



中国发展简报

Feature

Rural Miao struggle to get a foot on migration ladder

An estimated 150 million people have now migrated from China's villages in search of work. During the recent Spring Festival holiday, Matt Perrement met some of the least successful, back home in the mountains of eastern Guizhou.

Household incomes in Shiqing village (石青村), an ethnic Miao community in the east of Guizhou Province, average just CNY 800 (USD 100) per year. "Some earn as little as 300 yuan," according to village leader, Yang Linan (杨利南): just USD 10 cents per day for an entire family. "But things are better now in the reform era," he adds.

Only the most ardent Maoist would disagree. But 27 years of market reforms have brought few visible benefits to this village, except perhaps the freedom to go looking for work elsewhere.

"Around 700 of the 2,058 population of Shiqing have left in search of work," says the village head, with young people leading the exodus. Some go only as far as the city of Kaili, 25 kilometres away, but others travel to the more prosperous provinces of Guangdong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang.

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Most who leave have little choice in the matter. "I can't survive here living off the land. I have to find work elsewhere or my family and I would starve," 43-year old Yang Tongjin (杨通进) tells me. His fate was effectively sealed in 1979 when the death of his father reduced the family's allocation of arable land to just 0.8 *mu* (533 square metres). When Tongjin married and started to raise his own family it was impossible to feed them on so little.

Six years ago, when Tongjin and his wife first ventured out, it was to plant melons for a fruit farm on Hainan Island. Long hours and low wages-CNY 500 per month-forced the couple on to Guangdong in search of a better break.

"I didn't know the area so I didn't know where to look for factory work. We had to collect garbage for six months to cover our basic living costs," he explains. Their joint earnings for scrambling around in treacherous refuse piles and sifting through waste bins came to just CNY 12 (USD 1.5) per day, but "there was no other choice," says Tongjin.

Their situation is by no means unique in China. Migrant workers with the least resources and connections end up in the worst paid work. "Most of the refuse collectors there were Guizhou natives who had no *guanxi* (social connections) or relatives in Guangdong," he adds.

An employment agency eventually arranged factory work for Tongjin and his wife in return for a CNY 200 "introduction fee." But living costs in Guangzhou and remittances sent home ate up a large slice of their combined, monthly wages of CNY 1,600, and the rest went on school fees for their two children. "We haven't saved anything," Tongjin points out, even though major expenses are looming. Their 13 year old daughter will soon go on to high school, hoping eventually to reach university, and the couple's 9 year old son will follow; but fees for education beyond middle school are soaring.

Faced with mounting bills the Yangs, who have since moved on to factory work in Zhejiang Province, can hardly be described as lucky, but they are doing better than some Miao migrants who only manage a precarious existence polishing shoes on the streets of distant cities.

Yet most who make their way in the world

beyond the village clearly take pride in their employability in almost any capacity. Many Guizhou locals, including Miao people, describe the rural areas as backward, devoid of opportunity, full of ignorance-and full of people like 54 year old Yang Zhenxian (杨贞贤) who is left behind at the bottom of the heap.

Zhenxian's squalid home, just a few doors down from Tongxin's, is cramped, dimly lit and poorly ventilated. At the door he is all smiles, welcoming me into a two-room hovel that can barely seat four people and whose only source of warmth is an open wood fire laid straight onto the earth. His hospitality measures up to standards in this part of China even if his living conditions do not.

Tongjin had described Zhenxian as "a person without culture," and his meaning soon became clear. Zhenxian has never been to school, is illiterate, speaks only Miao language, and "would not last in the outside world," according to his neighbour.

Zhenxian's childhood and life prospects were blighted in 1959 by the great famine that cut a swathe through the population. It took the lives of both of Zhenxian's parents. He only survived thanks to an older sister who cared for him until his teenage years.

Without even basic education people like Zhenxian cannot compete in China's new labour markets. Several years ago, he watched his wife die of a liver disease, unable to afford any treatment for her.

The village leader assures me that education has improved greatly, and that all children in Shiqing now receive the nine years of compulsory schooling. One or two students from the village have even gained university places; but most will go off to find work after graduating from junior high school.

Most will also return, according to villagers. "We will work for two or three more years in Zhejiang and then come back. We need to return to take care of family affairs," says Tongjin, who is planning to go into animal husbandry on his return.

But it will be hard for him to thrive if the village's woefully inadequate infrastructure and basic services are anything to go by. Just 14 out of 450 households have a latrine connected to a

septic tank, and telephone lines are no more numerous. Most births take place at home with the village medical worker, a vocational school graduate, in attendance; but hygiene standards are unlikely to be high in the deplorable squalor that is evident in people's homes.

If the village stands any chance of prospering under market conditions it will need local investment and entrepreneurial skills, both of which are in short supply. Not one of the 30 people I interviewed in four villages had been able to invest in anything beyond food and the occasional household appliance. Most say they lack the "technical ability" to progress onwards and upwards.

Life is a struggle even for those with special skills, like Yang Zhen Huang (杨贞皇), a traditional artisan, adept in painting, weaving and woodwork. His workshop is adorned with paintings that reflect the life of the Miao people, wooden handicrafts and tapestries woven on looms in his upstairs workshop. Sales to occasional tourist groups, mainly foreign, now bring him an income of just under USD 1,000 a year, and have enabled him to give up his job in the primary school to dedicate himself full time to his art.

His parents he said, wanted to see him find a steady job and had no faith in his artistic ability until his first sale at an exhibition in Kaili in 1980. But domestic demand for his talent remains sluggish because, as he puts it, "the fragrance of the indoors bloom is only appreciated from outside" (墙内开花墙外香). "A trader from Yunnan came last year and offered only CNY 60 per piece for a bulk buy of 20. I turned him down. Some of these paintings take me days or weeks to finish," he says.

Zhenhuang wants to improve his basic living standards and expand his business to catch up with the rest of China, but has no idea how. For others, like Zhenxian and kinsmen who still hunt near the border with Guangxi Province, progress beyond the stone-age is more like a dream.

China Development Brief will shortly be publishing a Special Report that contrasts the experience of migration for ethnic minorities in three different Chinese provinces.

First person

'I felt too embarrassed to ask for my wages'

An unexplained growth disorder meant that Zhang Xuanbao, 23, never reached four feet tall, but that didn't stop him from leaving his village in search of fortune. Tina Qian listened to his story.

My name is Zhang Xuanbao (张选宝) but friends and people I know usually call me Xiao Bao. I was born in 1982 in a small village in Fuyang (阜阳), Anhui Province.

There are six people in our family: parents, two older sisters, a younger brother and me. My father is 50 this year; I can work out his age because I know he was born in a Year of the Monkey. And my mother was two years younger than him. My sisters were born in 1979 and 1981 and are both married now, one to a guy in our village. The other married into a very common family in Yingshang County (颍上县), just southeast of Fuyang.

Neither of my sisters went to school. I didn't start first grade until I was twelve and stopped after junior middle school. To be honest, I didn't enjoy studying and didn't get on too well. But now I've been working in cities for the last few years and I'm thinking more and more of studying again. My ten year old brother is now in primary school. Unfortunately he's not a top student either.

My parents and I didn't realise I was different from other boys until I was in third or fourth grade. My height reached 105 centimetres, but I didn't keep on growing like my classmates. So my parents took me to hospitals in Fuyang, and later to the provincial capital, Hefei, for medical check-ups. But they couldn't find anything wrong with me apart from being short. Doctors couldn't really explain what illness I had, but they made my parents understand it couldn't be changed.

The rest of my family are all normal height. When I was young, Dad didn't let me play outdoors, for fear that other people would look down on me and my family.

A singer in Shenzhen

For a while my dad worked on a construction site in Shijiazhuang (石家庄), Hebei. He lost the job after he hurt a leg in an accident at work. He more or less recovered after several months, but could no longer take on heavy work.

In 2003 he began to make a living as a tricycle driver in Yingshang. The same year, I dropped out of school and went to Yingshang with him. Most of the time I wandered round the streets, doing nothing.

Then a middle-aged local woman spotted me as a possible performer in a singing troupe her brother runs in Shenzhen. She kept on at my dad to let me take the offer. The way she described it, life in the south would definitely be 'a lot of fun'-eating well, no need to wash clothes by hand because there would be a washing machine. And she promised I'd get one or two thousand yuan a month. I decided to take the job. I could earn some money and it would be good for my future.

After nearly 24 hours on a packed train I finally arrived at Shenzhen. As soon as I got there, I found the reality was totally different from what I had imagined. I had to share one small room with two or three guys. Every day we had to cook for ourselves and hand-wash our clothes. There would be at least one performance every day, usually lasting for half to one hour. I can't recall all the places we went to, except Bao'an (宝安) and Longgang (龙岗) in the suburb. The boss grabbed every possible chance to make money. We had no regular place or fixed time to perform. In the daytime it was usually in front of some big stores, in the evening it tended to be in night clubs. We didn't have any weekends off.

Most of the 30 or so members of the troupe were young girls, under 20, from different parts of China. As far as I know, they earned a basic

wage of about 1,000 yuan per month, but they would get extra if they went off with clients. Some of them had done some dance training at local art schools.

I and another short guy were the only two male members of the troupe. He came from the same place as the boss, and had been working with him for six or seven years. He said the boss paid him more than 20,000 *yuan* (USD 2,500) a year. But they didn't give me anything, and no one remembered to mention my pay. I felt too embarrassed to talk about money directly to the boss.

My part in the shows included singing and drama. I sang 'Save the Earth' and 'Enraptured,' by Hong Kong pop star Du Dewei (杜德伟). And I acted Fahai (法海) in the "The Legend of a White Snake," (白蛇传, *adapted from a classic story about a snake who assumes the form of a beautiful woman and falls in love with a Hangzhou scholar; Fahai is an interfering monk who tells their secret.*) It was really funny to see me in make-up, but I enjoyed the show very much.

A doorkeeper in Beijing

In June last year I left for home. The only pay I got from the boss, for one and a half year's work, was 2,000 yuan when I asked for money at Spring Festival. I gave it to my parents.

But I only stayed at home for a month. My dad often blamed me for 'offering no help to the family,' making me feel I was useless at home. Sometimes I tried to educate my brother to study harder, using my experience as a migrant as a lesson. In my opinion, if he could only get into college or university he could 'eat fragrant and spicy' [*ie, would be set up for life*]. He responded with silence, but no visible change happened in his study.

One of my sisters, who had migrated to Beijing with her husband, invited me to spend some time there after she learned about my difficult situation at home. I accepted at once. To me, Beijing is where I can realise my dreams. I want to see the 2008 Olympics, as well as the

solemn national flag rising ceremony.

In Beijing I stayed with my sister and brother-in-law, who make a living at an interior decoration wholesale market on the outskirts. During the day I just played around at the market. One day someone offered me work. I accepted the job in a restaurant very close to Beijing Railway Station.

In fact my job there is very simple: standing on the door welcoming customers, foreign or local. If the customer arrives by car I have to open the car door for them politely. And I hold back the restaurant curtain to let them in.

Guests all like to talk to me. They always ask the same old questions, like 'How old are you? Where are you from?' After a while I get fed up and ignore them.

My mum works as a cleaner in the same restaurant. The manager, who's a couple of years older than me, treats me well. The boss wants to make his restaurant special, to attract more clients.

I'm paid 700 yuan a month. I can't say I'm satisfied with the salary. There's another short guy, from Shandong, who has been working here for a few years and earns more than 800 a month. I know the takings in the restaurant are 80,000 to 90,000 yuan every day.

We have no weekends off, just two rest days a month. My twelve-hour shift starts from two o'clock in the afternoon, until late evening. I live in a dormitory rented by the boss, close to the restaurant.

It's a privilege of mine that I don't need to buy a ticket when on trains or buses. I just get on. Even public buses don't charge me. Once a conductor asked me 'Who are you with?' I answered 'Nobody.' Then she just let me on board. I know she must have supposed that I was a little kid neglected by my parents.

Friends and hopes

When I was in Yingshang, I got to know someone who became a 'godfather' ['ganba' - a non blood relative who becomes a close family friend and paternal influence]. He worked at the

County Transport Bureau, and often rode round town on a motorbike to monitor the road conditions. After we got to know each other, he often took me home, entertaining me with delicious food and interesting things.

He has two daughters so I often comfort him by saying that I will take care of him when he gets old. He treats me extremely well. Before I left home, he bought me a set of clothes. When I was in Shenzhen he called me from time to time.

In Shenzhen I got to know a girl of nineteen, working in a bar. She said she came from China's northeast. Every day she came to chat with me after we finished the performance. One day she suddenly said 'I like you' and I just said 'I like you too.' Then she asked, 'Do you really mean that?' I replied 'Yes.' But when she invited me to her place I refused, with an excuse that my boss wouldn't allow it. That was true, too, we were never allowed to go out without permission.

We kept in touch for three months in this way. Later she went back to her hometown for some emergency in her family, but kept in touch by phone. Soon I decided to quit the job in Shenzhen and returned to home. Unfortunately I lost her phone number and never heard from her again.

Sometimes the idea of looking for a girlfriend tormented me. But now I've decided I will never get married. Could anyone in the world really be meant to fall in love with someone like me? I don't believe it! My parents never broached the subject of marriage in front of me. If you ask what kind of girls I like, I would say I appreciate the gentle and refined type.

My only wish is to support my younger brother through getting an education, and taking good care of my parents, who are getting older and older.

If I had a lot of money I would open a shop in my home town. Mainly for my brother's sake. Like me, he is not good at studying. So I can't really expect him to get into university. But I don't want him to leave to work outside. With a shop, he could stay home, managing it. Migrant workers are always the targets of bullying by others.

My dream is to travel around the world.

Profile

Veteran fighter for “ugly duckling” that serves rural women

In 1993, Xie Lihua launched a magazine, Rural Women, that has spawned numerous sideline projects, including a Practical Skills Training School and a Rural Women’s Culture and Development Centre. These ventures together now employ 43 full-time staff, and the Culture and Development Centre alone had an income of more than CNY 2.5 million (USD 313,000) in 2005, making it a large operation by the standards of China’s ‘grassroots’ NGOs. Tina Qian and Nick Young trace the long and winding road of personal and institutional connections along which this restless social entrepreneur has travelled.

The China Women’s News is housed in a utilitarian, low-rise block from the era of Soviet aid and influence—the kind that is now being gradually obliterated in Beijing’s Olympic modernisation drive. A couple of women keep an eye on the main door from a reception cubicle, checking on visitors, but not too officiously. The building’s long, bare corridors have the intangible but unmistakable feel of the official work unit, ticking over without exerting itself much.

In her rather plain office on the second floor, Xie Lihua (谢丽华) serves her visitors boiled water from a Thermos flask. She has a pleasant, down-to-earth manner, like someone’s kindly aunt, but this outward ordinariness conceals a very determined interior.

Born in Changyi (昌邑), Shandong, in 1951, Xie was one of China’s laosanjie (老三届) generation who missed out on university

because the campuses were closed by the Cultural Revolution. Instead, when she graduated from high school in 1969, she was assigned to a People’s Liberation Army communications division stationed in Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province. A PLA posting saved her from the notorious rustification (上山下乡) programme that sent educated urban youth to join rural communes for a decade or more.

Fourteen years in the army also gave her experience and confidence operating in a male dominated world, she says, recalling the years with evident pride. She was appointed head of the section where she worked, and in 1976 she married a fellow soldier, a few years younger than herself, who saw active service during China’s 1979 war with Vietnam. She gave birth to a daughter in 1981.

When Xie took off her army uniform in 1983 she was assigned to the general office staff of the All China Women’s Federation, but found the working style “extremely inefficient . . . there was very little sense of achievement.” The following year she was moved to the Federation’s newly established *China’s Women News* where she served for ten years as a reporter, studying part-time for three years at the China Journalism College and then rising to become Director of the newspaper’s Marriage and Family Department. In this capacity, she says, “I commissioned debates on many cutting-edge topics with a gender perspective. For example, are quota systems for women’s political participation helpful, or are they just another kind of discrimination? How should women’s career development be balanced with family life? Should women whose husbands are unfaithful resort to divorce or is saving a marriage in the best interests of women?”

But she still felt unfulfilled, wanting, she says, “to demonstrate her own abilities.” She and a group of friends had set up an informal club to arrange recreational activities for older single people (大龄未婚青年)—an innovative idea in those days—and in 1993 she went to the leader

of *China Women's News* with a proposal to create a new magazine aimed at this market. At that time, government and party cadres were being encouraged to “jump into the sea” (下海) by creating entrepreneurial opportunities (创业) outside of the state system, and it was quite common for senior work unit staff to propose their own ideas.

Xie's boss told her she would have to make a formal application for an official periodical number (刊号), and there was no guarantee she would get it. However, under China's state controlled publishing system, *China Women's News* had already been assigned a number to start up a magazine aimed at rural women; would Xie like to take this on?

No-one else on the paper was ready to touch the project, believing there was little future in a readership of poor, semi-literate women of ‘low quality.’ But Xie was more optimistic—overly so, she now feels—reasoning that “There are three or four hundred million rural women in China, if just a third of them became our readers, it would be a huge market!” Moreover, she believed, the national Women's Federation network, reaching down to township and village level cadres, offered a potential distribution network. So Xie took on the job, with an initial investment from *China Women's News* of just CNY 60,000 (then around USD 10,000). The parent newspaper also offered her a safety-net: they would cover her salary for the next three years, and she could have her old job back if the new venture failed. Colleagues and friends, she recalls, still thought that she was crazy.

Re-connecting with the rural roots

As soon as she made up her mind, Xie returned to her Shandong birthplace, which she had not visited for nearly 40 years, to learn about rural women. She had left Changyi aged just five, after a family tragedy that provided an early lesson in the trials of life for rural women. Her maternal grandfather had taken a second wife in the hope of producing

a male heir, but wife number two, like Xie's own grandmother, bore only girls. In the ensuing family strain Xie's grandmother committed suicide. Xie's mother then left the village, taking her daughter Lihua with her (but leaving behind an older daughter), to join her husband in Beijing, where he had been working as an accountant. Xie was thus among the first generation of rural-urban migrants in Communist China, also experiencing the division and separation of families that migration all too often causes.

Growing up in the city, her life diverged completely from that of her rural relatives.

In those days, city life was by no means free of either hardship or gender inequity. Xie remembers the three years of “natural disaster” that followed Mao's Great Leap Forward, when food was desperately short even in Beijing. “My mother gave priority to my younger brother, the only son of my generation in the family, feeding him first; and I too went along with this.” Her later years with *China's Women News* gave her plenty of insight into gender discrimination. But still, she frankly admits, “For a long time, I didn't think there was any real link between me and China's vast rural areas.” Today she still sees China's rural-urban divide as a huge challenge. “Educated urban women enjoy the right and capacity to choose their life, while the overwhelming majority of rural women barely finish junior high school, with no skill or trade, and can hardly find a job, let alone live the life they want.” Rather than being a national sisterhood, she says, many urban women in China still turn a blind eye to this glaring disparity.

Rural women, Xie came to feel after her return visit to Shandong, are “like a gold mine that hasn't been exploited.” She saw the magazine as a way to help realise their potential by providing practical information on subjects such as farming, health, hygiene and education, in language that would be accessible to women with limited reading ability.

It was with this hope that, joined by one other Beijing colleague and by a migrant woman from Anhui who had no college education or journalistic experience, she began to work on the new magazine from a 10 square metre apartment loaned by the Women's Federation. To reflect the breadth of information it hoped to capture, the magazine was called in Chinese 农家女百事通 -literally, 'Rural Women's Almanac' although at first it sailed under the English name *Rural Women Knowing All*, suggested by Xie's father in law who, she says, has proved very supportive.

But after publishing just two issues the magazine ran out of cash. Distribution through the Women's Federation was initially disappointing, failing to make the

30,000 sales per issue that was the threshold of cost recovery.

"I couldn't accept the failure," says Xie, but she did not know where to turn. A private investor offered CNY 500,000 capital on condition that the publication target better-off rural households and serve as a vehicle for delivering advertising; but Xie did not want to go down that road. Dozens of commercial magazines now target white-collar urban women, using cover pictures of models to attract readers. By comparison, Xie knows that her magazine is "a rustic, ugly duckling" (土的丑小鸭), but she is unwilling to sacrifice the content and approach to profit-driven market growth.

Making international connections

It was at this point that Wu Qing (吴青), a well-connected teacher at the Beijing Foreign Studies University, introduced Xie to the Ford Foundation.

Xie recalls her shock, on meeting the Foundation's then Reproductive Health Program Officer in China, Mary-Ann Burris, at also encountering for the first time the Chinese phrase 生殖健康 (*shengzhi jiankang*). This has since become widely used to translate the notion of 'reproductive health' but, to the uninitiated Chinese ear, it blurs an all-important

distinction between animal and human reproduction.

Xie nonetheless found Burris sympathetic. "She listened to my story for an hour and a half. I was impressed because she was the first person at that time who was really willing to listen to me." Moreover, the Foundation agreed to pay for 8,000 magazine subscriptions for women in sites where it was funding other projects, if Xie would add a health column, drawing on the work of other Ford grantees, such as the Yunnan Reproductive Health Research Association. Xie left the meeting, she says, feeling that "We were saved." Ford has been a major supporter ever since.

The Foundation also paid for Xie and several other Chinese women to attend a Women and Media workshop in Bangkok. This was the first time she had traveled outside of China. "There I saw so many active and dynamic women's groups, and newsletters and publications they compiled, and I suddenly felt that our *Rural Women* was one of them." The 1995 Beijing Women's Conference, a milestone in the history of NGO development in China, further strengthened international linkages and the sense of being part of an international movement. "We were seen as a window to learn about the situation of China's rural women. [International organisations] preferred visiting us rather than the Women's Federation because we could offer lively, personal stories."

With international support, the magazine thrived for a while, with circulation peaking at 230,000 in 1997. Distribution via Women's Federation networks, however, was a double-edged sword. Magazine staff estimated that two thirds of the copies went to lower ranking officials and Federation cadres, with only a third reaching the real, target readership. It is the individual, rural readers who have proved most loyal and appreciative, says Xie, responding to her monthly editorial column with moving letters, personal stories and appeals for advice. A selection of these was published in book form in 2003.

But in the late '90s, says Xie, with

mounting tensions in the countryside, central authorities were looking for ways to reduce the burden on rural people, and one small consequence was a cut in the number of publications that local governments and Party agencies were required to buy. The Women's Federation occupies a relatively weak position in the administrative hierarchy, so its publications were among the first to go. As a result, *Rural Women's* circulation dived to around 60,000 at the turn of the century, gradually picking up again to some 70,000 now.

Growth and diversification

Even as circulation difficulties loomed, however, Xie was busy diversifying. The magazine provided an umbrella for rural women's literacy, income generation and microfinance projects, as well as action research efforts on issues such as domestic violence and suicide. This work was supported by international donors ranging from Oxfam Hong Kong, which has been a major contributor to migrant worker training projects, to the International Republican Institute, which recently supported a small training programme on women's political participation.

Why, given that the magazine was struggling to maintain circulation, did Xie not concentrate on developing its quality and reach, rather than branching out into other activities? "Farmers need very practical support," she replies. "Through projects they can get to know the magazine and become our subscribers." Engaging with rural women in this way also brings sharper insights into the target readership's needs and perspectives. And, Xie points out, international donors "are more willing to support new projects, such as suicide prevention and political participation, rather than supporting a magazine year after year."

In the 1990s, Xie became preoccupied by the rising tide of rural-urban migration, and in 1996 she started a club to offer mutual support, recreation, and informal education

opportunities to migrant women (打工妹) in Beijing. This was followed in 1998 by a Practical Skills Training School in an outlying district of Beijing, registered as a non profit organisation (民办非企业单位), with Professor Wu Qing serving as the Principal. The school provides vocational training for young women from all over the country and has so far completed 147 residential courses for nearly five thousand women. The migrant club, meanwhile, continues to operate under the auspices of a Rural Women's Culture and Development Centre, established in 2001, that now also serves as an umbrella for other research and training programmes in rural areas. Professor Wu is the Centre's 'legal person' (法人).

As they develop these independent initiatives, Xie and her colleagues often refer to the All China Women's Federation as their *niangjia* (娘家 -the family a woman grows up in before marrying out into the world.) They readily acknowledge the value of links with the Federation, both in terms of providing legitimacy in official circles, and in opening an administrative channel that reaches down to rural areas.

But Xie is frankly critical of the Federation's bureaucratic working style and top-down approach, arguing that "it should talk about problems, not just successes." She believes the Federation should change its cadre assessment system so that their performance is measured by how well they serve women's needs rather than by how well they satisfy their leaders; and she also argues that Federation cadres should be elected rather than appointed by higher levels. (Hebei's Qianxi County [迁西县], she points out, has experimented with election of cadres by women's representative assemblies [妇女代表大会]) She believes, moreover, that the Federation should concentrate more of its efforts on serving marginalised women's groups. The great hope, she says, lies with younger women cadres, whose energy and drive may be able to transform the Federation.

Exemplary of the grassroots leaders who Xie would like to see invigorate the Federation is 37

year old Zheng Bing (郑冰). She attended a *Rural Women* training workshop in Beijing in 2003 and is now collaborating with Xie Lihua in a new, outreach effort.

Zheng once taught as a rural *minban* (民办, that is, not formally qualified) teacher. In 1999, she left to join her husband's small business selling fertilisers and pesticides. For two years she arranged bi-monthly lectures on agricultural technology, and at the end of 2001 she formed a women's activity centre in one village, arranging dancing and debating contests and study groups to read newspapers and official documents.

After attending the *Rural Women* training workshop Zheng founded the Puzhou Farmers' Association in Yongji, Shanxi Province (永济市蒲州镇农民协会). Since registering with the local Civil Affairs Bureau in June 2004, the Association has grown to 3,800 members from 35 villages, and is using *Rural Women* as an information source and study aid in "entertainment-study-cooperation" (娱乐-学习-合作) sessions. Local officials and cadres, according to Zheng, previously thought it was "an impossible task" to organize farmers, who are in a state of disunity after de-collectivisation of agriculture. Xie and Zheng are now discussing with international NGO, Plan, the possibility of exporting this marketing and informal education model to Plan's project sites in Shaanxi Province.

Service provision versus advocacy

Xie's work has been widely recognised by international donors and women's organisations, and has won accolades in China too. The Cultural Development Centre was recently awarded a prize by *China Newsweek* (新闻周刊) as one of the ten "best NGOs of 2005." Xie is now planning, she says, to step down as Secretary General of the Centre, retaining a seat on the Board, and devoting more of her time to the magazine.

As she prepares for a more back-seat role, Xie Lihua is far from complacent about her achievements. The kind of opportunities she has been able to create for rural women, she says,

can make a big difference to individuals' abilities and self confidence; but this in itself is not much if wider society does not also provide better opportunities. For example, she says, the Practical Skills Training School may help rural women find a job as maid, cook or hairdresser, "but this hardly changes their fate fundamentally!" Labels such as 'migrant worker' (外来务工人员) or 'rural labourer' (农民工), she points out, already mark these women out as second-class citizens; and their 'migrant children' (打工子弟) start out in life equally stigmatised.

Yet, asked if she hopes to respond by scaling up the operations she has initiated, Xie replies that "We don't want to be very big, but to do things well." In Bangladesh, she argues, large NGOs have tended to replace government as service providers and have developed "bureaucratic tendencies" in the process. A more appropriate role for NGOs, she believes, is "to use their successful experiences to advocate to society, and to influence the government, which has huge resources and should bear the main responsibility for providing social services."

There is no shortage of material for advocacy but some issues, Xie implies, remain too hot to handle. For example, she argues, market-oriented reforms have increased pressure on women, especially from poor families, "to exaggerate their sexual characters as selling points, or in some cases to 'lean on a money-bag' (傍大款). This is absolutely a step in the wrong direction." But, while questioning the fairness of blaming the victims and sending female commercial sex workers into prison, she adds that "We haven't been brave enough to step into this sensitive field. But I believe that in ten year's time Chinese NGOs working on these issues will come into existence."

Rural Women is keen to cooperate with international organisations that may help to promote the magazine through their project sites. Interested parties can contact Xie Lihua via China Development Brief.

Shorter news stories*UNDP cultivates corporate relationships for development, AIDS prevention*

The United Nations Development Programme and Stora Enso, a Finnish multinational paper products company, are joining forces in south-west Guangxi Province in a public-private partnership that UNDP hopes will set new standards for environmental and social corporate practice.

The agreement “can help Stora Enso make a positive contribution to commercial plantations in China and offer a bench-mark for operational best practices for large-scale investment projects,” according to Renaud Meyer, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in China.

The five-year deal follows a joint Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) of the company’s forest plantation project in Guangxi. The collaboration will attempt to conserve biodiversity and foster social development through rural communication and information centres, along with investments for health, water, hygiene, basic education and skills development.

“Environmental impacts identified in the study will be managed with Stora Enso’s good plantation management practices,” according to the company, which has moved to reassure investors that the ESIA report contains “no major environmental or social issues that could jeopardise [its] plantation project.” In UNDP’s words, the assessment “does not highlight any show-stoppers.”

Guangxi is strategically important to the company’s operations because it offers “one of the few places in China where Stora Enso could build a pulp, paper and board mill complex close to plantations,” according to a November statement by Asia-Pacific President, Markku Pentikäinen.

The company, which had operations across five continents and sales of EUR 13.2 billion in 2005, is increasing its plantations by 120,000 hectares and has recently contracted 34,000 hectares of land in Guangxi. The company is also expanding in timber-

rich South America and Russia.

Renaud Meyer adds that “We would like to use this opportunity to demonstrate the potential of these ESIA’s to promote sustainable development and the importance of public and private partnerships to China’s development.” But the agreement is also a PR coup for Stora Enso, whose Chief Financial Officer, Hannu Ryppönen, concedes that it “increases the credibility of the project and helps Stora Enso win the acceptance of stakeholders.”

AIDS prevention partnership

Meanwhile, more than 100 business leaders and government representatives from China and abroad gathered in Beijing at the end of March for an HIV/AIDS workshop organised by UNDP, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, the China Business Council for Sustainable Development and the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS in China.

Participants discussed staff and workplace policies, including educating employees on discrimination against workers living with the disease. UNDP described the meeting as “an effort to bring that work down to a very practical level, and provide businesses with resources they will need to address the problem in the workplace and local communities where they operate.”

Constance Thomas, Director of the International Labour Organisation for China and Mongolia, told the workshop that “The workplace is an important and ideal setting where reliable information on HIV/AIDS prevention can be disseminated to the working people, especially to those who may be engaging in behavior that puts them at risk of becoming infected by HIV.”

The point was reinforced by UNDP specialist on HIV/AIDS, Edmund Settle, who noted that “There is an urgent need to strengthen the general population’s knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS, and the private sector is in a perfect position to facilitate efficient and sustained distribution of HIV/AIDS education and awareness messages.”

Shared space gives green groups room to grow

The Global Greengrants Fund (GGF), a US-based organisation that disburses small grants to environmental NGOs, is helping local groups to buy modest, low-priced apartments in several Chinese cities to serve as regional resource centres that grassroots groups can share.

Green Anhui and the Wild Bird Society of Dalian have already moved into new offices. Green Camel Bell in Lanzhou, Green Longjiang in Harbin, and Guizhouren in Guiyang will do so as soon as purchases are finalised.

“We are trying to support grassroots NGOs in a more sustainable way” says Coordinator of GGF’s China Advisory Board, Wen Bo. “Before, we helped cover office rental costs for many local groups, but it is cheaper for them to purchase office space rather than keep renting for many years.”

Many NGOs, he points out, are heavily dependent on project grants from international donors to cover their operational costs, in which office rent looms large. Often, the groups face closure once a project grant comes to an end. “So we’d hoped they could have a place to base themselves, get a computer, bookshelves and be able to work,” says Wen.

Users of the resource centers must be willing to encourage new groups and initiatives in their regions. The China Advisory Board wants to see the premises serve as public spaces that a number of small, local groups can share for meetings and other functions, as well as public information centres.

GGF has chosen cities where no international environmental NGO has established a presence and where property prices remain relatively low. The one- or two-bedroomed apartments cost no more than CNY 200,000 (USD 25,000) each.

As the next step GGF plans to encourage better-established environmental NGOs in China—especially those in Beijing, which are relatively rich in resources and information—to pass on materials via the regional resource centers to small groups thirsty for reading matter.

At the end of 2002, GGF supported a

program by Beijing Earthview to establish 50 regional lending centers in China, making a library of environmental films available free of charge to local schools, university student groups and the general public. According to GGF, more than 1.1 million users benefited from the USD 5,000 project in 2003 alone.

The new GGF initiative draws on the example of Earth Island Institute in San Francisco which serves as an incubator for environmental projects, and the New Path Endowment, a private American foundation that invited newly forming NGOs to use part of its office space in Beijing during their start-up phase.

Many Hong Kong service provider NGOs, including the YMCA, now also derive income from lands awarded by the colonial government during the last century of British rule.

TQ, March 24 2006

Ashoka looks for one in ten million Chinese to change the world

A non-profit organisation founded 25 years ago by a former management consultant is looking for outstanding Chinese individuals to join its global fellowship of “social entrepreneurs.”

Ashoka, headquartered in Virginia, USA, now has representatives and programmes on every continent except Oceania, pursuing the organisation’s mission “to shape a citizen sector that is entrepreneurial, productive and globally integrated, and to develop the profession of social entrepreneurship around the world.”

The organisation’s website defines social entrepreneurs as “extraordinary individuals with unprecedented ideas for change in their communities.”

Christopher Dumm, who is leading program development in East Asia, describes the ideal candidate as an innovator who is able “to recognise when a part of society is stuck and to provide new ways to get it unstuck.”

Ashoka offers such people three-year fellowships that include a modest personal stipend to allow them time and space to develop their work without worrying where their next

meal is coming from. But, says, Dumm, fellowships are not awarded simply for raw ideas. Fellows need to demonstrate that they are already putting

their ideas into action, with a significant prospect of scaling up the impact.

Since 1980, Ashoka has appointed 1,700 fellows from 60 countries, and it is electing around 150 more each year. Dumm emphasises that “One of the biggest benefits is the fact that there’s a peer network-like doctors, or a lawyer joining a bar association,” because Ashoka encourages a collegiate spirit of transnational cross-fertilisation and sharing. “If there’s someone in India we can connect them with someone [working on a similar issue] in Mexico.”

As a rule of thumb, says Dumm, Ashoka calculates that “around one in ten million” people are natural social entrepreneurs, and this remains fairly constant across cultures. The organisation plans a slow and careful start in China, expecting to elect about two dozen fellows in the first three years.

“Our hypothesis is that the fields that are going to be big [in China] include the environment, and dealing with elders,” says Dumm.

Ashoka was founded in 1980 by Bill Drayton, a former McKinsey & Co. consultant. He piloted the organization in India with a budget of less than USD 50,000. Its annual budget has now topped USD 17 million, all drawn from non-government sources.

A 2004 book by prizewinning journalist, David Bornstein, “How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas,” profiles Drayton as himself a social entrepreneur, alongside an array of others such as South African, Veronica Khosa, who pioneered home-based care for people with AIDS, and Brazilian, F@bio Rosa, who initiated a rural electrification drive. Also featured is Florence Nightingale-not for stanching the wounds of Crimean War soldiers, but for her less famed work as a pioneering public health scientist who brought statistical rigour-and hygiene-to the monitoring of preventable illness in army barracks.

Ashoka takes its name from an Indian

emperor, Ashoka Mauryan (died c. 233 BCE). In the early years of his reign, he was reportedly as ferocious as his contemporary, Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (259-210 BCE), who unified China’s Warring States. However, after waging a fierce war against the neighbouring kingdom of Orissa, Ashoka’s rule took a more peaceful turn. He became a great patron of Buddhism, and a benevolent promoter of agriculture, unleashing a tide of vegetarianism across the land.

NY, March 10 2006

Academicians plot route to greener economy

A combination of technical innovation, institutional reform, price and tax mechanisms, backed up by greater public consultation and participation, could enable China to become a “resource-efficient and environment-friendly society” by 2020, according to a group of Chinese Academy of Science scholars who published a 400-page “China 2006 Sustainable Development Strategy” at the end of February.

Based on a composite index of resource use and end-pipe pollution relative to gross domestic product, the researchers calculate that China’s overall environmental performance ranks 54th out of 59 major countries that together produce more than 90% of the world’s GDP. Applying the same indicator to analyse differences within China they find that richer regions generally perform better, with poorer, western provinces lagging behind. This, they argue, shows that “comprehensive economic power” is necessary to achieve industrial restructuring-”problems arising from development must be overcome by accelerating development”-but future development must nonetheless “leapfrog” to become less resource-, energy- and pollution-intensive.

To achieve this, they say, China must move beyond end-of-pipe pollution abatement and control to create resource efficiency and pollution prevention strategies for the whole production, consumption, and recycling chain. Citing Germany and Japan as examples of industrialised countries that took an early and integrated approach to achieving this shift, the

scholars present a series of recommendations, including:

- Traditional industries must be greened with improved technologies, and new growth areas developed based on ICT, “green manufacturing” and modern service industry. This will require more state support for research and development. At the same time, environmental performance standards and certification should be introduced, with “more stringent market access standards for key industries and products.” China should create a “producers’ responsibility system” (akin to the “polluter pays” principle for internalising externalities.)
- Developers must pay realistic prices for extracting or using natural resources that belong to the state or to local collectives. China must stop being a “low-priced state”
- As major purchasers of goods and services, central and local governments must develop “green procurement systems.”
- There should be a drive to develop “smart cities,” with particular attention to sustainable public transport and energy efficient buildings.
- Sustainable consumption should be encouraged by emphasising “cultural, technological and knowledge-based consumption” rather than material and capital consumption.
- Government should encourage public consultation and participation, creating an enabling environment for media and NGOs.

If China follows this recipe, say the scholars, it will be possible by 2020 to cut, per unit of GDP produced, energy consumption by 50%-60% per cent; water by 80%; cement by 40% and non ferrous metals by 20%. It will also be possible to cut, per unit of GDP, the emission of CO₂ by 60%, SO₂ by 75% and waste water by 70%. There should, the scholars say, be zero growth in total use of water, and less than 45% should be used for agriculture.

The report was published ahead of the annual assemblies of the National People’s Congress and the China People’s Political

Consultative Conference. It is available in Chinese (2006 中国可持续发展战略报告 — 建设资源节约型、环境友好型社会), and can be bought online at: www.sciencep.com/sciencep/publish/bookdetails.php?searchingbookid=15487

NY, March 24 2006

Local resources, government, are keys to sustainability for Muslim NGOs

A Muslim charitable organisation that carried off one of the awards in the World Bank’s recent Development Marketplace grants competition will aim to mobilise local resources to continue the project when the World Bank grant comes to an end in one year’s time.

“Our experience shows that we need to cooperate with local government rather than conducting projects without them,” according to Bai Shengyi (摆生义), Director of the Lanzhou Xingbang Cultural Consultancy and Service Centre (兰州兴邦文化咨询服务中心).

The group has already shown the ability to leverage government and community resources to support micro-projects in Muslim communities in north-western Gansu Province. In Guanghe County (广河县), the county government provided CNY 4,000 (USD 500) to match a Canada Fund grant of CNY 21,000 for a three-month literacy and health education project that also offered introductory training in women’s and children’s rights to 65 women from Sigou Village (寺沟村) in Ali Matu Township (阿力麻土乡).

In the same village a school was previously built with CNY 30,000 raised in individual donations from readers of Muslim News, a weekly paper where Bai Shengyi used to work, matched by CNY 60,000 from the local government. That project was carried out by the Muslim Cultural and Educational Promotion Association.

Afterwards, according to Bai, the local government spent CNY 200,000 improving the

road linking the village to the county seat and another CNY 200,000 to help villagers terrace sloping land.

The Muslim NGOs have also mobilised college students to serve during vacations as volunteer teachers in remote, rural Muslim communities. Donations from mosques, individual supporters and businesses cover volunteers' food, accommodation, and transport allowances. Ramadan-the Islamic month of fasting-is the peak time, says Mr. Bai, for cash and in-kind donations from better-off urban residents.

The Xingbang Cultural Centre's new grant award from the World Bank will support basic education for ethnic minority children of rural migrants in Lanzhou, especially girls aged between ten and fifteen.

According to Bai, "ecological relocation" has resulted in many Muslim farmers from Dongxiang (东乡), Guanghe and Kangle (康乐) counties flowing into Gansu's provincial capital. Most make a living as rubbish collectors, construction workers or other unskilled labourers, but earn too little to send their children to school-and most of the migrant families have more than two children.

Xingbang Cultural Centre currently has five full-time staff, mostly recent graduates, as well as volunteer assistants. The Centre was established in June, 2005, and is registered with the local Bureau of Industry and Commerce because of the difficulties of registering as an NGO in China.

Director Bai Shengyi was formerly active in the Muslim Cultural and Educational Promotion Association. "As a new group," he says of the Xingbang Centre, "our advantage lies in the ability to innovate."

Bai has worked in the past as a researcher for the provincial Geological and Mineral Bureau, as a department store manager, and as a newspaper editor. His varied background, he says, has made him aware of "the value of education in minority regions."

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TQ, March 22 2006

ActionAid opens rural development, health programs in Shaanxi

ActionAid has signed agreements with two county governments of Shaanxi Province to support rural development programmes over the next six years, in collaboration with the provincial and county Women's Federation.

Yongshou (永寿) County, says ActionAid China Country Director, Zhang Lanying (张兰英), is marked by high rates of women's illiteracy and ill health. The county has a high prevalence of Kashin Beck's Disease (also known as 'big bone disease'), a disabling swelling of the joints that is believed to be associated with mould that grows on stored grains and with dietary deficiencies of micronutrients, notably selenium. ActionAid is planning to respond with women's literacy and health programmes in Yonghsou. It may also support pre-departure training for rural migrants who are mobilised by the local government to work on assembly lines in Shenzhen's export processing zones.

In Hanyin (汉阴) County, ActionAid will begin with work to support rural livelihoods and income generation. Villages in project areas are small and scattered, says Zhang, such that rural infrastructure and public goods are only poorly developed.

ActionAid has pledged to invest a minimum of CNY 200,000 (USD 25,000) per year in each county, raised from the international network's child sponsorship programmes in Italy and Greece, but expects to supplement this with additional grant funding. Zhang also hopes the ActionAid program will be able to mobilise additional resources from local communities and governments.

The global ActionAid network, which is now headquartered in Johannesburg, first started working in China in 1998, and has supported rural development programs in Hebei and Guizhou.

Hebei women learn self-care

Recent work in Hebei has included a one-year reproductive health project carried out with the Women's Federation and health authorities in eight villages of four counties-Zhuolu (涿鹿),

Wanquan(万全), Chongli(崇礼) and Kangbao(康保)-within the administrative district of Zhangjiakou City (张家口市).

Over the year, nearly 1,000 women received free reproductive health checks and these revealed very high prevalence of reproductive tract infections in all project sites-ranging from 30% in the Kangbao villages to 80% in Wanquan-as well as cases of ovarian cancer.

The high work burden of rural women means that “They have less time for themselves, ignore their own health and regard themselves as the least important member of the family,” according to Zhang Lanying. Women are also reluctant, says Zhang, to discuss their reproductive health with local doctors, the great majority of whom are men.

The project identified peer educators from two villages in each of the four counties, and they encouraged other women to attend gender and health education trainings delivered by local health authorities. ActionAid materials quote a 21-year-old from Kangbao describing her role as being to “take the lead in talking about problems which most girls are too shy to talk about . . . I also persuaded them to take part in village trainings and health checks.”

The Zhangjiakou Women’s Federation produced a personal health care training booklet, designed for readers with minimal education, to convey key messages.

ActionAid’s evaluation suggests that, since the project began, women have adopted new washing habits, using a separate tub to bathe their feet, and that household environments have become cleaner, with men also taking increased responsibility for domestic hygiene.

Women’s activity centres and “medicine cabinets” were established in each of the eight project villages.

MP, NY, March 11, 2006

Global Witness urges China to keep promise on illegal timber imports

A new forest protection agreement between China and Burma could end the flow of illegal timber into Yunnan, according to Global Witness investigators operating in Burma, but the UK-

based NGO is continuing to stress the need for action to ensure effective implementation of the agreement.

Global Witness has continued to track developments along the border since the release, in October last year, of its report *A Choice for China: Ending the Destruction of Burma’s Northern Frontier Forests*. The report concluded that 90% of timber crossing into Yunnan from Burma’s Kachin State was illegal and prompted both governments to sign a memorandum of understanding which pledged to increase cooperation on forestry issues and curb the illegal timber trade.

Burmese sources announced details of the forest protection agreement to Global Witness during interviews in February. A posting on the website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirms this and states that China will join forces with the Burmese government to control the 1,300 mile border and put an end to the import of legal timber.

Global Witness has welcomed the move in a press statement and “looks forward to prompt and demonstrable implementation [of the plan],” which Global Witness hopes will be a blueprint “to remove all illegal timber from China’s supply chain.”

“There is a pressure to respond to the situation in Burma,” Professor Zuo Ting (左停) of the China Agricultural University confirmed to China Development Brief. The state Xinhua News Agency also quotes a spokesperson from the State Forestry Administration, as saying that it will “firmly crack down on illegal deforestation and illegal imports.”

However, concrete measures have yet to be made public and fresh evidence gathered by Global Witness in late February suggests that “at least 150 loaded log trucks are crossing the border from Burma into China every night.” The organisation estimates that the trade is worth USD 350 million per year.

“The Burmese and Chinese governments must move decisively to close the gap between the increasingly encouraging rhetoric and the reality on the ground”, said Mike Davis of Global Witness.

MP, 13 March 2006