

Ray of hope for young dropouts

Beneficiary of welfare project devoted to education in poor areas

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

When Zhang Shengli was first told that his wife was pregnant, he knew straight away what their child would be called.

"Xi Wang (hope)" was the name that he wanted to give the baby when it was born, after a scheme called "Project Hope."

"Project Hope" is a well-known public welfare project which helps many school dropouts in the country's poverty-stricken rural areas in China. The project began on October 1, 1989.

Zhang Shengli, born in North China's Hebei Province, was lucky enough to be the first child sponsored by "Project Hope," which has been a saviour in his lifetime.

"I could not imagine what my life would have been like if there had not been a 'Project Hope,'" Zhang, 25, recalled. "It is the project that pulled me out of hopelessness at that time."

Hopeless

Born in a poor peasant home with two brothers and one sister, Zhang dared not to wish that he could sit in the classroom with other children when he silently watched them reading books through windows in the Taomugada Primary School, the only school in the Taomugada Village, in Laiyuan County of North China's Hebei Province.

The family were poor, not only because they lived in a remote village but also because his parents' health was not good.

His mother was unable to speak and his father had stomach cancer. To cure his father's illness, the family owed out much money in debt. The crops the family planted could only support them for three months out of the year.

"So 'school' was a luxury and a sensitive word in my family," Zhang recalled.

But his dream of going to school never died. "I want to go

to school!" Zhang would plead. He was finally allowed to go to school but sadly his father got more and more ill.

"School fees for one year cost only 10 yuan (US\$1.24) but it was still a heavy burden on the family at that time," Zhang said.

To save enough money for school fees, little Zhang collected hair that was cut by family members which he sold for money.

Little Zhang knew that it was not easy for his family to pay for him to study and he wished to pay them back as soon as he could.

Every day after school, Zhang helped with the housework. He carried water, hacked firewood and fed pigs, he then would go and do his homework.

Unfortunately events would soon change all of this. Zhang's father died and now with the main bread winner gone the family would struggle even more. His mother married another man in another village, leaving Zhang and his brothers and sister orphans.

"We had to beg for food from neighbours since they had both left. I felt hopeless," Zhang said. Further bad news followed. Because most of the students at the school could not afford the school fees, the school was closed down.

Dream came true

But Zhang didn't give up his dream of going to school.

He bravely wrote a letter to a man he had only heard about —

Che Zhizhong, a former government official of Laiyuan County who had visited the village years before and apparently cared much about the problem of school dropouts.

In his letter, Zhang told his miserable story and asked the unknown "grandpa Che" to help him to go back to school. Months passed without a reply.

"I believed that 'grandpa Che' had got the letter. Maybe he was too busy to reply me," Zhang thought.

But he still waited for a



Zhang Shengli and his wife, Wang Yaping

miracle. And the miracle did happen.

Che was deeply moved by his letter and passed on the letter to the Beijing-based China Youth Development Foundation, the initiator of "Project Hope." The foundation at once sent people to visit the village in July.

Taomugada Primary School was then chosen to become the first sponsored school in the project on October 17, 1989.

Zhang was supposed to give a speech which represented all of those in a similar position in his village on the day of the ceremony, but he forgot everything he had prepared. "I am so happy and I am so excited!" were all that Zhang could manage. A tear of joy rolled down his cheek.

His dream of attending school finally came true. "The children need me," Zhang said. "They want to study. I want to help them."

Back to children

Under "Project Hope," Zhang finished his primary school and middle school education in the county.

In 1995, with the help of the China Youth Development Foundation, he was sent to Shanghai No 1 Normal School for college study.

"The study experience in Shanghai finally opened my eyes," Zhang said. "But later a short experience in the United States was even more fantastic,"

he added. In 1996, Zhang and another girl were invited to join the 1996 Atlantic Olympic torch relay.

"When I was on the torch relay in Niagara Falls, I was very nervous because of my shabby appearance," Zhang recalled. "I could not help but cry. What can I do to help improve my hometown?"

A 10-day trip to the United States deeply affected him.

When he returned from college, he gave up making plenty of money in large cities and went to a remote village to be a primary school teacher.

"The children need me," Zhang said. "They want to study. I want to help them."

When he was a primary school teacher, he had taught many better students in a few shabby schools.

And the one who had taught him to be a primary school teacher was already in his school quietly. The former

teacher united together to rebuild the school step by step.

Zhang wanted to build a bigger and better school which could accommodate more children from nearby villages.

It was again the "Project Hope" that helped him.

New classrooms were built, new chairs, desks and blackboards were made.

Students travelled for miles to visit the school.

"Some parents didn't want their daughters to go to school just because they were girls," Zhang said. "I told them their daughters could study for free under the sponsors of 'Project Hope' and they finally agreed."

Fruit of love

Zhang Shengli never imagined that "Project Hope" would also eventually find him a wife! He married Wang Yaping in the Spring Festival of 1999.

Wang, born in a richer county nearby Laiyuan, owned a small shopping mall in the county town. She was a kind woman and wished to do something for the school.

One day after she read the story of Zhang Shengli in a newspaper, she decided to go to his village to see what was really happening with her own eyes and to see if there were anything she could do to help.

After she had stayed in the village for a week and watched how the children were being taught, she decided to leave home and join them.

"I began to love him when I saw how clumsily he cooked for the children and how he washed their clothes," recalled Wang, smiling. "I could feel his deep love towards the children and I admired him."

The happy couple now live in the school with their students. They take care of the children just like their parents would.

"Project Hope" saved my life and offered me hope for a brighter future. I want to give the same hope to the children here like others gave to me," said Zhang.

WHAT'S ON

STAGE

Keep it in the air: The Chaoyang Theatre is one of the Beijing theatres to present acrobatics all year round.

Top acrobatic artists invited from all over the country perform for Chinese and foreign tourists. The programme features trick cycling, leaping through hoops and Chinese magic tricks. Some of the artists have won prizes in international competitions.

Time: 7:15 pm, daily
Place: 36, Dongsanhuan Beilu, Chaoyang District
Tel: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

Joyful jugglers: The China Acrobatic Troupe is staging a nightly variety show at the Tiandi Theatre, where the seemingly impossible is made real.

Spinning plates, juggling umbrellas, contortionists and acrobats fill the air. Integrating superlative juggling, unicycling, balancing and jumping through hoops with the finest ancient Chinese dancing, the star-studded cast will amaze.

Time: 7:15 pm, daily
Place: 10 Dongzhimen Nandajie, Chaoyang District, Beijing
Tel: 6502-3984

Opera excerpts: The Liyuan Theatre presents traditional Peking Opera excerpts specially packaged in short programmes for foreign audiences in the original style.

The theatre revives the ambience of Old Beijing by setting up Ming-style tables that enable guests to sample snacks during performances.

With an explanation in English, the performances are from the Beijing Peking Opera Theatre.

Time: 7:30 pm, nightly
Place: Qianmen Hotel, 175, Yong'an Lu, Xuanwu District
Tel: 6301-6688 ext 8867

Living life online: A drama with a difference is coming to the Beijing stage.

The plot tells a story which touches on many different aspects of modern-day life. The role of the Internet in our lives today plays a major part in the drama, which is being brought to the Qingyi Small Theatre. The hopes and aspirations of different people coming to Beijing from different places adds a cosmopolitan edge to the play.

Time: 7:15, until January 4
Place: Beibingmasi Hutong, Jiadaokou

Nandajie, Dongcheng District
Tel: 6407-5959

All that jazz! Free Ballet of Valery Tereshkin from Russia will stage a jazz dance show in Beijing.

Once a successful acrobatics choreographer, Tereshkin established a dance company 13 years ago consisting mostly of former sports stars.

This is the first time Free Ballet of Valery Tereshkin has come to China. It will perform "Madam Swing," a piece which centres on a young woman who meets four young guys and makes all of them fall in love with her, attracting each with different sides of her feminine nature.

Time: 7:30 pm, December 26-28
Place: Century Theatre, 40, Liangmaqiao Lu
Tel: 6427-9197, 6466-4805

Latin swirl: Hot Latin dance will sweep up Beijing's stage to ignite the wild inner spirit among Beijing spectators.

Hungarian Latin dance troupe Latin Fire is one of the best performing troupes of Latin dancing in Europe. It is made up of young, energetic and professional dancers who will stir up the stage with hot, wild, and passionate Latin dancing.

Time: 7:30 pm, December 29-31
Place: Beizhan Theatre, 135 Xiwal Dajie, Xicheng District
Tel: 6835-1383

Learning lessons: The Puppet Art Troupe of China has created a puppet show especially for pre-school children.

The play called "The Lion's Trick" is a fable about animals in the forest, dreamed up by the artists to teach children some of life's morals.

Time: 9:30 am, 10:30 am, until December 30
Place: China Puppet Show Theatre
Tel: 6425-4798

Food for thought: The drama is set in a famous restaurant that forms the backdrop for a series of tales about different customers.

Chinese food is delicious and it is especially so in this restaurant. Diners come and go, leaving lots of sensational stories that have as many different flavours as the food served in the restaurant.

Time: 7 pm, December 28-January 15
Place: Capital Theatre, 22 Wangfujing Dajie
Tel: 6525-0996, 6524-9847

CONCERTS

All-girls concert: Red Poppy Percussion will present a vivid performance on Beijing's stage to welcome the New Year's Day.

Founded in 1999, the percussion is the first group of this kind in China made of girls aged 18 to 23 who are mostly students from music schools in China. The young and energetic singers will deliver a series of newly created pieces with electronic remixing.

Time: 7:50 pm, December 27
Place: Guangbo Theatre, 2 Fuxingmenwai Dajie
Tel: 6595-7562; 6507-9704

Poem concert: A music-accompanied poem recital party called "Muse's Harp" will be staged.

Famous film actors and drama players will be invited to recite poetry and essays by a large number of Chinese and foreign writers, such as Gu Cheng, Bei Dao, Hu Shi, Shakespeare, Walt Whitman, Lord Byron and Goethe.

The accompaniment will be played by the Festival Orchestra and Festival Chamber Orchestra under the Beijing Concert Hall with the singing by Mulan Children's Chorus and Voice of Spring Chorus.

Time: 7:30 pm, December 28
Place: Forbidden City Concert Hall, inside Zhongshan Park on west side of Tian'anmen Rostrum
Tel: 6559-8285

From Russia with love: The Russian Philharmonic Orchestra will bring their skills to Beijing's stage with three performances at Poly Theatre.

Founded in 1992, the orchestra has a relatively short history but international recognition for its quality and prolific CD-recording works. It is a collection of top musicians in Russia including many who have won major prizes for the prowess. The orchestra will present classical music by Tchaikovsky and Johann Strauss. Two Chinese pieces also will be played.

Time: 7:30, January 19-21
Place: Poly Theatre
Tel: 6561-0651

EXHIBITIONS

Emotions on canvas: The Wanfung Art Gallery will hold an oil painting show — "Their Words" — beginning early next month.

Artists include Liu Baomin, Xiao Se, Li Chunyao and Wei Jia. They will express their emotions on popular issues through brushstrokes. Viewers can clearly experience the artists' emotional world in the show.

Time: 9 am-5 pm, January 3-31
Place: 136, Nanchizhuang, Dongcheng District
Tel: 6523-3230

Charmed by China: An exhibition featuring delicate china wares used in the past is on display at the Chinese Revolution Museum.

The exhibition highlights the 1,700 year history of China in old courts. There are altogether 1,688 precious pieces collected from the china collection in museums in Beijing, Shanghai and abroad on show.

The exhibition has been staged around the world since 1989.

Time: 9 am-5 pm until December 31
Place: east side of Tian'anmen Square
Tel: 6526-3355

Unique style: A worthwhile retrospective displaying famous artist Zhao Jiaqian's original paintings is on at the Museum of China History.

Zhang has a niche for his style developed from the combination of strict traditional Chinese painting skills and western art theory. The exhibition selected 79 museums in Taipei, Sichuan and Beijing. Most are paintings with a few copies of ink and wash.

Time: 9 am-5 pm until January 5
Place: east side of Tian'anmen Square
Tel: 6512-8321

Picasso's prints: An exhibition displaying some of the most important artists, Pablo Picasso's prints were made in Paris from 1942 to 1947, a spell which took in the end of the Second World War and the following years.

The artist's most accessible period was in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The exhibition will display 161 original prints that the artist's flexible expression of bold and wild ideas.

Time: 9 am-5 pm until February 15
Place: 9 A, Fuxing Lu, Xidian District
Tel: 6853-0257

In four seasons: A feature painting exhibition focusing on the scenes of *hutong* in four seasons starts at Universal Classical Culture Centre.

The exhibition is themed to depict the vast majority of buildings in Beijing in the past. More than 40 art works including oils, washes, watercolours, traditional Chinese paintings and sculptures by 17 artists portraying the different appearances of the *hutong* in four seasons will be displayed.

Time: 10 am-6 pm until February 28
Place: Eastgate Plaza, 29 Dongzhong Jie, Dongcheng District
Tel: 6418-3012

Huang Zhou revered: The Yanhuang Art Museum is holding a commemorative exhibition in tribute to Huang Zhou (1925-97), a famous modern artist in China who was also the founder of the museum.

In commemoration of Huang, the exhibition will run at the front hall to the entrance of the museum, where scores of Huang's original paintings are displayed in rotation. Huang is known for his vivid portrayal of donkeys. The exhibition includes his water paintings, sketches and flower and bird paintings.

Time: 9 am-5 pm daily
Place: 9 Huizhong Lu, Chaoyang District
Tel: 6491-2902

EVENT
Singing contest: The Foreigners Singing Chinese Songs Contest on the Beijing TV Station (BTV) is an annual TV show well-received by viewers in China since 1995, when the first contest was held.

This year's event will be expanded to include singing and dancing; ballads and story telling; crosstalk and sketch; acrobatics and magic; calligraphy and painting; martial arts; and traditional operas.

The contest for traditional opera, ballads and story telling will be on February 8; singing and dancing on February 10; and other forms on February 9.

Foreigners who work, study or live in China are all welcome to take part.

On February 10, the TV shows will be broadcast on BTV, as well as on CCTV (China Central Television), Phoenix TV, some local channels in China and some TV stations in the United States, Australia, Canada and Europe.

Time: 6842-9608, 6841-9528

TODAY'S RADIO

FM 87.6 MHz (all stereo)

09:00 Traveller
10:30 Movie Fans Club
14:00 Radio Drama
16:30 Chinese Folk Music

FM 97.4 (all stereo)

16:30 Review of Old Albums
18:00 New Sound of Modern City
20:30 BBC Pop Music

FM 90.0 MHz (all stereo)

12:00 Conversation

AM 603 kHz

07:00 Peking Opera excerpts
16:00 Literature Cafe
16:30 Popular CD
18:00 Chinese folk music
20:00 Into Music

AM 603 kHz

07:00 News
08:30 Reading Time
10:00 Community & Life
12:00 Legal Times
18:00 Travelling Guide
20:10 English pop songs

TODAY'S TELEVISION

CCTV-1 Channel 2

16:10 Drama Focus
19:00 News; Weather
20:06 20-part serial: Dr Sun Yat-sen (19)

CCTV-2 Channel 8

10:30 Road to Health
11:20 Life
17:25 Oriental Horizon
19:35 China Financial Report
21:00 Earth Stories
22:05 Stock Market Today

CCTV-3 Channel 15

15:45 Arts Scope
18:30 Elementary Art
19:30 Symphony World
20:33 Performance Arena
21:35 Music Bridge

CCTV-4 Channel 32

11:20 Traveller
12:30 China Report
18:30 Focus Today
21:00 China News

CCTV-6 Channel 18

10:12 Movie
12:21 Documentary: Sound of Music
14:29 US movie
19:40 Chinese movie
21:37 US movie

CCTV-8 Channel 29

11:05 Animal World
19:00 Around the World
19:35 Studio Express
20:00 Serial: Kangxi Empire (39, 40)

CCTV-8 Channel 29

21:48 Everyday Jiayi

BTV-1 Channel 6

07:00 Good Morning Beijing
08:50 Stock Watch
11:30 Beijing Express
18:30 News; Weather
21:45 Focus Today
23:14 Window of China

BTV-2 Channel 21

18:00 Screen Archives
19:07 Entertainment Live
19:40 Serial: The Sword (29, 30)
21:40 Sports news

BTV-3 Channel 27

11:25 Golden Times
19:00 Animation World
19:30 Green Action
20:40 Science Education Express
21:00 News

BTV-4 Channel 17

19:03 World Archives
19:32 365-part series: The History of the Communist Party of China
21:31 Series: Imperial Envoy (15, 16)

BTV-6 Channel 19

10:00 2001/2002 Italian soccer league
17:00 Bodybuilding Everyday
19:25 Live telecast of 2001/2002 CBA
22:35 Soccer report

BTV-7 Channel 24

19:30 Luxury & Elegance
20:00 Health & Life
21:20 Today's Life
21:30 Estate in 21st Century
23:35 Sunshine Culture

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

With the holidays rapidly approaching, let's spend the week looking at some suitable gifts for bridge friends — or for yourself.

First, Marty Bergen's latest, "Marty Sez" (Magnus Books, 2001). You get 114 useful tips, one per page, covering all aspects of the game, but most (94) are about bidding. The book ends with a glossary.

In this deal, you are sitting East, looking at your hand and the dummy (North). Against three no-trump, your partner leads the spade jack. Declarer wins with the queen in his hand, then runs the club jack, partner playing the seven. How would you plan the defense?

Bergen — following present-day tournament style — recommends opening two no-trump with 20 or 21 points. This hand, with so many aces and kings, is arguably too strong, being worth a two-club opening and two-no-trump rebid, which in his style shows 22 or 23 points. With 24 points — lucky you! — force to game and hope partner doesn't have a Yarborough.

You must duck this trick. When partner follows to the next club, win and shift to the heart queen. As dummy's clubs are dead, South can collect only three spades, two hearts, two diamonds and one club. If you grab the first club

North			
♠	K 6 5		
♥	6 3		
♦	7 4 3		
♣	K 10 9 8 5		
West	J 10 9 7 4	East	8
♥	8 7 2	♥	Q J 10 9
♦	Q 10 8	♦	J 9 6 2
♣	7 2	♣	A Q 4 3
South			
♠	A Q 3 2		
♥	A K 5 4		
♦	A K 5		
♣	J 6		
Dealer: South			
Vulnerable: Both			
South	West	North	East
2 NT	Pass	3 NT	All pass
Opening lead: ♠ J			

trick, he will win your heart shift and continue clubs until you take your ace. With the spade king as a dummy entry, declarer will rake in an overtrick with three spades, two hearts, two diamonds and three clubs. Marty sez: When declarer attacks a suit and you have two stoppers, it is often correct to duck.

CROSSWORD (No 6476)

ACROSS

- 1 Bristles
- 6 Lifting device
- 11 "Little Women" author
- 13 Make fizzy
- 15 African desert
- 16 Great Lakes St.
- 17 Food cooker
- 18 Dupe
- 20 Mentally sound
- 21 Condensation
- 24 Elf-sized
- 25 - it (fighting)
- 26 Wedding tale
- 28 Important exams
- 32 Take off "I -- Rock"
- 33 Japanese delicacy
- 34 Make muddy
- 36 Bird dog
- 38