

## Visiting the Spring Bud Girls: A Story of Hope *by Charlie Schlangen*

In the spring of 2005, after hearing about fellow Director Roz Koo's latest trip to China to visit the Spring Bud schools, I expressed so much enthusiasm about what I had heard that Roz invited me to accompany her on the next trip. Once I had accepted, she immediately smiled and said, "Good! You can help carry my luggage." I chuckled at her little joke, and she rejoined, "No, really. You can help with my luggage." In what I would later come to realize was a pattern, Roz got her way. But it was well worth it, because the trip to Shaanxi province to visit the Spring Bud girls proved rewarding, inspiring, and heartwarming.



Spring Bud delegates (back row, left to right): Jean Crehan (Executive Assistant), Heidi Ross (Professor, Indiana University), Anni Chung (Director), Stan Yee, Frank and Lily Lee (Donors), Lei Wang (Doctoral Student, Indiana University), pose with Roz Koo (Director) and the Spring Bud girls of Cheng Guan Key Middle School.

**October 22** In Beijing, we had the opportunity to visit the China National Children's Center (CNCC) to get an idea of the resources that are available to children of families in the capital with the available time and money. CNCC offers weekend seminars in dance, art, calligraphy, music, and other subjects. It was clear that the parents are extremely involved in their child's education, extracurricular and otherwise, and were willing to pay large (for China) sums for classes. The results of this extra expense and training were apparent: the children's work and maturity far exceeded their years. It would prove quite a contrast to the situation in the schools we were about to visit, where the average annual per capita income is less than \$100 and children see their parents at most on the weekends, and often only a few times a year.

**October 23** Our group assembled in Xi'an, the ancient capital of China, the night before our school visits began in earnest. Roz and I were joined by 1990 Institute Executive Assistant Jean Crehan, Professor Heidi Ross of Indiana University (see her

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## Shanghai Conference Papers on Governance of State-Owned Enterprises in China

*by Hang-Sheng Cheng*

In May 2004, The 1990 Institute joined the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences in hosting an international conference on the governance of state-owned enterprises in China. The two-day conference was attended by 28 experts from abroad and more than 30 officials and scholars from China. The Institute contributed six papers and sponsored seven paper presenters and seven discussants. In addition, a 1990 Institute Honorary Chairman and world-renowned scholar, Professor Robert Scalapino of the University of California at Berkeley, served as a conference co-chairman, and two other experts from abroad presented summaries of the conference proceedings.

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- THE 1990 INSTITUTE'S ANNUAL BANQUET PROGRAM

**The 1990 Institute Welcomes New Board Members**



**Anni Chung** Anni was born and reared in Hong Kong and left for further studies in the United States in 1971. She graduated from the School of Social Work at San Francisco State University and has been the President & CEO of Self-Help for the Elderly since 1981. In 1997, she graduated from the Gallup Leadership Institute and was a National Fellow with the Asian Pacific American Women Leadership Institute (APAWLI). She was APAWLI's Board Chair from 2001–2004. She oversees and manages a non-profit organization in San Francisco Bay Area that provides a comprehensive range of health, housing, educational, social and recreational services to over 25,000 seniors a year. It employs over 500 staff with an annual budget of approximately \$25 million. The Agency is widely recognized as a model program for seniors throughout the country.

Anni is an active member of various civic and non-profit organizations. She presently serves on St. Mary's Medical Center Community Board, the NICOS Chinese Health Coalition, Community Technology Policy Council and San Francisco Workforce Investment Board. She is also the Chairperson of the Asian Pacific American Community Partnership and member of Verizon's Community Collaborative Committee which make technology grants to non-profit organizations. ✨



**Jeannette Wei** Jeannette was born and reared in Shanghai, came to the U.S. at 16, attended Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, and received her B.A in Music at Mills College in Oakland, California at 19. She married Robert Kwong upon graduation. Watching her daughter and son grow, she became interested in child development and education. After receiving a teaching credential from Lone Mountain and an M.A. in Education from San Francisco State University, she taught in San Francisco for 11 years and then in Palo Alto for 24 years. She received the Outstanding Elementary Teacher Award in 1972.

Jeannette was one of the pioneers of Ohlone School, an alternative school in the Palo Alto Unified School District. Since retirement, Jeannette volunteers at Ohlone weekly and substitute teaches there.

Her marriage ended in 1980. She took a year's sabbatical to teach in China, at the Beijing Language Institute. There she met her second husband, James Caldwell. They married in 1983. She earned an M.S. in Psychology in 1984 from San Francisco State University.

A breast cancer survivor, Jeannette volunteers to counsel and support cancer patients. She is an elder at the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown, San Francisco, serving on committees there and at the Presbytery of San Francisco.

From 1984 to 1989 she joined the board of Miramonte Mental Health Agency in Palo Alto, California, serving as Vice President in 1989. Jeannette volunteered for The 1990 Institute's "Women, Leadership, and Sustainability" conference, the "Paint California's Environment" project, and now serves on the committee for the "Face to Face: Magic Moments" project. ✨

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## Obituary

John J. Balles, 1921–2005 *by Hang-Sheng Cheng*

John J. Balles supported The 1990 Institute from its inception and was a founding director until his death on October 3, 2005.

John was President of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco from September 1972 until his retirement in January 1986. He recruited me to the Bay Area in 1973 and together with Michael Keran, then Director of Research at the Bank and now a director of The Institute, launched the Bank's Pacific Basin Program in 1974. The purpose of the Program has been to conduct research on the economies in the region and promote research cooperation among the central banks of the region. In 1980, he and I were members of a six-person Federal Reserve mission, led by then Chairman Paul A. Volcker, to China shortly after the country was opened to the rest of the world. Thus, he was one of the few senior U.S. officials who helped establish the first contacts between China and the U.S. and witnessed the launching of the economic reform that has changed the country. John loved China, having been there several times and traveled all over the country. Even in his retirement, he kept up with the events in China and often discussed with me their significance.

During World War II, he was a captain in the O.S.S. One day in 1945, close to the end of the War in Europe, he was at the front and received an order from the Allied Headquarters in Paris to lead a platoon to go behind enemy lines and secretly penetrate a mountain hideout in southern Germany, where the famous German scientist Wernher Von Braun and his group sought to surrender to the Americans rather than be captured by the Russians. The mission was successful and Von Braun and his scientists were quietly rescued and immediately flown to the United States, thus beginning the U.S. rocket industry and enabling the U.S. to compete successfully with the Russians after the launch of Sputnik in the 1950s.

John loved life. Besides working hard for the Federal Reserve Bank, including a thorough restructuring of the Bank and overseeing completion of construction on a new building, he found time to travel widely with his wife Jane and to engage in his favorite hobby, water skiing. Three years after losing his wife of more than 50 years to a sudden illness, he married Jane's best friend, Carol Courtley. John is survived by Carol and his two daughters, Nancy and Janet.

In his death, The 1990 Institute lost a faithful friend. We shall long remember him. 


Dick Holton, 1926-2005 *by Charles McClain*

The 1990 Institute lost a great friend and supporter when Board member Richard Holton passed away after a long illness last October. Dick, Professor Emeritus of Business at U.C. Berkeley's Haas School of Business, had a long and extremely distinguished career in academia. He began his teaching career at Harvard, came to Berkeley in 1957 as an assistant professor and remained at Haas until his retirement in 1991. He taught courses on a variety of subjects including marketing and entrepreneurship, published widely, was a key figure in developing the school's international business curriculum, and was dean of the Business School between 1967 and 1975, a challenging time to say the least for anyone in an administrative position on the Berkeley campus.

Dick took time out from teaching between 1963–65 to serve as Assistant Secretary of Commerce in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. After returning to teaching he served as chairman of President Johnson's Consumer Advisory Council and as chairman of a Federal Reserve Bank Committee on Truth in Lending.

Dick had a longstanding interest in China. In 1981 he agreed to take charge of a U.S.–sponsored program that brought American business school professors to teach at the university in Dalian. Its purpose was to introduce U.S. business concepts to aspiring Chinese managers. He visited that university frequently over the next five years and published several articles during this period on China's economic reforms.

Dick was a very active and energetic board member of The 1990 Institute. He chaired the committee that planned The Institute's 2002 Conference on China and the WTO held at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. I had the pleasure of working closely with him and several other board members on this project and never failed to be impressed with his vision, his attention to detail and his ability to bring out the best efforts from those who were collaborating with him—efforts that were greatly needed as very few of us were involved in planning this event. The conference brought together a stellar array of lawyers, businesspeople, academics, government officials and generated truly illuminating discussion of this very topical issue. That it was a great success was a tribute to Dick's leadership skills.

Dick is survived by his wife of almost 60 years, Constance, a brother, two daughters, a son and three grandchildren. I, like all who knew him, will remember him for his keen intelligence, his dry wit, and of course his warm and ever-ready smile. He will be sorely missed. 

## The 1990 Institute Launches "Magic Moments" Initiative *by Billy Lee*

In the September 2005 publication, I wrote about The 1990 Institute's C2C-C2C Project: A Long Term Vision, which is to set up a mechanism to enable and encourage thousands of students at the middle school level from China and the U.S. to visit each other. The goal is to broaden the communications between the Chinese and American children through planned visits, activities, and shared experiences with a focus on friendship, art (including music), and the environment.

This vision is now turning into a reality. The 1990 Institute and the China National Children's Center—which is a branch of the All China's Women's Federation (ACWF)—signed an official agreement this February to implement just such a mechanism. Indeed, The 1990 Institute and ACWF/China National Children's Center (CNCC) share a common spirit and have already developed a trusting relationship from collaborations on four very significant projects since April 2000:

1. The 1990 Institute sponsored the "Women, Leadership, and Sustainability Forum" in San Francisco. Mme. Gu Xiulian and nine ACWF leaders conferred with women leaders from California on environmental and sustainable development issues.
2. A nation-wide Children's Art on The Environment contest in China (co-sponsored by The 1990 Institute, CNCC, and CEEC-SEPA). The awards celebration was held at CNCC in Beijing, and one hundred selected drawings were brought back to tour various museum in the U.S. for two-and-a-half years.
3. CNCC hosted a "Mural Painting Weekend" for a group of U.S. middle school art students together with Chinese students in Beijing. The art was an expression of their love for animals and nature.
4. A group of art students and teachers from CNCC visited California to "Paint California's Environment" in August 2005.

Present realities suggest that we should first promote movement from the U.S. to China and allow reverse traffic to naturally develop over time. According to the agreement, CNCC will first assume the role of a "referral agency" in China and facilitate the partnership of interested groups from the U.S. with compatible schools in China. The 1990 Institute's responsibility is to do the promoting of the program and screening of groups in the United States. The two organizations are also concerned about qualitative results. Both organizations will provide guidelines on programs and activities, as well as providing and teaching special skills in enhancing connections and avoiding possible misunderstandings due to cultural differences in habits and in expectations.

CNCC's Deputy Director Mr. Zhou Yu Xing and Foreign Affairs Coordinator Ms. Chen Ying are most enthusiastic about

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## The Spring Bud Program Expands to Create The Peony Fund *by Matilda Young*

In the spring of 2004, the first 1,000 Spring Bud girls we supported were ready to graduate from 6th grade and enter junior high schools. Because many of the supporters of the original Spring Bud classes expressed their desire to help more girls from the 4th to 6th grades, we approached our contacts at the Shaanxi Women's Federation. Vice-Chairman Wang Hong was most enthusiastic about our supporting more Spring Bud classes in the elementary schools, and assured us that there was a great need in the rural villages, some of them just a couple of hours outside of Xi'an. With her help, we started another five Spring Bud classes that September totaling 250 4th grade students. For the supporters to differentiate this new group of elementary school students from the junior high school students commonly known as the Dragon Fund, we decided to call the new group the Peony Fund.

More supporters joined in and we added nine more Spring Bud classes in September of 2005 so that now there is a total of 700 girl students currently being supported in the elementary grades.

That same year, in addition to supporting the girls' education, we agreed to help some of the neediest villages renovate or rebuild some very worn-out and damaged school buildings. We returned in October of 2005 to see the new buildings, almost completed, in one of the villages, Po Di Cun in the county of Pu Cheng. Even though the new buildings are not equivalent to school buildings in the U.S., it was gratifying to see that they at least have adequate electric lighting in the classrooms, since most of the other classrooms we have visited only had a single, bare light bulb for illumination.

Over the years, we have noticed the different abilities of the teachers in the Spring Bud classes. Some of the teachers are confident and knowledgeable, while others have only high-school proficiency and are shy. We want the best for our Spring Bud girls, and after our visit in the fall of 2005, we began the process of setting up a summer program at the Shaanxi Normal University to provide some additional training in the new techniques and methods of teaching to the teachers of these Spring Bud classes. We feel that unless the teachers are well prepared, they will not be able to effectively teach the students.

Although we initially started by improving girls' elementary school education, our support has extended to many related and worthy projects. Meanwhile, we make every effort to ensure that our funds are being properly allocated and used in the villages. To this end, we are scheduling two trips a year to Xi'an and the villages to visit each and every one of the schools and projects in which we are involved. We are enthusiastic about the fact sponsoring girls' education through the Peony Fund classes will help us accomplish our ultimate goal of reducing illiteracy in rural China. 

## The Pathways to Peace Project: "Visual Voices" from Xi He Middle School *by Heidi Ross*

More than three months have passed since my October 2005 trip to China with the Spring Bud delegation. I was so impressed by the local people I met: the cadres from the Shaanxi Women's Federation and the principals and homeroom teachers from the four schools we visited. The cadres from the Women's Federation worked ten hours a day during our trip, and they told me that this was their normal workload. Homeroom teachers come to school at 7AM and return to their homes at 10PM. Most of the girls are boarding students. Their homes are far away from school and many parents have already migrated to cities to earn cash. To the Spring Bud girls, homeroom teachers are like mothers and friends. Homeroom teachers stop by their dorms almost every evening before going back home. They lend money to girls who are short of cash and hold birthday parties for girls who cannot spend the special day with their parents. I particularly remember Ms. Cheng, the homeroom teacher of a Spring Bud class in Langao Middle School. Her daughter has a brain tumor, and sometimes the girl cannot sleep because of the pain. Ms. Cheng once thought about quitting her position as a homeroom teacher so that she could have more time to take care of her own daughter. But eventually she gave up this idea, because she loves the Spring Bud girls. "I am touched by these girls," she said. "Compared to other children at a similar age, they are much more considerate and mature. In class time, if they see me tired, they always bring a chair to me and ask me to rest a while." I should say that without these devoted local people working on the ground, this large-scale project could not be implemented so well.

Donors from The 1990 Institute, cadres from the Women's Federation, principals and teachers build strong social capital for the impoverished girls. When they have the opportunities for access to cultural resources and social support girls' aspirations are raised. During talks with girls over lunches and dinners, I learned the girls wanted to be doctors, teachers, writers and entrepreneurs. I was excited to hear a girl saying that it is her absolute responsibility to construct her hometown in the future.

"School is my home." I am so touched by this sentence. I not only saw this slogan on school walls, but also heard girls say it. To the Spring Bud girls, school is such a warm place—the place from whence their dreams come. Before the field trip, I also interviewed American students who are participating in the "Photovoice" project. My heart ached when I saw some of the pictures the American children took. Every morning, the students have to wait outside in a long line for the school gate to open. To them, school is only an institution from where they acquire knowledge. They cannot imagine that on the other side of the earth, a group of girls regard school as warm as their home.

—Lei Wang, doctoral student

### Introduction

The photovoice project described below is part of a larger longitudinal study of the impact of schooling on the aspirations and expectations of the 1,000 girls participating in The 1990 Institute Spring Bud project.<sup>1</sup> The photovoice project, funded by a grant from Indiana University, engages Chinese and American middle school students and their teachers in an interactive activity to enhance global understanding and collaborative learning. Over the past year, the project has brought together three Chinese and American middle school teachers, Ms. Xiaoli Mei and Ms. Na Li from Xi He Middle School, Dan Feng County, and Ms. Becky Boyle, from Batchelor Middle School in Bloomington, Indiana. The teachers have traveled to each others' classrooms, talked with each others' students, and learned to use photovoice methodology, a research and learning tool aimed at building dialogue among culturally diverse groups and examining individuals' perceptions of social reality through the use of photographic images. Twenty-five Xi He and Batchelor middle school students were given cameras by the teachers to frame, record, and evaluate their experiences in three arenas: home, school and society. The pictures taken by the students then became the springboard for open-ended interviews that are currently being transcribed, translated, and exchanged across cultures. Through exploring each others' pictures and explanations of their significance, students have begun to understand what it is like to grow up at school, at home, and society in each others' countries.

I became interested in the power of girls' voices for transformative learning when I was conducting interviews with girls in secondary schools in urban, suburban, and rural China between 1996 and 2000. I began to notice how the voices of girls created a new space for critical self-understanding about the purposes of schooling. Each interview, regardless of whether it took place in an advantaged or a struggling school, inevitably drew a circle of attentive teachers and administrators. They were fascinated by their students' stories and surprised and proud by what student responses revealed about schooling, teacher-student relationships, and perceptions about justice in Chinese society. In turn, students were fascinated that they were being taken seriously by adults.

In 1999 I participated in a high school reunion for girls who had benefited from an educational access project that supported the high school education of high-performing girls from poor families. One of the girls, who had returned for the reunion after a successful first year at college, was being featured, along with her parents, in a provincial television program hailing girls' education. The girl's father, caught off guard by the camera and the fast-talking reporter,

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<sup>1</sup> The project team includes Professor Heidi Ross and Indiana University doctoral students Lei Wang and Jingjing Lou.

## The Peony Fund in Action *by Sarah Stadler*

In October my daughter and I joined a colleague and several other friends who were going to visit rural schools in China where they are sponsoring 700 girls to remain in school beyond the 3rd grade. Although China has mandated compulsory education through the 9th grade, it is one of those unfunded mandates we are becoming more familiar with in the West. The reality is that past the third grade, schools, particularly in rural parts of China, do not have enough money to operate and so they charge special fees that are tantamount to charging tuition. Because of the preference for male children, girls often get fewer resources and a significant number of poorer families do not find the funds to keep them in school.

The Spring Bud program emerged to address the needs of these girls. The program was started in the 1980s by the All China Women's Federation (a quasi-governmental organization) and is administered by provincial-level Women's Federations. This particular Spring Bud program in Shaanxi Province has



Natlie Cowan (the author's daughter) poses with her new Spring Bud friends

been receiving additional funding from private foreign donors. The philanthropists in our group included several who have been involved with the project for many years. Their experience has shown them that it is desirable to make regular visits to see how the funds are being spent. We were visiting schools each with a classroom devoted to Spring Bud scholarship-supported girls in the 4th through 6th grades.

We visited five schools over the course of three days. Each morning we got on a bus and headed out before 8AM. The schools are all in Shaanxi Province, arrayed around Xi'an. We would drive for two to three hours to reach our destination, stopping along the way to pick up another car or two filled with local officials and Women's Federation personnel.

The drives to the schools were often slowed by road conditions and hilly terrain. But we would always know that we were nearing a school when the sound of band music filtered through the windows. Lining the road were children waving streamers, shaking tambourines, and banging cymbals and drums. When we emerged from the bus, two Spring Bud girls took each of us by the hand. They led us towards the school, stopping only to tie a red China Youth scarf on each of us. As we moved along all the people we passed joined the procession and we became a parade! By the time we arrived at the schoolyard the entire village was assembled. Elders from the villages were dressed in bright, embroidered costumes, playing drums and cymbals also.

At most of the schools we listened to speeches by the local



A new school is built in the village of Po Di Cun.

officials and Women's Federation representatives, followed by the head of the school and finally the teachers.

The children waited through it all and then performed carefully choreographed dances and choral declamations. Afterwards, time was set aside

for photographs. When this was finished there was just time for a quick look in the classroom before we were spirited away to visit one of the Spring Bud girl's homes and informed about the family's difficulties, usually due to illness. In one of these families, we learned that the girl's brother suffered from epilepsy, thought to be related to a brain tumor. The family was unable to afford the operation and so he gradually became more and

more impaired. This was a reminder that medical care in China is on a strict fee-for-service basis, and even if the fees were not large by Western standards, they were completely out of reach for many. It was also a reminder that there are enormous global needs beyond those that the Spring Bud program can address, and one could easily be distracted from the purpose of our visit.

As we traveled every day in different directions from Xi'an, I was reminded of similar surroundings in the most distant places. One day the landscape brought southern France to mind, on another, the hills reminded me of my childhood home, the countryside of southern Michigan. But, as we pulled into some of the villages, the low brick buildings and heavy overcast

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**The Peony Fund in Action** *continued from page 6*


sky were reminiscent of Wales and the coal mining country described in a D.H. Lawrence novel.

The last morning we visited a school that was in the process of being rebuilt with funds contributed by some in our group, along with a matching grant from another international non-governmental organization: Plan China. As we walked towards the schoolyard, we were startled by a series of loud explosions as fireworks were set off—a Chinese custom to scare away the bad spirits. It was a cold day and we were all shivering through the presentations. Even though the sky was grey, the villagers were in a festive and cheerful mood and the community was very hospitable but seemed particularly poor. Children in the marching band wore uniforms over their regular clothes, but many of them were in thin sneakers without socks. This village, Po Di Cun, is located on top of a large arid plateau. It lacks sufficient water, which is the main cause for the poverty we saw there.

The school, originally built in 1938, was not only worn and damaged but also dangerous. The old buildings for classes were completely torn down and new ones built. Some of the surrounding buildings for the teachers that were not in terrible condition were being preserved and repaired.

The two new buildings contained a total of six classrooms, one each for the elementary grades. These buildings were insulated against drafts, well-lit, and simply but adequately furnished. Since one of the new buildings was still under construction, we were able to view the construction. Structural elements were troublingly thin, and would not pass muster in the U.S., but it was clear that the new buildings were a great improvement.

When we were boarding our bus for the return trip to Xi'an, we were showered with gifts from the villagers—handmade embroidered animals for good luck, the paper cutouts for which the area is famous, and bags full of apples and peaches that they grew—all as expressions of gratitude for the new school. We were deeply touched.


The wish to make our contribution through the Spring Bud program meaningful to satisfy even that relatively narrow objective led us to want more information about the students, schools and communities targeted by the program. And it became apparent that new kinds of effort would be required to obtain information that would be relevant for helping us refine and target the program to better meet the girls' needs in the future. 

**OYCF 8th Annual Meeting on  
"Social Classes in Transitional China"  
to be held over Memorial Day weekend  
in Southern California**

*By Katherine Xu and Hao Zou*

The 8th Overseas Young Chinese Forum (OYCF) Annual Meeting on "Social Classes in Transitional China" will be held May 26–28, 2006 in Costa Mesa, California. This meeting is co-organized by The Center for Asian Studies at U.C. Irvine (CAS–UCI). Sixty to 80 scholars, advanced graduate students, and professionals are expected to attend the meeting, discussing topics ranging from transformation of class structures, the rural/urban divide, emergence of the wealthy and the middle class, to state bureaucracy, skewed power and wealth distribution, and class conflict. The meeting aims to provide a forum to explore both theoretically and pragmatically what major social transformations have taken place in the past two-and-a-half decades, and what policy implications have been and need to be introduced together with such profound changes. A call for papers was launched in the beginning of 2006 in major academic and research institutions in the U.S., Singapore, mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. A book volume consisting of select papers is expected to be published in Chinese at the conclusion of the meeting.

OYCF is a non-profit organization established in 1999 to provide a forum to discuss issues related to China's development and to explore solutions to problems related to that development. OYCF ([www.oycf.org](http://www.oycf.org)) sponsors teaching and research in China and publishes an on-line journal, *Perspectives*. OYCF's annual meeting has increasingly become a major forum for China-related studies. Since 1999, the annual meetings have covered themes such as the theory and practice of liberalism, the WTO and China, the civil society, women's issues, and developments in rural China.

In 2002, a research collaboration project was established between The 1990 Institute and OYCF. Recently, Institute Chairman C.B. Sung and President Hang-Sheng Cheng have accepted OYCF's invitation to join as advisors to its Board. OYCF welcomes The Institute's affiliates and friends to contribute papers and to attend the Meeting. Please contact [callforpapers@oycf.org](mailto:callforpapers@oycf.org). 

froze. Seconds passed. Slowly, the daughter stepped forward, took the microphone away from the reporter, faced her father, and, gently putting a hand on his shoulder began to interview him. Later remarking on this moment, in which I saw hard-won authority conferred on a young woman by education and experience, I raised the possibility that she had been “empowered” (a strategy of change that implies redistribution of power). She thought about my conclusion for a moment and then rejected it as “too simple.” “I don’t know where I’ll be after school,” she said, “and it doesn’t take the hurt into account.”

My first use of photovoice methodology was inspired by the young woman’s demand that her hurt be taken into account. Using photovoice became my means for doing research from the ground up. It has also helped me re-conceptualize research as a form of intervention in understanding the social, political, and cultural contexts of schooling and in clarifying how girls’ stories, as speech acts and as politics, provide them a space for re-imagining themselves and their possibilities. I adapted my use of photovoice methodology from the work of Caroline C. Wang and Mary Ann Burris, who developed the activity in the context of a Ford Foundation project on community health care in rural China. Wang and Burris noted a discrepancy in information on health care issues collected through informal conversations and through formal surveys of the same rural Chinese women. Women’s responses to surveys were confused and abbreviated. In stark contrast, their conversations about health care were brimming with anger and ideas. Wang and Burris decided to put disposable cameras into the hands of rural women, allowing them to frame the health care topics to be studied. They concluded the approach provided “the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world.”<sup>2</sup>

Like Wang and Burris, I have found that photovoice shifts the “power” of defining research questions, in my case to young people who choose to photograph what they feel is most important in their lives. Deciding what photographs to take inspires girls to examine their own lives. Through practice they gain confidence in speaking candidly with respectful peers and adults, and sometimes, like the college student above, to “recognize the vitality of their own voices in public spheres.”<sup>3</sup>

### Photovoice at Xi He Middle School: What schools are for

Xi He Middle School, located in Shangluo City, Dan Feng County, was founded in 1986 and is a recent recipient of the title of Shaanxi Province Model Junior High School. One hundred of Xi He Middle School’s, 1,380 pupils are Spring Bud girls, divided into two classes, one of which is a “key point” or fast track class of higher achieving girls. Dan Feng is the poorest county in Shangluo, a region rich in mineral resources and waterpower, but mountainous and with little productive farmland—only 0.08 acres of field per person. Average annual per capita income is \$173. The county’s poorest townships average a much lower annual per capita income of \$86, and money for schooling is scarce.

Shangluo’s educational system, with 407 elementary schools, 23 junior highs and three senior high schools, is a portrait of contradictions. In 2005, the county had 63,000 students in grades 1–9, 46% of them female, with an average attendance rate of 98%. Only 64% of students complete compulsory schooling in Dan Feng, yet the county ranks as one of the most successful in Shaanxi in providing access to tertiary education. Last year, a very respectable 1,158 of the 1,700 county students who sat for the college entrance examination were able to enter college.

Life in Dan Feng has been dramatically affected by the increasing migration of men and women to more prosperous cities for work, and by the gradual abandonment of agriculture. Xi He teachers estimate that nearly 60% of the Spring Bud girls’ parents migrate to cities looking for wage labor.

*This is a picture showing a group of people working on sifting sands. They dig sand from the river bottom and sell it to make money. I hear one truck of sand brings only just over 10 yuan, but they make a living doing this. I feel great compassion for people sifting sand. It is really hot in summer with the scorching sun. So it tells us that we need to work really hard so that when we grow up we won’t be like them, working under the scorching sun and doing such drudgery.*

— a Spring Bud girl

Many of the Spring Bud girls’ pictures capture images of agriculturalists working in fields, feeding pigs and chickens. Girls use the word *xin ku* (drudgery) to describe the work depicted in these pictures. They see being successful in school as their only means to escape or “fly away” from such drudgery. They also see success in school as a way of meeting the weighty expectations of their parents.

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<sup>2</sup> Wang, C., M.A. Burris and Y.P. Xiang. 1996. “Chinese Village Women as Visual Anthropologists: A Participatory Approach to Reaching Policymakers,” in *Social Science Medicine* 42 (10):1391-1400.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid at 1392.

The father of a Spring Bud girl told us:

*My only concern at this point is the academic performance of my children.... My son used to rank among the top ten students in his grade. Yet, after I had the accident<sup>4</sup>, he lagged behind and is now only in the top 20. I feel very sorry about that. I have not been able to work, and my wife is the only laborer in the whole family. Life is now much tougher than before. The family has very little income. But I am still quite content since both my son and my daughter are top students in the school. I'm very proud of them. The only wish of my life is that my son and my daughter can go to college, even go to study abroad, so they could visit her sponsors. I would be willing to die immediately if that wish could be realized.*

Another Spring Bud girl's explanation of one of her photovoice pictures underscored how she tried to succeed academically to satisfy her family's expectations:

*Among all the pictures I took at home, I like this one with all my family members best, because this is my family. I do not do very well at school. My family hopes that I could work hard. They all work very hard and they care about my studies a lot. Every week when I go back home, they will say, "Study hard when you are at school!" My little brother does not do very well at school, so they said that I am the only hope of the family; they have pinned all their hopes on me. I really appreciate them, because they trust me.*

The girl then chose another picture.

*Heidi and Becky are both in this picture. I will work very hard because you all have helped me and I appreciate your help. It helped solve some of my difficulties in life. I really appreciate you. This picture is my favorite among all I took at school, because this is the one of great encouragement for me. Because if I want to see you again after I grow up, I should really, really study hard now.*

The girl's homeroom teacher was not surprised by the girl's anxious mantra about hard work. The teacher pointed to a picture the girl had taken of a newly built local railway and highway, which represented to the girl Dan Feng's changing economy.

*This picture shows that, after working all these years here, they had formed fairly accurate views about their life and about the world. Besides, she focused on the economic development. I could say that they also look forward to that kind of life, and they hope to leave the village for the outside world by working hard and studying hard.*

Listening to the girls and their teachers describe the crucial role of schooling in social mobility helped us understand how girls develop what MaryJo Benton Lee has called "achievement oriented selves."<sup>5</sup> Girls work hard out of obligation to and gratitude for the sacrifices of their parents and hometown supporters — and 1990 Institute donors. The cycle of high expectations, success, obligation, and achievement helps girls overcome lack of early educational opportunities and subtle gender stereotypes (espoused even by teachers) to begin to see themselves as achievers and share these same expectations.

A girl called Xiao Yang picks up a pile of "school" pictures. The first is of a pile of rubble and construction workers building a road.

*I took this picture, because I think it shows how the economy has been developing nowadays. Before a dirt road ran in front of the school; now it is replaced by this concrete road with an underground sewer system.*

She turns to another picture.

*This is the flower garden of our school. This is a Chinese map made of flowers in the school garden. There are flowers here—and there. I like flowers, because we ourselves are like the flowers of our motherland. We must do something to make our motherland proud.... And this next one was taken when we were working on our homework in our classroom after our meal. The students are all very diligent, not wasting a second. It is finals, so everyone is working hard. It is really hot, and the fan is on. Here, students rest their heads on their desks. Nobody talks during nap time. Only after we get enough rest can we work really hard.... These are some banners hanging around the school: "Create a future!" "Cherish life!"*

Xiao Yang picks up her photos of "society."

*This is a grocery store, right near my uncle's home. It opened last year. This is the pharmacy section. Our hospital recently closed. My aunt has some background in medicine, so she opened a clinic at home for the convenience of local people. I like the school supply section in that store.... This is at my uncle's home. His house is the best furnished in the village. I like their TV the most. Before, there was only one color TV in the village, and that was my uncle's TV.*

Xiao Yang returns to her pictures of "home."

*My mom is raising these two little piglets for cash. They're sleeping.... Many people in the village plant beautiful flowers,*

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4 After losing a permanent job, the father, a high school graduate, found temporary employment and eventually lost his leg in an accident in a privately-owned coal mine. He will receive no compensation.

5 MaryJo Benton Lee. *Ethnicity, Education and Empowerment: How minority students in Southwest China construct identities*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2001.

article, “The Pathways to Peace Project,” on page 5) and Lei Wang (one of Heidi’s Chinese doctoral students), Stan Yee and Anni Chung (one of The 1990 Institute’s new Directors, biography on page 2), Frank and Lily Lee (Spring Bud program donors), and Rita Zhao (Beijing-based anchorwoman for the English-language CCTV who was doing a feature on the Spring Bud project). We were treated by Mme. Liu, Chairperson of the Shaanxi Women’s Federation, to the first of many sumptuous 15+ course dinners we would have during our visit. After the banquet, we retired to Roz’s room to assemble gift packages for the homeroom teachers and principals of the schools we would be visiting. The fact that we were assembling items that most Americans take for granted—basic toiletries and cosmetics—that the recipients would view as luxuries was a reminder of the difference in living standards for the places we were about to visit.

**October 24** This morning we boarded a train for the five-hour journey to the city of An Kang. The train wound its way through some pretty mountain landscapes with a celadon-hued river running through the valley floor beneath us. Upon our arrival, we were transported to the Hanbin Key Middle School (“key school” being more or less equivalent to the U.S. concept of a “magnet school” for the most talented students) where we were greeted by smiling, white-shirted children—some beating drums, others blaring a tune from brass instruments that sounded something like a cavalry charge, others waving half-hoops decorated with brightly colored paper, and all shouting, “Welcome! Welcome!” in Mandarin.

Our first stop was the modern language lab funded by The 1990 Institute donors. I was quite impressed by the size and quality of the facilities and equipment. (Frankly, it surpassed the language lab I had for studying Chinese at Stanford only ten years ago!) The students enthusiastically affirmed that they use it often as part of their curriculum. The next item on the agenda was a visit to the girls’ dormitories, which are very basic: bunk beds with thin quilts, a box for their few belongings, and a plastic washtub for

each. After seeing where they lived, we ate dinner with the girls in their school cafeteria. The food was plentiful and nutritious, and my understanding was that a more recent part of the support we are providing the Spring Bud girls is to ensure that, in addition to help with tuition, technological resources like language and computer labs, and teacher training, we are also helping to provide nourishment. The girls were very patient with my rusty Mandarin, and although they were a little shy, they were gracious and generous hostesses who wanted to be sure that I had had enough to eat. Of course, the reverse was my concern. We ended the day by treating them to the See’s lollipops we had brought, which caused, I think, equal amounts of joy and consternation: joy at a surprise, sweet treat, and consternation because it was something totally unfamiliar.



Clockwise from upper left: Roz and a student test the new computer lab at Hanbin Key Middle School; Spring Bud girls from Cheng Guan Key Middle School; an ethnic dance performance at Shi Ma Key Middle School; Spring Bud girls sing about loving and missing their mothers.

**October 25** This was, for me and many others, a moving day. We took a van to Lan Gao County to visit the Cheng Guan Key Middle School. Once again, we received a delightfully noisy, colorful welcome. Although the focus and purpose of our visit was to see the Spring Bud girls, the whole school turned out for an assembly and sat patiently in the raw October morning air while school and local officials made numerous speeches thanking The 1990 Institute, and especially “Gu Nai Nai” (Grandma Koo), for their efforts on behalf of their school, and exhorting the students to study diligently and hard for the sake of their country.

What followed next was an amazing series of song and dance performances with costumes in every color of the rainbow, all held beneath an enormous red banner welcoming the American guests from The 1990 Institute. In addition to some songs and recitations in admirable (considering they had only been studying for two years at most) English, one number was particularly moving: several girls broke into small groups while one of their classmates sang a song about how much she loved and missed her mother. As many of the girls are orphans or live far from their families, it was not surprising to see many of them crying during the performance. We were also touched by the

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appearance of a Spring Bud girl who attends a school other than Cheng Guan but asked to be taken to meet us because she wanted to share her essay, “The Dreams of a Disabled Girl.” She has been wheelchair-bound practically since birth because both of her legs broke when she was less than a month old, and her family hadn’t the money to seek treatment, and now any available funds had to go towards treatment for her father’s esophageal cancer. (Her father has since died.) Although she was too moved to recite her essay as she had planned, in it she thanked Grandma Koo and the Spring Bud program for making it possible for her to attend school and realize a better life despite her handicap. As her lively, affectionate friends pushed her around in her wheelchair, she presented us all with friendship bracelets that she had woven for us as gifts.

Cheng Guan Key Middle School has a unique element to its curriculum, which is a garden that the program pays the rent on and in which the students cultivate a variety of vegetables to supplement their diet. Because most of the girls come from an agricultural background, Roz thought it important for them to gain an understanding of what it means to grow one’s own food, and to appreciate the kind of hard work their parents do for a living.

The devotion of the teachers was evident. I was particularly touched by the story of Ms. Cheng, who teaches English and is a homeroom teacher (but really more of a surrogate mother) for the girls. Although her own daughter is very ill, she has considered but rejected the idea of leaving her Spring Bud girls, whom she loves and who need her. Despite their poverty and the many accompanying challenges it presents, the girls are cheerful, confident, and grateful for the opportunity they have to learn. After we toured the dormitories, which were similar in their simplicity to those at Hanbin, and shared lunch with the girls, who again were incredibly solicitous of us as their guests, we headed back for the long train ride to Xi’an—but not before I got a flirtatious marriage proposal from Ms. Cheng, if I were ever to return to that part of the world!

**October 27** After a day of rest on the 26th, which Jean, Lei, and I took as an opportunity to explore the beautiful and fascinating city of Xi’an (including the famed terra cotta warriors and the sumptuous gardens of Tang Dynasty courtesan Yang Gui Fei), our group set out for the city of Shan Lou to visit the Xi He Key Middle School. Stan and Anni had left, and we had been joined by Joel and Lisa Alvord, who plan to set up a program in southern China similar to the one The 1990 Institute had sponsored and were gathering ideas.

The countryside on the journey to Shan Lou was much different: far more lush and bountiful, with staggering foliage changing color, persimmons ripening quickly on bare branches, and dramatic granite rock formations that were reminiscent of Yosemite.

After another display of song and dance performances, we had the chance to meet the girls. They struck me as very confident, engaged, and willing to practice their English. This impression was confirmed by Roz and Heidi, who had visited them before and were very impressed with the transformation in a short time. We asked the girls if they felt that it caused any difficulty with their peer groups to be singled out as they were, and receive special money, attention, and other resources. Their reply was that they were very proud to be Spring Bud girls, and that their classmates did not cause them any problems despite their uniqueness. Once more we had the opportunity to share a meal with them. The girls enjoyed the chance to speak English and were eager to make friends, and it was an equal pleasure to get to know them.

**October 28** For our fourth and final school, we visited Shan Nan County’s Shi Ma Key Middle School. We walked through the gauntlet of students beating small drums, boys in blue, girls in red, and as we took our seats on the platform, it became evident that dozens of townspeople were crowded outside the gates, eager for a look at the visiting Americans. Even though the area surrounding the school has a population numbering in the millions, we were still a curiosity. It requires an adjustment in one’s thinking about what a “normal” sized city is when so many in China that are considered small cities have populations three times or more the size of San Francisco proper.

This time the performances had a particular emphasis on minority cultures, traditions, and dress, which was interesting to see. The dances, music, and costumes sometimes had distinctly Indian or Middle Eastern influences, which makes sense given China’s enormous scope both ethnically and geographically. After a visit to the computer lab—again, donated by The 1990 Institute—we toured the dormitories. I was chatting with one pair of girls who were clearly very good friends, and I expressed our concern that their living conditions were not sufficient to keep them warm in winter. They smiled, and one put an arm around her friend and replied, “That’s why it’s nice that we share two to a bed; we keep each other warm.” It was such an arresting moment for me to think of the living circumstances that Americans just take for granted, and how most American girls could not conceive of not having their own bed. But that made it all the more rewarding to realize the extent to which we could help the Spring Bud girls lift themselves into a better standard of living through education and acquisition of marketable skills.

During the lunch we shared with the girls, their level of English proficiency was quite impressive. Many declared it to be their favorite subject, and it was fun to have bilingual conversations with them. When it came time to say goodbye and head back to Xi’an, many of them wept openly and did not want to bid farewell

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All these papers and discussions were collected in a conference volume published in Chinese by the Social Sciences Press (Beijing, China) last October. The title of the book is State-Owned Enterprise Governance in China: An International Comparative Perspective. Also included in the volume were a number of articles that were submitted to the Shanghai Academy but not presented at the conference. All together, the 42 papers and discussions constitute a thorough exchange of ideas on the governance of state-owned enterprises in selected foreign countries and the relevance of their experiences to China.

The “international perspective” was provided by the foreign experts and papers on the experiences of six countries in the governance of state-owned enterprises. Among the six, Hong Kong is known to be free of state-owned enterprises. It was selected because its business environment, which fosters free enterprise, provides a sharp contrast to that prevailing in China, and since China aims to move toward a market economy, Hong Kong’s experience seemed to offer a model. Russia’s shock treatment of wholesale privatization of state-owned enterprises also contrasts with China’s partial and gradual privatization. Taiwan shares with China a similar cultural environment and initial dominance of state-owned enterprise. Its experience of privatization, both successes and failures, should be particularly relevant. Singapore’s Temasek Holding, Limited is an example of a state-owned holding company that owns and operates several large state enterprises that have successfully competed and expanded in the international arena. Poland’s experience should also be enlightening, because like China it, too, faces failing enterprises that were responsible for providing virtually all the major social services to the populace. Lastly, France is primarily a market economy and yet still retains a sizable sector of state enterprises. Its experience of operating the state enterprises in a market economy should also be of significant interest to China.

### Hong Kong

The paper on Hong Kong was by Andrew Sheng, Chairman, Hong Kong Securities and Futures Commission, and his colleagues. In the paper, Sheng emphasized the critical importance of “property rights infrastructure” in a market economy. If China were to succeed in establishing a market economy, it must fulfill all the necessary conditions for such a structure, including business laws, effective enforcement of laws through the courts, rigorous and transparent accounting and auditing systems, banks and securities markets as well as strict regulatory and supervisory agencies over these institutions, and equal treatment of all enterprises within this structure. Among these market institutions, he singles out the financial institutions as particularly crucial in enforcing market discipline on the governance of enterprises, whether state-owned or private.

### Russia

The paper on Russia was by Michael Keran, former Chief Economist, Prudential Insurance Company, and former U.S. Treasury Advisor at the Russian Ministry of Finance. He applauded China for its gradualism in economic reform, including its partial and gradual privatization of state-owned enterprises. In contrast, Russia’s abrupt total privatization of large state-owned enterprises before the market was ready has resulted in huge oligopolies entirely controlled by the private sector at the expense of national production and provision of social services. On the basis of Russia’s experience, Keran recommends that China should slow down its pace of privatization, sell loss-making state enterprises on the market (but not to the managers and workers), shift the burden of social services from the state-owned enterprises to the local governments, and adopt strict accounting standards and improve transparency in enterprise governance.

### Taiwan

The Taiwan paper was by Tzong-Shian Yu, President, Chinese Institute of Economic and Business in Taiwan. As in China, the economy in Taiwan after World War II was dominated by state-owned enterprises. As Taiwan’s economy began its rapid growth, private enterprise grew by leaps and bounds, while the state-owned enterprises stagnated. By 1989, when the government started selling off its holdings experimentally, the share of state enterprises in manufacturing had fallen from 56% in 1952 to about 10%. Another wave of privatization began in 1998, but it is facing a slowdown as social and political resistance increased. Resistance came mainly from two sources: legislators who benefited from state enterprises, and labor unions that resisted privatization in order to protect workers’ jobs and pensions. In order to gain favors from the legislators, especially those on the committees supervising the respective state-owned enterprises, these enterprises often resort to granting special favors—such as free services, hiring relatives, appointment to senior positions upon retirement—to the legislators. Labor unions want to protect jobs and pensions for fear that privatization might mean closing some of the inefficient state-owned enterprises or shedding surplus employees.

### Singapore

The Singapore paper was by Mrs. Lim Hwee Hua, Managing Director, Temasek Holdings in Singapore. Singapore won its independence in 1965 and relied on state-owned enterprises to build its industrial structure and basic industries. In 1974, Temasek Holdings was established as a corporation to hold and invest in state enterprises on behalf of the government. Currently, it holds 21 state companies, including a development bank, an airline, and companies in sectors such as electricity, telecommu-

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nications, shipping, harbor and port developments, and hi-tech industries. It accounts for 10% of the economy, compared to the 45% owned by multinational companies. The government leaves the company's management almost entirely to its board of directors, keeping only one seat for a Ministry of Finance representative and requiring the board to submit an annual financial statement. The board, in turn, supervises the companies in its holdings and decides on their major capital investment projects, but does not interfere with their management. The corporation has averaged 16% annual growth in earnings over the past 30 years.

### Poland

The Poland paper was written jointly by John Bonin, Charles Hubbard Professor of Economics, Wesleyan University, and Bozena Leven, Chairman, Department of Economics and Business, College of New Jersey. Poland is another former Communist country, but unlike the others it continues to hold on to most of its state-owned enterprises because of concerns about losing them to private oligopolies and foreign companies and of causing widespread unemployment and declines in social services. Although its ultimate goal is privatization, its operating strategy is to go slowly and allow time for essential market rules and institutions to be developed.

The authors identified two programs of the Polish government for governance of state-owned enterprises. One separated ownership from management by establishing 15 National Investment Funds (NIFs) in 1995 to manage and restructure the 512 state-owned enterprises with the ultimate goal of privatizing them; the other program retains state ownership of the enterprises in certain "key" sectors (such as airlines, ports, railroads, electricity, natural gas and oil, telecommunications) and under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance set up corporations to improve their governance. By 2004, there were still 485 companies in the first group and 1,277 companies in the second; together the two accounted for 25% of the national output.

The shares of the NIFs were traded on the Warsaw Stock Exchange, and hence their ownership was dispersed widely among the populace, although the government retained the controlling shares. For each NIF, the government appointed members of the Supervisory Board to oversee its management, which was farmed out to a foreign management-consulting firm. Because most of the appointments were politically motivated, the appointed supervisors lacked management experience, and due to the short time horizons of management planning, the NIF program was not regarded as a success, even though the program

did succeed in attracting a considerable amount of new investments and helped restructure a number of state enterprises.

For the second program, the authors focused on the petrochemical industry for an in-depth case study. The government established a specialized company to be responsible for restructuring the ten enterprises in the industry. The company helped the enterprises to restructure their operations and worked with local government to develop industrial parks in economically depressed regions that increased employment and stimulated economic growth. It also worked with the Gdansk Refinery to transform it from a traditional enterprise in a centrally planned economy, with backward technology and dilapidated infrastructure, into a dynamic modern business venture, in a decade.

The authors believed that the experiences of the first group might be useful to China's State-owned Asset Supervision and Administration Commission, and those of the latter group for state management of the large state-owned conglomerates in China.

**“The outcome in China will depend a great deal on the extent of the state's interference in the governance of state-owned enterprises.”**

### France

Finally, the France paper was by Charles Pigott, Senior Economist, Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris. Like other countries in Europe, after World War II France nationalized several industries in order to pursue rapid economic reconstruction; subsequently, the Socialists gained political power and sought to expand the social welfare system through nationalization of major industrial firms. By the mid-1980s, state ownership accounted for nearly 20% of employment and output of manufacturing—including leading media, transport and public utility companies—as well as most of the banking industry. Impelled by public scandals, drains on the Treasury, changes in social thinking, and market competition, waves of privatization followed, such that by 1999 the state had withdrawn almost entirely from the manufacturing sector (accounting for merely 2% of manufacturing employment) as well as from the financial sector. Nevertheless, the state retained 97, mostly large, enterprises, primarily in the transport, public utility, and telecommunications sectors, some of which went public and thereby partially privatized.

Each of these state enterprises is governed by a Board of Directors, one third of which represents the state, another third the public, and the final third the workers. The state appoints the first group, the labor unions the final group, and the middle group depends on whether the enterprise is totally state-owned (appointed by the state) or partially privatized (elected by the

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*because they have more free time for leisure. I like plum flowers, because the plum blooms in the winter when all other flowers have died. The plum has a tough spirit which well deserves our respect. We should learn from the plum.... My family all work very hard, and they care about my studies a great deal. They work so hard to get me school supplies, just so I can focus on my studies.... Every week when I go back home, they will say to me, 'Study hard when you go to school.'*

### **Conclusion: China's "new poverty," "left behind" girls, and educational opportunity**

*When I visited Xi He Middle School and talked to students and teachers there, I couldn't help linking their life stories to my own personal experience. I was born and reared in a rural village in East China until I was 12 years old. Just like them, I used to be a rural girl studying in an ordinary rural school. If it were not for my father's promotion, which brought me to the city and eventually the best school resources the city could offer, I would not imagine myself now being here, studying abroad for my Ph.D. in the U.S.*

*Looking at those Spring Bud girls, I know it very clearly: there is no essential difference between them and me. We are all rural girls. It is the access to good schools and more resources that makes a difference in my life and changes my fate. I could have been a rural woman, with only a high school education and temporary work here and there or married and staying at home. And the Spring Bud girls could become highly educated specialists serving their society and local communities, or Ph.D. students studying in the U.S. This is exactly how I see the important job the Spring Bud fund is doing for these rural girls.*

*—Jingjing Lou, doctoral student*

The story of contemporary Chinese education is a tale of two systems, and Xi He's Spring Bud girls are caught somewhere in between. The first tale is the one most Americans read about in Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat* or the Asia Society's summary of lessons of what Americans should learn from China.<sup>6</sup> In this tale we learn about China's rapid economic growth and its rising Human Development Index, ranked in 2005 as 85 out of 177 countries, 20 places higher than in 1990. This tale cautions that American institutions and citizens face stiff competition from their Chinese counterparts and extols China's ambitious fifty-year national educational plan to transform China "from a Country with a Large Population to a Country with Sound Human Resources."

The second tale begins with the reality that in spite of China's dramatic gains, there is still a "development gap" between its

commitment and investments. Education in China's poorest counties is compulsory but still not universal, and the education gap between regions is widening. Less than one-half of China's poor lived in the west in the late 1980s. A decade later the number was more than two-thirds. Nearly 45% of Chinese citizens live on less than USD \$2 per day and the disposable income of urban citizens, on average 1.89 times higher than those of the rural population in 1990, was 3.1 times higher by 2003. That was the same year that the official media reported that as many as 27 million, or 10%, of China's school-age children were unable to attend various levels of compulsory schooling.

Xi He's Spring Bud girls are nearing the end of compulsory schooling and next year will face the extremely competitive examinations that will determine their access to high school and quite possibly whether they will become part of tale one or tale two. They confront this transition just as the government is seriously engaging the question of how to create the conditions for more balanced development in the face of a "new poverty" concentrated in remote areas. Responding both to a perceived skills gap among the young working population and the potential for social unrest, the state has mandated the elimination of tuition for compulsory schooling in rural areas by 2007 and has proposed a number of measures designed to boost village income, including lightening or eliminating agricultural tax burdens and increasing social services. Some of these policies have been implemented at Xi He.

While resources and subsidies are crucial for getting girls into school, they are not always enough to keep them there. Four Xi He students from the ordinary Spring Bud class have dropped out this semester. All four students are discouraged by their academic performance. One student stays at home to help her mother with family chores. The remaining three have become migrant workers. In all cases parents said they wanted their daughters to continue studying. When Ms. Na Li and a colleague visited one of the student's homes, the girl broke into tears, crying, "I couldn't catch up. I want to give up." Her parents responded by saying that if teachers couldn't persuade their daughters to go back to school, there was nothing they could do but let their daughters drop out of school.

Before we wonder "what went wrong," it is important to put the girls' and their parents' decisions into perspective. A recent survey conducted by the Central Committee of the China Association for Promoting Democracy indicated that the average rate of dropouts in rural junior high schools was

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<sup>6</sup> Asia Society. 2005. *Education in China: Lessons for U.S. Educators*. New York.

as high as 40%. Nearly half— 48.3% — stay at home to work as farmers, while 16.7 % leave their hometowns to find work.<sup>7</sup> National figures also suggest challenges that rural girls in poor communities face if they wish to continue through high school and into college. The percentages of urban residents with senior middle school education, junior college education, and a four-year college education are, respectively, 3.5, 55.5 and 281.55 times higher than in rural areas. There has also been a marked decrease in the proportion of students from rural areas attending China’s most prestigious schools and universities.<sup>8</sup> This decline is attributed primarily to the system of ranking high schools by academic prestige that Chinese scholars call an important mechanism that consolidates and enlarges socio-economic gaps.<sup>9</sup>

Three complex questions that have emerged from the photovoice project will become central to our understanding of how and why Spring Bud girls succeed in school. The first is the influence of academic achievement on girls’ decisions to continue in school. Our research suggests that success in school is one of the most important determinants of girls’ staying in school and parents’ willingness to support them.

The second question is whether or how much son preference shapes Spring Bud girls’ access to education and their own expectations for success. Because rural women are concentrated in agriculture and/or relatively unskilled temporary jobs, it is widely accepted that perceived lower returns to female education influence parental decisions regarding boys and girls. Yet most recent research on rural schooling in China concludes that parents want education for both boys and girls, while believing it is more useful for boys. Most studies likewise suggest that son preference persists in the face of sweeping economic and social change, and that urbanization, female education, and employment only slowly change incentives for sending girls to school. Parental responses to the Spring Bud program indicate that “traditional” attitudes no longer erect severe barriers to girls’ access to education, and placing too much weight on “culture” may obscure equally or more important material obstacles with which girls and their families contend. In fact, parents want their daughters to attend school precisely because in the poorest villages there are no meaningful alternatives for them. In the short run

(before the roads, telephones, TVs, motorcycles and running water admired by Xiao Yang as clear-cut measures of rising standards of living are widely distributed), as subsistence farming is abandoned, as parents who are working away from the village remit cash back to the family, daughters are freer and encouraged to go to school (if school remains affordable).

Finally, the third question is how being “left behind” influences Spring Bud girls’ abilities to take full advantage of their schooling. As mentioned above, 60% of the girls’ parents are away from the home as migrant workers. Girls (and boys) are being brought up in the care of grandparents (many of whom are illiterate) or are staying with other relatives or spending significant portions of their time alone. A large international study conducted in China’s central and western provinces found that in 82% of surveyed families someone, usually the father, had left home to find paying work; in over 15% of families both parents had left their children behind.<sup>10</sup> In 2004 an estimated 90 million rural laborers migrated to China’s cities leaving behind more than 70 million children. These left-behind children are considered to be at risk for many problems including personal safety, abuse, anxieties, and long-term disabilities. Although left-behind boys are often considered at greater risk than their sisters because they enter China’s “floating population” at younger ages, many Spring Bud girls are also left to cope with the pressures of schooling without the support of their parents. In such circumstances, the school, teacher mentors, and peers will come to play an even bigger role in shaping the expectations and aspirations of girls, and, as Lei Wang noted at the beginning of this essay, providing girls with a supportive “home.” If so, policies that support girls’ schooling will be even more critical to girls’ well-being, affecting not just their welfare, but the welfare and stability of Chinese society as a whole. ✂

7 Xinhua News Agency March 4, 2005.

8 Since 2002, the gap between urban and rural education has begun to narrow, primarily because the percentage of China’s population defined as “rural” has decreased. Simultaneously, educational resources have shifted to urban rather than rural schools as a result of school consolidation and the construction of boarding schools designed to enhance quality. See Subject Group of Higher Education Research Institute of Beijing Institute of Technology. *Opportunity to Receive Higher Education: Narrowing Gaps-Report of the Subject Group of Research on Equity in China’s Higher Education*. (Ford Foundation: Beijing, 2005).

9 Subject Group of Higher Education Research Institute of Beijing. *Opportunity to Receive Higher Education: Narrowing Gaps*. (Beijing, 2005).

10 Sun, Shangwu (9/10-11/2005). “Rural children need a safety net,” China Daily, Beijing, p. 4.

stockholders). In any case, being the majority owner, the state exerts an overwhelming influence on the selection of board members. By tradition, the selection by the state is done, and the management of the enterprises is supervised, directly or indirectly, by several government ministries and agencies in charge of that sector.

This system stalled in the second half of the 1990s in the wake of two financial crises involving large individual state-owned enterprises. Investigations revealed serious lapses in the state supervision of the enterprises in their major decisions, ineffective control of the boards of directors over the governance of the enterprises, cronyism between government officials overseeing the state enterprises and enterprise management, and inadequate separation of the state's ownership and regulatory functions. The investigations resulted in two commission reports: the de la Serre Commission Report and the Douste-Blazy Commission Report, both of which are translated and summarized as appendices to the paper.

### State-Owned Enterprises in China

Each of the six papers sponsored by The Institute aimed at making recommendations to the Chinese authorities on the reform of the governance of state-owned enterprises in China on the basis of the experiences of the respective foreign countries or regions. Before summarizing their recommendations, it may be helpful to those who are unfamiliar with the field to briefly describe the current conditions of the state-owned enterprises in China.

Prior to the economic reform that began in 1979, for nearly 25 years the state owned virtually all the means of production in China. The state-owned enterprises not only were the sole source of revenue for the state but also, along with the government, the providers of cradle-to-grave services to every member of the populace. The central planning system through which the country was governed resulted in low and declining productivity and extreme poverty to the nation. Since 1979, the government has adopted a gradualist and experimental approach to economic reform. Starting with agriculture, China then moved on to industrial firms and the urban sector, instituting taxation reforms and building the infrastructure and institutions necessary for a market economy, while allowing state-owned enterprises to be confronted with increasing competition from domestic private firms and foreign investment in China. Many state-owned enterprises have failed, and even more have shed their social-service burdens, leaving their workers and families at the mercy of a society that is unprepared to care for so many, or to rely on their own small savings. As the state-owned enterprises' share in the national output steadily declined, there have been

feeble or purely legalistic attempts at enterprise reform—all to little avail. The state-owned enterprises, including the banking sector, are today no longer the same as prior to 1979, but in their dependence on the state and close links with government officials at the central and local levels are no different than before.

In October 2003, the Chinese Communist Party made a fundamental decision to restructure the economy within the framework of a "Socialist market economic system," in which state-owned enterprises would be a critically important part. The decision also designated a previously established agency, the State-owned Asset Supervisory and Administration Commission (SASAC, established in March 2003) under the State Council to implement the policy. The decision was both of fundamental importance to the future of the economy and timely, as by an earlier decision to join the World Trade Organization China had committed itself to use world competition to accelerate the pace of economic and social adjustments for building a market economy, and the only major barrier to progress was the unreformed state-owned enterprise sector. At the time of the conference in May 2004, the SASAC had just begun its work of organizing a nationwide structure for the governance of state and local state-owned enterprises, and enterprise reform was the most prominent subject of academic discussions all over the country.

### Summary of Recommendations

Superficially, the conditions in the six countries or regions described in the papers differed widely from each other and from those in China. As such, it might appear difficult to see how their experiences would be applicable. Yet, what distinguished them from the Chinese case are only details, and what unified them is the basic principles of state-owned enterprise governance and the barriers to their implementation in the specific circumstances. How these principles were implemented (or not implemented) in the specific circumstances provides invaluable lessons for China.

For instance, all six papers explicitly or implicitly recognized the supreme importance of what Andrew Sheng calls the "property rights structure" that underlies a market economy. Without an adequate infrastructure (consisting of laws, courts, accounting and auditing systems, and professional ethics), to establish a board of directors for each state-owned enterprise would be merely a legalistic legerdemain incapable of improving its governance.

The separation of the government's ownership from its regulatory and management functions is another principle recognized in nearly all (excluding Hong Kong and Singapore) six papers. These four countries recognized the importance of separating the two functions and have established different government bureaucracies to exercise them. However, in reality,

*continued on page 17*

### Shanghai Conference Papers *continued from page 16*

the separation was not as clear and distinct as desired. Depending on the cultural environment of the country, the regulatory bureaucracies often give preferential treatment to state-owned enterprises over private firms operating in that sector. In the short run, the special treatment might help, but in the long run it encourages inefficiency in the state-owned enterprises. The problem is especially prominent in Taiwan and Poland. China is no exception.

Apparently, privatization is no solution. Nearly all the six papers (again, Hong Kong is a major exception) recognized the perils of privatization and the need to retain certain sectors for state-owned enterprises. The extent of retention varies from country to country, depending on ideology, political will, and social conditions. Among the six, there seems some consensus to retain the arms sector, economic infrastructure (roads, harbor, airport, telecommunications) and public transportation, as state-owned. However, even there exceptions reveal the differences in approaches. Where to draw the line was an issue of heated discussion among our authors and the Chinese participants at the conference. Some argued that it is all a matter of competition: the state should leave all competitive industries to private enterprise and either regulate or own enterprises in sectors where monopoly is the rule. The argument, however, falls flat when it is realized that in reality monopoly or competition is a matter of state regulation, including the trade barriers both within the country and at the nation's borders. As the nation looks beyond its borders, world competition has substantially shrunken the extent of monopoly, and hence the scope of state-owned enterprises becomes questionable.

Ultimately, the outcome in China will depend a great deal on the extent of the state's interference in the governance of state-owned enterprises. On this subject, there was total agreement among the six papers: all agreed that state interference tends to thwart efficient governance. The question was how the principle was implemented in the six. Hong Kong's case was simple: the government does not interfere, so long as the law is observed. Russia was also uncomplicated, because privatization was total. In all the other four, arrangements differ, but in all cases the supervising agencies were separate from the governing boards of the state enterprises and refrained from interference in the day-to-day management. Differences emerge when the matter concerns strategic decisions, including major long-term capital investments and their financing. It was in these differences that the papers provided China a valuable mirror to examine this seemingly simple principle—a principle that is difficult to implement in particular circumstances. 🌸

### "Magic Moments" Initiative *continued from page 4*

working with The 1990 Institute. They will assume the roles of Project Director and Coordinator for CNCC, respectively. The 1990 Institute presently has a seven-member working committee, six of whom are 1990 Institute Directors: Flora Chan, Alice Chiang, Jim Caldwell, Jiong Ma, Billy Lee, and Jeannette Wei. The seventh, Ms. Peng Peng Wang, is a friend of The Institute and a distinguished artist in the Bay Area. Although the seven members have very different professional backgrounds and personalities, they share a strong common spirit and dedication to our project.

The committee easily agreed on a special title for this exciting new project. Emphasizing the essential goals we all want to achieve, we came up with "Magic Moments—Face to Face," or "MM—F2F." The group has started to put together a promotional brochure (being designed by Alice and Peng Peng) and a DVD (being designed by Sonny Tong) that will be sent to selected schools around the country some time in spring of 2006. Look for progress reports about MM—F2F in our future 1990 Newsletter Publications as well as our website: [www.e-planet.org](http://www.e-planet.org).

I would like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude for the generous support and contribution from the J.T. Tai Co. Foundation (in particular its Directors) of New York City, which make this project initiative possible. I also would like to express deep appreciation for the printing of the promotional brochure by my good friend Van Bagley of Planet Ink USA <[planetinkusa.com](mailto:planetinkusa.com)>. 🌸

### Spring Bud Visit Fall 2005 *continued from page 11*

to their beloved Grandma Koo. But Roz promised that she would be back soon, and she always makes good on her promises.

The whole trip was an eye-opening experience. There was the contrast not just between resources available to Chinese vs. American students, but also, and more interestingly, among students in China itself. I came away more mightily impressed than ever with my fellow Director and friend, Roz Koo. She was greeted and treated like a visiting dignitary and/or celebrity everywhere we went. It was clear that when she spoke, people listened and acted on her comments. Despite being in her late seventies, her energy and drive are unstoppable, and we often had to make an effort to keep up with her. She has a large vision for the possibilities for these girls, and she is transforming that vision into results. Despite their straitened circumstances, financial, familial, in terms of prior education, and otherwise, these girls, too, are dreaming and achieving. Many want to be teachers, businesswomen, and scientists, and hopefully the Spring Bud project can help make those dreams a reality. I am proud that The 1990 Institute is involved in sponsoring 1,000 girls to be the most that they can be. 🌸

## China National Children's Center Delegation Paints California's Environment August 2005

The CNCC delegation, all dressed up in uniform, ► arrives at San Francisco International Airport.



▲ Before leaving, the CNCC delegation—all very relaxed, the California way—takes one last look at the Golden State.

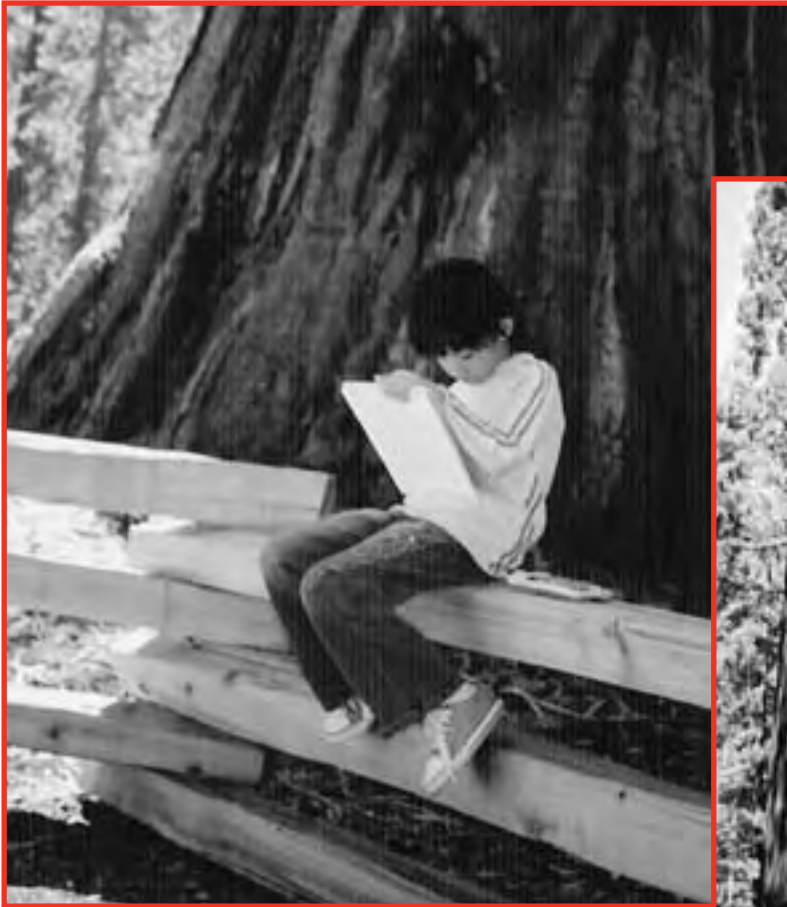


▲ Alice Chiang (Director) flanked by students from Beijing and San Mateo at the grand Group Art Celebration.



◀ CNCC's art teacher, Yu Lao Shi, and Foreign Liaison Director, Ms. Chen Ying, present their students' work.

## China National Children's Center Delegation Paints California's Environment August 2005



◀ Little Chen Yu (10 years old) paints California's natural environment.



▲ Han Ye (17 years old) contemplates the majesty of the California redwoods.



◀ Zhang Yang (14) and Chen Yu paint California's urban environment at San Francisco's Embarcadero Center.



## The 1990 Institute's 16th Annual Banquet

Friday, June 16th, 2006

6PM Cocktail Reception

7PM Dinner

8PM Program

### Program

Opening Remarks by Hang-Sheng Cheng, President: "The 1990 Institute Today"

Address by Guang Lei, President-Elect of the Overseas Young Chinese Forum: "The Past, Present, and Future of OYCF"

Musical Guest: Cui Jun Zhi, China's leading konghou harpist

Special Silent Auction of Framed Works from the "Flying the Children's Hope" Art Competition

Sheraton Burlingame Hotel

600 Airport Boulevard, Burlingame, CA 94010

Please make your reservation by contacting Jean Crehan at The 1990 Institute. Tel: (650) 558-9939

E-mail: [jcrehan@1990institute.org](mailto:jcrehan@1990institute.org) Deadline for reservations is June 14, 2006



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