criticism. When China participates in international affairs, why do we think we're powerful, yet others see us in a different light? We have to ask ourselves, where's our international responsibility, and what are our mainstream values?"

Liu Xuanguo visited the USA in November 2013. He was moved when he watched a video by the New York branch of Taiwan's Tzu Chi Foundation about its global relief efforts. "In the major disasters over the world, Tzu Chi is the first to arrive and the last to leave. It is merely a branch of a Taiwan civil organization in distant New York, but its staff's quality puts us so-called philanthropy professionals to shame. We are promoting China's soft power, but a civic organization in Taiwan can promote Chinese culture to the world, and this fact made us think."

In addition to reflecting on the "right path," the "Learning from the West School of Chinese Philanthropy" has begun to take action, trying to show to the international community how China philanthropy is assuming international responsibility.

In terms of organizations, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) is a pioneer. In January 2005, the CFPA, together with the Mercy Corps, donated medicines worth 44 million yuan [about U.S. \$5 million] to the tsunami-stricken areas in Indonesia, setting a precedent for Chinese NGOs in their

internationalization effort. In 2007, the CFPA instituted a strategic plan to develop into a grant-making, international foundation. Starting in 2008, it began to send aid to Africa where it has built a hospital and sent medical teams with the support of Chinese companies. **[Editor's Note: For more on the hospital, see the CDB article, "The Sudan-China Abu Ushar Friendship Hospital: China's First Overseas Charitable NGO Project".]**



*In July 2011, the Sudan-China Abu Ushar Friendship Hospital built jointly by the PetroChina and the CFPA was completed. The hospital represents the CFPA's first step in its internationalization efforts, and a new model for PetroChina in carrying out charity overseas.*

"As China gradually develops into an economic power, the international community expects more in terms of its role and image on the world stage: changing from an aid recipient to an aid donor, and bearing more responsibility for humanitarian relief, the environment, and conflict resolution. Chinese companies that operate abroad should pay more attention to resource utilization and environmental protection, strengthen their role awareness, and develop appropriate strategies," said He Daofeng.

The CFPA's efforts at internationalizing have impressed Liu Xuanguo. "The CFPA has philanthropic activities abroad and carries out projects with local Red Cross organizations there. If anything, the China Red Cross Foundation should be in the lead."

In fact, Liu has also been thinking about it. In 2010, the China Red Cross Foundation developed a plan to broaden its Red Cross Angels Program to other countries, prepared a budget plan, estimated how much it might need to build a village-level health station in Africa, and contacted several Chinese state-

owned enterprises with operations in Africa to develop an action program and research report.

“But there was no real progress,” said Liu regretfully. “In 2013, we developed a program to expand assistance to African and Southeast Asian countries. These projects are being implemented, and will be finished in 2014.”

While social organizations are accelerating their efforts to “go abroad”, China’s philanthropists are also moving in this direction.

In 2009, Feng Lun [of the Vantone Group, a large real estate company, and one of the founders of the Vantone Charitable Foundation] established the World Future Foundation (世界未来基金会) in Singapore, which is the first Singapore-based foundation founded by mainland Chinese entrepreneurs. Niu Gensheng of Mengniu [a large dairy company], which was implicated in the tainted milk powder scandal several years ago, is now actively involved in overseas philanthropic activities. Lu Dezhi [of the finance and investment company, Tehua] began to donate to American universities many years ago. According to the 2013 edition of China’s Top 100 Philanthropists released by CPRI, there were only four Chinese entrepreneurs who made overseas donations of over 200 million yuan [over U.S.\$30 million] in 2013.

This is just a starting point. As China philanthropy has modernizes, internationalizes and shoulders more international responsibility, more and more social organizations, nonprofit practitioners and philanthropists will follow.

In 1990, just in his early forties, Xu Yongguang started the first overseas philanthropic exchange. An Bugong, a Japanese citizen who loved Chinese culture, donated 100 million Japanese yen (equivalent to 8 million yuan at the time) to [the China Youth Development Foundation’s] Project Hope. It was a huge donation at the time. As an expression of gratitude, the China Youth Development Foundation collected some Chinese paintings, sponsored a Chinese art exhibition in Japan, and sent these paintings to the Japanese donor.

Xu always remembers the day when he and Li Gang, then director of the Communist Youth League’s International Liaison Department (and currently the director of the the central government’s Liaison Office

in Macau), each carried a bag full of tickets for the art exhibition, going door to door to every Sino-Japanese friendship exchange organization, to invite them to attend the exhibition, saying *yoroshiku*, a Japanese expression meaning “please.” Li had been to Japan dozens of times, and when he met people he knew along the way, he joked that he was “a salesman with a bag on his shoulder.” Twenty-four years have passed since that day.

# PEOPLE-ORIENTED URBANIZATION? THREE EVENTS IN MAY

By Martina Poletti, Master's student at the University of Turin and intern at CDB



*CDB intern Martina Poletti reports on three events in May that discussed making China's urbanization more sustainable.*

In March of this year the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council released the National New-type Urbanization Plan” for the 2014-2020 period (1). Today, Chinese urban residents make up 53.7% of the entire population; a huge increase on the less than 20% who lived in cities in 1978, at the beginning of the reform-era.

However, this figure is still less than the 80% urbanization figure for developed countries’ and the 60% that is common to countries with similar per capita income levels as China. In addition, according to data of the National Bureau Statistics, while 53.7% of the population lives in cities, only 35.7% holds the urban *hukou* that gives them full access to local services (2). Following the implementation of the new 2014 Urbanization Plan, by 2020 China’s ratio of urban residents to total population should reach the 60% mark, while urban *hukou* holders should account for about 45% of total population. As highlighted in the plan, further increasing urbanization will raise the income of rural resident through urban employment; unleash the consumption potential; and attract investments in urban infrastructure, public service facilities and housing construction.

Urbanization is nothing new, but in the specific case of China both the speed of the change, and the number of people involved, is unprecedented. How is China facing this process? What challenges does it have to overcome? What are the reforms that need to be

implemented? These are a few of the questions that experts are trying to answer and their responses will significantly impact the living conditions of a billion people. Who responds – whether it is down to the state, or whether there is a role for the non-state – is another question that is yet to be fully answered.

During the month of May, CDB participated in three important events concerning urbanization and its sustainable development. On May 16th the Embassy of Sweden welcomed the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China (FCCC) event “100 Million Questions: how will China accommodate its new Urban Residents?”, with Klaus Rohland, the World Bank (WB) Country Director for China, Mongolia and South Korea, explaining the core features of the WB report “Urban China” (also released in March 2014 (3)). According to the report, reform-era China is currently facing what is probably its hardest challenge: maintaining GDP growth while changing its development model. It is moving from an investment-led economy to a consumption-led one, while also dealing with numerous associated issues such as migration, erosion of services for urban citizens, growing inequalities, and rising environmental degradation.

Urbanization plays a key role in the new reform agenda of the Chinese government and, as highlighted in the WB report, it has to become more efficient, inclusive, and sustainable. As Rohland showed during his presentation, the majority of Chinese cities are too large, with a huge environmental footprint but not enough density. This causes urban sprawl, wasting both space and resources. According to the WB analysis, for example, Guangzhou could accommodate 4.5 million more people with Seoul’s density profile. Urbanization also hasn’t been inclusive so far, with the *hukou* system in particular creating deep inequalities between city dwellers and rural migrants. The fiscal system also needs to be improved. There is a huge discrepancy between local government income and what they spend on urbanizing. In the last few years, and while many migrant workers are unable to find affordable housing, too many resources have been



wasted in the creation of ghost towns and pharaonic projects with high impact on the environment.

**“Another message that was repeated at the talk was that China should stop thinking about growth and start focusing on the quality of life of its population.”**

Another message that was repeated at the talk was that China should stop thinking about growth and start focusing on the quality of life of its population. For doing so, the World Bank has suggested a comprehensive reform package centered around four priority areas: land, *hukou*, the fiscal system, and the incentive system of local governments. These four reforms would be followed by reform of social policies and service delivery, urban planning, and environmental management. While a few pilot projects have been implemented in some provinces, nationwide reforms will not be implemented for a number of years.



The second May event that discussed urbanization was the “Sino-European Workshop on Sustainable Development in the Context of Rural-Urban Population Transit.” It was organized by [PlaNNet Finance](#)(4) and held in Beijing on May 5th, 2014. Among the panelists and the audience, were senior experts from the [National Development and Reform](#)

[Commission \(NDRC\)](#) (5) and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Chinese officials; academics from Peking University, Ningxia University and Nottingham University; and representatives from Chinese and international foundations, NGOs, and media organizations.

The PlaNNet Finance conference started with an outline of the state perspective on urbanization. Xiao Jincheng, head of the Institute of Spatial Planning and Regional Economy of the NDRC, illustrated the current situation of the phenomenon. Xiao explained that alongside the 260 million migrant workers that are now living in cities without being entitled to any social services, there are also more than 50 million children and 50 million women left-behind in the rural ‘sender’ areas. Xiao argued that it was time to approach this issue in a more ‘people-oriented’ way, planning for a more gradual absorption of migrants into cities, especially in second and third tier cities (6). Qiu Aijun, Vice-Director of the NDRC’s China Centre for Urban Development, spoke after Zhang and highlighted the need to move from ‘quantity’ to ‘quality’. She argued that instead of just counting how many migrants are moving around China, greater attention should be focused on their life and needs.

After the NDRC speakers, Nini Khor, economist for the Asian Development Bank (ADB), gave one of the most interesting speeches of the day, pointing out that local governments have been paying heavily for China’s urbanization, and are now highly indebted due to excesses in urban construction and infrastructure development. While expenditures in this sector were sky-rocketing, the percentage of GDP invested in health and education has stagnated, notwithstanding the fact that in the last decade China has seen an increase of fiscal revenues, from 11% of GDP in 2000 to 22,6% last year. Khor’s ADB data highlighted the worrying gaps in education between urban and rural areas that have developed over the last few years: almost 70% of urban teenagers attend high schools, whilst this figure plummets to just 30% in rural areas. Khor made clear that to start addressing today’s social inequalities, and because China is becoming a higher-middle-income country that in the next two decades will need less and less unskilled labor, the time has come for China to invest more in human capital.

In the remaining part of the conference professor Richard Hardiman, Environmental Governance Specialist in the EU-China Environmental Governance Program, and professor Heinz-Peter Mang, German



Biogas Association, presented models and projects implemented in Europe for rural transformation and renewable energy development that might be applied to the Chinese case. In the afternoon Zhang Shuanbao, Deputy Mayor from Tongwei county in Gansu province, illustrated the urbanization path of Tongwei through agriculture industrialization, tourism and investments in infrastructures. Zhang pointed out the importance of the vocational training program implemented for raising the employability of migrant workers, with a plan to annually train fifteen thousand new employees every year in the future. Unfortunately, and as with most of the other presentations, the discussion didn't go further than the official level. After showing some data about GDP growth and investment rates, no time was given to explain how the local government has been addressing social problems, or about whether any role has been given to social organizations. Nor was there any mention of the environmental impact of the process, or whether any consultation at the grassroots level had been planned.

On the whole, the solutions suggested during the two events described above focused on economics and state planning, ignoring the possibility of alternative, more holistic and multilateral methods, involving civil society. As the founder and editor of China Dialogue, Isabel Hilton, said at the end of the PlaNet conference, it seems that the 'base of the pyramid' had been completely neglected. Fortunately, China's non-profit sector has been developing quickly in the last decades: several Chinese NGOs are now playing a valuable role in ameliorating the wide-ranging impacts of mass-urbanization.



For example, the Beijing-based NGO [Included](#) works for opening access to the city for migrants living in

poor areas. In May, Included organized an exhibition in the centre of a Sanlitun shopping district that aimed to raise awareness of the issues surrounding migrant workers. The exhibition — displayed within shipping containers and surrounded by the neon lights of high-commercialism — told stories of migrants lives: looking at where they came from, how they live, what sacrifices they have to make and what can be done to help them to achieve higher standards of living. Over the ten days the exhibition was visited by 25,000 people, a huge success for Included. (Watch an interview with Included founder and executive director Jonathan Hursh [here](#)).



Other examples of Beijing-based NGOs that focus on mitigating the negative effects of migration and urbanization include the [Migrant Workers Home](#) (北京工友之家文化发展中心), [United Heart Home of Hope](#) (同心希望家园), the [Beijing Rural Children's Cultural Development Center](#) (北京农民之子文化发展中心) and the [New Citizen Programme](#) (新公民计划), all specializing in providing education programs for children of migrant workers, psychological care volunteer services, and public welfare innovation. The organization [China Rural Library](#) (立人乡村图书馆) helps young people in rural areas to become responsible and active citizens, joining the volunteering project of "build a library in your hometown" for promoting literacy and strengthening rural education efforts. Centered on rural development is also the activity of the [Beijing Green Cross](#) (北京绿十字), an environmental protection NGO that aims at improving rural self-governance and community cohesion, through projects like rural cultural revitalization and training, soil improvement and organic agriculture, financing, tourism planning, ecological planning and design. Since thousands of

rural Chinese every year relocate to cities, creating “empty villages” in the countryside, Beijing Green Cross fights for reemphasize the importance of rural areas, helping in the creation of wealth and self-awareness, while protecting the environment.

Organizations such as these fill the gaps, anticipating the suggestions of international organizations and the moves of officials. For the future we hope to see better cooperation among these actors, so that the next time that CDB participates in a conference about urbanization the speakers will talk more about how to provide social services to disadvantaged people and less about how to obtain more GDP growth through urbanization.

Notes:

(1) Xinhua, “China’s new plan targets quality urbanization”, March 17, 2014. Available [here](#).

(2) The *Hukou* (户口) is a record in the Household Registration System required by law in the PRC. It identifies a person as a resident of a particular area of the country and includes basic information such as name, parents, date of birth and marital status. There are two types of *hukou*, the urban *hukou* and the rural *hukou*, holders of the latter not being allowed to enjoy the same public services as holders of the former in Chinese cities. Although still facing severe challenges and moving slowly, the Chinese government is trying to bridge the gap with its urban-rural integration initiative.

(3) The World Bank report, “Urban China: toward efficient, inclusive and sustainable urbanization”, 2014.

(4) Founded in 1998, PlaNet Finance is a leading player in the promotion and development of micro-finance worldwide. Through a range of advisory services and development programs, PlaNet Finance helps local financial institutions to adopt international best practices and contribute to the development of inclusive financial sectors.

(5) The National Development and Reform Commission of the Government of the PRC is a macroeconomic management agency under the Chinese State Council with the administrative and planning control over the Chinese economy.

(6) According to the World Bank, projections for the year 2030 say that some other 300 million people will leave the countryside heading towards to eastern regions of China.

# THE NEW LEI FENGs: FROM SACRIFICE TO WIN-WIN?

By Tom Bannister, CDB (English) Associate Director



*Tom Bannister, CDB (English) Associate Director explores themes from his research surrounding the changing culture of NGO volunteerism in China and the growing role of the Chinese individual.*

## Introduction

I sat sipping a weak coffee and listening to the young woman talk about how she drunk and smoked too much, how she spent too much money on clothes, and how she was too selfish and rarely called her mother. The next day I would talk to a young man with spiky hair, skinny jeans, and sunglasses with polarized lenses, and hear him talk about the deep influence of his beloved pop stars and his dissatisfaction with his life. The week before I had talked to a softly spoken man who talked earnestly, the conversation weaving back and forth between environmental issues and the desirability of the latest Apple product. And the connection between these three individuals? They were, and still are, committed volunteers, working in grassroots NGOs, and occupying one small corner of China's vast and varied civil society landscape.

There have been many studies of China's civil society but few focus on the 'average' individuals that operate within an NGO. This is an overlooked but important topic. With the growth of civil society over the past decade, there are now several million Chinese NGOs. Extrapolating from this figure there can be said to be several tens of millions of people who have worked in NGOs, with many of these doing so on a voluntary

basis. This is a considerable group of people.

How these people experience work in NGOs is an important subject for analysis. Firstly it can provide new insight into contemporary Chinese social values. As civil society and volunteerism experts Anheier and Salamon's state: "volunteering is part of the way societies are organized, how they allocate social responsibilities, and how much engagement and participation they expect from citizens" [1]. Secondly it can also shed light on the state of civil society, and on how civil society is itself having an impact on social values. Whilst not as tangible as issues of funding or program management, creating a positive and mutually beneficial experience for the individual who enters an NGO is important for the healthy and sustainable growth of civil society. Finally it also shifts the focus away from the 'activist' individuals that Western media tends to concentrate upon. For every 'activist' there are a hundred thousand volunteers quietly working within voluntary organizations, and, through doing so, gently shifting social-relations and values, and altering the relationship between society and civil society.

This article introduces some of the key themes that emerged from research that I conducted in 2011-2012 for my doctoral thesis on Chinese NGO volunteerism. The main part of the data was collected through the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with young, urban Chinese adults engaged in volunteer work with grassroots Chinese NGOs. In demographic terms, the individuals looked at in my study cannot be said to be representative of the Chinese population as whole. However, they can be said to be representative of a growing trend of urbanites engaging in volunteering and involving themselves in civil society [2].

## Re-defining the volunteer

In my research I interviewed more than sixty volunteers operating in grassroots NGOs in one city in southwest China. I asked the interviewees to talk about their volunteering experiences, their views on volunteerism, and how volunteering had changed their own attitudes and values. From these conversations, perhaps the dominant theme that emerged was how the interviewees' extremely strong notions of individuality and re-imagined social commitments

created anew, bottom-up generated identity of volunteering and voluntary association. This revised identity incorporated conceptions of Anheier and Salamon's 'social commitments', 'responsibilities', and 'engagement', that diverged significantly from historical and contemporary narratives of the Chinese volunteer. At the same time it also contradicted several conventional viewpoints: (1) historical readings that emphasize that the 'Chinese individual' is collectivist; (2) common contemporary readings that emphasize that the 'Chinese individual' is amorally, selfishly individualistic; and (3) globally accepted wisdom that correlate increasing individualism with declining civic engagement.

Firstly, let's deal with historical readings. The collectivism vs. individualism dichotomy is a core feature that defines any culture and, according to accepted wisdom, the Chinese individual has long been subordinate to the collective [3]. For Chinese volunteering this was personified by the 'selfless' and 'sacrificial' Lei Feng who represented the ideal socialist; fully collectivist, and devoting his altruism to the Party. Lei's "screw spirit" (螺丝钉精神) – calling for collectivist devotion to the Party and the People – was promoted by the state, whilst March 5th became 'Learn from Lei Feng Day', when students and workers were detailed to engage in 'voluntary' activities.

However, for the individuals interviewed in my study, the 'self' was at the center of their accounts and a selfless, Lei Feng-style approach to volunteering activities was criticized by every single interviewee. For example the interviewee Ziqing, who was one of the most committed volunteers in the survey talked about how "volunteer spirit is about yourself" and that "I'm helping people but that I'm not sacrificing myself to help people". Similarly, Zhenyi, another of the most committed volunteers, said that "today's volunteer spirit is absolutely not about selfless sacrifice." [Authors note: all interviewee's names are pseudonyms]

Secondly, the definition of volunteerism generated by the individuals in my study also disputes the dominant narrative in media articles that states that Chinese individualism is anti-social, selfish, or hedonistic. According to this narrative the relationship between the individual and the 'collective' is portrayed as zero-sum, and to be overly individualistic is to do so at the expense of the collective. However, even though the individual was at the center of the interviewee's accounts, it was not anti-social self-interest. Instead it

was the positive-sum recognition that a stronger individuality was both desirable for the individual themselves, and good for society as a whole. The relationship that they were looking for was one emphasizing reciprocity and mutuality, looking for 'balance' and a 'win-win' situation.

**“However, even though the individual was at the center of the interviewee’s accounts, it was not anti-social self-interest. Instead it was the positive-sum recognition that a stronger individuality was both desirable for the individual themselves, and good for society as a whole. The relationship that they were looking for was one emphasizing reciprocity and mutuality, looking for ‘balance’ and a ‘win-win’ situation.”**

Many of the interviews contrasted this 'balance' with the 'imbalance' of 'sacrificial', Lei Feng-style volunteering. For example the interviewee Hongmei said that "Lei Feng was selfless (无私) but today's volunteering is to help yourself first then help others" and Ziqing also talked about achieving a better balance in helping others: "[it] made me think that I'm helping people but that I'm not sacrificing myself to help people. That I'm probably the same as them anyway and that we are facing the same problems. We will solve problems together."

Finally, on a global scale the findings dispute Western communitarian critiques of individualism that draw links between increasing individualism and 'declines' in society, civil society, and pro-social attitudes. However, the emphasis on the individual in the volunteers' accounts suggests that, at least for the Chinese context, a strong emphasis on individualism can lead to an increase in pro-social action and an increased engagement in civil society. The interviewees drew attention to some of the ways in which a



stronger conception of individualism can actually induce pro-social behavior and, in doing so, they showed that a rejection of ‘sacrificial’ collectivism does not necessarily result in anti-social action.

### Exploring lifestyles and perspectives

This ‘redefinition’ of volunteering – incorporating more individuality, mutuality, and reciprocity – informed many of the other themes that were identified in my research. One of these was that of ‘exploration’ [探索]. Many of the interviewees said that they volunteered in an NGO to ‘discover’ new ways of thinking and doing. For some of the interviewees this was because they wanted to initiate [开始] a change in their life, or even because of a desire for redemption [拯救] – to ‘do good’ to make up for the ‘bad’ things that they did in the normal course of their life. For many it was because they wanted to make their life ‘broader’, ‘more colourful’, or ‘more meaningful’. The interviewee Wenling saw volunteering as a way to encounter new people and new ideas: “I wanted new experiences, to get involved with a social group so I can see society from a new perspective” and went on to say that: “I don’t mind who I am helping: old people, sick children, etc. The most important thing is that they are different to me”. Engagement in a NGO was therefore portrayed as being a transformative, symbiotic [共生] process; broadening the horizons of the volunteers and providing them with new materials to shape their own identity.

**“Engagement in a NGO was therefore portrayed as being a transformative, symbiotic [共生] process; broadening the horizons of the volunteers and providing them with new materials to shape their own identity.”**

The interviewee Xiuying’s statement succinctly summed this up: “Whether it’s from the perspective of the people we are helping, or from the perspective of my fellow volunteers, from coming into contact with them I can use their eyes to view the world. This can give me a really fresh and new worldview or values system”.

Linked to ‘exploration’, some of the interviewees talked of their volunteering in ‘lifestyle’[生活方式] terms, indicating that the act of volunteering was just as important, or even more important, than the alignment [方向] of the action. This meant that for some it was ‘being a volunteer’ that was more important than ‘being an environmentalist’ or someone interested in helping the elderly. This is not to say that they were not committed volunteers, but rather that ‘the volunteer’ lifestyle was a more representative container for the sum of their views than the words ‘environment’, or ‘poverty’, or ‘LGBT’. Many of these interviewees also implied that they would get involved with other NGOs focusing on vastly different causes.

The interviewee Chenhua, who volunteered for a NGO that assisted the elderly in old people’s homes, said that: “I haven’t got a particular interest in helping old people – I just wanted to be a volunteer. If the activity was, for example, helping children, then I would also do it”. Xiuying said something similar: “I didn’t have any particular interest in an aim or anything, I just wanted to become a volunteer, because, well you know, becoming a volunteer is a way to expand the scope of your life. So I wouldn’t restrict myself to just one thing, like helping animals or helping children. I just wanted to purely become a volunteer”. In this sense for these volunteers, ‘volunteerism’ itself, can be seen as a type of identity-forming social movement.

### Patriotism

Another interesting theme that was identified was the lack of patriotic or nationalistic sentiment informing the interviewee’s decision to volunteer. The growth of Chinese popular nationalism is a trend that is heavily focused upon by Western media. It is also one that is incompatible with the plurality and diversity of the most commonly accepted definitions of civil society. One of the original hypotheses of my research was that nationalism or patriotism would be of considerable importance to the interviewee’s narratives of volunteering.

However, this hypothesis was overwhelmingly disproved. None of the interviewees described nationalism or patriotism as being big motivating factors in their volunteering. Although most of them said that they were patriotic, and some even nationalistic, almost all of them explicitly distinguished

between patriotism and volunteering. The interviewee Liyun was probably the best example of this. A self-identified ‘angry youth’ [愤青] who had recently taken part in anti-Japanese protests, she nevertheless saw no link between her volunteering and her patriotism/nationalism: “Yes, I am a patriot, yes I am a volunteer, but they have no relationship to each other. I’ve never thought about them being related at all.” Furthermore, although most of the interviewees said that they were patriotic, a ‘global identity’ was indicated as being significantly important by many of the interviewees. Many of them distinguished between volunteers and ‘non-volunteers’, regardless of nationality, in doing so indicating that as a ‘volunteer’ they had more in common with a foreign volunteer than with a Chinese ‘non-volunteer’. What was common to all of them was that the individual was central to their trajectories [轨道] of volunteering: as the interviewee Chende said: “it’s not that I love this country so I participate in this volunteer activity, it’s more that I love my life so I participate”.

## Conclusions

These brief summaries of some of the findings of my research have hopefully presented a more well-rounded picture of the individuals who form Chinese civil society and perhaps even an indication of where the society-civil society relationship is heading in the future. By focusing on individual narratives my research offers a portrayal of the contemporary Chinese volunteer and their use of civil society to reconcile individual and collectivist concerns that is at odds with many components of popular, state, and Western narratives.

Although most of the volunteers discussed in the paper clearly belonged to the ‘我一代’ (the ‘me-generation’) and had strongly individualistic tendencies, they were not selfish, anti-social, or ‘money-seeking’ (往钱看). Although they were not boundary-pushing activists, they could not be accurately described as ‘heirs’ of Lei Feng (雷锋传人), guided solely by the state, or nationalistic ‘angry-youth’ (愤青), volunteering for national glory. Instead they conceived their volunteering activities around a balanced conception of individualism and collectivism, harmonizing the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ in a reciprocal equilibrium. This balance, it could be argued, is something that China has lacked in the past. As the interviewee Meixiu said “My understanding of the modern concept of ‘volunteer spirit’ is that it needs to

come from the individual [...]. It is not that they go forth and help others because they rely on what someone or something else says. Rather, they give a contribution to society because they themselves attach importance to helping others. In that way they can solve many problems in a more balanced way.”

[1] A recent UN report says: “China is experiencing a wave of volunteering. It has become a social trend to volunteer in communities, in schools and in corporations”. UN Volunteers (2011), “State of Volunteerism in China 2011”, available at [http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/docdb/pdf/2011/corporate/China%20Volunteer%20Report%202011\\_English.pdf](http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/docdb/pdf/2011/corporate/China%20Volunteer%20Report%202011_English.pdf), pp.32

[2] Anheier, H.K. and Salamon, L.M. (1999), “Volunteering in Cross-National Perspective: Initial Comparisons”, *Law and Contemporary Problems* (62): 43-66, pp 43.

[3] See for example Hofstede, G. H. (2001), *Culture’s consequences: Comparing values, behaviours, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed), Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications; Cao, J.X. (2009), “The Analysis of Tendency of Transition from Collectivism to Individualism in China”, *Cross Cultural Communication* 5(4): 42-50.

“Who should I contact for information about education programs for the *children of migrant workers*?”

“Who can we *partner* with for *project* on reproductive health in Guangzhou?”

“Which environmental NGOs are working on *water issues* in Yunnan?”

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China Development Brief's

# Chinese NGO Directory



CDB's Chinese NGO Directory includes detailed profiles of more than 250 Chinese grassroots NGOs (non-government organizations) and a report landscaping the Chinese non-profit sector. The Directory, which distinguishes independent, non-profit NGOs from government-run or affiliated institutions, was compiled through a thorough, year-long process in order to develop the most comprehensive and authoritative listing of the longest-running, active, and influential Chinese grassroots NGOs. Covering more than 28 provinces and municipalities, the Directory includes NGOs working in areas such as environmental protection, public health, migrants and labor, gender, child welfare, law and rights, disabilities, education and more.

The accompanying report, written by Dr. Shawn Shieh and Amanda Brown-Inz, includes analysis and mapping of the NGO landscape in China regarding geographic and sectoral trends, organizational capacity, and funding. Together, these resources will provide the international community with critical insight into the Chinese NGO community, enabling the development of greater collaboration and resource flow. To order your copy, please visit our [website](#).