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## SUPPORT EDUCATION IN RURAL CHINA PROGRAM SERIES

## 認助中國鄉村教育項目系列

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### 2006 Annual Report



**ESS** summer visit to China in 2006 took us to Hefei City and Huoshan County (Anhui Province), Chongming Island (under Shanghai Municipality), and Chifeng in the Nei Monggol Autonomous Region. The State of Maryland, being a “sister” state of Anhui Province, gave strong support to the conferences/workshops held in Hefei. Six professors from Maryland delivered lectures on a range of topics on education. A number of specialists from universities and educational institutions in the US, Hong Kong and Taiwan were also invited by ESS to make presentations at the conferences/workshops. About 1,700 teachers and school principals from China’s rural areas participated in these activities. During our visit, we also met with some of the student recipients of SERC scholarships, and observed the use and management of library books, teaching materials, equipment and facilities financed under the various SERC programs.

Education and Science Society, Inc. (ESS) is a non-profit, non-political educational organization, registered as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization in the State of New York. Its missions are to promote understanding between the peoples of the United States and China, and to promote human and social development in rural China by raising literacy levels and improving the quality of education.



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The ESS Board of Directors holds regular meetings every quarter and the SERC Executive Committee holds regular meetings bimonthly.

## Support Education in Rural China (SERC) Program Series














### 2006 Annual Report

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## SERC Program Series 1988-2006

### Major Results and Activities at a Glance

<b>SERC Series I: Providing Reading Material</b>			
 Adopt a Rural School Library	(1989-2006)	4,400	ARSLs
 Adopt a Rural Public Library	(1988-2006)	45	ARPLs
<b>SERC Series II: Improving Teaching and Learning</b>			
♦ Basic Education Conferences/Demo workshops for rural Teachers - Jointly held with provincial/municipal institutions	(1993-2006)	38 conferences	
♦ Essay contests and publications			
 <i>Read to Discover</i>	(1996-2006)	11 <sup>th</sup> year	
Collection of award essays		6,000 vol./year	
 <i>Teach to Inspire</i>	(1999-2006)	8 <sup>th</sup> year	
Collection of award essays & selected basic education conference papers		8,000 vol./year	
♦ <i>Read Classics</i> projects – pilot testing in selected schools	(2000-06)	73 schools in 8 provinces	
♦ Teaching Equipment and Facilities			
 Musical instruments in poor counties	(2002-06)	214 schools	
 Science laboratory equipment	(2002-06)	26 schools	
 Equipment/material for physical education	(2005-06)	8 schools	
 Teachers training VCDs	(2002-06)	28 schools	
 Audiovisual equipment	(2002-06)	12 schools	
 Classroom desks, chairs and tables	(2002-06)	48 schools	
 Students beds for boarding facility	(2002-06)	1 school	
 Equipment/facilities for schools in specially poor counties	(2003-06)	5 counties in 3 provinces	
 Equipment/material for rural teachers training centers	(2004-06)	10 counties in 8 provinces	
<b>SERC Series III: Financial Aid for Rural Students</b>			
Total number of scholarship awards	(1997-2006)	13,276	
Of which: Primary students (PS)		2,154	
Junior secondary (JSS) and special education students		8,406	
Senior secondary students (SSS)		2,656	
College students (HE)		60	
<b>Special Projects</b>			
♦ Tree planting project in Nei Monggol & Gansu	(2003-06)	>10,000 saplings	
♦ Soya bean workshop & pig farm in Fuping County, Hebei	(2003)	1 school	
♦ Arts/skills training for girls in specially poor counties, Gansu	(2003)	2 schools	
♦ School-wide broadcasting system in Guyuan County, Ningxia	(2005-06)	3 schools	

## Support Education in Rural China (SERC) Program Series – Now in its 18<sup>th</sup> Year

Dr. Lungching Chiao, ESS/SERC Executive Director

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Since we started the Support Education in Rural China (SERC) Program Series 18 years ago, we have firmly believed that education is the only means to bring about fundamental changes in life and reduce poverty in China's rural areas. We have been able to sustain our efforts over the past two decades because of the importance Chinese culture places on the education of the young. Most peasant families, even when confronted with immense hardships, believe that there is hope so long as their children become educated. Most rural teachers, though poorly paid, remain dedicated to their tasks. Our sponsors have continued to give generously to our programs. Our volunteers within and outside China have worked assiduously to bring about results. The link in all our efforts has been our concern for the future of our cultural heritage, and our belief in the role education plays in enhancing the quality of life.

The major results and activities of the SERC program series over the past 18 years have been summarized in the table on page E-3. Our work in 2006 continued to revolve around the three main focus areas, as highlighted below. Details are further described in the respective sections of this report.

***Providing Reading Material.*** To promote reading and writing, which are basic skills essential in life and work, the SERC program helped set up 371 rural school libraries (ARSLs) and 3 rural public libraries (ARPLs) in 2006. The *Read to Discover* and *Teach to Inspire* annual essay contests were held in their respective 11<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> years. The *Read Classics* projects are now piloted in over 70 schools.

***Improving Teaching and Learning.*** Our emphasis throughout the years has been on the training of rural teachers, who make up 70 percent of the total number of teachers in China. Most rural schools are located in remote areas outside the normal network of communication. Rural teachers have hardly any training opportunities, nor do they have books or other resources to upgrade their skills on their own. To help improve the quality of teachers and school principals in rural schools, ESS has worked with one or two local educational institutions each summer to organize basic education conferences and workshops for rural teachers. In 2006 three conferences were held in Anhui Province (Hefei City and Huoshan County) and in Shanghai Municipality (Chongming Island). A new training model, "Let's Talk about Teaching and Learning," was piloted to give rural teachers the opportunity to discuss and share their experience. About 1,700 rural teachers and school principals participated in these activities.



***Scholarships for Rural Students.*** Over 13,000 SERC scholarship awards have been provided to students in China's rural areas since 1993. Many scholarship recipients in junior secondary have moved onto senior secondary and some onto higher levels of education. We are happy to see that some have returned to serve their home villages after their graduation. As the government has eliminated all fees for primary and junior secondary education in the rural areas, the SERC scholarship program has shifted its focus from junior secondary to senior secondary and higher levels of education. We have also started to provide assistance to students with disabilities.

Notwithstanding the fast economic development in China over the past two decades, many schools in China's remote rural areas still suffer from lack of resources. As development opens up opportunities, it also brings along deterioration in the natural environment, while new social problems arise as people try to grapple with the rapid changes in life. It is even more urgent that children growing up in this environment are provided with quality education to help them deal with these new challenges. Children today hold the key to the future of our civilization. The SERC program series will continue to focus on the quality of education for the vast and growing number of young people in China's rural areas. Your continuing support will be much needed, and greatly appreciated.



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## SERC Program Series I Providing Reading Material

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***Adopt a Rural School Library (ARSL).*** In 2006, ESS implemented 371 ARSL projects in 17 provinces and regions in China. The total number of ARSLs since 1989 has increased to 4,400. Details regarding their growth and distribution are shown in Chart 1 and Tables 1 and 2 (pages B-1, B-2).



***Adopt a Rural Public Library (ARPL).*** In 2006, two new ARPLs were set up in Guangxi and one in Guizhou. A working conference was organized in Guangxi for ARPL librarians and assistants. Local representatives reported that some ARPLs had not been operating satisfactorily due to inadequate support from local authorities. Some ARPLs suffered from lack of funds to buy library books while others had part of their staffing or premises taken away. The number of library users has dropped, and seven ARPLs have been closed. In the near future, instead of setting up new ARPLs, the program will focus on strengthening the management of the existing ARPLs, providing sufficient funds for books and support for library services. Sponsors are encouraged to donate funds for the consolidation of the existing ARPLs.

***Read to Discover*** and ***Teach to Inspire*** Essay Contests. To encourage reading and making full use of the library books, ESS organizes annual essay contests for students and teachers. Awards for winners in these contests are funded by the K. P. Tin Foundation in Hong Kong and the Raybin Q. Wong Foundation in the U.S. Primary and secondary students from 20 provinces and regions in China participated in the 11<sup>th</sup> *Read to Discover* essay contest in 2006. Among the 2,664 essays submitted for review, 171 were selected for awards. Concurrently, teachers from primary and secondary schools in 11 provinces and regions participated in the 8<sup>th</sup> *Teach to Inspire* essay contest, and out of 1,240 essays submitted, 99 received awards. Essays that received distinguished awards in these contests have been posted on the ESS website. In this report we are happy to share with you two of these essays, one from each contest (see page E-10).

### Promoting Reading in Nei Monggol

— Fan Youxiang, ESS representative in Nei Monggol

As an essential part of the Support Education in Rural China (SERC) program series, the ***Adopt a Rural School Library (ARSL)*** projects have steadily increased in Nei Monggol since 1995. With a total contribution of about 1.6 million yuan, over 255,000 volumes of books have been purchased for 378 ARSLs set up in rural primary and secondary schools. Most project schools cherish the resources they receive, not only caring for the use and maintenance of the library books, but also engage in various activities to promote reading. Results are particularly outstanding where the local education authorities take an active role in these activities.

Many different methods are used by the project schools to promote reading. The most common practice is to set up “mobile classroom libraries”. Library books are placed in a box or small cabinet at one corner of the classroom, managed by a designated student. Students in the class can borrow the books at any time. To make reading interesting for the students, many schools set up book clubs and societies and organize various types of speech competitions, recitals, essay contests, debates, etc. Some schools invite parents, teachers, distinguished students and community leaders to talk about their own experience in reading. To promote effective reading, some schools help students draw up targeted reading plans. Teachers are encouraged to guide students in their reading habits and teach them reading methods.

Evidence shows that in project schools that promote reading, students’ reading capacity and writing skills have far surpassed stipulated norms. Parents have also reflected that reading has not only raised their children’s skills in using language, but also enhanced their understanding and appreciation of happenings in their daily life.

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## SERC Program Series II

### Improving Teaching and Learning

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To help improve the quality of teaching and learning in rural schools in China, the *Support Education in Rural China (SERC) Program Series* includes a group of activities aimed at motivating students to learn, upgrading the quality and skills of teachers, and improving the overall learning and teaching environment in rural schools. Each summer ESS organizes basic education conferences and workshops for teachers and school administrators from the rural areas. Since 1993, 38 such conferences/workshops have been held in conjunction with local institutions involved in the SERC programs (details in Table 5, page B-5).



In 2006 we visited Hefei Municipality and Huoshan County in Anhui Province, Chongming Island in the Shanghai municipality, as well as Linxi County and Keshenketeng Banner in Chifeng, Nei Monggol Autonomous Region. *Basic education conferences/workshops* were held in Hefei, Huoshan and Chongming, including two sessions of “*Let’s Talk about Teaching and Learning*”. About 1,700 teachers and school principals participated in these activities.

The State of Maryland, being a “sister” state of Anhui Province (see page E-7), gave strong support to the conferences/workshops held in Hefei. Six professors from Maryland delivered lectures on various topics, including school management, pedagogy, use of classroom time, and assessment of student progress.

A number of specialists from universities and educational institutions in the US, Hong Kong and Taiwan were also invited by ESS to participate in the conferences/workshops. They gave a series of lively presentations covering a wide range of topics, from China’s cultural heritage to educational reforms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from curriculum design and management to the relationship between ecology, environmental protection and education, from macro issues in education to specific methods in teaching mathematics or promoting reading. The rural teachers at the conferences and workshops were much inspired by the breadth of their knowledge and their enthusiasm in teaching.



Of special interest were the two sessions of “*Let’s Talk about Teaching and Learning*” held in Anhui. These sessions piloted a training model developed last year to tackle the special problems faced by teachers in the poor and remote rural areas in China. The model was designed to create a platform initially for a core group of teachers to interact with each other, to discuss their individual findings and experience in teaching, and to receive input from their peers as well as educational specialists. These teachers would then return to their respective schools and put into practice the new concepts and methods they have learned. They could also replicate the training model in their school districts so that other rural teachers in their neighborhood could contribute towards the discussions and learn from each other’s experiences.

In the two sessions in Anhui, ESS sponsored the participation of forty distinguished rural teachers from 12 provinces/municipalities, who were known for their initiatives and results in the respective subjects they teach. The teachers responded enthusiastically to the training method during these sessions, made interesting presentations, and had lively discussions and exchanges with each other and with the specialists present. The picture above shows teachers at one of these sessions. We will follow up on their progress with much interest in the coming year.

**Read Classics Projects.** These projects were initiated a few years ago to teach children how to appreciate Chinese classics and understand their rich cultural heritage. With over 10,000 sets of books donated through ESS, these projects are now implemented in 73 schools in 8 provinces.

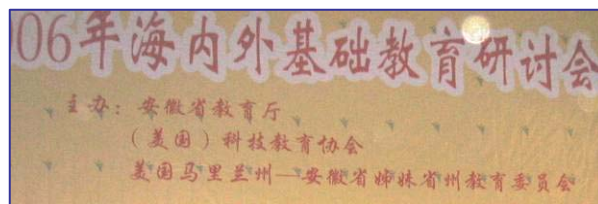
**Provision of Teaching and Learning Materials, Equipment and Facilities.** As part of the SERC program series to help improve the learning and teaching environment in rural schools, in 2006 science laboratory equipment was provided to 12 schools, musical instrument to 66 school, physical education equipment and materials to 8 schools, and desks and chairs to 9 schools. The provision of musical instruments is especially welcomed by the rural schools (see further details on page E-12). The pictures below show junior secondary students in Qinghai practicing the flute and primary students in Gansu performing over Chinese New Year.



## Exchange Programs between the State of Maryland and Anhui Province

— Chen Qigang, ESS representative in Anhui

Since the State of Maryland and Anhui Province established sister relationship in the 1980s, there have been frequent exchanges and cooperative activities in science and technology, education, human resource development, environment protection and agriculture. ESS was designated by the State of Maryland as the agency responsible for carrying out rural education exchange projects in Anhui. In the spring of 2006, the



State of Maryland sponsored 10 rural primary and secondary school libraries (ARSLs) in Anhui. They brought to the children much welcomed sets of reading material on a wide range of subjects, giving them the opportunity to learn about things outside the regular school curriculum.

### ARSLs Sponsored by the State of Maryland in 2006

City	County	School	Sponsors
Liu'an	Huoshan	Danjiamiao Junior Secondary	Ms. Huang Daokai
		Shangtushi Primary	Towson University
		Sanjianpu Primary (Deren Hope Primary)	Mr. Duratek
		Qingbufan	Mr&Mrs. John G. Danz
		Heishidu Center Primary	Mr. Chen Yonghua/Multimax
		Yingjiachang Primary	Johns Hopkins University
		Zhuizishan Primary	Towson University
		Mingde School	Mr. Chen Yonghua/Multimax
Suzhou	Shaoxian	Majing Junior Secondary	Purdue Farms, US
Xuancheng	Jingxian	Qinxi Center Primary	Purdue Farms, US

In July 2006, ESS worked together with the Maryland Education Commission and the Anhui Education Bureau to organize basic education conferences/rural teachers workshops in Hefei City and Huoshan County. Professors from Maryland and other educational institutions across the US, as well as from

Hong Kong and Taiwan, made presentations to an attendance of about 1,200 teachers and principals from rural primary and secondary schools.



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## SERC Program Series III

### Financial Aid for Rural Students

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In 2006, SERC scholarships were provided to 1,727 students from China's rural areas. Of these, 36 were in primary schools, 711 in junior secondary schools, 821 in senior secondary schools, 58 in teachers training and vocational schools, 47 in colleges, and 54 in special schools for students with disabilities. They are located in 19 provinces and regions in China. Development of the SERC scholarship program from 1997-2006 is shown in Chart 2 and Table 3 (page B-3). Details of the geographical distribution of scholarship recipients are given in table 4 (page B-4),



As reported in last year's annual report, all school fees (including expenses for books) have been waived for primary and junior secondary students in China, and expenses for room and board for junior secondary students are currently subsidized by the government. We have therefore reduced the number of SERC scholarships for primary and junior secondary students. On the other hand, as rural families have to rely entirely on their own meager resources to educate their children at the senior secondary and college levels, we have increased our support at these levels.



The decrease in the total number of SERC scholarships in 2006 reflects our shift to finance higher levels of education, which cost considerably more. Currently, SERC scholarship awards are provided at US\$28 per primary student per year, US\$50 per junior secondary student, US\$200 per senior secondary student, and US\$350 per college student.

In 2006 we have also begun to support the education of students with disabilities, mainly the deaf and blind. Special education spans over 9 years of primary and junior secondary. SERC scholarships are provided at US\$75 per student per year.

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Every now and then, we receive letters from SERC scholarship recipients that bring to life the hardships that China's rural students face. As they reflect the difference our contribution has made in the life of the individual students, they also underscore the urgent need for support for education in rural China. Included below, and on the next page, are excerpts from two such letters, one from a student in the final year of senior secondary, and the other from a recent graduate who has just become a teacher in a rural school in China's northwest region.

#### — Letter from Huang Shaoqing —

*Dear Uncle Lin: Do you know that, at the beginning of the semester, a seventeen year old teenage girl packed her bags and went on the road to Guangdong. That was my younger sister. Borrowing from here and there, my poor parents could only scramble together enough money to pay tuition for my younger brother who was getting on to 11<sup>th</sup> grade. They had nothing left for me or my sister. My cousin working somewhere outside the village managed to send back only 500 yuan. Confronted with this difficult situation, my sister offered to go find work to earn money for me to go to school. I would not agree. However, my father said that was the only solution as it would be best for me to finish the final year of school. When my mother and I saw my sister off at the train station, I watched helplessly as she lugged her bags around her tiny body, preparing to board the train to Guangdong. I thought at that time: "If I had enough money, my sister would not have to go to Guangdong. She was only 17. She should be studying in a spacious and bright classroom." Leaning against my mother, I cried. But my sister eventually boarded the train. I ran after the train, crying until it disappeared, leaving behind only the sound of its siren. How deeply I felt the pain of parting, how cruel I felt life was! Dear uncle, when I held the SERC scholarship remittance slip in my hands, I could not hold back my tears. I felt the warmth of life. Although we never met, you have selflessly offered me help. I realize that there are many good people in the world and love is always around. I understand now that life is like a mirror: if I smile at it, it will smile; if I cry, it will cry. So I will look at life in a positive way, so life will be full of sunshine. I would like to thank you for your support and care. I don't know how to pay you back except to study hard so that I could report to you my good results.*



### — Letter from Jing Mao Mao —

Dear Uncle Cai: Supported by your generous contribution over the past three years, I have now successfully completed teachers training and have started to work. This year's employment situation was very tough. Out of 600 graduates, only 200 succeeded in getting a job. Of the 150 students who took the examination on teaching English in primary schools, only 50 students were qualified. I got 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the English examination, and 10<sup>th</sup> place in overall results. Now I have been assigned to Xinglong Primary School in the Pingxiang school district in Tongwei County (Gansu). There are altogether 10 teachers and 300 students here. Being the only English teacher, I have taken up the heavy responsibility for the entire English curriculum in the school. In addition, I am the class mistress for primary one and I also teach the class Chinese language. I clearly recognize how crucial it is to build a solid foundation for the students. My experience here in the past few months has brought home to me the difficulties confronting primary education in the rural areas, which are way beyond what I could imagine. There is first the language barrier, as students are hampered in their learning, communication and articulation by their heavy local dialects. The second problem is weak family education. Uncle Cai, to tell the truth, I did not expect my working condition to be such. Rationally I told myself, "Rural children need a good teacher and a good partner, who can bring them knowledge and make them happy." I think my experience in life will be richer the more trials I let myself go through when I'm young. Moreover, I will never forget the spirit of your selfless contribution. I tell your story to the children, and I also try to follow your example in my own way, such as buying a school bag or an exercise book for a student from a poor family. What I have done is really insignificant, not worthy of mentioning, but I will start with the small things and work towards greater results.

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## How I've Become a Sponsor of ESS Activities Supporting Education in Rural China

— Kristy L. Balsanek

As a returned Peace Corps Volunteer from China, I had been looking for a way to give back to the country where I had spent two years teaching English. I found the perfect organization in ESS.

I had been home from China for about five years and working as an attorney in Washington, D.C. when I came across ESS in a late night Internet search about education in China. It seemed the perfect fit. I had been an English teacher at a rural three-year teachers college in Dachuan, Sichuan where I had seen first hand the transformation of students learning a foreign language in the classroom. Our classes opened up a whole new world for students who had never before met a "foreigner". Their curiosity constantly inspired me. During our time in China, we met with numerous rural middle school students who faced difficulties on a daily basis as they tried to pull together the funds for paying the yearly tuition just to attend school.

When I came across the ESS website I knew that this was the perfect organization for me to provide a contribution. I was so pleased to learn about the various programs that ESS has been sponsoring in China. For me, the library adoption and scholarships were the perfect way for me to give back to the rural areas that had provided me with so many rich experiences.



I started my first year by adopting a middle school library. When I contacted ESS, I explained how I had lived in Sichuan and wanted to adopt a library there. I was able to work with a former Chinese colleague who taught with me at our teachers college in Dachuan. Through the local ESS representative, this teacher located a school library for me to adopt in the same county where I had volunteered.

The second year, ESS provided me with the opportunity to sponsor two junior middle school female students at the same school. Several months later I received a wonderful package from ESS containing photos and papers on the school and the two girl students whose scholarships I had provided. The photos and information about the school and students were quite impressive and brought me even closer to the school that I had become involved with in Sichuan. I so appreciated reading about the students and seeing photos of them using the library.

I believe that ESS is truly providing wonderful opportunities for students in rural China to learn more about the world and about themselves, and I am proud to be a sponsor of ESS activities.



## Laughter Comes Back To Our Home

by Dong Jia Jun

(third grade student, Shang Tai Elementary School, Tai Zi Village, Tu People's Autonomous County, Qinghai)

- Translated by ESS Volunteer Bella Li

There was only mom and I. Since my dad passed away, everything had changed. There was no laughter in our home any more. Mom was a homemaker. She cooked for me, tended to the pigs and goats. She thought nothing of having to work extra hard to put me through school. Everyday mom looked depressed, and I felt listless. Our life was filled with loneliness and grief.

Once I got my math test back. I earned a 95% score. My teacher asked us to obtain our parent's signatures on the back of the papers and bring them back. I went home and showed my mom the test paper.

Holding the paper in hand and checking the score, she said: "You did a good job!" I said, "Mom, the teacher wants your signature." She froze. After a moment, she sighed and said, "But I can't write!"

It never occurred to me that my mom was not able to write even her own name. I gazed at her hands, what nimble hands! They were good at sewing, embroidering, and almost everything, yet not writing. I grabbed her hands and said, "Mom, I'll teach you how to write!"

Mom was taken by surprise. She kept staring at me that I almost became embarrassed. Her eyes brightened and said, "Good, teach me!"

It only took fifteen minutes and Mom was already writing her name. She is truly my mom with nimble hands! I spread out the test paper, and steadily she wrote "You Jun Hua". Even though the three characters looked nothing like being stylish, yet not missing any stroke either. I tilted my head, took one look at them, then another look, and I smiled. Mom smiled also. That was the first time I saw my mom smile after we lost my dad.

Ever since, after doing my homework, I taught mom some everyday words. We brought back laughter and happiness to our home.

~~~~~  
§ Comment: Young friends, can you tell me why learning to write her own name can bring back the mom's laughter? Is it because it is fun to write? Not entirely. I think it is because we feel fulfilled when we experience a breakthrough in life. And that makes us happy. Our young friend Dong Jia Jun has opened up a window in his mom's life.

Teacher: Qi Guo Wen

ARSL Donors: Huang Yu Lin and Huang Zi Hou

## "The Little Ferry Boat" of Tao River

by Liu Yi

(teacher at the Zhongxin Elementary School, Nanjin Township, Ziyang City, Sichuan Province)

- Translated by ESS volunteer Bella Li

The Tao River is plain and unattractive. Even the locals at Ziyang city would be hard pressed to come up with its exact location. However, at the mention of the "The Little Ferry Boat" of Tao River - Mr. Li Xudong - everyone within the parameter of fifty miles, all the way to the next town Zizhong, knows who he is.

Why do people affectionately call him the "Little Ferry Boat" of Tao River? On the one hand, he is the boat that literally ferries all the students across the river everyday. On the other hand, he is also the vehicle that carries the poor students at the closed-in Tao River area away from ignorance, helping them embark on a journey towards the sea of knowledge.

Li cares about his students as his own. Rain or shine, he escorts his students across the river one by one. During the rainy seasons, folks at Tao River invariably witnesses a moving scene in the morning hours before school: Li Xudong, wading across the river with one student riding piggy back on him, two students clutching his hands, and at times, a fourth student clinging onto him under his arm. He is like a mother hen sheltering and guarding her chicks.

This peaceful and lovely river in the mountain becomes turbulent and wreaks havoc during the rainy seasons. Li Xudong has tried many times to build a small bridge across the river at several different locations. Every time, the surging water brought on

by the rain wiped out the bridge just in one single flash. As a result, Li has to ferry the students on his back, in his hands...

He has been doing this for twenty years, losing count of how many times he has waded across the river — thousands, or ten thousand times? All he knows is that he has developed a serious case of arthritis by now.

One day in May of 1992, a storm caused the temperature to drop precipitously. Li came to the river early to meet the students. He saw a fourth grader Zhen Yun step onto the bridge he built. Before he could reach out to her, a flash flood from upstream barreled down and instantly capsized the bridge and Zhen Yun. Without hesitation, Li jumped into the roaring flood and swam towards Zhen Yun. Finally he grabbed her hair and managed to raise her above water and clutched onto the debris of the bridge.

Suddenly, another current hit them head on. The two of them were swept down the river for more than ten meters. Li choked on the water several times but still kept Zhen in his grip. Parents alarmed by the cries of the students on the riverbank rushed to them and rescued Li and Zhen from the torrents. Li was shaking all over from cold. Sharp river rocks had cut deep lines across his body, and the beach turned red with blood...

Tao River Elementary School is in fact a one-teacher, one classroom school. Li Xudong is an average teacher who does not even have a teacher's high school diploma to his credit. But for more than ten years, the quality of teaching at Tao River Elementary School has been ranked at the top among the elementary schools in the entire county, surpassing the county magnet center school on many occasions. Tao River Elementary has produced 55 college and/vocational school students, winners in citywide Mathematic Olympic contests, and first place winners in citywide essay contests! What is the secret of Li Xudong?

Li's answer to my question: "A strong sense of responsibility and sincere love for the students propel me to do a good job."

In order to make up for his deficiency, he has kept on studying and done research on teaching materials on his own. He has traveled long distance to take music lessons and bought piles of drawing instruction books to practice on a small blackboard. Over the years, his school has offered lessons in music, physical education, fine arts, natural science, crafts, and character and ethics up to the rigorous standards of the educational guideline.

Over 20 years of experiment, Li has developed a unique method to teach the students of multiple levels sitting in one classroom. Lessons are carefully

designed for such a classroom: a class period of 45 minutes shall be best divided into three sessions, language used in teaching shall be compatible with the children living in the mountains, and examples used shall be relevant to their ways of life.

I sat in Teacher Li's class once. He first introduced the different types of geometrical angles to the fourth graders, then taught the second graders multiple adding and multiple subtracting, and finally gave reading lessons to the kindergarteners... Within the 45 minutes, Teacher Li performed like an outstanding concert virtuoso, gliding through tenor, baritone, and bass in a skillful and natural way.

It is quite commonplace that students in the mountains become absent every now and then. Once fallen behind, the student would find it hard to catch up and the progress of the entire class would be held back. To make up for the absentees, Li has bought a small lantern and made a small blackboard to tutor the students at nighttime in their homes.

In the spring of 1994, student Wei Huajun missed school for 18 days due to a bout with smallpox. Li went to tutor him every night for two weeks. On a cold rainy night, Li trudged home after tutoring Wei, holding his umbrella and a bag in one hand, a lantern and the blackboard in the other. He was met with a gust of wind and the lantern went off in an instant. Li lost his footing and fell more than one meter down the embankment. Not being able to rekindle his lantern, and his umbrella now gone, he just muddled on in the pitch darkness. He would have to rest in the muddy water in the company of the rain that night if his wife had not come searching for him and pulled him back up the embankment.

During his tenure of more than 20 years, there has been no increase of new illiterate person in the six villages of the school district of the Tao River Elementary School. Not a single student has dropped out, nor any had to repeat. Not only all the school age children in the school district have been educated, but also children from the neighboring townships have come all the way to be taught by him. Due to Li's hard work, 100% of the school age children have attended school and stayed on to graduate, and again all 100% of them have moved onto junior high school.

Teacher Li Xudong is no more than ordinary. It is exactly because of such tireless teachers, who quietly and faithfully carry on their duties in spite of hardships of all kinds, that the children from China's vast areas of rural and mountainous villages stand a chance to escape a life of ignorance and walk closer to civilization day by day.

These teachers are the major forces in bringing progress to China's rural areas.§

ARSL Donor: Wang Xuezh





## SERC Project Program Series – Providing Musical Instruments



we review the processes of application, implementation and feedback, we are happy to report that this program has made fruitful contribution to the rural schools and to the lives of the rural students and teachers.

Letters from students and teachers expressed their appreciation of the instruments they received. Xitou Primary School in Jixian (Shanxi Province) reported that, “This is the first time in 60 years that students in our school are able to enjoy their music lessons taught with musical instruments. It’s like a miracle for the children. They are exhilarated.” A student wrote, “Now that I’m learning to play the flute, life after school has become rich and interesting. Music has brought me endless joy.” Another student from Chenzhuangzhen Secondary School in Pucheng (Shaanxi Province) wrote, “Since the arrival of the organ, all my musical cells have been activated!”

A blind student in the Luzhou Special Education School in Sichuan Province expressed her feelings this way: “Music gives us something we cannot have in our daily life. There is no sunshine in our world, but in the sound of music we can see things we do not usually see. In the world of music, we feel that everything is beautiful. We are no longer lonely children with disabilities. We are happy because we have music as our friend.”



The provision of musical instruments to rural schools has become a regular SERC program activity. Funding is provided at 2,000 or 3,000 yuan per school, based on need and the size of the school. Funds provided can only be used to buy specific musical instruments required for teaching or for the school choirs or bands. Each province can submit applications for 5-7 schools each year.

### SERC Projects in Qinghai Province

— Zhang Honshan, Basic Education Division, Qinghai Education Bureau

Over the past decade, rural schools in Qinghai have benefited from a number of SERC projects:

- a total contribution of 928,238 yuan for 225 Adopt Rural School Libraries (ARSLs);
- a total contribution of 656,400 yuan for 870 SERC scholarship awards; and
- 58,000 yuan to purchase musical instruments for 23 schools, and 38,299 yuan to purchase teaching equipment and facilities for a teachers training center in Huangzhong County. In 2006, 38 training sessions were organized at the center, mainly for teachers from the remote rural areas.

#### Major Tasks

- strengthen the management of the ARSLs and promote reading activities to ensure that the library books are fully and effectively utilized;
- encourage local residents to use the ARSLs, introducing to them books that discuss topics relevant to their daily activities;
- set strict standards and procedures in the handling of scholarship awards; and
- focus on teachers training, making full use of the equipment and facilities provided under the SERC projects.