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華源協作 CHINASOURCE

Perspectives and analysis for those who serve China

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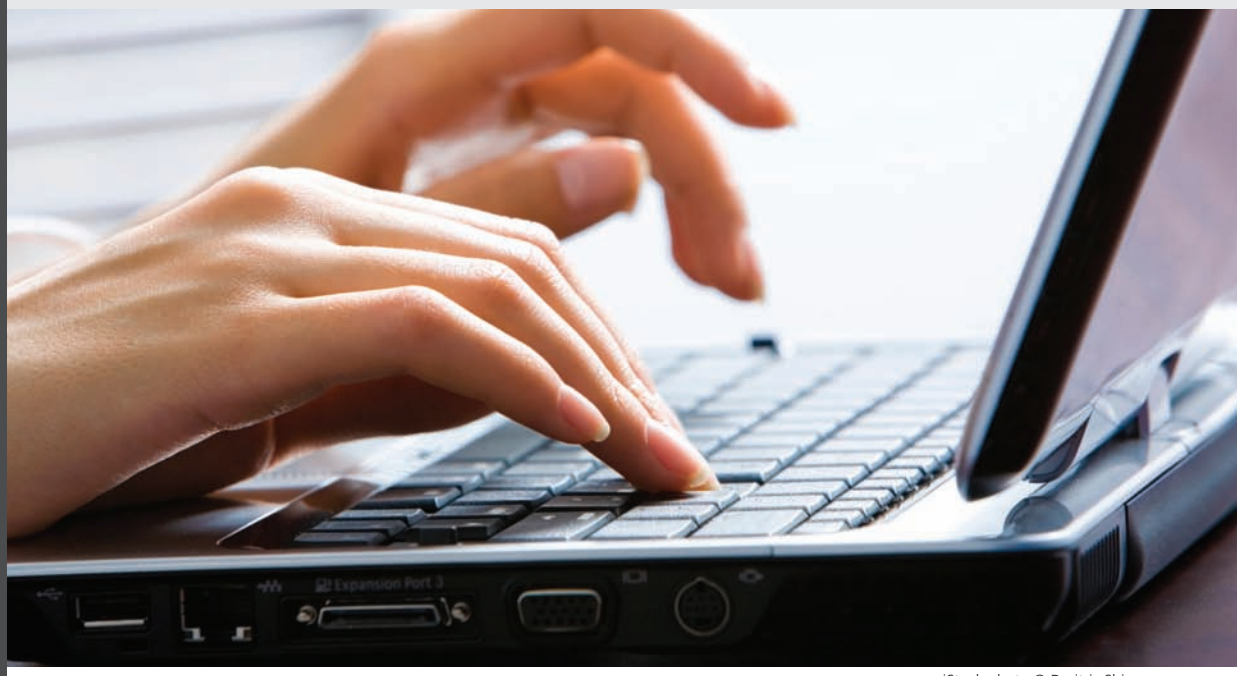
Theme: China's Youth



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Interconnected:
China's Youth and the Internet

Jonathan Hwang

My parents grew up in the 60s during the Cultural Revolution. During their youth, their communication was based on their small community. They would speak with people in their village or ***danwei*** (work unit)," a student said. The Cultural Revolution was a time of political and social upheaval in China.

Under the leadership of Mao Zedong, fervent Chinese youth destroyed Buddhist and other religious temples, sought to bring to justice anti-Communist perpetrators and changed the social fabric of everyday life. Any symbols or speech contrary to the Communist ideology of Mao Zedong was considered sacrilege and violators were punished with humiliating exercises and torturous executions.

From a time of social upheaval and instability, China has entered an era of material prosperity and social progress. The Chinese youth are at the forefront of China's dynamic evolution. With greater economic liberalization, Chinese society has become more open to foreign cultures but also more open within itself. One student said, "My parents would not speak on certain topics, especially

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ChinaSource serves the international faith-based community by identifying critical issues, formulating strategies, convening resources and evaluating results for the promotion of responsible and effective service in China.

The purpose of the ***ChinaSource*** journal is to provide up-to-date and accurate analysis of the issues and opportunities facing Christians involved in China service and to provide a forum for exchanging viewpoints and discussing strategies. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of ChinaSource or its cooperating agencies.

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China's Youth in Perspective

Brent Fulton, Editor

Youth in China today undoubtedly represent the most privileged generation of any in China's history. Globalization has brought iPods and McDonald's, and the legacy of China's one-child policy is that these "one and only" children are the sole recipients of the affection of multiple sets of grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Previous generations of youth in China have been characterized by their unique struggles and corporate experiences shared against the backdrop of China's unfolding political history. Nearly a hundred years ago the May Fourth generation made its mark as it stood against the oppression of China by imperialist powers following World War I. In the wake of the Second World War, revolutionaries in the 1940s joined Mao in ushering in the new China. Later the "lost generation" of the Cultural Revolution again cast its lot with Mao, only to be discarded in the countryside following a period of nationwide chaos. The June Fourth generation was left similarly disillusioned as the leaders whom they hoped would bring true reform to the nation fell from grace and their own fortunes fell with them.

Today's youth generation has no shared struggle, no defining life and death experience. In spite of the attention and material prosperity these youth enjoy, this generation is perhaps the most alienated. The research featured in this issue of the *ChinaSource* journal highlights the state of today's youth, who describe themselves as increasingly distanced from their parents and teachers. Browbeaten by unrealistic pressures to succeed in a highly competitive society, many retreat to the security of internet chat rooms or spend hours playing online games with friends. While many in the church are today awakening to the need to reach out in new ways to youth, successful models for such ministry are hard to come by.

In a society where relationships are key, the challenge is connecting with the youth where they are as opposed to waiting for them to find the church. Here is where the very technology that seems to be pulling youth away from meaningful relationships can instead be a means to bring them into contact with the Truth. This interaction will likely take place virtually via websites, telephone texts, or internet chats. Along with much creativity, those seeking to connect with youth need long patience and a willingness to genuinely listen.

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Today's youth are tomorrow's leaders. In the late 1970s it was largely youth who took up the challenge to take the gospel to the far-flung regions of China, resulting in a rural revival that spawned what has arguably been the most massive church growth in history. As the stage now moves from the countryside to the cities, it is up to this generation to pass the baton to the next.

***Brent Fulton**, Ph.D., is the president of ChinaSource and the editor of the* ChinaSource *journal.* ▮

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politics. Young people now have much more freedom to speak on topics they want to talk about. There are more ways to communicate with the internet, QQ (Chinese Instant Messaging), and Skype." Communication now travels over longer distances and is faster than ever before with China's youth taking advantage of new technologies like cell phones and computers.

"I lived in post-reform China and had the opportunity to go to college so my network is much bigger. I even have the opportunity to meet with foreign students," a student added. Chinese under Mao lived under strict controls. Movement between cities or towns was limited and even marriage was determined by one's *danwei* (work unit). Individual freedoms and personal property were limited. Now, Chinese youth have better prospects for working in other cities. Moving from China's smaller cities to bigger and more affluent cities such as Shanghai and Beijing is now more common. "The people I knew when I was small were within my community in my hometown. Then I went to college and then graduate school. My network becomes larger as I move on in life," declared another.

However, there are certain drawbacks for China's new generation. "There is much less face-to-face communication nowadays. Technology cannot help certain problems. For example, with text messaging, sometimes you are not able to completely understand the other person's emotions or meanings. Some emotions cannot be communicated through technology," was one student's observation. Although China's youth have enlarged their social networks, relationships are weaker than they were in previous generations. To a great degree, due to the greater physical and social mobility within Chinese society, some Chinese youth find it difficult to maintain close relationships. Text messaging and instant messaging take precedence over social interaction in the lives of many young Chinese.

"People spend a lot of time on the internet but not much time with other people. Also, many people are reliant on technology. Sometimes people develop virtual relationships which could be dangerous," noted one young person. Regarding the statement that, "It's perfectly possible to have real relationships purely online with no face-to-face contact," about a fifth of Americans agree (21%), while almost two-thirds of Chinese do (63%). As somewhat of a paradox, the flourishing and ease of modern communication has brought about less communication and interaction between young people. The liberation of the individual has brought about a decline of collective unity.

China, at 384 million, now has more internet users than the entire population of the United States. The China Network Information Centre reports that about half of China's internet users are between the age of 18 and 30. The vast majority of these "netizens" (an internet citizen) are youth in their teens and 20s. The impact of the internet has affected nearly every major aspect of living for Chinese youth, from how they communicate with each other to what things they buy. The internet has changed everything.

Many youth spend their free time in *wangbas* (or internet cafes), and surfing the net has become an addiction. In 2009, over 24 million youth were reported to be addicted to the internet. China is one of the first countries to classify internet addiction as a clinical disorder and is due to report it to the World Health Organization.

Over seventy percent of internet addicts are males, who are often obsessed with computer games such as "World of Warcraft." These games allow them to create virtual avatars through which they live a dual lifestyle, one real, and the other online. In such games, players fight enemies and gain levels and respect from other players. As these virtual worlds encapsulate entire landscapes and friends, players become preoccupied with their standing and achievements in the virtual world, not their real one. As a result, many internet addicts drop out of school and have severe social problems. Many also suffer from depression and some are even suicidal.

The government has recently advocated campaigns to stem unhealthy internet use. In Anhui province, primary schools are teaching young students the benefits and dangers of internet use. Particular attention is focused on the potential of internet addiction. Government Official Li Yuling said: "The internet is a double edged sword. While fulfilling the curiosity and knowledge of students, the internet can also badly influence the health of youth." In Gedong, Shanxi, the government banned all *wangba* operations because of the detrimental effects on youth. Nationwide, internet cafes are not allowed to host minors under the age of 18, but this rule is violated more often than not.

Many youth spend their free time in *wangbas*, and surfing the net has become an addiction.

Because of the severity of internet addiction in China, many internet addiction treatment centers have flourished in the past few years. The industry is now a billion *yuan* industry with over 400 institutions around the country. There has been recent criticism of the treatment centers given the violent and abusive nature of some of the treatments. Many camps employed

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China's Youth and Christianity

A ChinaSource Interview conducted by Cathy Gibson

Q was born in China, went through the Cultural Revolution, and was a youth communist leader. While studying overseas, he became a Christian and later served in Latin America. He has a special interest in church planting, community development, and working with youth. Currently, he has been working inside China for 14 years. I recently talked to QQ on Skype to hear about what is happening with youth in China today.

CS: ***What kind of Christian work is being done with youth in China today?***

QQ: The majority of youth work is probably in three areas. One is the house church where they have Sunday schools that reach out to youth. The second area is campus outreach, going out onto the university campuses to reach college students. This creates crucial fellowship. The third area is occasionally having teams do summer camps.

CS: ***What is the purpose of these approaches?***

QQ: For house churches their main purpose is passing on basic Christian beliefs, Christian training with not as much emphasis on discipleship. In relationship to leadership training they are very weak, but they do focus on evangelism. For the campus outreach style, the focus is really on discipleship and, of course, some leadership training. The summer camps' purpose is pre-evangelism and evangelism along with basic Christian training. So, they do preaching, and preaching and preaching.

CS: ***To what degree are young people in China today open to spiritual things—or are they just taken up with the material?***

QQ: They are just taken up with the material because what surrounds them is the material. Their constant goal, under the pressure of their parents, is pursuing higher education and great success. With youth, you lead by example, and the parents really hunger for the material. Even though the youth are really empty (they are like blank, white pieces of paper) it is hard to get them to open to spiritual things. In China, young people have not even heard of the name of Jesus. They categorize Christianity as "religion" based on what other people tell them. However, if they have the chance to really hear about Christianity, if they have someone to tell them about it, they are eager to learn. Their hearts are empty, so when they hear the gospel, they open up and really want to learn more—especially the university students.

CS: ***What understanding do China's youth have of God? How do they view him?***

QQ: Under the education of atheism, most youth will say there is no

God. They view God as a superstition or a provider of material things. Money is their god because money is their power. That's how they view Him. They view God as a material thing, something they can see, not an invisible power.

CS: ***What questions do today's youth have? What are the issues that concern them the most? That influence their lives the most?***

QQ: They are concerned with first, education, next, what kind of job they will get. They are pursuing an endless point. The immense pressure starts at elementary school, continues as they look towards high school and then on through high school to college and from college to work. The questions they have are: "Where am I headed? Where do I reach the end?"

Another crucial question youth have is: "Where are my parents?" Over fifty percent of youth do not see their parents regularly. Their parents are outside of their province and live in the major cities, working, pursuing material things and income. They leave the young people behind to live with their grandparents. Over sixty percent of youth stay at their schools Monday through Saturday, so the teacher becomes their parent. There are so many life issues and questions that nobody answers other than the teachers. The teachers influence them the most—not their parents.

Other questions they often have are: "Why did my parents give birth to me since they don't care for me? Why do I need to work hard and study hard?" and "Why is money so powerful?" Since their parents are pursing money, they think money is their god.

CS: ***What role do the internet and other modern technologies play in youth work?***

QQ: It's a major part right now, very influential. Youth connect with each other through the internet. With the single child policy of China and the way most of the students spend all of their time at school, whenever they have access to the internet they are looking for someone to talk to. Any chance they have to get on the internet, they do so. Addiction to the internet in China is a major problem. We do have some outreaches to youth through the internet, like with QQ (www.qq.com). That is the most popular youth site in China. People of all ages are using it but youth the most. The internet has become one of the main avenues to reaching the youth because we can't just walk onto the school campuses.

Chinese youth use a lot of music websites. Also games are very popular, China being one of the biggest consumers of computer games. We do have some outreaches to youth through the internet, but in using all these modern technologies in youth work we are still far behind. A lot of Chinese Christians are putting Bibles and things on the internet for youth access. One of the most popular ways of reaching out to Chinese youth is through music.

Also, the cell phone has become a good resource. Youth are sending many text messages and doing internet chats over their cell phones. We use this to reach the youth, sending out texts right before we have meetings.

CS: ***How do the youth respond? What method(s) seems most effective?***

QQ: They respond very quickly, and information spreads very fast to others. The most effective method is just connecting with them. Keep listening to them and letting them express themselves—but not preaching to them. Youth don't like preaching, especially in China. They listen to their teachers Monday through Saturday, so they don't like someone preaching to them.

CS: ***How is youth work different today than it was 20 years ago?***

QQ: The key thing that is so different in China, and makes our work so effective, is relationships. China is very focused on relationships. Everything that you want in order to be successful is found in relationships. Youth work is also all about relationships. How can we build relationships with the students in high school? With those on the university campuses? We want to bring people into relationships to grow together, like with Big Brother and Big Sister programs. Based on relationships, we hold camps; based on relationships we do teaching. We build relationships with teachers, because they are the vital influence; they are in the schools with the youth. One of our key strategies is reaching the teachers in order to reach the youth. Being a Christian teacher is hard in China. We try, by all means, to support the teachers, encouraging them to take care of the youth. That's very different than 20 years ago. Everywhere I travel in China, you don't see youth [in the churches]. For example, in a 10,000 member church their Sunday school for youth has only 300 students. China still has a big need here.

Also, based on China's background, most of the high school and university students are away from their families. The work we are doing is not church-based because they are already in their own community. Instead it is community based, school based, university based. Our approach is very different; we reach out to them as a group, lead them as a group, disciple them as a group. As they grow, they grow as a group. This approach only began three years ago, especially in working among the high school students and is just the beginning.

CS: ***What excites you about youth work in China?***

QQ: There is always something new, always a new challenge. There is not a single format or a single method that can do it all. Also, China is in a new era and willing to try new things. It excites me to see the young people who turn to Christ when they "get it." When we see a whole class of high school students turning to Christ—that excites us. They are all like a [blank] piece of paper, so white, you can write anything on it. If we care about them, they care also.

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Peter Lucinsky

Youth in China: A Look at One City

Allen Reesor

Several agencies have joined together to sponsor research on China's youth. Divided into three units of research, the first part, conducted in Changsha, has been completed. Following is a summary of the findings. In June, the research will be carried out in Chengdu and, towards the end of the summer, in a third city. The entire research project will be completed by the end of 2010.

A teacher says "students lack a historical perspective and fail to examine themselves in the light of China's history." One student complains that "some teachers are wordy and talk about things unrelated to the classes; for instance, when they come into the classroom, the first thing is to ask for money for tuition or materials" and another bemoans that he had "hoped teachers could give me more knowledge and the classes would be more lively; that teachers would teach the students all they know."

The qualitative research conducted in Hunan early this year uncovered the consequences of rapid change and increased distance between youth and the generation of their parents and teachers. Young people are significantly influenced by the international media: movie, music and fashion. These influences are either unfamiliar to parents or written off as either Japanese and Korean influences of Asian youth culture or American and European influences from the West. For the parents of young people in Changsha, the living memory of the past is present and shapes every facet of life; for the youth these events are irrelevant.

The research report contains over thirty pages of processed and raw data gathered over four days of focus groups conducted by local volunteers trained to facilitate discussions. These discussion groups are designed to solicit various perspectives of the needs, attitudes and values of youth in their region. The volunteers conducted and reported the results from over thirty-five groups. Their reports were read, organized, processed and reviewed by the lead consultant and five indigenous volunteers working with young people in various programs in the region.

Key issues and questions for which the agencies working in the region sought answers, ranged from family relationships, attitudes toward education and religion, influences, ideals and social interaction. The answers provided in the report are drawn from the raw data that was collected in the discussion groups. These answers provide some interesting insights; however, as is often the case in research, they also

raise additional questions to be answered and hypotheses to be tested.

Some of the key findings include the conclusion that youth admire leaders who are strong, decisive and will employ any means to achieve benefit for those who follow them. They want their leaders to listen to their ideas and share their knowledge and insights in ways that will lead them to action. Action to combat boredom can be either virtual or actual, so these young people seek out adults they can trust who will empower them to actively address the needs and challenges they face. Often these are not their parents.

While family is important both to youth and to how they view society, both youth and parents recognize the disconnection between them. In an attempt to provide material plenty for children, parents neglect the value and importance of personal time spent listening to the ideas, aspirations and fears of youth. Parents are reported to shield their child from the difficulties faced in society, and this intent to protect seems to be interpreted by youth to mean that parents have no confidence in their ability to contribute, are guarded in their disclosure and lack transparency. Parents, on the other hand, feel that children should focus on school, ignore the influences of the international youth culture and allow themselves to be guided by the adults. The gap is further widened by parents' unfamiliarity with media such as video games, the internet, contemporary music and film. Often they do not recognize the degree to which these shape the thoughts and values of youth. Since adults exhibit little interest in finding out why such activities are interesting to young people, the conclusion is drawn that parents are not interested in youth. Parents generally respond to young people by offering advice and prescribing behaviors in ways that reinforce young people's assumption that adults do not listen, do not care and are irrelevant to contemporary life.

Studies and education fill much of the time young people have, even

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Photos by www.flickr.com/funky! (top left & bottom)

though they express the concern that what they learn does not prepare them to get good jobs, support their families or know how to live successfully. An interesting conclusion was drawn by the analysts when considering the frequency of youth reported to isolate themselves in their homes. It was felt that the reports from the discussion groups indicated that there is an unhealthy combination of being overly absorbed with school, a sense of insecurity, a competitive nature of relationships with peers and the ease of staying in and playing video games, going on line or watching television. This combination means that the safest way to cope is to opt out.

Despite the evidence that youth have a desire to succeed—variously defined as engagement in community, making a difference in the lives of others, having a good job or providing for family—young people are unsure of themselves. They are uncertain that their parents and teachers respect them, they are unsure what the future holds and they feel that although they have abilities and talents, they are given very few opportunities to develop these into skills for the future.

The moral formation of youth is not demonstrated in the evidence reported in this study. Some youth said that to be honest makes it impossible to be successful; others stated that you need to protect yourself so sometimes you have to lie. It was felt that there are times to be honest and other times when it was foolish and naive to be truthful. Regarding romantic relationships, youth are equally uncertain as to what path they should follow. Some are very conservative and think that all

Despite the evidence that youth have a desire to succeed, young people are unsure of themselves.

relationships should be avoided. However, it is acknowledged that while youth pretend not to be interested, it is an all consuming topic of conversation. Although the reports did not indicate that youth were sexually active, those interviewed felt that nearly everyone in university is involved in relationships, and these usually lead to sexual activity. Some of those in the groups felt that society should be more open to alternate relationships, and others suggested that experimentation is the best way to know what you are doing when you are married.

Most young people do not have a clear idea of God. They are told that God is like a father, but their parents, especially fathers, are generally perceived as harsh, critical, and unsupportive. Parents are often not good role models of prayer and scripture reading. Generally, youth do not have relevant evidence or experience of God helping them, and those who want to be independent think it is not good to rely on God. Most young people in the study do not see how Christian practice is connected to the reality of everyday life.

In this age of information, since programs must be designed to help youth who have a high priority on communication that flows both ways, program design must take into account that they want to hear, but even more, they want to be heard. Programs designed to address the needs of youth and children should help students learn, but equally should give them an opportunity to share their opinions and ideas. Overall, they want to be involved in helping others and finding self-fulfillment and personal success. The activities used by programs should avoid coming across like another training; they already feel that they have too much information forced on them that others feel is important. Rather, programs should give youth opportunities for self-expression—allowing them to experience life in an environment where they can learn and are given an opportunity to lead. Whether at home, school or church, it is important that they are able to evaluate the success of their efforts and learn life lessons from either success or failure in these programs.

Parents, teachers, or youth leaders who are involved in programs with youth should be good examples of a balanced life. These leaders must use their programs to show that everyone (including the leaders) has problems, and that problems are only effectively resolved by application of good character. As such, adults should not come across as having all the answers or knowing what needs to be done in every situation; adults are not God, they make mistakes too. Adults must also model getting along with others, not quarreling or competing, whether in the home or in public institutions.

It is hoped that this brief synopsis of the study will stimulate the reader to more closely examine both the conclusions and the raw data. In doing so it is possible to design programs for youth which will give them an opportunity to know the truth and so be freed from their fears and self-doubt.

Dr. Allen Reesor *is the executive director of Metadigm, a research firm. For further information or the complete report of the Changsha research portion, contact Bruce Yee at bruceyee@onehope.net* ∎

China's Youth and Christianity
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Sometimes the young people do not have baggage, which is a good thing. I thank God for that. In the last fifty years, with the culture being changed and traditions vanishing, the youth are living at a crossroads. They don't know where to go. When someone cares for them, they hear and they "get it"; they taste and see the new life. This is happening on university campuses and in the high school locations.

One of the things challenging us is how to follow up with all of this. We need mature Christians and mature leaders ready to spend time and follow up with them.

CS: ***What are the greatest challenge you face in youth work?***

QQ: Money—because a youth worker needs to spend a lot of money. The workers cannot collect money [from the youth], they can only spend money.

Another challenge is how to follow up with the youth and how to enlarge the campus work. We need personnel for youth work because not many really understand the youth or enjoy working with them—[a group with] constant change and high energy. We need to know the culture to reach out to them, to reach in, to make our lives an example for them. That's a great challenge for all youth workers inside of China.

Also, the government of China is carefully guarding the next generation, the youth, at all times. They think it is their responsibility to train the next generation for the future. We need to learn what Jesus says: "When you enter a place, be wise like a serpent and humble like a dove."

CS: ***What else do you think our readers should know about youth work in China?***

QQ: One of the major things is that youth work in China is very dangerous. The government is constantly watching whoever works among the youth. We do know this is spiritual warfare. Satan doesn't want us to bring the youth of China to Christ; he will try every way to stop us.

Pray for the churches of China, that their leaders would be willing to put in their best effort for the next generation, the youth, instead of being focused on theology or differences or their own little circle. Encourage them to support a youth worker or to raise up youth workers to reach the youth. There are over 400 million youth in China waiting for the Lord. They are the future of everything. So please, do not delay.

Cathy Gibson *worked with college students, both in the United States and internationally, for over eight years. She now serves on the staff of ChinaSource.* ∎

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the use of beatings and electric shock in order to "cure" patients of their addictions. (The use of electric shock was banned in 2009.)

In Southwest Sichuan, an internet camp was accused of abusive behavior last year. Pu Liang, a teenage internet addict, attended the internet addiction camp and was reportedly hospitalized with water in his lungs and kidney failure because of the beatings he sustained from camp counselors and fellow students. Reportedly, eighty percent of those who attend these camps become rehabilitated from their addictions but there are growing questions about the methods used to produce these results.

Although there is much talk about the dangers of internet use such as its role in alienating youth and debilitating social skills, the internet, through the use of social networking, may create more cohesive networks among youth. *Xiaonei*, a copy of Facebook (the look is exactly the same), has caught on like wildfire among college students in China. On *Xiaonei*, you are able to message friends instantly, upload photos from your cell phone wherever you are in the world and even do tasks like buying virtual pets or play a game of cards with your friends. Students are now able to keep their vast network of friends as they move from college to work or even abroad. Other websites allow users to make online avatars but *Xiaonei* requires users to use their actual names and encourages real profile pictures. *Xiaonei-ers* post real world information like the schools that they attend, books they like and friends that they know personally.

One major difference between American and Chinese internet users is the proliferation of forums, called BBS in China. BBS forums affect internet use ranging from discussions on the latest fashion to people directly buying items from other netizens through BBS to the influence of criminal court cases. Official news is often communicated through BBS. Nanjing University, one of the most prestigious universities in China, uses BBS to communicate to students. According to a report produced by iResearch Consulting Group in 2007, around 36.3 percent of users in China spend one to three hours per day on BBS sites; about 44.7 percent of users spend three to eight hours, and even 15.1 percent of users are on BBS sites for more than eight hours each day. Over sixty percent of users will log in to at least three BBS sites more than three times each week. Registered BBS users run over three billion, and eighty percent of Chinese websites utilize the BBS format. BBS forums are an integral part of Chinese internet use.

Photo by www.flickr.com/Wesley Fryer

Internet blogs now allow Chinese youth to access information and opinions not found in state-controlled mainstream media. One student said: "Influential blogs are written by people who have a social conscience. It definitely involves more people. Information is spread fast." Han Han is China's most popular internet blogger. He has more than 306 million hits on his blog, thanks in large part to his direct and confrontational style. He does not have any reservations about his criticisms of the government or of other literary figures. He wrote on his blog: "I believe China has the world's biggest sex and gambling industries [both are banned in China], their biggest customers may be our Communist party members." As a race car driver, a best-selling author and a high school dropout, Han Han has lived a life that would be unimaginable without his influence on the internet. Now at age 27, Han Han continues to influence young Chinese net surfers through his opinions on his blogs. With three of these censored, he simply continues to open up new ones.

There is much talk about the future of the internet in China, especially with the recent Google retreat from the mainland. Although the internet has allowed greater access to information, this has not necessarily translated into substantial political change. What has changed is youth culture, the demographic most affected by China's leap into the digital world. The future of China is perhaps in the fingertips of bloggers like Han Han or an ordinary member of *Xiaonei* now that China's youth have more ways to connect with one another than ever before. It will be interesting to see how they utilize this potential for future social and political change. As one student said, "Technology opens up the world."

Jonathan Hwang *is a Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Fellow and a staff writer for* US-China Today. ▮

After Thirty Years

Jonathan Li

Joann Pittman

Throughout 2009, official propaganda in Beijing lavished its compliments on the past 60 years since the founding of the People's Republic, and especially the past 30 years since reform and opening-up. Coincidentally, my father was almost nine years old in 1949, and I was almost nine years old in 1979. Two of us witnessed China developing in different ways as we grew up—from ages nine to thirty-nine, from the perspectives of a young boy to a man stepping into his forties, the threshold of middle age. The years of our youth were passed quite differently.

My Father: 1949 to 1979

The keywords of that era were politics, ideology, collectivism and idealism. Revolution and war ended in the new People's Republic. The founding fathers deemed it necessary to repair the bankrupt economy left by those who fled to Taiwan, yet the Great Leader thought it more vital to change people's mindsets nurtured in a semi-feudal, semi-colonized society to something up to socialist reform. Meanwhile, ideological cleansing and idealistic social-economic campaigns were launched from time to time. A massive scale of social mobilization for a population of four hundred million required a collectivist uniformity in the strictest term and an absolute annihilation of personal interest or individual will.

Sound scary? Yet, the youth back then felt it romantic. A new China! Chinese people stand up! We are called "the morning son around 8 - 9 am" by our Great Leader! He says, "The world will eventually be yours!" He tells us that "man will surely conquer nature"! When youthful blood was burning with these wonderful thoughts, the choice of "plunging my limited life into the unlimited cause of serving the people" seemed more natural than ever.

When I asked my father about his impression of his youth, he said: "We were busy participating in the political movements." I can hardly imagine the days when young students were inspired by the great socialist cause and the words from the Great Leader. They became avant-garde against capitalism and anything to do with it. They were organized into "Red Guards" and began attacking their teachers—the advocates for the capitalist academic authority. The middle school I attended had a history of the first homicide since the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. One of the schoolmasters, a lady in her 50s, was beaten to death by a group of student "Red Guards" right on campus. Nobody was accused. A few days later, the chief of the "Red Guards" was even awarded the opportunity to meet with the Great Leader himself.

I can hardly imagine the days when young students were inspired by the great socialist cause and the words from the Great Leader.

Then, the Great Leader called on young students in China to go up to the mountains or down to the villages, right after high school. Boys and girls from big cities settled down in remote areas of the country. Some got married and were assimilated into the rural population. Most still wanted to go back and, after staying in the countryside for almost 20 years, were redeemed by a new policy after reform and opening-up. Thus, a generation of educated young people lost their youth in the countryside.

I am in no position to judge my father's generation; I only know that he was not with my mother when she gave birth to me. In fact, 100 days after my birth, he asked her to come back to join him in the "cadre school"—a farm where civil servants with a college degree had to stay for a period to be re-educated by physical means. I was under my grandma's care, and it was not until I was nine months old that my father saw me for the first time. That year, he was about to celebrate his thirtieth birthday.

There were no birthday cakes or candles for me or for him. Those were luxuries and only rich, rotten capital-

ists enjoyed them. Here I want to improvise a monologue of my father's generation.

> *What did we enjoy? Well, we didn't think in terms of "joy." We didn't even try to "feel." Yet, we lived by the great revolutionary will and communist ideal. We only knew that no matter how difficult reality seemed to be, we could overcome it. We would prevail, because we could always find inspiration from the founding fathers and the revolutionary martyrs. We sincerely believed that "the roads twist and turn, yet the future is bright."*

Myself: 1979-2009

Now, it's my turn to grow. Keywords are dull to capture the color of this era, so I use key phrases such as "economics as the focal point," "allowing a few to get rich first," "black cat or white cat, mouse catcher is the good cat," and so on. Meanwhile, individualism and materialism have come back to life in China together with capitalism, both covertly and overtly.

The grand parade through Tiananmen Square on October 1, 1984, is in my active memory. I found out that a few students from Peking University made a banner and wrote, "Xiaoping *Nin Hao* (Hello, Xiaoping)!" on it. They secretly took the banner with them and joined the parade, then suddenly brought it up over their heads. Xiaoping refers to Mr. Deng Xiaoping, the top leader since 1979 and the "chief architect" of China's reform and opening-up policy. In fact, the phrases quoted in the previous paragraph were all from him. People, in general, felt grateful for his leadership, and young students wanted to thank him for deciding to resume higher education in a fair and regular manner. They improvised this surprisingly unique, utterly personal, yet forbidden tribute—a parade with top leaders watching from the tower of Tiananmen is a highly controlled event. A self-made banner without forewarning and permission is a serious offense and had never happened before—or since then. Luckily, the words on this banner captured the hearts of everyone, including Mr. Deng himself, maybe, when he saw it and smiled. No investigation was made into the incident. The banner itself was lost in the action.

As a 14-year-old middle school student marching at the end of the parade, I shared the sentiment of optimism over the common destiny: with good reform and the opening-up policy, our future as a nation would be better and better. This promising vision of the future was the natural outcome of the image of our reality, which was becoming more and more colorful. Thanks to the opening-up, we were exposed to pop music from Taiwan and Hong Kong, we gained access to television and stereo from Japan, we could wear T-shirts, sing Karaoke and talk about love between the opposite sexes among teenagers.

The young, educated youth began to explore Western ideas and to think critically about traditional Chinese culture. As they became more open to the former and more critical regarding the latter, their discontent began to escalate with the unchanging power structure in the political reality. When public demonstrations broke out on college campuses, top leaders showed their true colors and iron fists. The incidents, disasters and tragedies began to present themselves throughout 1986 to 1989. During the last decade of the 20th century, the youth in China learned to live with indifference and apathy over political issues.

Since 1979, continued momentum of growth has made the Chinese economy the second largest in the world after thirty years. Yet, the growing process of young people in China is halted by a long interval after 1989: the youth stopped being youth when they stopped dreaming, and now all they care about is how to satisfy physical and material needs, how to derive residual benefit from a system to be phased out, or how to get out of the system in any way. Occasionally they have been induced or aroused to cheer for the country's new wonders: GDP growth, WTO entry, Beijing Olympics, Shanghai Expo, and so on.

Our current premiere, Mr. Wen Jiabao, composed a short poem in blank verse titled "Looking up to the Starry Skies" when addressing a group of college students in Shanghai, in May 2007. He said that a nation would be hopeless when everyone only cared about what was happening under their feet. I consider his message much more meaningful than the Great Leader's metaphor for youth as "the morning son around 8 - 9 am." Everything about Mr. Wen is readily accessible via the Internet, yet the number of those who heed his call might be less than he desires.

Our youth should be
exposed to the richness of the world
including all its absurdities.

After two periods of thirty years, I feel that we are still at a loss in terms of the upbringing of our youth. Our youth should be exposed to the richness of the world including all its absurdities. They should be encouraged to explore the extremes without being tumbled into them. They should not be frustrated or worrying at so early an age. They should develop within them a steady love of truth, freedom and peace.

I am looking forward to what the next thirty years will bring to my son, whose birth date was September 09, 2009.

Jonathan Li *is a university professor in Beijing.* ▮

As the Family Goes, **So Goes the Church**

Li Sha 李沙

Today, the church in China is facing a leader development crisis. There is a crisis of quantity and quality of leaders. Churches should be thinking now about the strategies to call and equip leaders needed to lead churches in 2025 and beyond. Leaders are not built once they hit adulthood. Instead, it is a process that is nurtured from a child's early years on. Therefore, future leadership within the body of Christ in China is a present-day responsibility of Christian parents with help from the local church. Peter Bensen, Director of the Search Institute, says that "as the family goes, so goes the future of the church. Religious life in the home is more influential than the church."

Parents and families in China today are faced with many challenges. Let's take a look at a Chinese urban family.*

Ting Ting just turned five years old in March. Her parents, Zhao Guang and Hu Tao, are in Beijing. Like most children in big cities, she is the only child of this small family. Ting Ting goes to a full time kindergarten at a boarding school where she stays from Monday to Friday. She is only with her parents during the weekend. This is becoming a more common childcare situation for Chinese.

Why do Ting Ting's parents send her to a full-time kindergarten? Her mom says: "Our parents do not live near us. We feel she can get a better education in kindergarten than staying at home. There are two reasons we send her to full time kindergarten. First, we both are very busy at work and come home late in the evening. Second, the kindergarten we like the most is located very far from where we live."

What values are most important to Ting Ting's mom in raising her child? Hu Tao says, "good health, a happy family and a good education."

This story of an urban Chinese family offers a glimpse into the challenges facing families in China—busy working parents and the expectations parents have for their children to succeed. In a recent article in *Beijing Today*, a young woman explained that "Chinese parents do not give their children much choice in what they should study. The most important thing is studying for the examinations. The parents put a lot of pressure on careers that will bring in money the child can use to support the rest of the family."

For Christian parents the challenges become more complex as they have another hope for their child—to grow in the knowledge of God. Christian parents realize that faith is the greatest life advantage. To be a parent is to have hopes and dreams. Parents want great lives for their children and look for signs of giftedness, high IQ or athletic skill. So, families organize their lives around schedules that will foster higher achievement for their child. However, for Christian parents, there is one dream that far surpasses all others—that their children be gifted in faith.

Psalm 78 says:

> [1] O my people, hear my teaching;
> listen to the words of my mouth.
> [2] I will open my mouth in parables,
> I will utter hidden things, things from of old–
> [3] what we have heard and known,
> what our fathers have told us.
> [4] We will not hide them from their children;
> we will tell the next generation
> the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
> his power, and the wonders he has done.
> [5] He decreed statutes for Jacob
> and established the law in Israel,
> which he commanded our forefathers
> to teach their children,
> [6] so the next generation would know them,
> even the children yet to be born,
> and they in turn would tell their children.
> [7] Then they would put their trust in God
> and would not forget his deeds
> but would keep his commands.

In this Psalm we see that God commanded that the stories of his mighty acts in Israel's history and his laws be passed on from parents to children. This shows the purpose and importance of Christ-centered, biblical teaching in the home—to help each generation obey God and set their hope on Him. Christian parents are commanded to make Jesus known to their children. Scripture does not give this command to church leaders but to parents. A quick survey of Old Testament verses clearly shows that parents, not the church, have the responsibility to nurture faith in their children.

Joann Pittman

Genesis 18:19—"For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord."

Deuteronomy 4:10—"Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they…may teach them to their children."

Deuteronomy 6:6-7—"These words which I command you today shall be in

your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children."

Deuteronomy 32:46—"Command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law."

Joshua 24:15—"As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

God's word clearly teaches that the most effective, life transformational context for children is the family. Parents have been given the primary responsibility for building their children. Through proper training in a family, children come to know Christ, inward character and external behaviors are formed, life-skills and relational abilities are developed, and principles of mercy, righteousness, holiness and love are learned (Ephesians 6:4). We need to return the major role of spiritual nurture of children to the family—this is a key paradigm shift. The family is the very best place to grow in Christ. In the family, spiritual life is nurtured, life skills are acquired and ministry occurs within the context of loving and accountable family relationships. In order for children to spiritually mature, they need to watch and follow how their parents or caregivers pray, study God's word and serve others.

A study published in November 2008 by the Search Institute discovered that seventy-six percent of youth believe that their parents are the greatest influencers on their spiritual development. The influence of parents rated higher than the influence of friends, mentors, teachers, worship services and even Sunday school classes. This study was conducted over a three-year period of listening to the voices of youth in 17 countries. There were ten focus groups of youth from China. The study looked deeply into the dynamics and practices in the family that may play a role in the spiritual development of children. It examined both what young people see (modeling) as well as practices that the family does together. The most common response was seeing parents be joyful because of their religious faith (70%), seeing a parent pray or meditate by themselves (70%), talking with parents about their beliefs (65%), and praying with a parent (66%).

So, the next question is if parents are the greatest influencers, then why aren't we taking the opportunity to influence? We know that a large majority of believers rely on their church, rather than their families, to train their children to become spiritually mature. Parents are spending fewer and fewer minutes in a day with their child so the answer is not necessarily more programs for churches to keep families even busier. Churches need to build and train parents to bring Christ and Christlike living into the center of their homes.

The church's role is to nurture, encourage and resource the capacity of parents to train and disciple their own child. The local church needs to find effective ways to engage parents and equip them to fulfill their biblical roles as the spiritual leaders of their children. How? That is the subject of another article. But for now, the important point is to realize that the ministry of the church is to inspire and equip parents to disciple their own child.

The majority of parents in China have no idea how to nurture the spiritual life of their child during the daily activities of their busy lives. However, there is a movement building in the church around the world to reclaim families through the church. Leaders are beginning to realize that equipping families to bring the love of Jesus into every area of their lives—at home, at meals, walking in the park, at school—will bear fruit in the church. Churches will be healthy when families are healthy. The next generation of leaders will have a firm foundation with Christ at the center.

*Names have been changed.

***Li Sha* 李沙** *has been serving in Chinese ministry since 1991. She was the president of a student exchange organization in the 1990s before becoming the Director of Strategic Partnerships for a leader development ministry. She is now serving in family ministry.* ▮

INTERCESSORY notes

please pray

1. **That China's youth will have the opportunity to hear and understand the gospel** and will respond positively to it.
2. **For wisdom, discernment, flexibility and strength** for those working with China's young people.
3. **That parents of Chinese children will embrace their responsibility** for providing spiritual teaching for their children and model a biblical lifestyle before them.
4. **That those serving through radio, media and the internet** would have wisdom and creativity to know how to reach the youth of China.
5. **That China's teachers, especially Christian teachers**, will answer their students' questions wisely and be positive role models.

Thinking about **What China Thinks**

What Does China Think? *by Mark Leonard (PublicAffairs, 2008), 164 pages; ISBN-10: 1586484842; ISBN-13: 978-1586484842*

Reviewed by Andrew T. Kaiser

I still recall quite clearly sitting in my college Introduction to International Relations class in the spring of 1989 and watching CNN's live video feed from Beijing. The powerful images kept coming and these were the emotionally loaded tools with which I formed my earliest understandings of how China works.

A year later, I found myself living on a university campus in Beijing. Everywhere I went I was hounded by students eager to know what I had heard and seen while in the West of the "Beijing Spring" events on June 4th. Invariably, each conversation I had with a student or a local resident would circle the topic before plunging into personal stories of frustration and tragedy. At the time, I was powerfully struck by the incongruities between the understanding of China with a capital C that I had learned in the classroom and the intensely local experiences of these individual Chinese citizens. The people I met continually forced me to revise or even discard my "big picture" view of China.

My experiences in China since then have only heightened this sense of disconnect. I know what many particular Chinese people think. But all of them together? Where to start?

What Does China Think?

A few years ago, journalist Mark Leonard set out to paint precisely this big picture—and to paint it as quickly as possible! With less than 150 pages of text, Leonard's *What Does China Think?* attempts to give the Western reader a good look at the main concerns and perhaps future direction of China's government.

As I read through the book I found myself more often than not nodding along in agreement. Many of the events he discusses—the various economic and political "experiments" taking place in China—are familiar to me. The ubiquitous "Harmonious Society," the up and coming "Scientific Development," even the embarrassingly awkward "Three Represents"—all these slogans and others receive fair and, in places, helpful treatment and elucidation in Leonard's breezy prose. Issues that are familiar to anyone who has spent an extended time in China are discussed—again, briefly—in context and used to provide background understandings of where China's new economic and political ideas are coming from. From education to pollution, from energy to populism, Leonard has digested and condensed a tremendous amount of information.

For the basic building blocks of his argument, Leonard musters a bewildering list of Chinese thinkers and politicians.

For the basic building blocks of his argument, Leonard musters a bewildering list of Chinese thinkers and politicians—and then moves through them quickly. While admirably using quotes and statistics to give each individual's contribution meaning and context, Leonard is rarely able to grant more than a mere two or three slim pages per individual. The publishers were clearly aware of this limitation, and so they chose wisely to include a section at the back of the book outlining these various dramatis personae.

At its best, *What Does China Think?* provides a powerful corrective to many of the outdated and simplistic understandings of China that are prevalent in Western discussions today. Here we have a contemporary book on China that eschews the images of Soviet-era apparatchiks and gives us instead a parade of Chinese leaders and influencers who are actively seeking to develop their country in ways that fit neither American nor Soviet categories. In this light, Leonard's limning of the "New Liberals" and the "Neo-comms" is particularly instructive. His elucidation of China's experiments in deliberative democracy should open many Western eyes, and his discussion of China's role in Africa will hopefully draw attention to other more detailed accounts of this potential paradigm shift in development theory.[1]

Clearly intended to be a popular rather than academic treatment of the subject, *What Does China Think?* would be a tremendous contribution to Western understandings of China if it were to, in fact, become popular. If the un-

derstanding of high-level political and economic thinking that Leonard presents in this book were to be accepted and digested by the popular media in the West, I would have to spend a lot less of my time and energy explaining life in China to the people outside of China who support and participate in my work.

Is This What China Thinks?

Despite all this praise, I do see two limitations to *What Does China Think?* On many occasions Leonard's book left me with the impression that I was reading more of an historical work. In fact, I often had the feeling that I was reading an English review of National Party Congress reports from the last ten years. While this suggests that much of what Leonard records is accurate, it also means that for those of us who follow Chinese newspapers this book should be largely old news. Part of this problem stems from China's blistering pace of development. A book published in 2008 is necessarily based on research from a few years earlier, and in China a lot can change in just five years.

My other concern is more difficult to describe. At its most basic, I suppose I was never really comfortable with just who the "China" in the book's title was supposed to represent. Of course, Leonard's book is unabashedly macro in its scope. I suppose it succeeds in this regard. However, all my years of living and working in China have taught me that China is essentially local, and I am not sure how this work stands up to micro scrutiny.

I have tried to engage some of my government and Party friends on the ideas and individuals recorded in *What Does China Think?*—so far, with very limited success. I have yet to find anyone especially familiar with any of Leonard's thinkers (though with only Pinyin names to work with I am a bit hampered). Some of the general ideas make sense to local politicians, but these are not the concepts that they themselves employ in their own conversations. Provincial officials, university academics, local party cadres—I am struggling to find connections between the ideas in this book and the Chinese people I know.

Of course, I can think of many reasons why my concern may be misplaced. In a society where information is controlled, it is not reasonable to expect national, frontline thinking to be instantly and accurately distilled at the local level. I suppose many of these ideas do exist in more popularized forms at the local level. Just yesterday I was talking politics over lunch with an academic and a bureaucrat. They talked about how anyone who is bold enough to publicly curse the top official in their respective offices is guaranteed to earn the respect of all the underlings. Is there a hint of deliberative democracy in this story? Perhaps, but it doesn't sound quite like the kinds of things Leonard is presenting. In fact, what these two men actually talked about was the crisis of identity within the party and the increasing internal pressure for China to adopt more aspects of liberal democracy. I'm not sure how to fit these two topics into Leonard's China, but I know they are common themes in mine.

Part of What China Thinks

Here's the thing. I like this book, and I see a lot of accuracy in the things Leonard records. And yet—I'm not sure what to do with it on the ground. At least in my city (a provincial capitol!), no one in government talks in these terms. Sure, the slogans are repeated, but most officials simply use the language of politics to avoid responsibility or to promote their own status. I see China's increasing confidence as a nation, and I see it reflected in new policies and official processes. Yet, just this past week I have been bombarded by requests from anxious parents who are desperate to get their overwhelmed middle school kids out of China as soon as possible. Again, the contrast is striking. One young local volunteer calls for world peace while on the same day a taxi driver cries out for the immediate invasion of Taiwan.

I suspect that these contrasts are the real answer to the question, "What Does China Think?" You can't condense 1.5 billion people's thoughts into a handful of ideas. People are not machines, and over the long march of history they have consistently (sic) shown a stubborn determination to hold fast to ideas that are just not consistent. Put simply, "China" (whoever she may be) may have all kinds of ideas, and be thinking many of them at the same time. Seen in this light, *What Does China Think?* provides the thoughtful reader with a helpful pair of lenses with which to examine this fascinating country in transition and in particular its future role on the global stage. But the ideas Leonard portrays are not the only lenses available—and they are not always the most useful ones.

Every year as June 4th approaches there are more colleagues that have to be reminded of why this date matters. Of course, there are still Chinese people for whom those events are still deeply significant. However, for many others they are irrelevant details that mirror an older way of thinking from an unrecognizable past. My own ideas of What China Thinks are similarly stuck in the same quandary: concepts that I find representative and descriptive of China as a nation are often deemed irrelevant by many local people. Those of us who have come from outside to work in this country need books like *What Does China Think?* to expose us to new areas of Chinaís development and to force us to grapple with the contrasts that persist in China today.

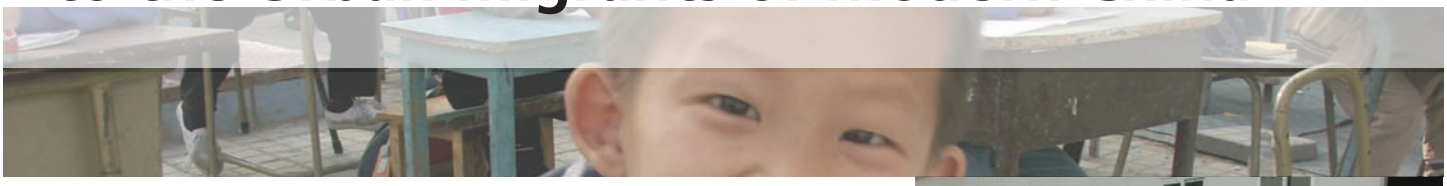
Endnote

1. For more on how China is winning the hearts of Africans by espousing a philosophy of development that appeals to African leaders across the continent, see the very technical and quite positive *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* by Deborah Brautigam (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Andrew T. Kaiser *lives in China with his family. He has been working in China's non-profit sector since 1997.* ∎

A White Paper

The Moving Population: An Introduction to the Urban Migrants of Modern China



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