



Support Education in Rural China Program Series

2002 Annual Report

Statement from the Executive Director of ESS/SERC

Dr. Lungching Chiao

In 1988, the Education and Science Society (ESS) started the “Support Education in Rural China” (SERC) programs. Over the past fourteen years, the SERC programs have provided resources for people in China's poor rural areas to gain basic education, knowledge and information that would help them improve their lives. Feedback from teachers, students, school administrators and local residents, as well as field visits to rural schools, indicate that the SERC programs have brought much needed support to almost two million people.

The past year has witnessed continuing progress in the three main categories of SERC program activities, as summarized below. Once again, we would like to thank our contributors who have shared their hard-earned savings, and our volunteers who have selflessly dedicated their services. Thanks are also due to the many teachers in Chinese schools and writers in the Washington metropolitan area who took time to review the essays submitted for the “Read to Discover” and “Teach to Inspire” contests. We would also like to thank the Tian Jia Bing Foundation (in Hong Kong) and the Wang Ru Bin Foundation (in the US) for funding the contest awards and the publication of the winning essays.

- Under the “Adopt a Rural School Library (ARSL)” program, 376 rural schools have established libraries in 2002. This brings us to an accumulated total (since 1989) of 2,871 ARSL schools in all 29 provinces and municipalities in China. Last year, we also provided supplemental packages of 200-300 library books to 100 ARSL schools, to replace books which have become damaged over the years.
- In 2002, a total of 1,356 students benefited from the “Financial Aid for Rural Students (FARS)” program, including 908 junior high school students, and 174 high school/vocational high school students. In addition, 274 primary school students received books, and 84 students in mountainous areas received subsidies for nutrition. Since 1997, the SERC programs have provided 3,576 financial aids to support students from poor families complete their education, particularly at the junior secondary level.
- Last year's efforts to help “Improving Teaching and Learning” included diverse activities:
 - A basic education conference was held jointly by ESS and the Gansu Education Bureau in Lanzhou, the 28th such conference sponsored by ESS since 1993. It provided rural school teachers and administrators an opportunity to enhance their professional development through discussions on pedagogy, education reforms and new trends in educational development.
 - The 7th “Read to Discover” essay contest for school children and the 4th “Teach to Inspire” essay contest for teachers were organized to encourage the use of the library books to improve reading, writing and application skills. The contests received overwhelming response. ESS awarded 150 prizes for children (out of 1,200 submissions from 20 provinces sent to the US for review) and 90 prizes for teachers (out of 751 submissions from 16 provinces).
 - The “Read Classics” project, which was piloted in Qinghai, Neimonggu, Gansu and Jilin in 2001 with donated textbooks, was introduced last year to schools in Tongwei County, Gansu Province, with an additional 150 sets of textbooks provided.
 - A new initiative, “Adopt A Musical Education in Rural Schools” program, was pioneered last year. Musical instruments were provided to fifty rural schools to support the setting up of school bands and choral groups, to help cultivate children's sensual development through the appreciation of music.

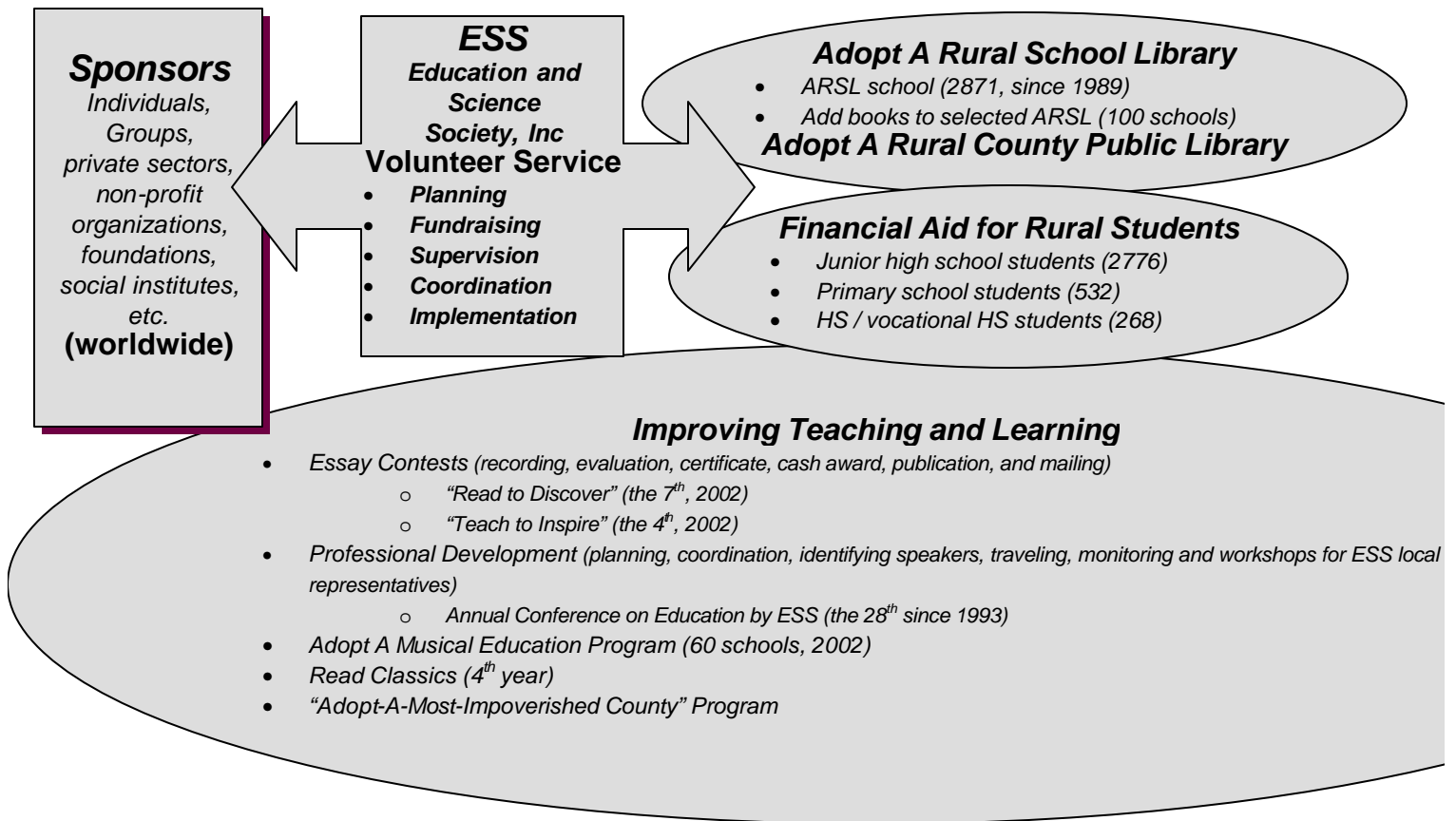
Looking ahead, as we continue to implement and improve upon the SERC programs, we hope to strengthen our support in the following areas: (a) providing urgently needed educational resources for poor rural schools, including laboratory equipment, computers, multi-media equipment, musical instrument, and equipment/material for art and

physical education; (b) funding for the training of teachers in rural schools, to help gradually enhance the quality of teaching and learning; and (c) programs in girls education and career development, to help reduce the number of girls dropping out of school, to provide them with the necessary skills in life, and to create opportunities for their future development.

Notwithstanding rapid progress over the past twenty years, investment in China's basic education is sadly inadequate. Many rural schools, especially those in mountainous and remote areas, still suffer from insufficient educational resources, resulting in lack of books and teaching equipment, crowded and poorly furnished classrooms, and inability to pay teachers adequately and in time. Resources provided under the SERC programs have brought hope to many disadvantaged children and their communities in China's poor rural areas. Let us continue our efforts, to help more children fulfill their dreams.

Programs - *A Unique Operational Model that Serves Both the Recipients and the Sponsors*

*Support Education in Rural China program Series (SERC)
Duties and Responsibilities of ESS Between Sponsors and SERC*



ESS inaugurated the "Adopt A Rural School Library" program in 1989. Working with ESS appointed local representatives in China, schools are selected by the board members of ESS on a need basis. Contributions from sponsors are distributed to the schools through ESS. The names of the sponsors are stamped on the books. The schools forward the following items to sponsors via ESS: thank you letters; documentation from the principals; study reports by students, teachers, and villagers; and photographs of the books in the libraries.

In 1993, ESS undertook a new program, "Improving Teaching and Learning", by organizing the first "Summer Institute on Education." The institute offers the seminar "Lead to Excel" for principals, and workshops for teachers. Three more activities have been added to the repertoire. In 1996, the annual essay contest "Read to Discover" was first conducted among students, aiming at the promotion of book reading. In 1999, the annual essay contest "Teach to Inspire" was conducted for teachers. In 2001, the "Read and Recite Chinese Classics" program was introduced and is now practiced in five provinces. In 2002, a new initiative, "Adopt Music Education in Rural Schools" was pioneered.

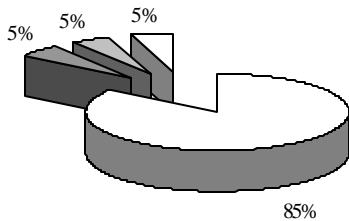
“Financial Aid for Rural School Students” was first offered in 1997 to qualified students who would have been forced to drop out due to the financial difficulties of their families. Each student is identified through a detailed process. Upon receipt of the financial aid, the student will submit his/her receipt, letter of appreciation, transcript and study report to the respective sponsor in the States via ESS.

For all three programs, ESS functions as a bridge between the sponsors and the recipients. As the scope of the operation has grown over the years, ESS has relied on a growing base of devoted volunteers who have been contributing a countless amount of time and energy to the mission.

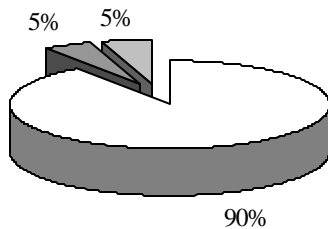
Accomplishments - *By Keeping the Expenses to the Minimum, ESS Achieves the Maximum Charitable Results*

ESS has been able to keep an extremely low expense-to-donated-funds ratio by hiring no salaried staff and paying no rent for office space. The three programs require engaging and time-consuming work at all stages. Thanks to volunteers in China and in the States, no salary has ever been paid. The need for an office has never arisen because volunteers offer their residences for meetings, projects, and storage. Only costs incurred for postage, printing, telephone, fax plus transportation for local representatives in China are billed as administrative expenses.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE DONATED FUNDS:

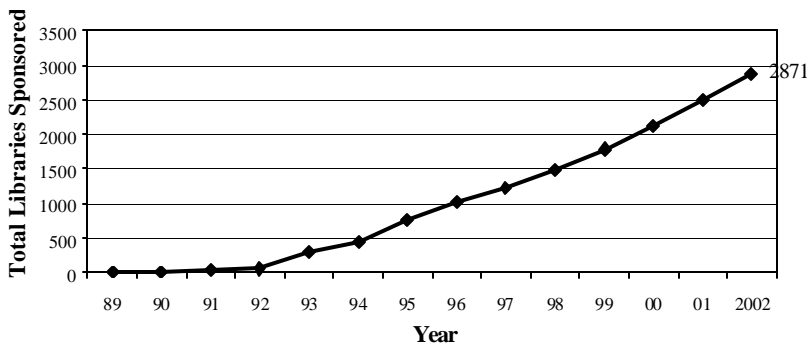


LIBRARY: 85% of funds are used for books. Of the remaining 15%, 5% is earmarked for the “Improving Teaching and Learning” program. 5% is used for administrative expenses in China and the other 5% for the same in the States.



FINANCIAL AID: 90% is allocated for subsidizing expenses for textbooks, miscellaneous fees, and/or room and board for junior high students. 5% is used for administrative expenses in China and the other 5% for the same in the States.

THE IMPRESSIVE GROWTH OF OUR PROGRAMS:



The cumulative total number of school libraries sponsored through ESS from 1989 to 2002 is shown on the left. There were 4 school libraries in 1989 and a total of 2871 in 2002, a cumulative growth of 718 times in thirteen years.

School year	Junior H. S.	H.S. /Voc. H.S.	Primary School	Total
1997-1998	33			33
1998-1999	139		77	216
1999-2000	351		81	432
2000-2001	582	25	50	657
2001-2002	763	69	50	882
2002-2003	908	174	274	1356
Total	2776	268	532	3576

The progress of the financial aid program from school year 1977 to 2002 is shown in the table on the left. There were 33 recipients for school year 1997 and 1356 for 2002, a growth of 41.1 times in five years.

Writers' Forum

FAYETTEVILLE-MANLIUS HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE HONOR SOCIETY STUDENTS SPONSOR ESS PROGRAMS



The Fayetteville-Manlius High School is located near Syracuse, New York. The Science Honor Society of the school sponsored by teacher Ms. Jamie Cucinotta is a group of about 150 students. They raised fund by washing cars, selling candy, and collecting donations to contribute 14 financial aids and one library through ESS to the rural Chinese students. Society officer Solomon Hsiang introduced the ESS program. The stories he read at the meeting about the children's struggles touched each society member's heart. The members quickly decided that raising money for the program should be a major goal for the 2001-02 school year. Solomon's father Professor Wu-the Hsiang is in his third year of sponsoring these Chinese students.

According to FM science student Catherine Owens, many people paid \$5, \$10 or more at the car wash, though students were charging only \$3. She said it was very touching to see not only the students come together, but the whole town as well. The members all hope that this contribution will brighten the lives of rural children in China and help provide promise for their futures. Ms. Jamie Cucinotta indicates that the students will continue to sponsor the ESS programs in the coming years.

LET'S DO A LITTLE MATH

By Sponsor Wu-Teh Hsiang

Professor Hsiang has been an ardent sponsor of ESS programs. In addition to introducing the programs to the above-mentioned honor society, he often rallies his own classmates with his characteristic math pep talks.

Let's do a little math here. For \$0.30 a day for 365 days, we'll get \$109.50 [= $\$0.30 \times 365$]; for \$2.10 a week, which is less than a cup of coffee at Starbucks per week; for 52 weeks, we'll get \$109.50 [= $(\$2.10 \times 52) + \0.30].

For a \$100.00 contribution, the sacrifices upon us seem quite acceptable. With the \$100.00 contribution, it may improve someone or some family's life tremendously. For such a \$100.00 investment, the return, using business terms, is really immeasurable.

According to the Chinese government statistics for year 2000, there are 440,284 elementary schools and 39,313 middle schools, totaling 479,597 schools. Sponsoring one school library amounts to helping 0.0002% of the schools. Let's not be discouraged but be mindful that by adding up the tiny numbers we shall arrive at a small number. And by adding up the small numbers, we shall eventually arrive at a larger sum.

THE STORY OF A SMALL LIBRARY ROOM

By Sponsor Sam Hsieh.

Mr. Hsieh and his silver haired elementary school classmates, and their octogenarian homeroom teacher Wu and principal Pai, sponsored three libraries and one financial aid. He produced this essay based on the feed back materials from one of the three schools. For this current year Mr. Hsieh and his good friends are working on doubling their contribution.

I am a small library room, located in the Middle School of Bayan Village. I have 2000 books. Half of them were published before 1976 and are obsolete. There are 10 classes with 538 students in the school, which amounts to less than four books per student. Bayan Middle School is in western Huangyuan County of Qinhai Province, where the Hans, the Tibetans and the Mongolians live among one another. It is a mountainous area 10,000 feet above sea level cut up by steep cliffs and ravines. Commuting is virtually impossible; hence 60% of the students reside on campus. Due to the high altitude plus a cold and dry climate, only a limited variety of grain and vegetable can be cultivated during the brief frost-free season. The annual production is less than 150 kilogram per acre. Annual income per capita is 300 *renminbi*. By national standards, this is the most poverty-stricken village in an extremely deprived county.

In October 2001, the 1955 Zhong class alumni of the Elementary School for Future Women Teachers in Taipei, Taiwan donated 620 books, valued at over 4000 *renminbi*, to me through the volunteer service of the Education and Science Society (ESS) in the United States of America. Our school submitted the school's history, village background, principal's credentials, rules and regulations for the library operation, and the background of the librarian, to ESS. Fortunately our school passed the stringent screening of ESS and was awarded the books. Today all the books, stamped with the name of the sponsor, are displayed in a special case here. During the

book awarding ceremony, the lead educational official of the county delivered the acceptance speech. What we have here is truly a comprehensive collection, covering a broad spectrum of information: from biography of notables to an encyclopedia of science; from classic literature to contemporary art; from basic science to computer technology; from vegetable production in cold temperature and high altitude to repairing domestic electrical appliances and tools. The books are well edited and up-to-date, broadening the reader's horizon in some subjects and yet honing understanding in other areas. Reading them immensely benefits students, teachers and villagers. The books are providing a source of mentorship for my patrons to overcome poverty in an efficient way.

MY TRIP REPORT TO THE RURAL SCHOOL IN ANHUI

By Sponsor James Jen.

Mr. Jen, a classmate of Mr. Hsieh, visited one of the three schools they sponsored and shares his insight with us.

Of the three rural schools that we had donated books to in 2001, I visited the one in Anhui province while I was in Shanghai in April of 2002. I arranged my own trip rather than going through the official ESS contact. Although I notified the ESS representative in the capital of Anhui a few hours in advance, I am certain my visit was a total surprise to the school. Because of this, I believe I saw the real situation of this school, which was my intention. I rode the train for fifteen hours to a depot near the village. A Chinese medical doctor from a near by big city came to meet me at the train station and we rode a taxi for two hours to the school in the early afternoon on Friday. The visit lasted for three hours and we left around 5:00pm.

Upon arrival, I immediately looked for the library where our donated books are. We were escorted to the Principal's office, where two vice principals (one for middle school and the other for elementary school) were talking to each other. Both accompanied us to the library and called the principal via mobile phone. This one room was used for both a library and reading room, scheduled to open Tuesday and Friday afternoons. In the library, I saw the books donated by us stored nicely on a new bookshelf with Sam Hsieh's name and our class name on a banner on top of the bookshelf. Each of these (over 500) new books was stamped with the same imprint on the last page. These books amount to about 25% of all the books in the library. Other books in the library were much older and on older bookshelves. The books donated by us were selected according to the standard ESS contract with 15% in agricultural technology. While I was talking with the two vice principals and the librarian, the principal arrived. He started out as the principal of the middle school three years ago, and was promoted to serve as the principal for the adjacent elementary school also. He is now working

towards the position as the principal for the entire district, which comprises of one middle school, nine elementary schools and eight single classes. The single classes are strategically located in the mountainous district so that young elementary school pupils do not have to commute for hours every day. For the same reason, most of the 600 middle school students board in dormitory and go home on weekends. The most important statistics I found was that the graduation rate increased from 60% to 80%. Since many students help out on the farm, skipping school is quite normal during harvest season.

This school is definitely in a poor rural area. I saw 25% of the kids without shoes. I remember we brought our lunch box to school in Taiwan. The middle school students there brought their own rice to their dormitory and prepared their meals individually. The reported annual income is about US\$100 per person there. There is not one computer in the school, and no equipment in the laboratory. During my visit, the principal promised to keep the library open five days a week by asking students to serve as volunteer assistant librarians just the way I suggested. He also told me that of the three three-story school buildings on the campus, one is donated by a former villager who is doing well in the city.

After I concluded my visit to the school, I am totally convinced that "Adopt a Rural School Library" by ESS is a worthy program. If only one student benefits from reading the books we donated, he or she may be the one to contribute back to his/her hometown one of these days. ESS has my unequivocal support now.

WORKING HARD AT BECOMING THE FIRST COLLEGE BOUND FROM MY VILLAGE

By Huang Zi-hua, recipient of ESS financial aid, Huaguang Senior High, Nanning, Guangxi Province

Translated by volunteer Bella Li / Photo, P.16, Chinese version

My Name is Huang Zi Hua. I was born on November 14, 1987 in a poor mountainous village in Guangxi. People here maintain a conservative view and resist change. Only a few have ever gone to school. Those who have gone are all boys. The girls are out of luck. Some of the girls are forced into marriage in their teens. Those over twenty and unmarried become the laughing stocks of the village. Girls are, in the eyes of their parents, no better than a pile of soil. I have been relatively fortunate. I developed an interest in drawing at age four, drawing on the floor and furniture with a stick of charcoal in lieu of paper and pencil. When my older brother came home from school on Saturdays, he would teach me to write and read poems. I could recite the poems even though I had no idea of what they meant. When I was six, an out-of-towner came to buy hogs from us. He said to my parents: "You have a bright daughter. Why don't you send her to school? She may make something of herself." My

parents sent me to school the next year! I studied hard and was granted half of the tuition by my school. My principal said to me, "In order to fight poverty, you need to be educated. Keep on working at it and you will win." On my graduation day, I held on to the items awarded to me by my school over the past six years: 17 certificates of achievement, two fountain pens, 11 workbooks and 8 notebooks. I wept. A week later, I received the acceptance letter from my county junior high school. Everyone in our neighborhood was elated. When we noticed that the tuition amounted to 500 *renminbi*, my parents turned silent. My brother had already given up his college admission because we could not afford his tuition of several thousand *renminbi* on top of the expenses for my younger siblings in elementary schools.

Good fortune struck again. On August 14, 1998, I received a "Scholarship for Rural Students" through ESS. My gratitude was beyond words. A good person somewhere over the rainbow extended his/her helping hand to send me to school. Competition was keen in the junior high school and I work extra hard to stay ahead in my class. My classmates were encouraging too. At times they would buy me a bun for breakfast. In the third year, my school granted me half of the tuition based on my academic performance.

I was accepted by several high schools upon graduation. The tuitions were all over 4,000 *renminbi*. I did not think I stood a chance. We were already taking out loans to pay for my older sister's medical and hospital bill. I was severely depressed and wanted to cry my heart out. Two days before school started, I received another acceptance letter. This time it was from Nanning Huaguang High School. The tuition was 2,000 *renminbi*, to be reduced by 2/3 for disadvantaged students. My feelings were beyond words again. Bringing with me a few hundred *renminbi* from selling hogs, and the well wishes bestowed upon me by my parents, relatives and neighbors, I boarded the bus headed for Nanning, the state capital. At the school, the fee for the room and board was also reduced for the disadvantaged students. To return some of the kindness, thirty plus of our classmates visited orphanages and nursing homes on Sundays to help out. To earn spending money, I stayed in Nanning and worked as an *au pair* during the winter vacation, and studied in the spare moments.

My only goal now is to study hard, to work hard at becoming the first college student from my village, to build up my hometown with what I am going to learn.

THOUGHTS ON EVALUATING THE STUDENTS' WRITINGS FOR "LEARN TO DISCOVER" COMPETITION

*By Jean Ming-chen Cheng, a renowned writer
Translated by volunteer Bella Li*

This was my first time serving as one of the evaluators for the competition. Though the reading load was heavy, I plunged myself freely into the world of each student and reaped a wealth of insights.

My first impression was that none of the writing was lacking fluency. At times I felt that some of the pieces were superior to articles in the Chinese newspapers. The children in the rural schools have truthfully learned. And the books have not only helped them to discover, but have also helped them to open the doors of independent thinking, to develop their intelligence. They have experienced the sentiment of being on the receiving end of love and care through the giving of ESS contributors.

In the process of reading their writings, my emotions went through an unprecedented range of joy, sadness, and sympathy, leaving me with smiles, tears, and at times sighs... I knew I was reading works from life, not rhetoric...

From their essays, we can tell that their family backgrounds vary. A few of the students are supported by two working parents, and therefore slightly better off. Nevertheless, they are all blessed with family love. Parental love, as well as inspiration offered by their unyieldingly hard-working parents, are recurring themes in several writings....

In addition to their families, schoolmates exert a major influence in their world. Encouragement from their peers is another motivation for them to study hard. To be able to attend school places them in an environment where the important sentiments of fellowship, support, and empathy will be nurtured.

Naturally, negative accounts were not totally absent from their pens. For instance, "My Birthday Reward" told of the rural child who went to the city to celebrate her birthday. Upon noticing that a pickpocket was tailing a woman, she issued a warning. The pickpocket turned upon her and beat her up. Bystanders were aware of what was going on, yet none bothered to interfere...

The selfishness and apathy of the city people thus made an indelible impression on the rural child. After reading "People from Two Worlds," we can tell that the rural children were proud of, not ashamed of, being from the countryside.

We can draw solace from reading their works. They are telling us with their pens that the future generation is full of self-confidence. They are confident in the treasures to be found in their culture, such as in "Reading, Dazzling My Eyes." They are confident in the ability to build their own future, as it was evident in "The Ideal Me."

Last but not least, I may say that we can already glean the positive impact generated by your generous contribution in the students' essays. Indeed, books provide the fertile ground for the children to develop deep roots, and to grow strongly. Furthermore, through books and essays, we have connected.

LONGING TO LIVE

By Zhu Dan, a winner of "Read to Discover" competition, sixth grade student, Bai Mao City Center Elementary School, Yue Xi County, Anhui Province

Library Sponsor: Tian Jia-Bing Foundation (Hong Kong)

Teacher: Yu Yue-Hua

Translated by volunteer Bella Li

The night is frightfully still, as if everything has abandoned me. Except those cold, blinking stars outside the window, except this cruel heart disease.

Mother has placed her hand on my chest. I know she is trying to hold steady my racing heart. I nudge aside her withered hand, to find out that she has dozed off on the side of my bed. The moonbeams shine over her face. Tears glisten from the corners of her eyes. I feel a sharp convulsion of sadness: lately, mother has been taking all the pressure upon herself. Fatigue has taken its toll on her. My detested father has left us behind to find his new love somewhere else.

More than once I asked my mother, "For how long can my heart go on beating?" Every-time she acted casual as if nothing was wrong by saying, "Be strong and hang on, you will be fine soon." In fact, it is no longer possible for my mother to keep it from me, a sixth grader. I have heard from the others that my coronary heart disease has advanced to the last stage. My heart has enlarged quite a bit. Undergoing surgery is my last chance. And the cost of the surgery is expensive. Which amounts to an astronomical figure for my disadvantaged family. We have already resorted to borrowing to cover my current medical expenses, what else can I say?

Yesterday, my teacher and classmates came to visit me and warmed up my small room. (Because we cannot afford to stay in the hospital, mother has rented this room from a relative.) They told me schoolyard stories. Talked about the world outside. They rejuvenated my weakened heart and helped me to forget that I am a heart patient. They said to me; "Dan Dan, our school has decided to start a 'Learn to Discover' writing competition. You are such a good writer. Would you like to participate? You could win a grand prize!" I nodded quietly.

The night is old. The moon has sunk to the west. Everything around me appears ghastlier. In this darkness, I recall my classroom, my desk, and my school bag in the desk and my college dream in the school bag. Once again I touch to feel my heart. I implore, I will my heart to beat slower, and to beat with more regulated rhythm. I hope the dawn shall come sooner and the sun will still rise.

THE PINWHEELS

By Yen Chen, a winner of "Read to Discover" competition, 4th grade, Sichuan Province

Because we are poor, I seldom participate in class activities. As a result, I have become indifferent to all that. I carry on with my chores without being bothered by all the excited talks and anticipation before the event - then the thrill and fun memories afterwards.

But this time it was different. My heart would not stay still. My class was planning to camp out at Ba Tai Mountain (Eight Plateau Mountain) and watch the sunrise the next morning! I've heard about Ba Tai Mountain. The soil up there is reddish, tea plants everywhere and their flowers are white. Ba Tai Mountain is especially beautiful in springtime when all the tea flowers are blooming. The tea flowers and the soil, they look like red-white silk brocade from afar. But the sunrise at Ba Tai Mountain is most special. People who have seen it have said: "The sun is bigger, redder at Ba Tai Mount. It's the first rate sun!"

For all of this, how could my heart stay still and not to want to go? But, the question was how could I go? Teacher said it costs forty dollars for each person. I am sure forty dollars won't be a problem for my classmates. But my parents are now worried sick for the eighty dollars they needed to buy the fertilizer. They would surely not waste forty dollars to let me spend a night in the mountain. No matter how hard it is, I decided to definitely go. Once I have made up my mind, nothing will turn me back. I am just that kind of a person.

The next day teacher Chang asked if I could make the trip. I told him without hesitation: 'No problem.' Teacher also asked me how would I come up with the money. I said quietly: "Even though my father won't give me any money, I can make some pinwheels to sell. I make great pinwheels, really." Teacher Chang didn't say anything, just gently patted my head as if to encourage me.

I started to get busy making pinwheels right after I got home from school. First I scraped the bamboo blades as thin as I could so that the wheels would be so light that they would start turning with the slightest wind. I put in extra work to add a whistle on each pinwheel. When kids blow on the whistle they can also look up to the sky and dream beautiful dreams. I bought paper of various colors with all the money I have ever saved. I can make colorful pinwheels and stick them all on a straw stick. That way the pinwheels will look absolutely more attractive.

In less than a week, I made twenty pinwheels. I stuck them all on a big straw stick and kept it safe in my tiny room. They looked beautiful! I didn't expect the sale of pinwheels would be so smooth.

A friendly looking stranger came to my house one Friday after school. He offered to buy all of my pinwheels. He said he would pay three dollars for a pinwheel without whistle and three dollars and fifty cents for one with a whistle. I sold him my entire stock. I stashed the seventy dollars worth of crisp bills under my pillow and started to

dream about the joyous time I would have on the mountain. This would be my first time ever to participate in any class activity. I moved around the house and tried forever to get ready and out of the door. When I finally got to school, the class had already assembled in the schoolyard. The red flag was flapping in the wind as if to welcome me. As I got closer, the scene made me speechless. Each one of my classmates, including teacher Chang, was holding a pinwheel that I have made. They started to blow the whistle on the pinwheel when they saw me. The pleasant sound echoed through the entire schoolyard. Staring at the turning wheels, listening to the pleasing sound of the bamboo whistles, my eyes suddenly became blurry and tears streamed down my face.

RURAL TEACHERS NEED LOVE: A SPECIAL REPORT

By Qu Yan-yue, Segang Zhen Junior Secondary School, Luoshan County, Henan
Translated by Josephine Pun

I have been a primary and middle school teacher in a remote mountainous area for almost 20 years. My personal experience tells me: rural teachers need love.

My school lies in the hinterland of the Dabie Mountain, along the border between the provinces of Henan and Hubei. The high mountain with steep slopes prohibits easy access and information exchange. With little natural resources, people in the mountains lead a monotonous life day in and day out. Children need to walk long distances to go to school, especially when they move onto the township middle school. Unable to sustain the hardship, many children drop out. Parents who can afford it try every means to send their children to urban areas. The rural school is left with children with uneven standards. Under these circumstances, one can imagine what pressure is placed on the rural teachers.

Compared with teachers in the urban areas, rural teachers face much more difficulties in preparing for lessons, researching for instructional material, correcting students' work papers or providing guidance to students. They have limited teaching material and facilities. They are burdened with additional responsibilities in managing the boarding students. Yet rural teachers are paid so poorly it's hard for them to remain motivated. Many young teachers have left the profession, to fulfill their dreams elsewhere under more favorable conditions. Can you say they're wrong? A colleague of mine, a core member of the school who has received numerous commendations, was preparing for marriage three years ago. But the parents of the prospective bride would not let their daughter live in the mountains, whereas he would not abandon the land that has raised him. They're still locked in a stalemate. Rural teachers need love.

Even though we may not be able to change the natural environment, we can improve the working conditions for rural teachers. It was often thought that investment in education consisted of a few school buildings. I don't think that's enough. The heart of the problem is: how to entice good teachers to come, and stay. For example, rural teachers could be compensated with higher pay than teachers in urban schools. Rural teachers should be supported with improved teaching facilities. And rural teachers need to be encouraged to upgrade their qualification and professional skills, to get "recharged" every now and then. At present, many urban schools are endowed with computers and such modern technology as internet facilities and multi-media equipment. These are beyond the wildest dreams of poor rural teachers. Nor is it easy for rural teachers to improve their skills on their own initiative, given their heavy workload and the paucity of information available to them. After a while, as their knowledge becomes outdated, rural teachers feel completely drained of all resources, and begin to lose their self-esteem.

Over the past decade, many rural schools have benefited greatly from the various SERC programs. I hope much more will be done. When an individual is satisfied in his needs, he finds the energy to work and to create. On the contrary, if he feels his value is not recognized and his potential cannot be fully realized, he will lose interest in everything around him. Rural teachers need love.

FOREVER A VILLAGE LAMP

By Wang Tuanjie, first place winner of "Teach to Inspire"
Translated by Josephine Pun

Life has been rather prosaic as a teacher for more than twenty years. Like running water, batches of students passed through my fingers: "good students" who made one proud, and "bad students" who gave one headaches. They left me only with memories, and wrinkles that silently crept up my forehead. Some people told me: you're like a candle, burning yourself to give others light. Actually, I am not that lofty and selfless, nor so tender and fragile as a candle. I am only a lamp in a poor rural village.

I graduated from teachers' college in 1981. Proud of my achievement, with my luggage in tote, I walked several dozen kilometers to the village primary school I was assigned to. My heart dropped when I saw the school. The crumbling house before me was full of holes and cracks; not a single pane of glass covered the black gaping windows, with remnants of paper flapping in the wind. A crowd of shabbily-dressed children stared from the door. I was shocked. I couldn't stop asking myself: Would this be the home for my future work and battle? Would these be the beautiful flowers I would cultivate? I wanted to run away. An elderly man took me into the house. He turned out to be the school principal. He said: "We heard that a

teachers' college graduate had been assigned to us. The children have been looking forward to your coming. This year's graduating class will be all yours. The school has bought an oil lamp especially for you. Don't be afraid at night. I'm here." I listened as I took over the new lamp, a warm current flowing through my chilled heart. That evening, I lit the lamp, and spent a sleepless night.

I began my class the next day, and thus began my teaching career for more than twenty years – years saddled with strings of bitterness and helplessness, but not lacking in joy and gratification. I can hardly forget my first lesson, for the fifth grade graduating class – the key class, the principal said, which would sit in the following year's township-wide joint examination for admission to middle school. As I stepped into the classroom for the first time, it was dark inside. The desks were of uneven height, the benches of uneven length. A wooden blackboard, streaked all over with chalk marks, had two cracks in the middle as wide as the chalk itself. The pupils sat according to their height, their clothes gloomy, the boys mostly bare-footed. Rural children being timid, it was very quiet in the room. Only the children's black and bright eyes sparkled with life and spirit. It was this sparkle that strengthened my confidence to teach.

In the days that followed, I had no time for other thoughts. The days passed by quickly as I taught all day. All twenty-six students in fifth grade were put into one class. For lack of rural teachers, I taught all the subjects for the class. We called this system "total responsibility for the class" here. I was the class master as well as the guidance counselor. I taught the children not only language and mathematics but also music, physical education, and art. Sometimes I got all the children in the school together and taught them to sing a good song. At the end of the day, I was exhausted, but I felt relieved and happy when I saw the laughing face of the children.

In the evening, the children went home, and the old principal also left to take care of his family. As darkness fell, I finished washing by the stream gurgling in front of the school, and went back to my room. I lit the lamp, my only company in the quiet and lonely school ground. I sat down and started to prepare my lessons and correct students' work papers, finishing the work left over from the day. When I got tired, I stopped to drink some water, stretched myself, and then continued. Late at night, I turned down the lamp, ending a day's life, and slept.

In the morning, little birds at the window woke me up. A new day began. I stood in front of the window, watching the arrival of the pitiful and lovely children. The rural population being spread out, the students lived quite far from school. They walked long stretches of mountain roads to come to school. School started late in the morning, and closed early in the afternoon. Noontime was the best time for me to engage in common activities with the students. I would give them an extra lesson on culture

that they might not have learned well, or play something for them with the er-hu or flute, or tell them stories about the outside world, about electric lights, television and telephone. They would crowd around me with their eyes wide opened, as if the scenes were played right in front of their eyes.

When winter came, it was bitterly cold and windy in the mountains. The dilapidated classroom felt like an ice pit for the thinly-clad students. To make the classroom warmer, I found some old newspapers to mend the cracks in the walls, and with my own money bought some plastic film to cover the windows. At noon I boiled water for the students to eat with the rice. At that time, I was only a few years older than my students. I treated them as my younger brothers and sisters, and they looked upon me as their elder brother. We enjoyed a very harmonious and sincere relationship together. On Sundays, I often visited their families, drinking many a bowlful of their tea and eating much of their brown rice.

In those days, middle school education was not yet universal. Primary school graduates would only move on to middle school if they succeeded in the township-wide joint examination. For the future of the children, for the name of the school, and to prove myself, I was determined to get the best results. I did everything I could, putting in extra time and effort, helping the students to improve in all aspects in order to gain additional placements in middle school. "The harder the plowing and weeding, the better the crop." Our class got the best results in the joint examination, with an admission rate more than doubled the township average. Later, two students even got admitted to renowned universities.

I spent quite a few years at that primary school. One class left, and another class came. The oil lamp stayed with me, from evening till dawn. Even when electricity became available later in the school, I could not bear to throw away the lamp. It has not only accompanied me for many years, but also inspired me in some ways. Isn't my life just like this common oil lamp, giving light to others as it lights itself? For more than twenty years, I have been giving out my weak light to lead the students forward. So it will be in the days ahead. Though lonely and poor, I will never leave my post or my profession. I will gladly be a lamp that brightens the children's heart.

REPORT OF ESS TRIP TO GANSU, CHINA

By Sheau Wei Y. Chen, executive board member

The 28th Basic Education Annual Conference of the Education and Science Society (ESS), cosponsored by the Department of Education of Gansu Province, was held in Lanzhou, Gansu from July 1 – July 13, 2002. The Seminar was held at two locations with a total attendance of 600, including principals, teachers of elementary and junior

high schools, and administrators of local education agencies. Many of the participants came from rural schools, and were the recipients of ESS Adopt A Library and Financial Aid Programs.

Sixteen topics were covered at the Conference, including Basic Education; Education Reform in the US and Taiwan; Character Education in the US; Multiple Intelligence in Taiwan; Creative Teaching; Curriculum Design and Evaluation; Reading of Chinese Classics; Reading and the Brain; Early Childhood Education; AIDS Epidemic; WTO and its Challenge to Education in China, etc. All programs were well attended and well received by the participants. The audience was inspired by the wide range of topics covered at the Conference, and was empowered by the message they received.

Lt. Governor Li Chong-an of Gansu Province, an enthusiastic supporter of the Conference, considered it the most important event on basic education in Gansu Province. He commended the efforts of ESS and the overseas scholars in bringing the newest education theories and experience from the US and Taiwan, and made immeasurable impact on the educators in Gansu. He expressed his deepest appreciation to all speakers for their dedication.

The Conference is a success. Nevertheless, there is always room for improvement. Shorter lecture time, more hands-on workshops, for instance, should be taken into consideration when planning for the next conference – which another group of rural teachers and educators look forward to eagerly.

A THANK YOU SPEECH

*By Liu Xian-yin, a recipient of ESS financial aid, of Jintai Four Mountains High School, delivered on 7/14/2002 at the 28th Basic Education Annual Conference of the ESS, Lanzhou, Gansu
Translated by volunteer Bella Li / Photo, P.14, Chinese version*

Dear Uncles and Aunties of ESS:

How are you?

I am honored to represent 45 disadvantaged students from the Jintai County bordering the Tungeli desert, because I can finally express our sincere gratitude to you in person. Dear uncles and aunties, you have changed the fates of many disadvantaged children by offering your unselfish love and financial support. You are the kindest people in the world. I am delivering our deepest thanks to you on behalf of the parents and students and we shall never forget you.

Teacher Zhang Rui of the provincial educational bureau visited us many times in spite of the difficult commute. She encouraged us to study hard, to help in building up our hometown. She also brought with her the well wishes and financial support from uncles and aunties across the ocean. Our emotions were beyond words. We dreamt about seeing you and telling you how grateful we

feel! We know very well it is not easy to send us to school and we cherish the opportunities you have bestowed upon us. During the last three years, we have overcome challenges to forge ahead in our study. Whenever frustrated, we recall the touching encouragements you wrote us. These messages become the propelling force for us to tackle difficulties and move forward. Most of us have been considered “Outstanding in Character, Academics and Sports” by our school. We have established a long-term goal, confident in our future.

I am a child forsaken by fate many times. My parents are nearing 60. Dad suffers from chronic cataracts because medical attention was beyond our means at the earlier treatable stage. Mom is in poor health. My second older sister is mentally challenged. I am the only healthy one. Since there is no one to cultivate the several acres of land we own, we are renting it out and subsist on the grain paid as rental income. Many times I have complained against the inequity in life and the scorn of God. At age seven, I begged my Dad to send me to school when I watched the other kids on their way to school. Tears streamed down from my Dad’s eyes. We could not afford the tuition!! We all cried. Dad finally borrowed from our neighbors and I went to school. During the six years of elementary school, we had to borrow the tuition, and on many occasions I nearly had to drop out. With my hopes of attending junior high school diminishing, you extended your warm helping hands from across the ocean and saved me from worry and heartbreak. Ever since then, my parents have been in better spirits. They are telling everyone that we have met the living God among us.

I was moved most by the two letters from Auntie Tu Hong-lui. She said that if I keep on being outstanding in character and academics, she would keep on supporting me, until I can be on my own. She also included a \$20 bill in the letter for books and stationery. Our school produced a special billboard on this news. The kindness of Auntie Tu reached the heart of every student. Many schoolmates cast a look of admiration upon me. I feel I was indeed the fortunate one. I have completed the junior high years without letting Auntie down and passed the entrance examination to high school with high marks.

It is true that the path of life is rarely smooth. Yet nothing compares to the despair of not being able to afford education. With the support of ESS and the loving care of uncles and aunties, we feel more confident about attending senior high school, about furthering our study. Dear uncles and aunties, please allow me to assure you that we shall never forget your profound love and the mission that we shall in turn carry on. Just like the example you have set for us, we have determined to make good of ourselves, to contribute our energy to helping and caring for those in need.

I would like to speak for all the parents and students -- I wish you health, happiness and success!