“Not One Less
— China Education Association, HKUSU

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The economy of Mainland China is booming at an unprecedented pace. This economic development, however, might only be beneficial to cities and coastal regions where favourable policies and foreign capital are introduced. In some remote and rural areas of Mainland China, poverty is yet to be overcome and many children still struggle to receive adequate care and education.

“The enrolment ratio for a senior secondary school in Guiding County, Guizhou, was only 65% in 2013. Many students are forced to start working to ease their families’ financial burden,” said Cathy Chan 陳淑玲 (MBBS Year 2), External Vice-Chairperson of China Education Association (CEA 中国教育小组) of Session 2014-2015 at HKU. She told us how CEA has brightened the lives of underprivileged students in China for the past 20 years.

Established in 1995 as the first students’ registered charity to support education on the Mainland, CEA started its venture for social good by serving primary school pupils in Hunan. “Our work targeted pupils’ educational expenditure and the maintenance costs of dilapidated schools.”

In 2007, a policy change in the education system on the Mainland caused CEA to switch its focus from primary school pupils to senior secondary school students as its service audience. The law on nine-year compulsory education and the “Two Exemptions and One Subsidy” (TEOS) policy implemented in China provide free education to children, no matter in which city or rural area they reside. But, many do not continue their studies in senior secondary schools because of their families’ financial constraints.

“Many have to work to feed family members at home. Since
2006, we have supported the three-year senior secondary school fees of students in Huaiji County, Guangdong for over four years. Although the total annual educational expense is RMB 6,000-7,000 per student, the maximum subsidy we can offer for each student each year is only RMB 2,600 due to insufficient donations.” said Jenny Mak 麥麗雯 (BSocSc Year 2), CEA Internal Vice-Chairperson. In 2010, CEA started serving senior secondary school students in Guiding County, Guizhou, where the economic situation is far less prosperous.

For nearly 20 years, CEA has been evolving along with the continual changes of the rural education system. “Over the years, we have been conducting expeditions and voluntary teaching service in rural areas. Apart from a change in focus on primary school pupils to senior secondary school students, education software, including teachers training to assist them with adequate skills to teach at a senior level, is now our first priority.”

Nevertheless, to make its goal practical, CEA is now having to overcome many obstacles and difficulties especially in soliciting donations that have never been seen before. When we are out on the streets for fundraising activities, some people questioned as to why we are helping an already rich nation. And some, probably because of our Chinese name, even mistake our efforts to be directed at “national education.” Despite constraints, CEA will continue to live its belief of fulfilling the dreams of underprivileged students in China.

www.hkusucec.hkusu.hku.hk

Since 1995, over 1440 students have benefitted:

Some 1200 primary school pupils in Baojing County & Yongshun County, Hunan

113 senior secondary school students in Huaiji County, Guangdong

127 senior secondary school students in Guiding County, Guizhou

CEA organised Shoes-off Walkathon as part of its annual fundraising programme.
Founded in 2013, the non-profit organisation SpeechExpress originally targeted Hong Kong teenagers who fear speaking English in public. In August 2014, the organisation extended its efforts beyond Hong Kong and organised its first summer camp in Yongchun, Fujian, titled “Dialogue with the World” which provides the opportunity for students to encounter Western cultures and receive training on English-speaking practices.

“Education in Mainland China is facing the same problem as in Hong Kong. It is exam-oriented,” said Alison Song 宋明潔 (BBA(Law) Year 3), the founding member of SpeechExpress. “So we picked Fujian – an economically middle-ranged area on the Mainland with a reasonable standard of English education where most of the service organisations seldom pay attention to.”

With 68 secondary school students participating in the programme, Alison and six other volunteers from Indonesia, India, Bangladesh and China took the responsibility to teach the students new knowledge based on English speaking techniques and global issues such as ‘globalisation’, while also drawing some attention to interest developments in the areas of drama and dance.

Adopting a pedagogy of “Learning by Doing” to intensively train public speaking skills of students in
two weeks, students were asked to deliver one to two public speeches daily.

“This was the first experience for many students to speak publicly in English. I still remember there was one student who, at the beginning, found it extremely difficult to engage in public speaking. She wrote every single word down on note cards and used them to cover her face when she stood on the stage, feeling too shy to speak. But on the last day, she didn’t need any notes at all to deliver a speech. She is now more confident.” Not only did the work of SpeechExpress improve the confidence and self-esteem of students but also, local English teachers were impressed by SpeechExpress’ pedagogy and slowly incorporated interactive activities into their normal English lessons. “The Vice-Principal informed us that drama was new to his school. He was so impressed by our interactive drama class that he aims to implement an inter-class drama activity in the next school year. When I heard about this, I felt so moved – our work paid off!”

With the success of the summer camp, Alison said SpeechExpress would definitely run the programme again next year. “It’s a win-win situation where students in Mainland China and we, the organisers, have benefited from the programme. We hope to continue our work next year and beyond, expanding it to other cities in China.”

speechexpress.org

“...The volunteer teachers’ crazy dance and games impressed me a lot. I was able to have more confidence to speak out in English.”

Yan Yan
A secondary school student in Fuzhou
Design for Good
— Beyond The Wall

Registered architect Amy Chan 陳雅妍 (BA(ArchStud) 2006; MArch 2009) has been designing private housing estates in Hong Kong for five years.

“When we make residential buildings, we focus on them as products to sell to people,” said Chan. “Design is not our top priority unfortunately.”

The priority, she said, lies in successfully selling a property at a given market price.

“Sometimes we just design a room that is not able to fit in a double bed. But if you design a bigger flat, people might not be interested because the price might be too high for them to purchase.”

Aspired to put comfort first, Chan and three graduates from Faculty of Architecture set up an NGO “Beyond The Wall” in 2013.

“Our motto is ‘Design for Good’. I really believe design can change lives,” said Chan. “We are trained in the field of architecture where we need to create a space for people to live in.

Having helped kids renovate their school in Nepal last year, the group is turning to serve Hong Kong this year.

Carol Kan 簡嘉露 (BA(ArchStud) 2007; MSc(UrbanPlanning) 2009), another co-founder, said they will

“One single mother in particular has four sons but has no desks for them to do homework at home. We can’t create a very spacious home for them. But we can try to improve their living environment.”

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be building furniture for free for five ethnic minority families in Kwai Chung. Kan said most of those families are too poor to afford furniture. One single mother in particular has four sons but has no desks for them to do homework at home.

“We can’t create a very spacious home for them because we can’t buy or rent a flat for them,” said Kan, who is also a town planner. “But we can try to improve their living environment.”

The group emphasises that the families involved will have a say on how the furniture will look. Participating students and designers are expected to sketch and create furniture with their families.

“Of course we can find some second hand furniture,” said Kan. “But I think if we respect them, we should design for them according to their needs. We can also take their culture into consideration.”

The furniture project has recruited 24 students studying at the Faculty of Architecture at HKU. Kan and Chan are still heading the association, but the pair hopes to gradually hand over their leadership roles.

“Our ultimate dream is that student bodies will run the project by themselves year after year,” said Chan. “We want to keep this alive at universities so that the passion of designing for good can be passed on to the younger ones.”

The group plans to run both local and overseas services concurrently. It is working to explore school building or renovation projects in Nepal or Cambodia next year.

www.beyondbethewall.asia
Before I started Read-Cycling, I had barely any experience of running a charity. Writing cheques in support of the survivors of natural disasters would be the closest I came to offering a helping hand to good causes. Then one day, I suddenly found I could no longer tolerate the chaos in my study, which had thousands of books all over the place. That was when I thought about setting up an organisation to help book lovers find new homes for their good old books.

My idea was promptly supported by my two best friends, Lily Ho 何莉英 (LLB 1986; PCLL 1987; PDipL(PRC) 1997) and Ivy Au Yeung 欧陽麗玲 (BSocSc 1986), who were my floor-mates in the Old Halls back in the 1980s.

We were, by training, serious people. When we wanted to do the right thing, we wanted to do it right. In the end, an impulsive idea turned out to become a government-registered charitable organisation, which marked our commitment to serving the community in a continuous manner.

Aiming at promoting resource sharing and the joy of reading, Read-Cycling is a philanthropy project for the community and a learning project for us. We had spent many evenings after work sorting out operational challenges and arguing hard for the best solutions.

It was 16 months after its inception that Read-Cycling hosted its first event, a three-day readers’ carnival, entitled “Bring A Book & Share”, in a high-traffic shopping mall.

Unlike most of the used book selling bazaars, “Bring A Book & Share” serves more than to raise funds. Visitors can freely curl up on sofas or beanbags and read as long as they liked. We believe one should be able to enjoy reading anytime, anywhere, even on the way to shopping. The event itself was a means as well as an end.
“Bring A Book & Share” now receives over 12,000 visitors annually. I always look forward to meeting them, watching them surrender to the magic spell of their silent companions and heading back home with a cartful of treasures.

Read-Cycling will be celebrating its fifth anniversary in December. Still a very simple set up with no full-time staff, the organisation has been entrusted with more than 35,000 quality used books and helped over 20,000 of them find new homes. We also, as at November 2014, made happen four reader’s carnivals, 12 authors’ sharing sessions, 24 school programmes, alongside many other community projects. What we have accomplished far exceeded what we originally expected we could do. For this, we were indebted to the synergy with like-minded organisations and sponsors, which gave a young establishment a lot of trust in helping realise some of its goals. We were also deeply grateful to our colleagues, friends and families. They never hesitate to perform the sweatiest of tasks.

In the movie *Field of Dreams*, farmer Ray, played by Kevin Costner, hears a voice that whisper “If you build it, he will come.” He interprets it as a command to build a baseball diamond in his fields; he does, and people flock in to enjoy the games.

When reality blends with fantasy, dreams can come true.

For me, that is Read-Cycling.

_Cynthia Lau 刘庭善 (BSocSc 1986) Founder of Read-Cycling 書送快樂 www.read-cycling.org_