



Foreword – Dr. Lungching Chiao, Executive Director of ESS/SERC

For the past 15 years, the Education and Science Society (ESS) has dedicated its efforts to help improve education in rural China through the *Support Education in Rural China (SERC)* Program Series. With contribution from many caring people who have generously funded and painstakingly implemented the SERC programs, we have made visible and remarkable achievements. Like drizzling rain that waters the earth with its timely moisture, each small project brings targeted, effective and sustaining benefits to clusters of rural villages across the land. Like spring shoots after the rain, project outcomes have grown and multiplied.

At least 70 percent of China's population are peasants who toil the land using traditional methods that bring them little return. In many rural areas, parents cannot afford to send their children to school, while schools do not have funds to pay teachers' salaries. Visitors often see gifted children wasting in dilapidated and crowded classrooms that lack basic teaching facilities and equipment. They see teachers trying to do a good job but have no reference material or opportunities to upgrade their skills. Improving the quality of education in rural China would require huge amounts of funding and human resources. It demands not only substantial Government investment but also the contribution and participation of many concerned individuals and organizations.

ESS is a non-profit intermediary service organization without any funds of its own. It plans and manages the SERC Program Series according to the educational needs in rural China, and supervises program implementation through its representatives in China. Sponsors contribute to the programs they select through ESS, which in turn provides regular feedback to the sponsors. Each program's scale and pace of development depend on the amount of contribution it receives. All ESS personnel within and outside China are volunteers, whose only reward lies in the outcomes of the programs.

Not long ago, one of the early founders of ESS sent us a set of photographs that juxtaposed snapshots of recent urban developments in China and disturbing scenes of rural poverty, together with a note: *"I believe education is the only means to bring about fundamental changes in the life of the peasants and reduce poverty in China's rural areas. For this, I would like to thank all the ESS volunteers who have for many years persistently devoted their time and efforts to education in rural China."*

I, too, would like to thank all the people who have supported the SERC programs through the years. Without your encouragement, your endorsement and your contributions, we would not have been able to do much. The achievements of the SERC programs belong to everyone. Education is a long-term investment. Only with everyone's concern and support can we hope to make a difference in the quality of education in China's rural areas, and in the life of the poor peasants and their children.

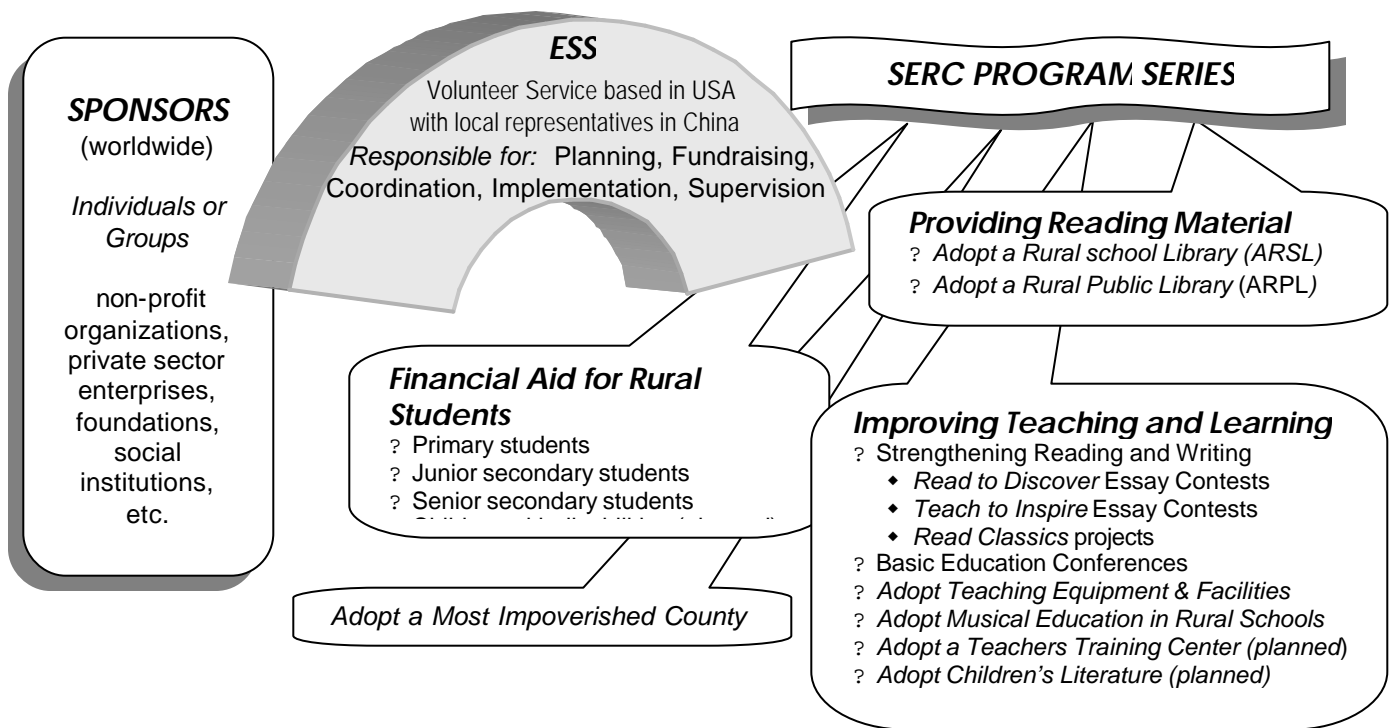
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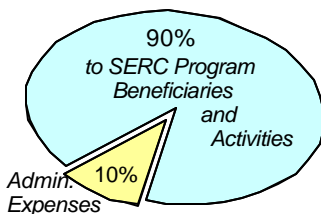
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Support Education in Rural China (SERC) Program Series A Unique Operational Model



The SERC programs are funded by private donations from individual or group sponsors, who may designate their contributions to specific program activities or authorize ESS to allocate the funds according to need. The flexible structure enables sponsors to support rural education in China through a range of activities and funding options. Sponsors receive feedback documentation for each activity they support, and are encouraged to correspond directly with and visit the schools and/or students they have supported.

ESS functions as a bridge between the sponsors and the beneficiaries of the SERC programs. It is responsible for program planning, fundraising, coordination, implementation and supervision. It sets the rules and regulations for each SERC program. It pilots all new programs and makes necessary adjustments and amendments before taking them to an expanded scale. Program implementation is facilitated by local representatives in China according to rules and regulations set by ESS. They work with local educational institutions and communities to identify schools and students to be supported by the SERC programs, provide liaison and support through every step of program implementation, and ensure that the targeted funds from ESS are handled and used properly. All ESS staff in China and the US are volunteers who have devoted their time and service without pay. They are mostly professionals and experienced educators.



Distribution of Donated Funds. ESS has been able to keep an extremely low expense-to-donated funds ratio because it has no paid staff and does not rent any office space. At least 85-90% of donated funds go directly to the beneficiaries as scholarship awards or for the purchase of library books and other equipment or facilities. About 5% of donations for the ARSL projects support activities to improve teaching and learning in rural schools (e.g., essay contests and basic education conferences). Only 10% or less of donations are used for

administrative expenses in China and in the USA, comprising the costs of postage, printing, telephone and fax communication, and transportation for local representatives in China.

15 years of Sustained Efforts to Promote Education in China's Rural Areas

From its experience with the SERC programs over the past 15 years, ESS finds that the success of education projects depends not on speedy implementation but on steady, practical and sustained efforts in development. Starting with the provision of reading material for a few rural libraries in 1988, the SERC programs have grown to encompass a series of activities that benefit many poor rural areas across China.

While improvements are needed in various aspects of education in rural China, the SERC programs have been designed around three main themes: (a) providing reading and teaching material to rural areas; (b) improving the quality of teaching and learning in rural schools; and (c) supporting educational opportunities for rural children. In practice, many projects work across all three themes. The major activities and results of the SERC program series are summarized in the following table.

SERC Program Series 1988-2003 Major Activities and Results	
Providing Reading Material	
✧ <i>Adopt a Rural School Library</i> (1989-2003)	3,279
✧ <i>Adopt a Rural Public Library</i> (1988-2003)	39
Improving Teaching and Learning	
✧ Essay contests and publications	
▪ <i>Read to Discover</i> (1996-2003)	8 th year
▪ <i>Teach to Inspire</i> (1999-2003)	5 th year
✧ <i>Read Classics</i> projects (2001-2003)	4 provinces
✧ Basic Education Conferences (1993-2002) held in 17 provinces	28 times
✧ <i>Adopt Teaching Equipment and Facilities</i> (2002-03)	
▪ Laboratory equipment	6 schools
▪ Teachers training VCDs	12 schools
▪ Audiovisual equipment	8 schools
▪ Classroom desks and chairs	14 schools
▪ Students beds for boarding facility	1 school
✧ <i>Adopt Musical Education in Rural Schools</i> (2002-03)	
▪ Musical instruments in 12 provinces	60 schools
And in most impoverished counties	14 schools
Financial Aid for Rural Students	
Total no. of scholarship awards (1997-2003)	6,140
Of which: Primary students (PS)	1,049
Junior secondary students (JSS)	4,455
Senior secondary students (SSS)	636
<i>Adopt a Most Impoverished County</i> (2003)	6 counties
Special Projects	
✧ Tree planting project in 1 school (Nei Monggol)	
✧ Soya bean workshop and pig farm in 1 school (Hebei)	
✧ Arts/skills training in 2 <i>Most Impoverished Counties</i> (Gansu)	

Having worked in China's rural areas for many years, ESS also finds that an effective mode of operation is to run a cluster of SERC programs in selected poor rural schools, which then spread the benefits outward to the remote and sparsely populated mountainous areas in their vicinity. This approach seems to be especially appropriate for schools in the very poor counties, where concerted efforts have to be made under several SERC programs, including the provision of reading material, scholarships, laboratory equipment, teaching aids and classroom facilities. The *Adopt a Most Impoverished County* program, initiated in 2002/03 with donations from the Raybin Q. Wong Foundation, has taken this approach. This program was implemented in six counties in four provinces (Gansu, Ningxia, Shanxi, and Nei Monggol) in 2003.

Where necessary, feasible and cost-effective, ESS has supported special projects initiated either by sponsors or by the rural schools. These have included an environmental protection (tree-planting) project in Nei Monggol, a school-based income generating project in

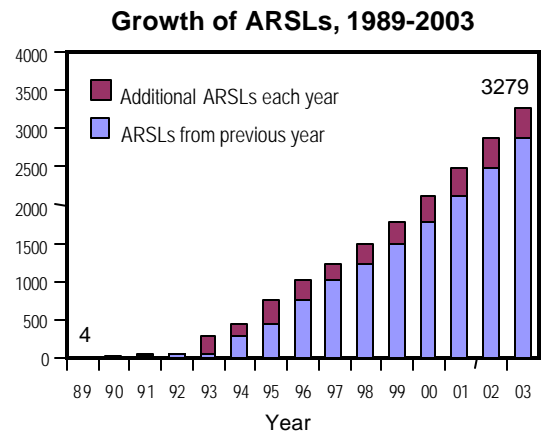
Hebei and two vocational training projects for girls in Gansu.

The three major areas of SERC program activities are described in further detail in the following pages.

SERC Program Series I - Providing Reading Material

Reading and writing are basic skills in school and in work. To improve their quality of life, China's rural population must learn to read and write. However, books and other reading material are hardly available in most rural areas. Rural schools are generally poorly equipped. Many rural students do not have the basic textbooks, not to mention other books for supplementary reading. Rural teachers lack teaching and reference material. Rural residents have little access to information that could help them raise productivity and improve the quality of their daily life, such as knowledge about hygiene, methods of cultivation, and processing of agricultural produce. In view of this situation, ESS started two projects in the late 1980s to provide library books to rural schools and public libraries in China.

❖ **Adopt a Rural School Library (ARSL).** With generous contribution from many sponsors, the number of ARSLs has grown from four in 1989 to 3,279 in 2003. They are now spread across all provinces in China, with the largest concentration in the poor rural areas in the southwest, northwest, central and northern regions (see table on the distribution of ARSLs). From the feedback information received from the ARSL schools, we see how much the books have meant to the students and teachers in the schools, as well as the local communities (see excerpts from thank you letters on the next page). As many of the books previously provided have become worn or damaged over the years, ESS is starting a second round of sponsorship for ARSL schools that have effectively used the library books.



❖ **Adopt a Rural Public Library (ARPL).** As of 2003, the ARPL project team based in New York has helped rural counties set up 39 ARPLs in Guizhou and Guangxi provinces in the southwest region. Each library has 5,000 to 15,000 volumes and about 10 different types of periodicals, mostly on farming and agricultural technology. The ARPLs are used mainly by local students and government workers, as well as some peasants. They work together with local schools to facilitate book circulation and hold reading and writing competitions. They assist in locally-run cultural events and agricultural training activities with relevant material and information. They also help set up village-level libraries by providing or sharing books and resources.

Setting up ARSLs. ESS provincial representatives work with local institutions and communities to identify schools that meet ESS selection criteria, help the schools through the process of application and signing agreements, guide them in the selection and purchase of suitable locally published books, and ensure the proper distribution of ESS allocated funds. ARSL schools stamp the sponsor's name on each book, catalog the books and put them on library shelves which are regularly open to students, teachers and local residents. After a year's operation, the ARSL schools provide feedback information via ESS to the sponsor, including receipts and lists of books purchased, thank you letters, book reports and photographs of the opening and use of the library. A contribution of US\$600 supports one ARSL. 85% of contributions are used for the purchase of books, 5% for essay contests and teachers training conferences, and 10% for administrative expenses in the US and China.

Setting up ARPLs. The ARPL project team reviews proposals initiated by local government agencies in poor rural areas. Project agreements are signed with the local government and cultural agencies responsible for library management. The local government is responsible for the provision and maintenance of library space and facilities, with a full-time qualified library manager. ESS supports the purchase of books for the ARPL in an initial five-year period, after which continuation of funding is guaranteed by the local government. ESS representatives in Guangxi and Guizhou assist in research on local conditions, handling of funds and purchase of library books. Each ARPL usually requires a contribution of US\$6,000, which may be remitted in full or by installments (initially US\$2,000 and subsequently US\$1,000 annually for four years). 95% of contributions are

used to purchase books, the remaining 5% for administrative expenses in China. Sponsors receive feedback information including receipts from ESS.

“The Books have changed me, my family, my school and my village”

-- excerpts from thank you letters sent to sponsors from students, parents, teachers, and local residents

☞ “I have found many of my favorite authors among the donated books. Books on popular science have broadened my horizon. Books on philosophy and literature have helped me develop a healthy attitude. Your sponsorship brings improvement not only to me and my school mates, but also to society as a whole.” - *Wang Pei, student, No. 2 Secondary School, He Tian District, Xinjiang. ARSL sponsor: Liu Meili (US)*

☞ “I am an ordinary peasant, spending all day toiling with earth and mud. I seldom read, and there was hardly anything to read. Inhabitants of the village are all Hui people. Ignorance prevailed. However, things have begun to change since our primary school received books donated by Mr. Tian Jiabing. Villagers have started to learn scientific cultivation methods and understand market economy. I myself have also learned some new concepts: that husband and wife should love and respect each other. The donated books have brought a refreshing breeze through our village, slowly opening up our stuffed minds.” - *Ma Caiming, parent, Shagou Township Primary School, Pingan County, Qinghai. ARSL sponsor: K. P. Tin Foundation (Hong Kong)*

☞ “Teachers must have a reserve of knowledge and skills, and must continuously upgrade themselves to keep up with the fast changes in knowledge and technology. In this remote and backward mountainous area with poor information channels, the books you gave us have helped us substantially. As an example, I adopted the method recommended in the book, *New Curriculum and Assessment Reform*, to assess the performance of students in an open, multi-dimensional, and comprehensive way. This has stimulated intense interest among the students as they enjoy their learning experience, seeing their own achievements and growth along the way.” - *Shen Yanan, teacher, Longshan Primary School, Kelaqin Banner, Chifeng Municipality, Nei Monggol. ARSL sponsor: Wang Tianhao (US)*

☞ “In the hinterland of the Daba Mountains, we did not use any scientific method to raise pigs or sheep. One day my child brought me a book, *Rural Pig Farms*, from the school library, and helped me read through it. I learned about ways to rear and manage the pigs and about the prevention and curing of diseases. I wished I had come

across this book much earlier. I passed on my newly gained knowledge to my neighbors, who were all full of praise and wanted to borrow the book to read. I used the methods and techniques described in the book to fatten the pigs and to prevent and cure common diseases. This year I was able to sell 13 fat pigs, netting an income of Y2,300. Next year I plan to expand the scale of the pig farm. I think I will get a good return.” - *Liu Jiafu, villager, third unit, Bayi Village, Sangyuan Township, Xixiang County, Shaanxi. ARSL sponsor: Wang Tianhao and Zhu Wenhui (US)*

Distribution of ARSLs, 1989-2003

Region	Province/ Municipality	ARSLs supported by sponsors from:				Total No. of ARSLs
		USA	Taiwan	Hong Kong	Main- land China	
Southwest	Chongqing	9	15	14		38
	Guangxi	89	74	98		261
	Guizhou	41	56	35		132
	Sichuan	88	29	43		160
	Tibet	26	9	4		39
	Yunnan	118	53	38	4	213
Northwest	Gansu	121	68	43		232
	Nei Monggol	113	33	96		242
	Ningxia	32	23	36		91
	Qinghai	82	39	37		158
	Xinjiang	77	35	10	2	124
Northeast	Jilin	36	3	6		45
	Heilongjiang	3		3		6
	Liaoning	8	2	2		12
Central	Anhui	91	36	91	6	224

	Hubei	53	6	35	94	Guangdong	37	4	24	65
	Hunan	76	50	49	175	Hainan	14	3	10	27
	Jiangxi	44	24	40	108	Jiangsu	7	33	4	44
North	Beijing	7	7	22	38	Shandong	38	43	4	85
	Hebei	38	42	36	116	Zhejiang	46	3	2	51
	Henan	99	71	70	240	Taiwan		6		6
	Shaanxi	48	19	81	148	Total	1,483	832	950	14
	Shanxi	41	38	17	96					3,279
Coastal	Fujian	1	8		9					

SERC Program Series II - Improving Teaching and Learning

In order to enhance the quality of education for children in poor rural areas, many SERC program activities have focused specifically on motivating students to learn, upgrading the quality and skills of teachers, and improving the overall learning and teaching environment in rural schools. Starting with the first “Summer Institute on Education” in 1993 which offered seminars and workshops for school principals and teachers from rural China, this group of activities has continued to expand to meet the needs of rural students, teachers and educators.

❖ **Strengthening reading and writing.** To encourage students and teachers to make full use of the books provided under the ARSL projects, the *Read to Discover* and the *Teach to Inspire* essay contests have been held annually since 1996 and 1999, respectively. Collections of outstanding essays are published each year and sent to all ARSL schools. In this report, we are happy to share with you the two essays that won first place awards in these contests in 2003 (pp. 10-12). In addition, the *Read Classics* projects, initiated in 2001 and now implemented in selected schools in four provinces (Jilin, Nei Monggol, Gansu and Qinghai), encourage children to recite classical poems, which help to improve their appreciation of Chinese culture and use of the Chinese language.

? The *Read to Discover* essay contests (the 8th in 2003) encourage students to read, to think freely and to write down what they think. Participation in the essay contests has grown rapidly, with over 10,000 entries from all over China last year. Out of these, 2,300 were selected by provincial representatives and sent to ESS for competition in the final round. Over 60 Chinese school teachers, writers and professors in the Washington, D.C. area helped review the essays ESS received. Through the last few years, reviewers have gladly noted that the essay submissions have become increasingly lively and creative, with fresh ideas and interesting plots. They show the minds of rural children actively opening up, writing freely and honestly of their thoughts and feelings.

? The *Teach to Inspire* essay contests (the 5th in 2003) encourage teachers to reach out and share their findings and experience in teaching and learning. Many rural teachers live a hard life. They are paid poorly and very often irregularly. Many of them stay in schools in mountainous areas where visits to and from the outside world are few and far between. Despite such hardship, most rural teachers take their work seriously. Constrained by poor teaching facilities and lacking resources, they strive to pass on basic knowledge to the children, relying only on chalk and minimal textbooks. Unfortunately, their work often remains unrecognized and forgotten. The *Teach to Inspire* essay contests have, on the one hand, provided a window of opportunity for teachers to write about their experience, and on the other hand, opened our eyes to their world. From their essay submissions, we see how keenly they observe the children learn and how painstakingly they try to figure out effective ways to teach – how hard they struggle to achieve outcomes, and how much they deserve recognition and support!

❖ **Conferences on Basic education.** Since 1993, ESS has worked with educational institutions in China to organize conferences in one or two provinces each year for basic education researchers, administrators, principals and teachers. Professional educators from outside China are invited to share their knowledge and experience in pedagogy, education reform and current trends in educational development. The objectives are to enhance professional knowledge and promote mutual understanding and cooperation. To date, 28 conferences have been held jointly with 17 provinces and municipalities. Papers presented in the conferences are included in the *Teach to Inspire* essay collections published each year, so that rural school principals and teachers who were unable to attend

the conference can read the presentations. In addition, ESS also puts together reference material for teachers, as well as teaching aids such as charts for classrooms.

❖ ***Adopt Teaching Equipment and Facilities*** projects have been a part of special assistance packages under the *Adopt a Most Impoverished County* program. Support given in 2003 included laboratory equipment (6 schools), classroom desks and chairs (14 schools), training VCDs for teachers (12 schools), and audiovisual equipment for teaching and training purposes (8 schools). In addition, one school in a mountainous area in Hebei Province was provided children's bedding for its boarding facilities.

❖ ***Adopt Musical Education in Rural Schools*** projects, initiated in 2002 in recognition of the role that music plays in children's development, have provided small packages of musical instruments and teaching material to 60 rural schools in 12 provinces. A donation of US\$300 supports the purchase of instruments and teaching material in one school. In addition, 14 schools under the *Adopt a Most Impoverished County* program also received local traditional musical instruments. Feedback from these schools indicate overwhelming response from the children, who eagerly participate in the music lessons and activities during and after school.

New projects in the Planning Stage

➤ ***Adopt a Teachers Training Center*** projects will provide regular training to teachers in remote rural areas to help upgrade their skills and professional standards. The training will not only help teachers gradually meet government requirements for in-service training, but also help them understand and adjust to the new curriculum in basic education now being implemented in China. ESS will work closely with county educational institutions, which will provide the venue, organize the teachers for training, and schedule the training courses. Sponsors can contribute to support the purchase of training equipment (such as projectors, computers, screens, video tapes of model teaching, etc.), travel and boarding expenses for rural teachers to take courses in the training centers, and/or expenses for training teams to visit the remote and mountainous areas and give lessons on site.

➤ ***Adopt Rural Children's Literature*** projects will develop reading material specially tailored to the interests and needs of rural children in China. As a starting point, we have found many outstanding essays in the *Read to Discover* contests that could perhaps be developed into publications of children's literature. We call on those who are interested in exploring this potential to work with us on this project.

The Crucial Link: ESS Representatives in China

Every SERC project results from the dedication of ESS provincial representatives, who have devoted freely their time and service to the programs. Their work is long and tedious, but crucial in every step. They help identify the schools and students that need support, guide them through the application process, help them understand the operational procedures, ensure that ESS funds are received and used properly, advise on the purchase of books and other material, collect feedback documentation and send them via ESS to the sponsors. Their persistence over the past 15 years has ensured the effective implementation of the SERC programs, winning the trust of many sponsors and resulting in a growing number of projects. We share with you below the observations from two of our ESS representatives.

☞ "Compared with the coastal regions, Anhui is relatively backward, with over 20 counties below the poverty line. The province has 224 ARSL schools, 118 scholarship recipients and 11 schools granted musical instruments under the SERC programs. Recently I was deeply touched when I visited various rural schools. Some schools were still holding classes in tents after summer floods took away their classrooms. I was told by one principal that when schools were closed in the spring under the threat of [the deadly contagious disease] SARS, the ARSL books helped the students and teachers learn at home. I also saw that the schools which received musical instruments were filled with excitement and joy as they set up small bands and held concerts. In my opinion, how well an ARSL project is implemented depends largely on how much a school principal respects his/her work. A good principal not only promotes the effective use of library books by teachers and students but also encourages local residents to borrow books from the school, thus creating a lively reading and learning environment, eventually bringing about social and economic changes in the local

community. However, the starting point is having books in schools! This has been made possible in many rural schools through contributions from overseas sponsors of the SERC programs over the past 15 years. Their efforts will have far reaching impact on the education of China's rural poor." -- *Anhui Provincial Representative: Ou Ling, Anhui Ass. for the Cooperation and Promotion of International NGOs*

☰ "In the nine years I worked as Xinjiang's provincial representative, 124 schools have been aided under the SERC programs. This year saw 14 more schools with ARSLs, 3 schools getting musical instruments, and 29 students granted scholarships. For the first time in their life, many children in these remote and poor areas saw books printed in color. Teachers now have much more teaching resources than one piece of chalk and one teacher's book. The library books have also opened the window for some local residents to learn about ways to develop their income-earning potential. Moved by the spirit of the SERC programs, the bookstores in Urumqi have increased their discounts for ARSL schools from 5% to 12%." - *Xinjiang Provincial Representative: Zhu Yanqun, Xinjiang Education and Science Research Institute*

SERC Program Series III - Financial Aid for Rural Students

Many rural children miss the opportunity to go to school for various reasons. In most cases, poor parents cannot afford the schooling expenses. In some families, children have to stay home to help with the work in the house or in the fields. In the sparsely populated mountainous areas where schools are spread out and transport is not available, children have difficulty walking to school everyday. Among the nomadic peoples, children's schooling is often interrupted as their families move around.

ESS initiated the *SERC Scholarship Programs* in 1997 to help children in the poor and remote rural areas in China to complete at least a basic education. The scholarships mainly pay for their books, miscellaneous school fees and/or room and board. A total of 6,140 scholarship grants were awarded over the past seven years, of which 1,049 were for primary school students (PS: grades 1-6), 4,455 for junior secondary students (JSS: Grades 7-9), and 636 for senior secondary students (SSS: grades 10-12). The number of students assisted has grown from 33 in 1997 to 2,561 in 2003, spread over 22 provinces and autonomous regions (see table below). Assistance efforts last year have concentrated in several inland provinces, particularly Gansu, Nei Monggol, Ningxia, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Shanxi. The six counties which have been included in the first phase of the *Adopt a Most Impoverished County* program are located in four of these provinces (Gansu, Nei Monggol, Ningxia and Shanxi).

Distribution of SERC Scholarship Recipients 1997-2003

Region	Province/ Municipality	1997			1998			1999			2000			2001			2002			2003			Total
		PS	JSS	SSS	PS	JSS	SSS	PS	JSS	SSS	PS	JSS	SSS	PS	JSS	SSS	PS	JSS	SSS	PS	JSS	SSS	
Southwest	Chongqing				10			22			42											74	
	Guangxi	8			24			59		4	70		53	15		18	24					39	314
	Guizhou				10			41			41		31										123
	Sichuan				10			31			61		70	10		44	23						249
	Tibet										20		59			102					123	8	312
	Yunnan	3			8			44			86		140			134	11	36	124	31			617
Northwest	Gansu	6			77	28		73		50	94		50	105	16	170	169	57	250	409	94	1,648	
	Nei Monggol									40		62			61	12		80	298	68		621	
	Ningxia																	40	120	20		180	
	Qinghai				10			23			38		76	5		141	13		144	39		489	
	Xinjiang															10			29			39	
Northeast	Liaoning									1		1			1							3	
Central	Anhui	8			21			13				45		20	58		30	88				283	
	Hubei									20		20		11	20			22	20			113	
	Hunan							6		6				30								42	
	Jiangxi							1														1	
North	Hebei						84								84							168	
	Henan	8			18			38		49	1	70	3		80	8		90	17			382	
	Shaanxi									25		42			46	6		58	11			188	
	Shanxi																	40	120	20		180	
Coastal	Guangdong																	38	6	1		45	
	Hainan									9		9			3				7			28	
<i>Total</i>		33			77	139		84	351		50	582	25	50	763	69	274	908	174	514	1,679	368	6,140
Total by Year		33			216			435		657		882		1,356		2,561							

➤ *Scholarship program for rural children with disabilities.* This new program being planned by ESS will focus on the special needs of rural children with disabilities, providing assistance for them to go to school to learn skills in an enabling environment, so that they will be prepared to participate in society with confidence and self-respect. We hope to receive the support of sponsors for this program.

From SERC Scholarship Recipients – Letters and Words of Appreciation

-- We have been deeply moved by the stories of many scholarship recipients and their families. We share with you below some of the recent ones we found amid the feedback documentation sent to sponsors.

☒ "Dear Uncle Peter and Auntie Wu: In a twinkling, you have helped me complete 4 years of school. Sometimes, when I saw on the way home my old classmates who could no longer go to school, I was filled with emotion. I watched their small bodies struggling up the hill under the scorching sun, carrying on their backs heavy bundles of twigs. I felt an urge to cry, wondering why life was so cruel. Thinking of them, how can I not treasure the opportunity you have given me? My parents toil for a bare subsistence day in and day out from dawn till dusk, seeing nothing but the yellow earth. I must make a breakthrough in their way of life. Development of this backward village will depend on us -- my generation. There's so much I'd like to say to you, but I will only say this for the moment: 'Thank you. I will try my very best.'" -- *Kui Li (11th grader, No. 1 Secondary School, Xiangyun County, Yunnan; sponsored by Wu Liyu and Peter Rubin)*

☒ "School opening was approaching day by day. Father lay in bed sick. Mother cried as she worked in and out of the house. As my friends in the village happily went into town shopping for school supplies, I was full of anxiety wondering how to pay for my school fees. Mother took me to school, crying as she begged for help. I was allowed to attend classes pending payment of school fees. A few weeks later, I was able to pay my fees with the 600 yuan I received from the ESS representative. When I went home, my mother broke into tears; my father got off bed so fast he nearly fell. I was so excited tears almost rolled down my face. But I told myself not to cry. I must be strong to be worthy of the support and expectations of my sponsors. I must reward them with the most excellent results." -- *Xu Jianmei (8th grader, Dandianxiang Secondary School, Huangchuan County, Henan; sponsored by the Raybin Q. Wong Foundation)*

☒ "I will be graduating in a year. I remember how I cried when I could not go onto secondary school. Then, your help came. Nothing can take the place of what I have learned with your support. Whether or not I will hear from you in the future, I will always remember you and wish you health and happiness." -- *Zhang Yaolian (12th grader, Tiandong Teachers College for National Minorities, Baise Municipality, Longlin County, Guangxi; sponsored by the Suyou Foundation)*

☒ "I am a girl born in a gully surrounded by hills. The world beyond was a distant dream. My mother was always ill, constantly on medication. My father toiled on the land, his hands thickened with calluses and his eyes sunken with exhaustion. To lessen the financial burden on my parents, I dropped out of school. Just when I felt lost about the future, I received your support. When I once again entered school with my school bag and sat in the spacious classroom, I felt I was the happiest person on earth." -- *Zhu Guian (11th grader, No. 4 Huzhu Secondary School, Huzhu County, Qinghai; sponsored by the Raybin Q. Wong Foundation)*

☒ "We would like to thank our overseas benefactors far away. With your support, we have been able to continue our schooling and move forward. We have enjoyed opportunities that so many children in the poor mountainous areas in China could only dream about. You have brought us light and hope. We will endeavor to carry this light forward, and to make it brighter far and wide." -- *student representative at scholarship award ceremony, No. 3 Secondary School, Tianzhu County, Gansu (a total of six students sponsored by: Xu Liji, Wang Shouyi, Sun Changyou, Shen Guiying, Hu Wensheng and Pan Chengfen)*

Setting up Scholarship Awards: from Sponsors to Recipients ESS representatives work with local institutions and school communities to identify the students in need of assistance. Detailed implementation arrangements vary from province to province. ESS representatives may send the scholarship funds directly to the student recipient or to his/her school. Schools keep the scholarship funds in special accounts from which withdrawals are made each term to pay for the student's books and miscellaneous school fees. ESS representatives verify that the scholarship recipients sign for these expenses, that the parents are informed, and that the funds are used for their intended purposes.

A contribution of US\$100 supports one junior secondary student for a year. 90% percent of the contribution pays for the student's books, miscellaneous school fees and/or room and board; the remaining 10% is used for ESS administrative expenses in the US and China (postage, telephone and fax communication, transportation, etc.). Contributors may also sponsor senior secondary students (at US\$180 per year) or primary students (at US\$25 per year). Sponsors receive via ESS feedback information including personal details of the scholarship recipients, signed receipts, thank you letters, study reports and transcripts.

First place winner, 8th Read to Discover Essay Contest, 2003

Winter in the Loess Highland

by Ran Cai-e

(12th grader, Three Forks High school, Zhenyuan County, Gansu Province)

? It is forever overcast in the loess highland in winter, dark and gloomy. When it snows, it is never more than a few flurries here and there, never a good snowfall. The surrounding mountains are barren, with little grass and fewer trees. Birds may not chirp in these mountains but the northwest wind does howl, pushing and pulling the dried weeds and bare branches that stand in its way, making the chilly winter even more desolate. More disturbing is the incessant noise from the farming machinery amidst the heavy sand dust in the wind. Nor have I ever seen any rabbits in the mountains, though I have heard that people often go up there with their guns to hunt for them.

If one wants to go ice-skating, there is no place to go. Even though the river is frozen, the stretch of ice is narrow and the river is not frozen solid. There is therefore practically nothing going on along the river.

By contrast, something interesting is happening in the valley at dusk. There is no jingle of camel bells, only the murmuring of running brooks, and the calling of the shepherds to their goats. There is no grand vista with white clouds against the blue sky over a green prairie, only a scenery of goats trying to feed on the roots of dried grasses on the barren mountain. Yet basked in the glow of the golden sunset, the goats look like moving spirits. When the last ray of sunlight fades away, the shepherds coax the goats home, and the goats unwillingly drag along,

leaving behind their voice of protest "Baa, baa..." on the winding trails. Just at this juncture, children come home from school, running, laughing and frolicking, breaking the stillness in the mountains. A dog joins in the excitement, dashing to the door barking. Still, this is not the most interesting part in the loess highland. That takes place in the home.

People in the loess highland make their homes in the caves tucked away in the loess hill, not in well-lit, spacious houses. It is dim but warm in the caves. Family members gather and chat while tending to their handiwork. Women put their winter days to good use by making shoes out of fabric and knitting

sweaters, two skills mastered by all girls growing up on the loess highland. The girls are artistic in their designs and neat in their executions. They turn out comfortable and long lasting shoes and their sweaters look better than those from the market place. The elders sit on the heated brick bed, smoking their shiny copper pipes polished with age, making hissing sounds while spinning tales of their own lives and from hearsay. Out from the corners of their mouths come the wisps of smoke which spiral up to the ceiling of the cave, making the lighting even dimmer. Yet the overall effect is a feeling of coziness and warmth.

A guest is usually offered a seat of honor on the heated brick bed, served a bowl of piping hot egg noodles and a few dishes of

preserved meat. It may be no more than a basic meal by outside standards, yet the people in the loess highland consider it a sumptuous treat for guests. After dinner, the guest and host sit around chatting about daily life and things in the past and present. Especially for the elders, the discussions mostly center around the virtuous heroes in the history that they learn about from the Qin opera.

When it comes to the Qin opera, there is much to talk about. From the very moment it came into existence in the loess highland, the Qin opera became a unique cultural scene among the people. It is referred to as "the original theater". People here are all for "putting up the show", meaning contracting a traveling troupe to perform in their town. Many would travel tens of miles to the town center only to see the show. Older people revel in watching the show. Children who may not fully understand the plots tag along just for fun.

After enjoying the show to their hearts' content, the elders would go home and tell the stories to their children. Some of them can hardly read, but they can tell the stories in the most vivid ways. Children spend their charmed childhood nurtured by these tales of legendary heroes, growing up with a strong attachment to the Qin opera. Perhaps this is how the passion for the Qin opera manages to perpetuate in the loess highland.

Once I saw a four year old twirling and waving a stick playfully, singing an unintelligible tune.

"What are you singing?" I asked.

"I am singing the opera."

"Which opera?"

"Singing the *Guan Yu*."

"Why *Guan Yu*?"

"Because he is good and invincible."

While the child was mocking the tune without knowing the lyric, it is quite a different story with the shepherds. They would raise their voices and sing at the top of their lungs, very much in tune with the Qin opera. They are singing the songs of the mysteries of the loess highland, its ancient past, its vicissitudes through the ages.

Nightfall is creeping up. The cold moonlight sprinkles onto the mountains in the company of the northwestern wind. The activities in the day have quieted down. In the moonlight, only the bare branches are making long shadows like old men's hands on the mountains. And the wind, whispering through the grass, is trying to tell a wistful story.

Epilogue. From the expansive green pasture of the grand Bayinbuluke prairie, I have come to this loess highland surrounded by mountains and interspersed with a myriad of ravines and canyons. Everything here is new and strange to me, the buffaloes plowing the field, the mules transporting water. Things I have never seen before. Especially in winter, there is only desolation and devastation to meet the eye. Yet for my heart and mind I have reaped a bountiful harvest. People here are industrious, simple and honest, warm and faithful, with a strong will and unyielding backbones to match these mountains. I feel deep in my heart that people on the loess highland will surge ahead in the current program to develop the western regions, making their homeland newer and more beautiful.?

Translated by volunteer Bella Li

Teacher: Xu Liandong. ARSL Sponsor: International New Prospect Educational Foundation (Taiwan)

First place winner, 5th Teach to Inspire Essay Contest, 2003

Walking Through the Valley of the Balachang River at Night

by Ma Haowen

? I paid a home visit to a student who had been missing classes, and brought him back to school with me. On the way, we shared a few interesting moments. Through our casual exchanges, I saw the inner world of a child who had grown up in the mountains, and understood how the generation gap between a teacher and his student could be bridged.

The red sun had descended to the top of the trees in the west and the lush tiger orchid was still sitting squarely in the wooden pot on the ridge of the small wood-shingled roof. Against the strong red sunset, I could no longer see the green color, only a yellowish silhouette, like an upright tree on the horizon of the prairie. Accompanied by a chanting meant for prodding the buffalo and the soft tapping of the hooves on the ground, several interwoven shadows of varying heights came tottering into my view.

Yang Xiaoqin, with a girlish name, was actually a guileless boy in third grade who lived in the Lone Family Village. He had missed the first two days of school, and that was why I paid him a visit.

I came at the crack of dawn, when the earth was covered with dew. I waited for a whole day. Now the dew was about to return. The humidity in this high altitude forest was indeed quite intense.

Yang Xiaoqin was bashful. He said "Hello!" upon seeing me and then quickly hid behind his father's back.

After being first admonished and then persuaded, he started to pack – a thick and handle-less small black pot, half filled with buckwheat meal, and a curved bladed knife for chopping the firewood. A pair of faded yellow rubber shoes was also tied onto his bundle.

He carried his bundle on his back. I carried his ration and other items by tying them onto

both ends of a stick balanced on my shoulder.

He jogged in the front; I jogged in the back. In order to avoid speaking to me, he tried to gain distance. Fearing that he might drop out of sight again, I tried to close our distance.

After climbing over the second mountain ridge, the red sunlight died down through the gap in the woods. He slowed down, perhaps out of fear, or perhaps because he thought I might be afraid.

"Were you helping out at home these days?"
"My buffalo 'Big Blue' was unruly. Dad wanted me to help him by leading Big Blue with a leash tied to his nose ring."

"Don't you worry that you will fall behind in your school work?"

"Dad said it is most important for a farmer to handle the buffalo properly, to make it obey orders."

"Your schoolmates are missing you."

"I guess. I'd like to play with them too."

...

We came to a stretch of the riverbank that seemed never ending when I first came, in the valley of the Balachang River. Century old trees were touching the sky, making layers of dark shadows. Wind howled while the running water hit the rocks, creating a mixture of unusual sounds.

I felt that my soles were soaking wet, and my legs ached, so I suggested taking a break. He stopped not far from me.

The sounds of nature seemed to be quieting down. In their place were echoes of "Gua-gua, gua-gua!" from left and right. They seemed to come from the river, and were becoming louder and louder. Finally they turned into a chorus.

"Xiaoqin, listen! What is this?"

"Teacher, this is the yelping of the stone goose and the hand clutcher. Quite often we come to catch them and cook them."

"Oh, so many of them?"

"Teacher, there are a lot more, everywhere in the river. They sleep in the water during the day, and upon nightfall, poke their heads up above the water and yelp!"

"Are they frogs?"

"No, frogs have green backs, they are black. You can find them on the food stand in the market, skinned and white. Teacher, shall I catch a few for you, so you can have a feast? They are tasty."

"Oh, catch ... sure. But I can't see any!"

"That's easy, just light the torch, we will see their big eyes."

When we lit the torch, the space in the distance looked darker, yet the surface of the river looked as if covered with a red glow. The shyness on the face of Yang Xiaoqin had been overtaken by a broad smile. Swiftly he rolled up his trousers and stepped into the water.

"Look, right there, they stop yelping in the light. Teacher, don't make any noise, they are quite alert, any movement will send them hiding in the water."

I followed his pointing finger and saw the upper body of a weird creature with bright eyes and a big mouth amidst the running water between two rocks. Before I knew what had happened, the creature was in his grip, kicking its muscular legs hard.

"Teacher, this is a pregnant female, about to lay eggs. Too skinny, not so tasty. Let's wait after she gives birth. We can come catch her sons next year."

Before he finished speaking, the creature made a beautiful splash at the deep end and soon disappeared completely. Quickly, he caught one after another until the count

came to over twenty. Looking at them, I felt both curious and compassionate.

"Xiaoqin, have you thought of farming them since they are tasty and marketable?"

"Yes. Last year, I placed twelve males and females in our well. But they acted weird. They neither yelped, nor laid eggs. All were gone by the next day."

"Do you understand their living habits?"

"Yes, every year by the time the peach trees bloom, they show up in the river. In the day, if you stick your hand between the rocks, they will clutch onto your hand. So we call them 'Old Hand Clutcher'."

"Do you know their scientific name?"

"No, we call the ones with a big mouth and a soft belly the 'stone goose'. We call the ones with a small mouth and big legs the 'hand clutcher'."

"Have you read about them in the book?"

"No. You can only find vocabulary and math formulas in the book."

"Xiaoqin, if you study hard, you will find much more in the book."

"Really, teacher, I can never figure out why my Big Blue Buffalo will only obey my Dad's chanting."

Without knowing it, we walked out of the valley of the Balachang River. Xiaoqin was holding the torch close by; I was carrying his belongings on both ends of the stick behind him. Caught in a mild draft, my face felt warm, the splattered trousers felt cold.

Through the woods, we could see a few bright lights halfway up the hill in the distance. Those were the classrooms of our school! ?

Translated by volunteer Bella Li

ARSL Sponsor: Raybin Q. Wong Foundation (USA)

From Sponsors of the SERC Program Series . . .

-- Over the past 15 years, the SERC program series has been supported by many individual and group sponsors. They have come from different parts of the world. You will find some of their stories here.

Hsin-Yi Foundation. Funded by Mr. He Chuan (Hsin-Yi), an entrepreneur in Taiwan, the Hsin-Yi Foundation was established in 1971. It has focused on promoting concern for early childhood education in Taiwan, creating an early childhood research and development center in 1977, and has engaged in many other related activities. In 1992, the Hsin-Yi

Foundation volunteered its service to help promote and administer the *Adopt a Rural School Library* (ARSL) program in Taiwan. The Foundation itself undertook to sponsor 100 ARSLs within the first three years, bringing nearly a million books to the rural areas in China and benefiting 60,000-70,000 people. The Foundation's staff (particularly Ms. Chuang Miao-yin)

have for many years labored assiduously on all the tedious administrative tasks associated with the program, including the handling of donations and feedback documentation, and facilitating communication between ESS, the ARSL schools and the sponsors. Their work has resulted in a total of 832 ARSLs supported by sponsors in Taiwan by the end of 2003.

K. P. Tin Foundation. Mr. K. P. Tin was born in 1919 in a rural village in Guangdong Province. When he was 16 years old, his father died, forcing him to drop out of school. He lived in Indonesia for some years, and did well with the plastic factories he established. In 1958 he moved to Hong Kong, where he continued a successful business in the chemical industries. Mr. Tin believes in giving back to society what one has taken from it. Established in 1982, the K. P. Tin Foundation has contributed generously to education, health and transportation projects in Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China. It funded 50 ARSLs in 1994, and has since supported 100 ARSLs each year. To date, the Foundation has financed a total of 950 ARSLs and has also subsidized the expenses for the *Read to Discover* and *Teach to Inspire* essay contests.

Raybin Q. Wong Foundation. A non-profit organization registered in New York State, the Foundation aims to help poor rural children in China to complete their basic education. The founder, Mr. Raybin Q. Wong, was born in a Chinese rural village in 1915 and served as principal and teacher in various schools before migrating to the US, where he lived and worked for 50 years. Throughout his life, Mr. Wong believed in the value of education and lived frugally to save money for his vision of creating an educational foundation for rural children in China. His dream was finally realized in the last year of his life in 1999, when he established the Foundation in his name and assigned to it 90% of his assets. In addition to a student dormitory for Long Kou Middle School in Mr. Wong's hometown in Guangdong Province, the Foundation has supported through ESS more than 200 ARSLs, granted scholarships to over 1,000 students, helped nearly 100 rural schools to purchase laboratory equipment and musical instruments, and provided new classroom furniture for some of the most impoverished counties in China.

☞ "In 2003 we met in China with ESS representatives from the US, local ESS representatives, and education administrators from the six counties to be included in the first phase of the *Adopt a Most Impoverished County* program. After two days of discussion, we arrived at a consensus over the responsibilities and expectations about the program, and built mutual friendship and trust among all parties concerned. ESS always functions as a bridge between donors and recipients, and keeps us **From ESS Volunteers . . .**

- As the scope of the SERC program series continues to expand, ESS has been relying on a growing pool of dedicated volunteers who have been contributing endless time and energy to the program activities. Some

well informed of all operations. Throughout the entire implementation process, starting from the allocation of funds to the final completion of a project, all required documents have been sent back to us from the adopted schools through the ESS feedback system, with all data clearly listed and easily verified. Our documents on file show that no other organization has ever provided such complete feedback as ESS has done." - Raybin Q. Wong Foundation

☞ "Having helped an orphan continue his schooling two years ago, I realize that in China today there are millions of children who want to but cannot go to school because of financial difficulties. From the feedback documents I received via ESS, I can feel the sincerity of the people we try to help and see how seriously they carry out their work... If we save 30 cents a day, we'll save \$109.50 a year - sufficient to support a student's schooling expenses for a year. It is only a small sacrifice for us, but of immense help to the children who will have the opportunity to create a brighter future for themselves and others." - Mrs. Ku from Texas, USA

☞ "Starting with one, I have now sponsored a total of 12 students, mostly from the poorest and remotest regions. When I received from ESS each year the children's thank you letters and their report cards, I was deeply touched not only by the children's unfortunate circumstances but also by the meticulous and painstaking work of the ESS volunteers. ... It will take us a few generations to improve the quality of life for China's rural population. Perhaps we will move from helping primary and junior secondary students today to supporting higher education students twenty years later. Eventually we will succeed in eradicating poverty in rural China." - Ms. Chi from Maryland, USA

volunteers, individuals or organizations (such as the Hsin-Yi Foundation in Taiwan), have also sponsored schools or students under the SERC programs. Two of our volunteers write about their motivation and experience below.

☞ "I feel gratified that I have been able to participate in the voluntary work for the SERC program series, because I am still aware of the pain of not being able to go to school when I was young...I remember my days spent in a poor village in the mountainous area between Hunan and Guangxi provinces. I know there are still many such villages in China. I can understand the difficulties the peasants face and empathize with the children's desire to go to school and change their destiny. I feel it's my obligation to do something for them. I also hope that more people within and outside China will be concerned about them and help them." - ESS volunteer Zuo Yixin

☞ "...Education has changed my life. . . .I'm so fortunate to have had an enabling environment to gain and absorb knowledge throughout my life, through all the years of schooling, work and retirement. I want to try my best to bring a good learning environment to all the children, teachers, principals, and others supported by the ESS programs." - ESS volunteer Chang Min

From an analysis of charitable organizations . . .

- ESS has been named as one of four charitable organizations worthy of support in a recent bulletin of the Phi Lambda (PLUS) fraternity. Mr. Tony Lin, Manager of the Bay Area Chapter of PLUS and author of the analysis, made the recommendation based on how well these organizations measure against the following criteria:

1. **Programs focused on high impact activities** -- that create the maximum benefits to the most people at the lowest cost: e.g., programs to improve basic health and education in China, particularly in rural China, have the highest return when considered in terms of the number of people assisted and the benefit provided each person.
2. **Low fund raising and administration costs** -- we want to support charities which spend their money efficiently, meaning those with modest administration and fund raising costs.
3. **Low ratio of fund balances to annual expenditures** -- This ratio represents the number of years a contribution would sit idle, before it is spent, when contributions are applied to expenditures on a FIFO (first in, first out) basis. The lower this ratio is, the faster our donations reach the beneficiaries.
4. **Adequate financial controls covering grant recipients** -- have procedures and agreements in place with their grant recipients, to ensure that all grants are properly spent.
5. **No self serving transactions with officers and directors** -- there are no transactions or fees paid to any directors or officers, as shown in the Federal tax return filed (which is available for public review).

Financial Management and Accountability of the SERC Program Series

- ◆ ESS has been granted tax deductible status as a non-profit educational organization by the federal government of the USA since 1983.
- ◆ ESS files annual tax returns to the US government through an accounting firm (and an annual application to the Federal Combined Campaign with the firm's audit report).
- ◆ ESS has the support of the Center of Educational Research and Development, Ministry of Education (MOE) of China, based on a Memorandum of Understanding signed by ESS and MOE in 2001. All SERC programs are recognized by local educational agencies in China.
- ◆ The duties and responsibilities of the administration, management and evaluation of SERC programs are shared and held accountable by all parties involved (in USA and China).
- ◆ All ESS local representatives in China are required to submit to ESS annual performance and financial reports (i.e., a budget summary of all the projects within his/her jurisdiction).
- ◆ All SERC project recipients are required to provide to the sponsor via ESS a feedback package (per requirements listed in agreements signed with ESS), including invoices and receipts detailing the expenditure of the grant.

- ◆ All SERC program materials are stored in an ESS database.