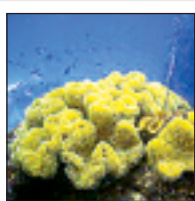


"I was astounded by all the colors, the different kinds of coral, the fish, it was like an underwater rainforest." **Page 16**



"The first time I heard about the Dakar Rally, I said to myself, 'Good Lord! How could anyone run in such a crazy race?'" **Page 13**



The sudden, and so far unexplained disappearance of the Dian Kingdom left many puzzles for historians. **Page 10**



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Compensation Claimed on Property Loss

Amendment to Constitution Inspires Lawsuit

By Hou Mingxin

For Chen Jinhong, the transition from an ordinary worker to the owner of a company with assets of over 60 million yuan in a period of five years was something of a miracle.

But eight years ago, an improper administrative order by the Foshan Economic Committee, in Guangdong Province, ruined Chen's life. He lost his company, his fortune and even his health.

Since then, he has filed several lawsuits in Guangdong in an effort to regain control of the company he established, so far without success.

Last month, reports that the protection of private property would be enshrined in China's constitution prompted Chen to file a suit in the Supreme Court of China, demanding that his case be re-heard and a compensation of 160 million yuan be paid.

ed hearing Chen's lawsuit. One year later, on June 28, the court issued a judgement rejecting Chen's claim, saying Chen was not qualified to file an administrative lawsuit.

Chen then brought the lawsuit to the Guangdong People's High Court on July 7, which subsequently transferred the case back to the Foshan Intermediate People's Court.

On June 24, 1999, Foshan Intermediate People's Court heard Chen's claim again. Chen requested Foshan Economic Committee pay him 170 million yuan in compensation.

On November 20, 2002, the court issued a judgement declaring the orders made by the Foshan Economic Committee wrong, but the court rejected Chen's compensation claim.



Chen Jinhong (center) at his company, Sanxingye in 1992, before his dismissal by the Foshan Economic Committee.

Photos provided by Chen Jinhong

while his health continues to deteriorate.

Focus of the lawsuit

According to Weng Chunhui, Chen's attorney, the nature of the enterprise is the key point of the lawsuit.

"There are three kinds of enterprises in China: state-owned, collectively owned and private enterprises. Compared with private enterprises, the first two enjoy much more favorable policies. For this reason, in the mid 1980s, some private enterprises were attached to state-owned or collectively owned enterprises, with the purpose of enjoying favorable policies as well as protection. Therefore, some seemingly collectively owned enterprises are actually private. Chen's three companies were private enterprises in the name of collectively owned enterprises," Weng told *Beijing Today* on Tuesday.

"The court must firstly determine the nature of an enterprise when judging the validity of administrative action related to it," Weng added.

He said the judgements of the two courts were made on the assumption that the companies fell into the category of collectively owned enterprises.

According to the rule on collectively owned enterprises, the government has no right to appoint or dismiss the leadership.

"No matter whether Chen's company was a collectively owned or a private enterprise, Foshan Economic Committee, as a governmental department, had no right to dismiss him."

During this period, the Foshan Economic Committee changed the name of the three companies that had belonged to Chen and combined them into one new company. By the end of 1997, the new company was in debt for a total of 17 million yuan and eventually declared bankruptcy.

The expense of the lawsuits had also driven Chen into debt, damages caused by Foshan Economic Committee."

Weng points out that Chen himself invested the initial 200,000 to register the company, Foshan Economic Committee invested nothing. According to a regulation issued jointly in 1996 by the Ministry of Finance, the State Economy and Trade Committee and the State Administration of Taxation, an enterprise should belong to the party who invested in it, and Chen's companies should be deemed as private.

A Mr. Liang, director of the general office of Foshan Economy and Trade Bureau (formerly the Foshan Economic Committee), who declined to give his full name, told *Beijing Today* Tuesday that Chen's companies should be seen as collectively owned enterprises, as it was established under the approval of the Foshan Economic Committee.

Chen's position was also appointed by the committee, according to Liang. Moreover, the original 200 thousand yuan registered capital did not belong to Chen at all. He borrowed it, registered the company, and the money subsequently disappeared.

The reason the committee dismissed Chen, according to Liang, was Chen's poor ability in managing the enterprise. From 1992, the situation of the enterprise started to decline, and it was about 10 million yuan in debt. In 1994, the company was in a very difficult situation, which triggered the dismissal of Chen, Liang claimed.

When told about Liang's response Wednesday, Weng refuted the claims, saying, "How could Chen register the company if he had no money?"

According to Weng, two staff members of the Foshan Economic Committee, Guan Shurang and Zhou Ningduan, provided testimony in court saying the committee did not invest even one penny, and that Chen was the

real investor.

Other traits of Chen's enterprises, according to Weng, also show that they were private, not collectively owned. For example, election is the only way for the leadership to be decided in a collectively owned enterprise. But Chen automatically became the general manager when his company was set up, because he was the juridical person of the company.

Furthermore, there was no labor union in Chen's company, unlike in a collectively owned enterprise.

Expert voices

"The problems between 'red hat' enterprises and governmental departments are due to historic reasons," Mao Shoulong, a professor at Renmin University told *Beijing Today*.

"In the initial stage of China's opening-up policy, the government allow some private enterprises to attach themselves to its departments. It was a transitional period. Although the state has issued a principle that the property right belongs to the investor, there is still some confusion because there were no related documents or rules to define the enterprise."

According to Tian Siyuan, a law professor at Tsinghua University, although protection of private property has been written into the new constitution, this is not relevant in terms of Chen filing a lawsuit in the Supreme Court, because China has already issued laws protecting private property.

Meanwhile Tian, too, said that defining the nature of Chen's enterprise was the key point of the lawsuit.

Weng Chunhui told *Beijing Today* on Tuesday that a group of 13 lawyers were preparing the suit, and that they were doing the work for free. Chen also expressed through his attorney that he would not give up the suit, because the companies belong to him.

Japan Told to Unconditionally Release Activists

China demands the Japanese side

guarantee the security of the seven detained Chinese citizens and release them immediately and unconditionally, said Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan yesterday.

Japan forcefully detained seven Chinese citizens who landed on China's Diaoyu Island and moved them to the Okinawa prefecture of Japan.

Kong said this illegal action by the Japanese side constitutes a serious provocation of China's territorial sovereignty and an abuse of the human rights of the Chinese citizens.

He emphasized that the Chinese side voices its protest over the event.

The Chinese government has instructed officials with the Chinese Embassy in Japan to head to the spot and handle relevant matters.

After the incident, China has lodged nine representations to the Japanese side, Kong said, underscoring the stance of the Chinese government on the Diaoyu Island issue, namely, the Diaoyu Island and the attached islets have been part of the Chinese territory since ancient times and China has indisputable sovereignty over these islands.

On the protest by Chinese people before the Japanese Embassy to China, Kong said, Chinese people have to express their will through certain channels for their national feelings were seriously hurt by the actions of the Japanese side.

China has stated repeatedly that the differences between China and Japan on the Diaoyu Island issue should be resolved through negotiations, the spokesman said.

(Xinhua)

From have to have-not

In 1986, Chen Jinhong set up a decoration company in Foshan, called Sanxingye, with registered capital of 20,000 yuan. The company was attached to the Foshan Economic Committee.

At that time, China lacked clearly-defined policy and regulations governing private enterprises, and it was common for private enterprises to be nominally attached to governmental departments. Such companies, which would pay a fee to the department according to a contract between the two parties, were known as "red hat" enterprises, because of their relationship with the government.

In the following two years, Chen invested 980,000 and 1.5 million yuan to set up two subsidiary companies.

By April 1993, Chen's enterprise had increased in value to more than 60 million yuan.

On May 3, 1994, Foshan Economic Committee issued an order moving Chen from the position of general manager to vice general manager.

On February 12 and March 29, 1996, the committee issued two more orders stripping Chen of all titles in the company and two subsidiary companies. Meanwhile, the committee issued two more notices, changing the titles of the juridical person of the three companies.

Eight-year lawsuit

Not prepared to take the loss of his company lying down, Chen filed a lawsuit against Foshan Economic Committee at Foshan Intermediate People's Court on April 15, 1996, demanding the court to cancel the orders issued by the committee and order the committee to compensate him for their wrong decision.

On June 25, 1999, Foshan Intermediate People's Court start-



Chen Jinhong

'No matter whether Chen's company was a collectively owned or a private enterprise, Foshan Economic Committee, as a governmental department, had no right to dismiss him.'

On November 30, 2002, Chen again filed a suit for compensation at the Guangdong People's High Court.

On December 11, the court returned the same judgement as the Foshan Intermediate People's Court.

During this period, the Foshan Economic Committee changed the name of the three companies that had belonged to Chen and combined them into one new company. By the end of 1997, the new company was in debt for a total of 17 million yuan and eventually declared bankruptcy.

New Rules Set on Public Welfare Foundations

By Zhang Bo

China has issued new regulations on the administration of public welfare foundations, in an attempt to encourage more wealthy people to commit to public welfare and thus foster new foundations.

"We still need more foundations to participate in public welfare, as we have inadequate non-profit organizations to meet the demand," civil affairs vice-minister Jiang Li told a news conference last Friday.

In view of the limited charity resources and widening gap between rich and poor in China, as well as inadequacies in current regulations, the new regulations, which will take effect from June 1, put forward standardized and definite measures to maximize public welfare.

The regulations divide foundations into two types: publicly-funded foundations, which could raise funds from the public, and non-publicly-funded foundations, which are not permitted to raise funds from the public.

Jiang said the division was intended to mobilize more people to participate in charitable activities and help maximize the utilization of the public's social resources, especially those wealthy groups, the introduction of non-publicly-funded

foundations will provide channels for wealthy people and enterprises to put something back into society.

According to the regulation, national and regional publicly-funded foundations are required to raise at least 8 and 4 million yuan respectively before registration, while individuals and enterprises hoping to establish non-publicly-funded foundations are required to donate at least 2 million yuan. In addition, the funds for registration must be monetary funds on accounts.

The regulations also stipulate that public foundations must spend no less than 70 percent of the previous year's income on public welfare projects, and non-public funded ones 8 percent of the balance of the previous year's income. The expenditure on the foundations' employees and daily operating costs should not exceed 10 percent of the total expenditure in a year.

Under the regulations, as a nonprofit judicial person, a foundation should orient its operations towards public welfare, and cannot pursue the interests of any organization or person.

The regulations make it clear that foundations must keep their operations transparent and open to the public, in a

bid to standardize their activities. Foundations will also receive annual inspections from tax and accounting authorities, and then publicize annual reports to the media designated by the registration authority.

Those breaking related regulations will receive a warning from the registration authority, which also has the authority to annul the registrations of foundations in extreme circumstances.

According to the regulations, directors and general secretaries of the foundations can not be serving officials from any administrative organs while legal representatives of the foundations can not simultaneously serve for other organizations.

Also, legal representatives of publicly-funded foundations and non-publicly-funded foundations raising funds from mainland China must be Chinese residents.

As to the framework, each foundation should set up its council made up of 5 to 25 members, whose tenure can not exceed five years. However, council members can be reappointed consecutively after reelection.

According to the regulation, overseas groups or individuals will be allowed to establish foundations in China, along with

representative offices. Overseas foundations must register at related administrations and operate in line with China's public welfare rules.

"Basically, overseas foundations will be treated in the same way as domestic organizations are handled, so long as they abide by our rules," said Li Bengong, an official from the Ministry of Civil Affairs at the news conference.

In the meantime, due to the limited public welfare resources in China, the regulations stipulate that overseas foundations are forbidden to raise funds from the public in China's mainland.

Jiang Li also revealed under the new regulations, foundations, donors and beneficiaries would enjoy preferential taxation policies, and the Ministry of Finance and the State Taxation Administration were working out concrete measures on the issues.

Non-government organizations, including foundations, did not appear in China until the 1980s, however since then, they have grown rapidly in number.

By the end of 2003, the number of foundations registered in civil affairs departments at various levels has totaled 1,200, of which 80 are national groups, according to statistics released by the ministry.

Public Security Review

Beijing 110 emergency hotline received 23 percent more calls this week than last week, and 178 criminal suspects have been apprehended after investigations.

Auto-related crimes have become a key target for police recently. City outskirts such as Xinyuanli and Nanmofang in Chaoyang, Yangfangdian and Qinglongqian in Haidian, Baizhifang in Xuanwu, and Shiliuyuan in Fengtai were the most common places for auto thefts to occur, most of which took place at night.

Police say criminals frequently use hammers, bricks or screwdrivers to break car windows in order to steal valuables from inside. Another common tactic is for one person to bang on the window of a car to distract the driver's attention while an accomplice opens a door and grabs any valuables within reach.

Police urge all residents to install high-quality anti-theft devices in their cars and not to park in unguarded parking lots at night.

(Information from Beijing Public Security Bureau)

State Relaxes Control of Airfare Pricing

By Hou Mingxin

The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the General Administration of Civil Aviation of China (CAAC) last Thursday unveiled a new regulation on the pricing of airfares. The regulation, which will take effect on April 20, allows for more flexibility in pricing in response to market demand.

According to the regulation, airlines will be entitled to decide prices based on the base price - which remains at 0.75 yuan per kilometre. The range of the allowed fluctuation will be regulated by the NDRC and CAAC.

For short air routes between neighboring provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, the price of air tickets will be allowed to fluctuate freely, without regulation.

For other routes, the new policy

will permit a 25 percent up or 45 percent down fluctuation, based on the official ticket price.

For special air routes where only one airline operates, the discount level can be decided by the airline itself in line with the market.

Airlines that wish to lower ticket prices beyond this range will require special approval from the NDRC and CAAC.

The new regulation takes into consideration advice and proposals from consumers, airline managers and aviation experts sought during a public hearing last July.

With the rapid development of the nation's civil aviation industry, competition between domestic airlines has become increasingly intense. At the same time, the government has decided to explore the possibility of gradually loosening control of pricing.

New Golf Course Proposals Vetoed

By Hou Mingxin

Beijing Development Planning Committee last Friday issued a notice suspending approvals for new golf courses and started setting up a mechanism to monitor already approved facilities.

According to the notice, work must cease immediately on golf courses currently under construction that lack the relevant permits, while those already approved will be closely supervised in terms of land occupation, water consumption and environmental protection.

There are now 19 golf courses in Beijing, with a further 10 under construction, eight of which do not have government approval.

A spokesperson for the committee said the move was in response to a recent State Council decision to crack down on reckless land snatches in the construction of golf courses.

Last Monday, the Ministry of Land and Resources released rulings on five cases of illicit land use. Severe disciplinary penalties

were given to government officials in Qihe County, Shandong Province, who were charged with illegally approving the transfer of 186 hectares of farmland to build a golf course and a villa.

Golf course projects have been listed along with road construction, property development and urbanization programs as major factors in the loss of over 230,000 hectares of arable land last year in China, according to the ministry.

A report in the *People's Daily* earlier this year said there are 176 golf courses in 26 provincial regions in China, adding that this was a conservative estimate as the figure does not take into account those under construction or with plans still under scrutiny of local governments.

Economists have proposed the establishment of land appropriation, control and preservation systems, under which farmers, as land contractors should be entitled part ownership of the plots they cultivate.

Rules Issued to Clean Up Conduct of Lawyers

The Ministry of Justice issued a series of regulations Monday to curb illegal operations by lawyers and law firms.

"Lawyers not only represent the interests of their clients, but are also a critical power to realize the justice of the law," said Zhao Dacheng, director of the ministry's department of lawyers and notarization.

The regulation, scheduled to take effect on May 1, lists 21 items on illegal activities, including the rescinding of a law firm's business license if the firm is found guilty of bribing a judge or prosecuting attorney.

Lawyers' associations will play a more important role in supervising lawyers and curbing illegal

activity under the new regulation. The administration will be able to entrust lawyers' associations to probe illegal operations.

The ministry also announced another regulation on the procedure for law firms to charge retaining fees, also to take effect on May 1.

Under the new regulation, lawyers are forbidden to collect fees in private from clients and law firms should be supervised by the judiciary and pricing administrations.

Rigid supervision will help lawyers rebuild their image, which has been harmed by the actions of some lawyers, He said, adding, "If the lawyers do a good job, the interests of all parties will be protected." (Xinhua)



Xinhua Photo

Olympic Flame Lit in Ancient Olympia

By Hou Mingxin

The flame for the 2004 Olympic Games was lit in a ceremony at the ancient site of the original Olympics yesterday afternoon.

The torch was lit by way of a concave mirror on an altar to Hera, a Greek goddess worshipped in Olympia during the original games, from 776 BC to 393.

The torch relay will be run around the world, including its first trips ever to South America and Africa. It will pass through all former Summer Olympic cities.

The flame will arrive in Beijing on June 8. Jiang Xiaoyu, vice president of the Beijing Organizing Committee for the 2008 Games, said Tuesday at a conference that the Beijing leg of the torch relay for the Athens Olympics is ready.

"We have selected a preliminary relay route, which is 45 to 65 kilometers long," said Jiang.

But Jiang refused to give any details on the route, only saying it will "show off the Chinese capital's historic view and modern attraction."

Beijing Leads in Export Tax Rebate Reform

By Zhao Hongyi

The municipal government is planning to adjust the structure of Beijing's export tax rebate system.

While the central government will contribute the average amount of the previous three years, any increase on that average will be shared by the central government and municipal authority, according to Chen Zexing, deputy director of the city's bureau of commerce.

"The municipal government will reimburse 25 percent of the increased part, while the central government cover the remaining 75 percent," Chen told a press conference on Monday.

"In the past, we asked local authorities to pay the 25 percent, but we are changing that," Chen said.

China has been lowering the export tax rebate rate by stages since joining the WTO three years ago. The latest step was made last October, which lowered the rate from 15.11 percent to 12.11 percent. In Beijing, the rate has decreased from the original 15 percent to 11 percent, lower than the nation's average.

"This indicates that the municipal government aims to streamline the rebate system, making it more efficient," commented Jin Bosheng, chief economist for foreign trade at the Chinese Academy of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, a think tank of the Ministry of Commerce.

Jin says the step will contribute to further reforms of the export rebate system, about which the US and Europe have long complained.

Though the total figures are not available, Beijing paid 5.5 billion yuan to local exporters last year. Total rebates last year nationwide amounted to 115 billion yuan.

State-owned Assets Exchange Trialed

By Zhang Zhan

The State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council will allow the exchange of state-owned assets on a trial basis in three cities, Xinhua reported Monday.

The Shanghai United Assets and Equity Exchange, Tianjin Property Right Trade Center and the China Beijing Equity Exchange will be responsible for releasing information regarding the exchange of state-owned assets and related exchange activities in the local property rights markets.

The decision means that billions of yuan worth of state owned assets controlled by the commission can only be traded within those three exchanges.

Regulation Issued on Non-governmental Funded Education

By Zhang Zhan

China issued a regulation on non-government funded education last Thursday. The new regulation will be put into practice on April 1.

The regulation stipulates the legal responsibility of the schools, how they should be established, organized and run, and how their assets and finances should be managed.

By 2002, there were over 60 thousand non-government funded schools in China, with some 10 million students enrolled.

China Life Sued for Fraud, Claims Innocence



China Life raked in \$3 billion from its IPOs in Hong Kong and New York last December.
Photo by Photocome

By Xiao Yingying

China Life Insurance Co. (LFC) is facing a lawsuit from a single shareholder over allegations of up to \$652 million in irregularities in its bookkeeping. The plaintiff's legal representative, law firm Milberg Weiss Bershad Hynes & Lerach LLP, issued a statement last Wednesday that China Life, "Under its old name and/or its parent or predecessor engaged in massive financial fraud to the tune of \$652 million."

The shareholder is charging that at the time of China Life's initial public offering, in which it took in \$3 billion in Hong Kong and New York last December, China's National Audit Office had already completed and was set to publish a report detailing the fraud, but China Life persuaded the office to postpone the release.

The plaintiff learned of the alleged illegal acts when the auditing report was published on the

National Audit Office's web site in the early February.

China Life insists that the mistakes were made by its parent company before its public listing. Lawyers representing the insurer are preparing to enter a plea for the company.

According to a report in the Guangzhou-based newspaper *New Express* on Wednesday, the insurer has little hope of winning the case and may have to accept an out-of-court settlement.

CCB to Chuck Bad Assets for IPO

By Zhao Hongyi

China Construction Bank (CCB) is stepping up its efforts to pawn off 50 billion yuan worth of stocks in a number of state-owned enterprises that have defaulted on loans, a *Beijing Youth Daily* reported on Monday.

As a first step, the bank has arranged 4.5 billion yuan of bad assets in packages for promotion during road shows in New York and Tokyo this week and next week.

Last year, the bank took in 5 billion yuan in cash from sales of shares in state-owned enterprises, such as Inner Mongolia Power,

Wuhan Iron & Steel and PetroChina.

Since splitting a \$45 billion capital injection from the central government in early February, CCB and the Bank of China are furiously working to improve their quality of assets, internal mechanisms and management with the goal of holding initial public offerings in the next three years.

CCB has lowered its ratio of bad assets to total capital to 9.12 percent, a figure still far from the target ratio of three to five percent set by the central government.

Shell Sells Sinopec Shares

By Xiao Yingying

Anglo-Dutch oil conglomerate Royal Dutch/Shell Group sold its two percent stake in China Petroleum and Chemical Company (Sinopec) last Wednesday for \$742 million, following a similar move by BP earlier this year.

When Sinopec went public in Hong Kong, New York and London four years ago, BP, Shell and Exxon Mobil were invited by the company to purchase a total of 41 percent of its H shares at HK\$1.59 per share. The total cost of the three oil giants' purchases came to \$1.83 billion.

In a statement released the day of the most recent deal, Shell said the sale was timed to capitalize on the high price of

Sinopec's stock. The value of the domestic company's shares have shot up 126 percent in the past year as a result of rising international oil prices.

Some domestic analysts have speculated that the move could signal that BP, Shell and other global oil giants are shifting their attention from this country to Russia, Southeast Asia and Africa.

But Shell denied the speculation, claiming it will continue to cooperate with Sinopec on several joint projects, such as the coal gasification venture in Hunan Province, natural gas exploration and production projects in the East China Sea, and a 500-outlet chain of retail gas stations.



American Insurance Group subsidiary American International Assurance operates in China from its domestic headquarters on the Bund in Shanghai. Many major world insurers have entered the massive China market in anticipation of its further opening.
Photo by Photocome

Group Insurance Excites Industry

By Zhao Hongyi

American Insurance Group (AIG) recruited more than 1,000 new employees in Guangzhou earlier this week in order to prepare for the opening of the group insurance market, according to general manager Lai Junliang.

AXA Minmetals Assurance, Generali China Life Insurance and Pacific-Antai Life Insurance, a joint venture of China Pacific Insurance and ING, are also gearing up to enter the promising market.

China opened its individual life insurance market when it entered the World Trade Organization on December 11, 2001, and its entry promises call for the far larger and potentially more profitable group insurance market to receive similar treatment by December 11 this year.

Group insurance entails comprehensive employee benefits programs for active and retired workers and surviving spouses, with products including health and accident insurance, annuities and pensions.

"Today we can only play in the individual life insurance market," said Lai, "but our business volume could triple, even quadruple, when the group (insurance) market is available."

Chen Guozhong, general manager of AXA Minmetals Assurance Guangzhou, told Guangzhou-based newspaper *New Express* that his company had developed a line of new group insurance products, including pensions and annuities, for companies and institutions.

According to Huang Yunkai, general manager of Pacific-Antai Guangzhou,

"We know that today, the group insurance market is completed dominated by domestic life insurers. But they focus on big state-owned enterprises. We'll target small and medium sized enterprises and develop potential clients among private enterprises."

With the development of the country's social welfare system, the pension market has grown rapidly and now generates annual turnover of over 100 billion yuan.

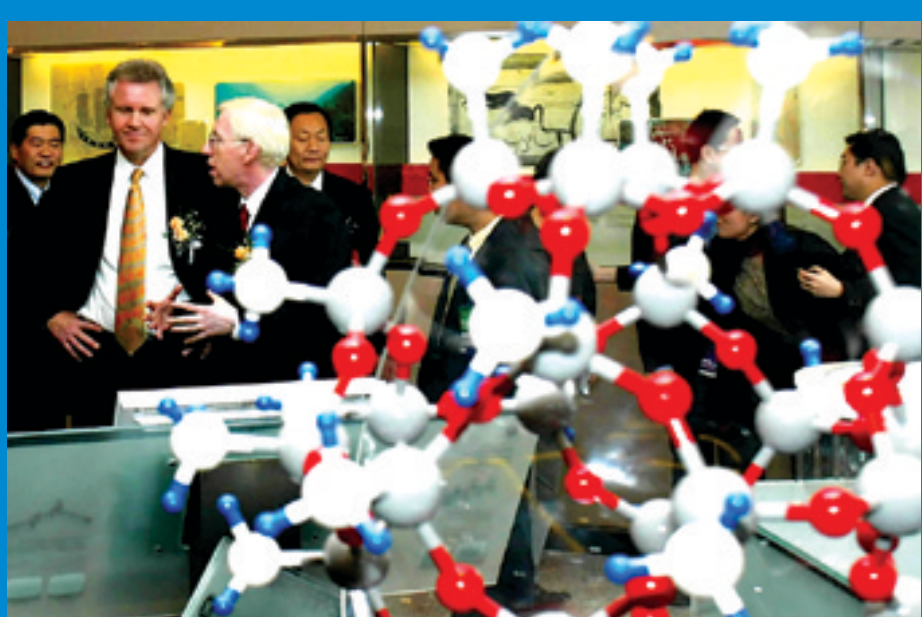
Pensions are the only kinds of group insurance product currently available in China and just a very limited number of large domestic insurers are allowed to issue these products.

While many joint ventures are honing in on the group insurance market, domestic giants such as China Life, Ping'an and Pacific Life seem to still be focusing on individual life insurance products such as health and accident insurance.

"These companies know that they have to perfect their individual life insurance services before they can properly get into the group insurance service market," noted Huang.

At a press conference in February, Li Kemu, vice chairman of the China Insurance Regulatory Commission admitted his organization was talking with the social security administration about opening the domestic pension market to overseas competitors.

"We believe through market-oriented operation, we can perfect our pension system and make it sustainable," he said, adding that new related policies would come out later this year.



Jeffery Immelt, General Electric chairman and CEO, visited GE China's R&D Center in Pudong, Shanghai on March 23.

The chairman highly appreciated his company's development in China, saying "Transnational corporations have shifted their interests in the Chinese market, from cheap labor to market shares,

efficiency and profits, and today's strategic resources such as patents, trademarks, senior management human resources.

"Corporations are upgrading their presence in China, from their production lines to regional headquarters, R&D centers and purchasing hubs," Immelt added.

Xinhua Photo

Coudert Brothers May Go West

By James Liu

David Huebner, 43, the youngest chairman in Coudert Brothers' history, made his second visit to Beijing on March 15 for an early celebration of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the practice's China branch, which falls on May 28.

In an interview with *Beijing Today*, Huebner and Coudert Brothers' China Practice Managing Partner Tao Jingzhou spoke about the boom in China's legal service market and unveiled their firm's plans to set up five to ten more branch offices around the country.

"We are here not to make a quick dollar, but aim at long term, academic returns," said Huebner. "In response to the Go West policy, we are seriously thinking of setting up new branches in western China within the next five years as foreign investors, will need legal support from Coudert."

Coudert China Practice is the New York-based firm's largest Asian office as well as its fastest growing and most



At 43, David Huebner is the youngest ever chairman of Coudert Brothers.

successful branch worldwide. The office currently has more than 60 Chinese employees.

"We are not a colonial law firm, most of the employees in our China practice are Chinese nationals," Huebner explained.

Since the Ministry of Justice now requires foreign lawyers hoping to practice in China to only have one year of practice experience, down from the previous limit of three, Coudert is likely to hire more foreigners as legal representatives in China in the future.

Both men said China's legal system was improving, but Tao argued that the government should stop protecting domestic law firms.

"The more they are protected, the more vulnerable they become," he said. "The encouraging news is that the Ministry of Justice is considering lifting certain restrictions on joint-ventures with domestic law firms in China. If there is a JV test firm in the West, we will go."

SEC OKs China Telecom to Pawn Off \$1 Billion of Debt

By Zhao Hongyi

China Telecom Corp. received approval from the US Securities and Exchange Commission on March 17 to sell debt and equity with a cumulative value of \$1 billion.

The country's largest fixed line telephone operator filed an application for the sale on March 1. It plans to sale debt securities and H shares, in the form of American Depository Shares, in a series of offerings or one single deal.

Money collected from the sales will be used to purchase telecommunications networks in ten provinces in southern China, according to a China Telecom press release.

China Development Bank Supports Small Business

By Zhao Hongyi

China Development Bank (CDB), the central government's policy bank for supporting domestic infrastructure construction and pillar industries, launched a 100 million yuan financing program to support the small and medium-sized enterprises in Beijing on March 21.

The targets of the new financing program are high-tech firms, agricultural companies, employment services and poor students.

China is home to over eight million small and medium sized enterprises, accounting for 99 percent of all enterprises nationwide.

Goldman Sachs Awaiting Investment Venture Approval

Goldman Sachs announced on March 23 it was negotiating to acquire a 33 percent stake in a securities investment venture with local banker Fang Fenglei and Legend Holdings, China's biggest computer maker.

However, the plan must be approved by the State Council before becoming reality. The companies will receive their reply in a report to be issued by the China Securities Regulatory Commission next month. Approval would make Goldman Sachs the second US securities firm to start an investment bank in China.

Morgan Stanley owns one third of Beijing-based China International Capital Corp., the nation's top investment bank, which has arranged more than \$200 billion in equity funding and \$2 billion in debt financing since it was founded in 1995.

(Xinhua)

EORI Launches Corporate Credibility Index

By Zhao Hongyi

The Economic Observer Research Institute celebrated the nationwide launch of its Corporate Credibility Index, the first listing of its kind in China, at an event in Beijing on Monday.

The index is based on the figures and information unveiled in the listed corporations' public reports and covers companies' legality, fairness, consistency, and symmetry.

"This list will play a critical role in a market that badly needs business morality and honesty," Qing Yi, president of the institute, said at the press conference for the release of the list on March 20 in Beijing.

New Cisco Networking Academy Launched

By Xiao Rong

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Cisco Systems on Monday launched the Cisco Networking Academy Program at China Women's University.

The program is a cooperative effort between UNDP, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and Cisco to promote information technology education in China utilizing the spirit of volunteers.

Established in 1997, the Cisco Networking Academy Program is a non-profit, comprehensive e-learning project that provides students with Internet-based information technology skills. Cisco donated 30 networking academies to universities in China's relatively underdeveloped western regions in 2000 to support education and bring opportunities to learn about cutting-edge technologies to women.

Airbus Promotes New Superjumbo in China

By Shan Jinliang

Laurence Barron, regional president of Airbus China, told *Beijing Today* on Wednesday that China's three major airlines have shown sincere interest in his company's high-tech A380 superjumbo jet.

The A380, which debuted in January 2002, is the world's largest and most expensive aircraft. The planes can seat up to 555 passengers and cost around \$286 million each. So far, 129 of the superjumbos have been ordered by 11 carriers including Lufthansa, Singapore Airlines and FedEx.

UN Hit by Corruption Allegations

United Nations, March 23 (The New York Times) – Secretary General Kofi Annan is pressing reluctant members of the Security Council to help investigate charges of corruption in the oil-for-food program that it ran in Iraq, in an effort to blunt allegations of a UN cover-up and shore up the organization's credibility.

At the urging of the US, Mr. Annan has decided to override private objections to an inquiry from France and Russia, the two permanent members of the Security Council that figure most prominently in the charges emerging from Iraq.

Acting in response to criticism of an in-house inquiry he had put into place, Mr. Annan circulated a letter among

council members over the weekend citing critical news reports and saying the charges, even if wrong, "must be taken seriously and addressed forthrightly."

The council president, Jean-Marc de la Sabliere of France, said Monday that the council would seek some clarifications from Mr. Annan before responding to his call. Last week, Mr. de la Sabliere had dismissed the matter, saying the council would not "react to media rumors of allegations."

The allegations, which first arose in an Iraqi newspaper in January, included a list of companies and individuals, 46 of them Russian, as recipients of illegal allocations of oil.

One of those identified was Benon V. Sevan, a career UN

diplomat now on leave until his retirement in April. In a statement on February 10, Mr. Sevan said, "I should like to state that there is absolutely no substance to the allegations made in a local Iraqi newspaper, now appearing in some international media, that I had received oil or oil monies from the former Iraqi regime."

The Security Council started the oil-for-food program in December 1996 to enable Iraq to sell oil to ease the impact of the sanctions imposed after the Persian Gulf war in 1991. The proceeds were to go to the purchase of food and other goods. Sales reached \$67 billion by the time the program ended a year ago with the invasion of Iraq.

According to testimony in Congress last week by the General Accounting Office, Saddam Hussein's government pocketed more than \$10 billion between 1997 and 2002 through the various schemes. Further disclosures of abuses are expected in Washington next month in public hearings before the House International Relations Committee, headed by Representative Henry J. Hyde, an Illinois Republican.

(Warren Hoge)

Analyst's Take:

At first glance, it reminds me of the "economic sanctions", which have rarely been imposed successfully.

The UN might have the

problems it's accused of. But compared with the importance of its authority, which no one can replace at present, what we need to do is to restore the status and perfect the functions of the UN.

Therefore, the best way is to let the UN investigate the case. As Kofi Annan has said, "the UN has no diplomatic immunity for its reputation." Within months, the UN will finish the investigation and a report will come out.

More interestingly, the US seems glad to use these allegations to press the UN more actively to participate in the restoration and reconstruction of Iraq after the war.

— Liu Zhenzhu, CCTV UN correspondent

Fujimori Supporters Launch New Party

Lima, Peru, March 22 (AP) – Disgraced former President Alberto Fujimori is banned from running for office in 2006, but his supporters have registered a new political grouping which they hope will be the "first step" towards his political comeback, a party member said Monday.

Peru's National Elections Board on Friday approved the name change of Fujimori's former party "Vamos Vecino" – or "let's go, neighbor" – to "Si Cumple," which translates roughly to "he keeps his word."

"The legal registration of Si Cumple with the elections board is the first step" towards building a political base across Peru, party leader Diego Uceda said Monday.

Congress banned Fujimori from holding public office for 10 years shortly after he fled to Japan, his ancestral homeland, in November, 2000, amid a corruption scandal that ended his decade-long government.

A comeback is also complicated by more than a dozen criminal charges against Fujimori ranging from corruption to authorizing death squads.

His support has been growing despite the charges. Polls show Fujimori consistently in third or fourth place among potential candidates.

In July, authorities presented Japan with a three-volume, 700-page extradition request in hopes of bringing Fujimori, who remains a Peruvian citizen, home to face trial.

But Tokyo has refused to hand Fujimori over, saying his Japanese citizenship protects him in the absence of an extradition treaty between the two countries.

"Si Cumple is the instrument that will promote my return to Peru and

organize the Fujimoristas and the people to triumph in the next elections," Fujimori said in a statement posted on his website on Friday.

Uceda said Si Cumple has "two or three" plans to overcome the legal barriers and get Fujimori on a ticket by 2006. But he declined to disclose them.

Analyst's Take:

Fujimori did achieve something during his ten years of presidency in Peru between 1990 and 2000. He solved the 8,000 percent inflation rate and led the country's economy into growth soon after he took office. His government also succeeded in battling the Shining Path terrorist group. He performed quite well in solving the kidnapping of staff

in the Japanese embassy in Lima in 1997. His government also settled the long lasting border disputes with Ecuador and Chile, and signed peace agreements with the two neighbors.

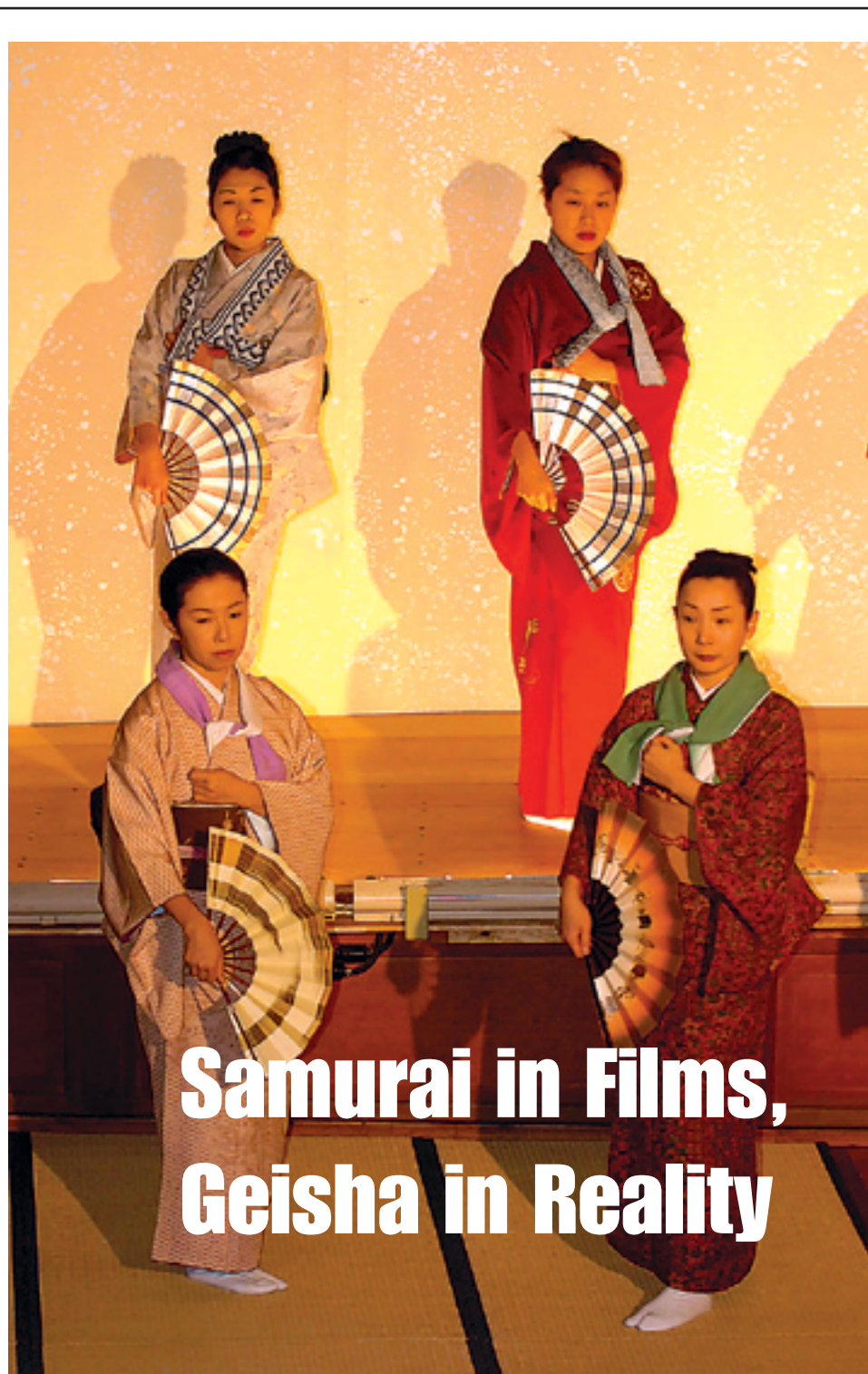
Toledo has launched a number of grand social and economic development initiatives since he took the presidency in 2001. But his government lacks the capability to implement them. Thus no progress has been achieved in alleviating poverty. The unemployment rate is rising. More seriously, corruption and scandals in his government are rising too, which seriously damages its image.

It's unlikely Fujimori can take the presidential race in 2006, as he is still a criminal in his legal status. Fujimori and his new party enjoy increasing popularity in Peru, but they still have a long way to go to win a seat in the country's legislative bodies.

— Liu Guoqiang, Xinhua News Agency reporter in Lima, Peru



AFP Photo



Samurai in Films, Geisha in Reality

For centuries, Samurai and Geisha have been the two symbols of Japanese social life.

To revive tourism, the Japanese have picked up Geishas again as a cultural attraction to allure foreign tourists. Geishas are now more popular, particularly

among youngsters.

On March 24, Shizuoka, the city at the foot of Mount Fuji in central Japan, held a Geisha Festival. Young girls are performing after years of strict and hard training.

Xinhua Photo

Billionaire Bosses

New York, March 15 (Forbes.com) – Fidel Castro, Yasir Arafat, the Queen of England. None of these world leaders are exemplars of capitalism, although their fortunes span decades or even centuries. Valuing the treasure can get tricky: Buckingham Palace belongs not so much to Queen Elizabeth II as to the British nation. Some estimates are fuzziest than others. We may never know the extent of the Prince of Liechtenstein's estate, which dates back some 800 years.

This year Forbes estimates the net worth of the heads of the world's seven leading democratic nations. It's a diverse group, from media billionaire Silvio Berlusconi to career politicians like Junichiro Koizumi of Japan. In most instances, assets were publicly disclosed. We included only salaries for their tenures in high office, assuming standard deductions for income taxes and cost of living. State-provided perks were excluded. Example: George Bush was credited only for his Texas ranch, though he primarily resides in the White House. Future earnings from books and lectures also were excluded, a tough break for UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, often compared with Bill Clinton, who now commands an estimated \$150,000 per speech.

WTO Members to Reopen Trade Talks

Seoul, March 22 (Yonhap News) – The 148 members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) will reopen the Doha Development Agenda talks in Geneva this week, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade said Monday.

"As the WTO bodies elected new chairpersons in February, they began to operate the negotiation frameworks for the first time since the ruptured fifth ministerial talks in Cancun, Mexico, in September," Ahn Chong-ghee, director of the ministry's WTO division said.

Agriculture will be the most eye-catching issue in the negotiations.

"I think the big guys - the US and the Europeans in particular - see value in the restarting," says John Weekes, former Canadian ambassador to the WTO.

Analyst's Take:

The WTO agriculture negotiations focus on three issues.

First is the subsidies for production and exports in the developed countries. The US spent \$18.7 billion in this regard last year and the EU spent 50 billion euros. Both are accusing each other.

The second is market accession. The developed members accuse the developing ones of adopting excessively high tariff barriers, while the developing members complain the developed ones have too many non-tariff barriers, such as too-strict quality and quarantine inspection criteria.

Thirdly, and most importantly, neither the developed nor the developing members have any great interest in pursuing the negotiations, though none of them oppose dialogue.

— Chen Dawei, professor, Beijing WTO Center

Name	Title/Country	Age	Net worth
King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz Alaud	Crown Prince/Saudi Arabia	81	\$25 billion
Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan & family	President/United Arab Emirates	86	20 billion
Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah	Sultan/Brunai	57	14.3 billion
Sheikh Mohamed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum & sons	Crown Prince/Dubai	54	10 billion
Hans Adam II	Prince/Liechtenstein	59	2.2 billion
Thaksin Shinawatra & family	Prime Minister/Thailand	54	1.4 billion
Queen Elizabeth II	Queen/UK	77	680 million
Queen Beatrix Wilhelmina Amgard	Queen/Netherlands	66	260 million
Yasir Arafat	President/Palestinian Authority	74	200 million
Fidel Castro	President/Cuba	77	150 million

Name	Title/Country	Age	Net worth	Notes
Silvio Berlusconi	Prime Minister/Italy	67	\$10 billion	Owens stake in Italian TV network Mediaset, publishing and banking interests.
Paul Martin	Prime Minister/Canada	65	225 million	Includes value of Canada Steamship Lines, transferred to sons before he took office.
George W. Bush	President/United States	57	15 million	Assets include 1,600-acre Crawford, Texas ranch, US stocks and Treasury bills.
Jacques Chirac	President/France	71	9 million	With wife, portfolio of luxury properties; denies allegations of corruption as Paris mayor.
Tony Blair	Prime Minister/United Kingdom	50	3 million	Oxford law graduate turned career politician; wife is barrister with London law firm.
Junichiro Koizumi	Prime Minister/Japan	62	2 million	Third-generation politician with a small real estate portfolio.
Gerhard Schroder	Chancellor/Germany	59	1 million	Former sales apprentice earned law degree before becoming a politician.

Fed Says Rates Could Rise

New York, March 25 (Reuters) – Two Federal Reserve officials gave further warning to investors on Wednesday that loose monetary policy won't continue forever given rising US economic growth.

A third Fed official joined them in reiterating the central bank's overall stand on monetary policy by emphasizing continued patience in raising interest rates in view of sluggish job growth and tame inflation, despite the robust economic data.

(Daniel Bases)



AP Photo

Microsoft Lashes out at EU Ruling

Brussels, March 24 (AFP) – The European Union slapped Microsoft Corp. with a \$613 million fine Wednesday for abusively wielding its Windows software monopoly.

Microsoft condemned the verdict as a devastating setback for IT innovation, saying it was "unwarranted and ill-considered".

More Bird Flu Found in Vancouver

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, March 25 (Reuters) – More chicken farms in southwestern British Columbia were ordered on Wednesday to kill their flocks, as Canadian agriculture officials try to stop the spread of bird flu newly found in Vancouver.

Officials estimated the order covers 10 farms and 33 smaller home flocks with a total of 275,000 birds. All are within a three-mile radius of where the first case of the disease was discovered.

Viacom Plans TV Venture in China

Beijing, March 23 (Reuters) – US media company Viacom plans to set up a television programming joint venture in China, the first of its kind since the country opened the door to foreign investment in the tightly controlled sector late last year.

Viacom's stake in the venture with Shanghai Media Group would be "huge" but not a majority, Chief Executive Sumner Redstone told reporters in Beijing on Tuesday.

The venture, which will make educational and animated children's programs, still needed final approval from the authorities.



AFP Photo

One Sweet Suite

Washington (AFP) – A leading Asian hotel chain, the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group International Ltd., opened its seventh American hotel in Washington with its presidential suite the most expensive in the US capital.

The rate for the 3,500-square foot (325-square-meter) suite at the five-star, 400-room Mandarin Oriental Hotel is a whopping \$8,000 per night. Most rooms go for \$400 to \$600.

Massive Mao Portrait Blanked at Auction

By Iris Miao

Not a single bid was made for a massive print of an official portrait of Mao Zedong measuring over 1.5 meters wide and two meters tall at an auction in Beijing's Asia Hotel on Monday. Organizer Rongbao Auction House set the starting price for the work at 20,000 yuan.

Printed in 1967, the portrait is one from a very limited run specifically made for hanging over the entrance to Tian'anmen Gate. The work is in excellent condition, partly due to the fact it was never used,

and is the first of its like to ever be up for public sale.

Monday morning's auction started with sales of more than 100 modern and contemporary paintings and calligraphy works. When a picture of the huge Mao head, lot 545, appeared on the screen in the auction room at around 10 am, there was a flurry of talk and activity, but not a single bid was made after the auctioneer called out the starting price of 20,000 yuan.

A spokesman for the Rongbao Auction House later noted that the company was not surprised at the results,

adding that collectors may have been dismayed by the portrait's massive dimensions, which would make it very challenging to transport and store.

In recent years, art related to China's revolution has proven very popular. In April 2001, an original poster entitled *Americans Go Away*, printed during the Cultural Revolution period, sold for \$2,070 at an overseas auction, and last April, a block of four stamps entitled *Long Live the Full Victory of the Cultural Revolution*, printed around the same time, fetched 1.1 million yuan in Beijing.



Photo by Jackey

China Open Offers Big Reward for Logo Idea

By Xiao Yingying

The Organizing Committee for the China Open, a new event on the ATP tennis tour, announced last Saturday the start of a worldwide search for a new official logo. The first China Open will be held in Beijing in September.

The creator of the chosen design will receive a cash award of 150,000 yuan and tickets to attend the Athens Olympics this summer.

Submissions must represent Beijing, the grace and energy of tennis and of the international nature of the China Open.

Logos should be accompanied by 100-word explanations and short resumes of the creators no longer than 200 words long. Submissions will be accepted until April 15 and can be emailed to chinaopen@ynet.com. For further information, contact Mr. Chi Dawei at 13901318079.

One-Wheeled Highway Venture Thwarted

By Wang Fang

Cars and trucks along the Third Ring Road in Chengdu, Sichuan Province had to make way for an unusual commuter traveling in the far right lane on Saturday. That day, Deng Yang, 19, of Suining, Sichuan, made a brave attempt to complete one lap around the loop highway on his unicycle, according to a report in *Chengdu Economic Daily* on Sunday.

Deng mastered the art of unicycling while working for a circus in Henan Province for five years. Afterwards, he moved to Chengdu and got a job at a hot pot restaurant. The boss learned about his unusual talent and persuaded Deng to serve customers from atop his unicycle as a marketing ploy.

The young balance master quickly bored of the restaurant's confines, however, and set his mind on making it around the ring road.

A crowd quickly surrounded Deng when he showed up on the side of the highway in the morning with his unicycle. He climbed on his wheel and took off, using his arms for balance and occasionally leaning forward or backward as he slowly made his way down the highway shoulder. Passing vehicles gave him a wide berth, some drivers slowing to watch him pedal or shout words and flash signs of encouragement.

Nine hours later, just seven kilometers away from his destination, Deng was spotted by a police patrol car. Officer Chen Junqiang quickly pulled him over and asked him to get off the unicycle because only vehicles with proper licenses and registration are allowed to use the ring road.



"License and registration, please." Photo by Guo Guangyu

Korean Using Feet to Support Olympics

By Shan Jinliang

Ahn Young-Min, a retired reporter from South Korea, arrived in the capital on Wednesday afternoon for a rest during his long solo walk from Shanghai to Seoul.

Ahn, 67, set out on the 3,927-kilometer trek on February 2 and hopes to arrive in the Korean capital in late May or early June. He will leave Beijing after a short break on Saturday.

At a press conference held at the South Korean Embassy for his arrival, Ahn explained that he intended his walk as a way to support the 2008 Beijing Olympics and promote Sino-Korean relations. He added that he was trying to get permission to pass through North Korean territory, including the capital of Pyongyang, so that he could complete the walk.



Photo by Jackey

Doctor Takes Aim at Fasting Record

By Su Wei

Chen Jianmin, a 51-year-old doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, last Saturday voluntarily sealed himself into a 15-square-meter glass cabin in which he plans to spend 49 days without any food. His aim is to shatter the world record for fasting of 44 consecutive days set by American escape artist David Blaine in a similar glass box suspended over the Thames River in London last year.

Echoing Blaine's record effort, Chen's small glass shelter hangs 15 meters off the ground in Bifengxia Valley, a mountain resort in Sichuan Province. He has kept busy the past dozen days by calling and emailing his family, friends, patients and the media, writing a diary, reading and meditating, often done in the tiny toilet area of the glass house.

"I feel perfect," he told *Beijing Today* through email. "I'm just afraid that I will end up losing too much weight."

His activity and health are being monitored by a surveillance camera mounted outside the shelter. A medical team from a local hospital has been assigned to check up on him, and if Chen's life is in danger they will rescue him immediately.

Chen, who owns a traditional Chinese medicine clinic in Luzhou, Sichuan, began studying martial arts at the age of 13 and three years later shifted his focus to traditional Chinese medicine. He has been a practicing doctor since the early 1980s.

He has told the press that he had done similar long-term fasts three times in 1987, 1994 and 1999 using body control methods documented in ancient Chinese medical literature and Buddhist scripture.

The public and colleagues in the medical profession have raised some questions about Chen's chances and motives in the record fasting attempt. According to Zhu Guang, vice head doctor of Chinese medicine at the Chengdu No. 2 People's Hospital, such aceticism runs contrary to Chinese medicine's intention of caring for the body.

Long before he got into the box, Chen approached Chengdu Wanguan Investment about organizing the event. Meng Hui, the company's marketing manager, told *Beijing Today* that when the doctor first made his proposal, the company's management was impressed with his dedication and intrigued by the idea. "People are sure to be very curious about whether a person could live on just water for such a long time. This fast should also provide valuable information for studies of human survival abilities," Meng added.

The company has already invested more than 1 million yuan to set up and run the attempt. "Even if Chen does not break the record, there is no way we can lose. The event will certainly help expand our company's national and international reputation."

The main focus of Chengdu Wanguan Investment is tourism, and the company established a panda conservation park last year and plans to open a hot spring resort later this year. "Chen did not ask us for one *fen* in reward money, but we will certainly give him something if he succeeds," Meng added.



Doctor Chen Jianmin's temporary, transparent home is suspended over a gorge in Sichuan Province.



Zoo veterinarians anesthetize Jini before starting the artificial insemination process.

Photo by Jackey

Zoo Tries to Knock Up Giant Panda

By Hans Leu

Veterinarians at Beijing Zoo tried to artificially inseminate Jini, a ten-year old female giant panda, on the evening of March 20.

The semen used in the procedure had been taken earlier this month from a panda living in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, and was kept frozen until shortly before the attempt.

Breeding pandas in captivity is very difficult, in part because of their short periods of annual heat and pickiness regarding mates. One researcher told *Beijing Youth Daily* that the estrus periods of female giant pandas last only several days. Jini was the first female at the zoo found to be in heat this year, but had so far shown no signs of interest in any of

the zoo's males.

At 8 pm everything was ready and the rare bear was anesthetized for the operation. Zoo staff then carried the 100-kilogram panda to an operating table. The actual insemination procedure took just six minutes, after which Jini woke up, a bit dazed.

In general, artificial insemination is far less likely

to result in pregnancy than natural mating, and it will be a few weeks before the zoo veterinarians know if their efforts were successful. In 2003, 16 baby pandas conceived through artificial insemination were born in China. The Beijing Zoo has succeeded in breeding 20 of the endangered bears since it began using the technique in 1978.

Painful Scam Cracked

By Guo Yuandan

A criminal who sacrificed his own pinky finger to trick local businesses into giving him money was arrested after his botched second attempt last Wednesday in Dongcheng District.

Chen Shengquan of Guangdong Province came to Beijing on March 13 with acquaintances Zhang Yi and Li Zhaobin. Zhang and Li convinced Chen to break his finger and then go into a restaurant, pretend to fall down and sustain the injury and finally demand compensation.

The next day, he broke his finger and then met Zhang and Li at a Goubuli Baozi Restaurant near Wangfujing. Chen put on the act as

planned, after which a restaurant employee took him to Peking Union Hospital, where a plaster cast was put on his finger. The store ended up giving him 1,500 yuan in compensation for the injury.

Zhang kept all by 100 yuan of that money, however, on the grounds that Chen was a bad actor. Three days later, Chen tore off the cast to exploit his broken finger again, this time in a McDonald's restaurant in Wangfujing.

By sheer coincidence, he ended up being taken to the same hospital and receiving treatment from the same doctor, who immediately had doubts about Chen's injury. Upon hearing that, the



Chen Shengquan's broken finger will likely heal in jail.

Photo by Liu Ping

McDonald's employee that took Chen to the hospital called the police. Chen was taken into police custody and Zhang and Li were arrested shortly after.

"I asked him why he broke his finger and he ad-

mitted that it was to earn money," officer Liu Ping of the Dongcheng Police Station told *Beijing Today* on Monday. "It's the first time I have heard of anyone hurting themselves like this to trick people out of money."

Planetary Party

By Chen Ying

Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn and Jupiter, the planets visible to the naked human eye, will be appearing together in a rare cosmic show nightly until April 3.

Tomorrow evening at around 6:30 pm they will give their best performance when they

appear near each other across the horizon.

The planetary phenomenon, which occurs only every 32 years, started this Monday and is best observed around 45 minutes after sunset.

Photo provided by Guo Xia

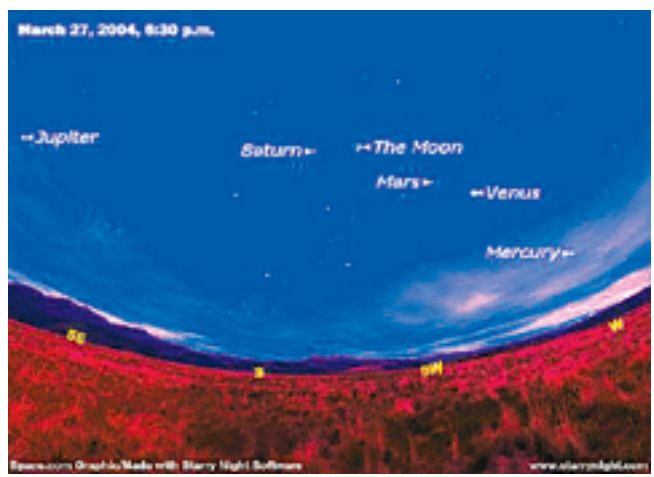


Photo provided by Guo Xia

By Chen Ying

Just five months after it opened, Dongzhen Primary School in Shangqiu, Henan Province was closed last Thursday.

A non-government school in Liangyuan District of Shangqiu, Dongzhen Primary School was set up to accept children from local AIDS families by Li Dan, a graduate student from the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The kids mainly came from Shuangmiao Village of Zhecheng County. Li Dan founded the school by collecting money from donations but he did not complete the necessary steps to get approval from the local authorities to set up a school.

Last Thursday afternoon, officials from Liangyuan District Education Bureau came to the school and said it had to be closed. Then last weekend, all the 18 students in the school were sent to Sunshine Home, a new orphanage for AIDS orphans that opened in February in Zhecheng County. It became well-known because the orphanage accepted 52 AIDS orphans from farmer Zhu Jinzhong in Zhecheng County whose story had been publicized throughout the national media. The orphanage also picked up the more than one million yuan in donations that had flooded in from around the country to help the kids in Zhu's care (see our special report on February 13, front page).

According to the local government, the establishment of the school contravened the 11th item of the Non-government Education Promotion Law — that non-government schools should get permission for establishment from the people's governmental education administration.

Beijing Today interviewed different parties about the AIDS orphans. They had different attitudes towards the issue.

"We need support from the local government"

"Though the local government's action is legal, that doesn't mean it's rational. Its declaration and local media reports didn't mention that we're trying to help the AIDS orphans," Li Dan told Beijing Today on Tuesday.

The 26-year-old volunteer said, "What we have done is to



Children at Li Dan's School

Photos provided by Xu Dasheng

Just a Misunderstanding?

Private school for AIDS orphans is shut down by the local government

try and mend what the government hasn't done or done poorly. The government should support us even if we can't perform well at the beginning instead of directly closing us down."

"The officials told me the local government has established the Sunshine Home orphanage so it's unnecessary for us to find another one. But the children now staying at the orphanage are mainly from Zhu Jinzhong and our school. What about other AIDS orphans?"

"Just before the bureau came to our school, we had decided

to admit nine more students. After the orphanage took the 18 students, we asked them to accept the nine others. But they refused," said Li.

Li also doubted the government orphanages' efficiency. "Employees there will lack compassion if they look at it only as a job."

"Dongzhen is only a kind of model. The government should allow its existence to get more experience in helping AIDS orphans," he added.

"Since Dongzhen Primary School is a part of Dongzhen AIDS Aid Project, we will con-

tinue our work to help AIDS orphans in the future," said Li.

Not the right way

"Our department just did what the higher-level government asked us to do," Cheng Youxin, spokesman for Liangyuan District Education Bureau, told Beijing Today on Wednesday. "Undoubtedly, what Li Dan and his colleagues have done deserves appreciation. But that doesn't mean they can establish the school without permission from the government."

"Personally, I think what Li Dan has done is actually the Government's business. The State Council recently issued the implementation ordinance of Non-government Education Promotion, regulating that it's forbidden to establish non-government schools that are funded by money from donations," he said.

"The day after the school was closed, Li Dan asked me whether he could re-open the school if he got the necessary permission. I told him it was impossible. I don't know what will happen in the future," he added.

A sound environment for AIDS orphans

"Given the related laws, I think the local government's action was reasonable," Jing Jun, director of the Social Policy Institute of Tsinghua University told Beijing Today on Wednesday. "But Li Dan and his colleagues should get appreciation and encouragement for what they have done. The government should commend Li Dan's actions."

"But unfortunately, it hasn't really helped the children's long-term education and development or their socialization," Jing said.

"As a graduate student, Li Dan had the option of seeking a good job. But his attempt to run this school reflected the urgency of taking measures to help AIDS orphans," Jing said. Many adults, who got AIDS after donating blood at the beginning of 1990s in Henan, have died or are dying after years of struggle with the sickness. "It's



Li Dan

time to pay more attention to the AIDS orphans," he said.

"I talked with Li Dan two months ago. He thought the children didn't get enough attention from their community and relatives. I think it reflects that what we have done in community care and promotion of non-discrimination against AIDS victims is still not enough."

"We have to admit there are still obstacles to helping AIDS orphans. But such obstacles can't be conquered only by Li Dan's idea," Jing said.

"To help the children come into society more easily in future, they should live in a normal environment."

"To gather children from AIDS families will make it more difficult for them to communicate with others. Such an environment will remind those children continuously that they're different from others. What the kids need is to forget the tragedy instead of strengthening their nightmares."

Jing said the children in orphanages who do not have any connections with communities and relatives were different from other AIDS orphans who remained in the care of their relatives.

"I once suggested to Li Dan that he should try and make his school a half-way house to help the AIDS orphans until suitable families can adopt the kids."

"What the local government has done is rather simple and crude.

They just used the simplest way to deal with the school. At least they should give an opportunity to Li Dan to argue his case."

Flexible policy needed in local government

This week, Yang Shaogang, senior counselor to the Shanghai Municipal Government, went to the State Council to report Shanghai government's proposal to urge the central government to show more concern for AIDS issues.

"I really appreciate Li Dan's action. But the nation has made some clear laws and regulations to establish non-government schools," said Yang, who is also the director of Jiuhui Law Firm.

"If someone has enough funds and can meet the basic requirements according to the laws, then he or she can found a school. Otherwise, the person can sue the government. Meanwhile, the local government is also within its rights to close the school if it doesn't match the law," he added.

"Henan is a special case. Whether it can put some special measures into practice is up to the local government," said Yang.

"The central government just outlines the general frame. But sometimes it may be improper to carry out national laws in special areas. In those areas, perhaps the local government could make some adjustments and allow favorable policies in particular cases." Yang also mentioned that local governments could be more flexible in dealing with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

How to make it better

Xu Wenqing, a national programme officer for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), told Beijing Today on Tuesday that UNICEF has cooperated with the central government to develop policy regarding AIDS orphans. "Meanwhile, we also have some cooperation with local governments, attempting to create different models."

"We recommend that it's better to let AIDS orphans stay with families and go to the community school instead of growing up in orphanages. We have to adopt different methods in accordance with different conditions in some areas," she said.

Xu said Li Dan had once visited her office to seek some suggestions. "I told him that establishing such a school is not the ideal method."

"I also suggested that he should try to establish an orphanage close to the kids' original community. Many families got AIDS in rural areas of Henan, so the discrimination there is not so severe. Discrimination will be worse if a school is established in an area that has a low rate of AIDS infections," she added.

"The most important thing is for all parties to cooperate together. After all, the children are the focus. The commitment from the local government is also very important, in terms of both investment and establishment of a sound environment for the kids' social development. It's not a question of who should do the work. It's a question of how to make things better for the children," she said.

A useful way

Yunnan Women and Children's Development Center is an organization run by Yunnan Women's Federation. It has cooperated with UNICEF to help AIDS orphans in Yingjiang County, Yunnan Province, one of eight pilot sites established by UNICEF since last March.

"We try to improve living conditions for the children and help them return to school. But the more important thing is to heal their psychological wounds," said Li Jianmin, a spokeswoman for the center.

To carry out the aid project, every employee of the women's federation is charged with several AIDS orphans from the various villages. Xu Wenqing from UNICEF said this has been really helpful in healing some of the psychological harm suffered by the children.

"Why are NGOs more suitable to carry out this kind of work? Maybe because their image is more suitable. Local people think they're kind. So the local government makes the policy and NGOs carry out the work," Li told Beijing Today.

Readers & Leaders

Improving the Farmers' Lot

By Shida Zhu

A recent report by the Institute of Economics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Chinese brain bank, warned that the gap in income between the city and the countryside is expanding and now ranks the highest in the world, if non-monetary expenses in medical care, education and unemployment security are added. The ratio is 6 to 1, more extreme even than Zimbabwe.

The report was based on years of intensive study and has caught wide social attention. Farmers constitute roughly three quarters of China's population. Without rural prosperity, there can be no Chinese prosperity. The issue has become a subject that has a close bearing upon basic social justice, the safe operation of the economy, social stability and sustainable growth.

In China's efforts to build an affluent society, it is imperative to build a relatively affluent rural society and help Chinese farmers live free from worries. It is a gigantic task confronting every Chinese government. The central government decided early this year to cut the agricultural tax rate by one percentage point per year and eliminate the agricultural special product tax (except for tobacco).

According to the office of the central financial and economic leading group, China allocated 120 billion yuan to support agriculture last year and will allocate 150 billion yuan for the purpose this year, the highest ever. It means an average of 166 yuan for each of the 900 million Chinese farmers. The

money will be used in beefing up rural taxation reform, ecological construction, rural education, medicine, professional training, rural basic facilities and assisting poverty-stricken areas and people. Special training will be offered by the ministries of agriculture and finance to rural youth in building, manufacturing, restaurant management and housekeeping. The money will help train 10 million workers for rural industries by 2008. It is hoped that 85% of the school-age children will be covered by the compulsory 9-year education and the illiteracy rate will drop to well below 5% in China's west by 2007. The central government also intends to allocate 6 billion yuan to help improve middle and primary school premises in the west.

The slow growth in the income of the vast rural population has always been an issue for Chinese leaders. They have adopted a series of measures to narrow the gap, including regulation of the prices of farm produce and lessening of the burden on farmers. The most effective way is to reform the system of taxation. Yang Zhifu, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference proposed in an interview that in areas where conditions allow, agricultural tax should be eliminated, adding that at least grain growers should be exempted from such tax. Many provinces and cities, such as Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Beijing, have tried to realize zero taxation in farm production and a system of direct subsidy to food grain growers, for instance in Anhui, will be established. Efforts will also be made to

trim the rural government and many of the surplus and redundant government staff.

According to Vice-Premier Hui Liangyu, the most fundamental problem with the farmers is that it is difficult for them to increase their income. To make the farmers better off, according to World Bank economists among others, it is necessary to expand agricultural production and in-depth processing and turn part of the rural labor force towards non-agricultural sectors, industry and tertiary services in particular.

The movement of migrant rural labor to the city has been largely spontaneous, unstable, and semi-underground, driven by the gap of income instead of by guidance of public policy. Due to the strict residence registration system, rural migrant workers find it very hard, virtually impossible, to live permanently in the city. To make the movement of the migrant rural labor to the city free from blindness, one of the most important and effective ways is to reform this system. It will mean equal rights for all, urban or rural, in education, employment, social security and medical care.

Shida Zhu, senior research fellow of the Institute of American Studies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

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Hard at their studies at Dongzhen Primary School

By Su Wei

Though most private enterprises in China have been growing steadily in China over the last two decades, a number are still failing at early stages and many more are facing serious problems, according to a report released early this month by the State Statistics Bureau. The report was based on research conducted into 2,434 private enterprises. "Even the 40 percent of companies that are growing steadily face considerable problems," the report said.

Difficulty in raising funds

Around 100 of the surveyed enterprises said their funds were raised through high interest loans. "The number is not too big but in reality fund raising has become a bottle-neck for the development of private enterprises," said the report. This situation is particularly severe in some coastal areas.

Private enterprises in Zhejiang said the difficulty in getting loans from financial institutes was the main factor hindering their development.

Statistics from the People's Bank of China in Wuhan, Hubei Province, reveal that in the first half of 2002, less than 2.8 billion yuan in loans from all the financial institutions in Wuhan went to local private enterprises, from total loans of 10.25 billion yuan.

"At the moment, around 90 percent of the newly issued loans go to middle and large-sized enterprises, though these make up only around 10 percent of the total number of enterprises in China," Xie Liangming, a senior employee of a major Chinese state-owned bank, told *Beijing Today*.

In a forum held by Zhejiang University on the development of private enterprise last November, 96 percent of private companies in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, complained that the requirements set by banks for the issue of loans were impossibly strict.

A report in *21st Century Economics* quoted Xia Shilin, chairman of Shenghua Group, a Zhejiang based private company with interests in production, commercial services, real estate and advertising. Xia said his company once ran up debts of nearly 70 million yuan by providing a guarantee service to other private enterprises (in which companies promise to cover the financial obligations of another company in case that company should be unable to). "This is often the only way to obtain loans, private enterprises providing guarantee service to each other. But it should not be adopted as a common rule as it can incur huge risks," he explained. "But what if private enterprises do not help each other, is there anyone else that can help us?" Xie Liangming says even the

Growing Pains

Chinese private enterprises are finding it hard to develop



A furniture manufacturing enterprise in Ningbo, Zhejiang.

Photo by Photocom

guarantee system exists only in large centers in China. "Companies with the ability to provide guarantee services are usually located in large and middle sized cities," he said.

Xie says the longer the financial market in China remains undeveloped the harder it will be for private enterprise to develop. "A real capital market has not yet been established in China. For example, investment banks still remain a kind of uncertain concept both for the government and the public," Xie said. "The lack of non-government investment banks in China hinders the development of the private economy. In other countries in the world it is the investment banks that provide financial services to enterprises."

He recalls in 2002 over 80 percent of the increase in China's GDP came from private enterprises. Last year, over 68 percent of people in towns were employed by private enterprises and more than 64 percent of the taxes collected came from private enterprises.

Su Zengfu, chairman of Super Group, a cookware and medical equipment company with seven

subsidiaries and over twenty branches at home and overseas, says size matters too much. He says state-owned banks are accustomed to serving state-owned enterprises and are only inclined to give loans to large clients with large projects in large cities, despite the high demand from private enterprises, especially those in less developed areas.

This caution is understandable to an extent. After all, around 80 percent of loans issued to private enterprises have not been paid back. "Banks have the impression that all private enterprises lack credibility," Su added.

Su believes real action is needed to address this situation. "Otherwise, the existence of the private enterprises will be threatened, resulting in the whole national economy being paralyzed," he said.

Official intervention

According to the Statistics Bureau's report, 54 percent of the surveyed private enterprises said it's common for local officials to "take away profits without any reason." In the case of nearly 67 percent of the surveyed companies, "They are always being asked by officials from different

government departments to hand in various fees," the report said.

Xinhua reported that during the first three quarters of last year, 20 of the 120 private enterprises in Jiangxi which were surveyed by its provincial government, had been asked to hand in a variety of fees that should not have been required, amounting to 930,000 yuan. "One private enterprise even had to pay more than 340,000 yuan during that period," Xinhua said.

Jia Xitai, deputy director of the Standing Committee of Fujian People's Congress, was quoted by *Zhonghua Gongshang Shibao* at the end of last year saying that some local government departments do not only order private enterprises to hand in fees but also purchase some equipment that they do not need. "Such government behavior not only infringes on the rights of enterprises but also degrades the image of the government," he commented.

Yang Weihong, preferring not to specify his job position, says there's nothing private businesses can do about this. "In front of the officials, private entrepreneurs can do nothing.

They have to present what they are asked for since they inevitably deal with officials from commercial and industrial and taxation bureaus during their business activities."

Zhong Dajun, director of the Economic Observation and Research Center of Beijing University, says private enterprises in China used to grow by cultivating relationships with government officials. "But the market economy can not allow such close ties between officials and businessmen," he said. "Only when private entrepreneurs have a strong sense of self-discipline and dare to cut off relations with corrupt officials can any unfair treatment they suffer disappear," Zhong said.

Lack of education

In the surveyed enterprises, over 80 percent of staff did not have university degrees. Over 66 percent of the general managers did not have university degrees.

China News Agency reported at the end of last year that research conducted by China's Industrial and Commercial Association among 21 cities showed that 70 percent of the private entrepreneurs could not read balance sheets

and over 90 percent could not use computers. "The majority do not even read books or newspapers, so it is impossible for them to improve their professional knowledge," the Association commented.

A famous cautionary tale in China is that of Baixin Shoes. Li Zhongwen grew up in a family of fishermen in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province. He opened his first shoe store with a loan of 4,000 yuan in Tianjin. He was 19 and it was 1994. Li had spent the previous two years learning the trade.

One year later, Li had made a profit of four million yuan. In 1996, he created Baixin Shoes, headquartered in Beijing. In the following four years, he opened over 80 chain stores throughout China, and his company grew to a capital valuation of three billion yuan. The Chinese media described the rise of this entrepreneur who had only been educated as far as senior high school as a miracle. Li did it partly by buying a counter or a store whenever he found that the original owners were making a loss.

However, after 2000 Baixin started to encounter financial problems. First, Baixin's branch in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, was closed in the autumn of 2001, owing 113 million yuan to over 500 shoe suppliers. Later in October 2001 its branch in Wuhan, Hubei Province, was found to be 14 million yuan in debt to shoe suppliers who had reported it to the police. Li fled.

Last May he was arrested in Changsha, Hunan Province. When he was caught, Li confessed that his failure was due to expanding his company too fast. "I believed the bigger it was, the more profit I would make."

Wu Dongfu, former chairman of Modern Energy Saving Engineering of Hengdong, Hunan Province, was only educated as far as primary school. His company went bankrupt in the late 1990s after ten years' operation.

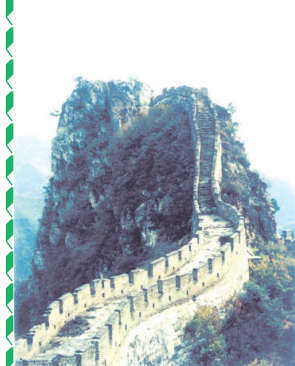
Wu admits that he had almost no idea about modern enterprise management. "I never recruited any strangers in my company. I only employed my best friends and gave them managerial level posts. They had helped me a lot when I started my company," he said. "I knew they put the company's profit into their own pocket but I never thought their behavior would cause the collapse of the company."

"The comparatively low standard of education suggests that these private enterprises will be unable to maintain continual development," the State Statistics Bureau report suggested. "The future of private enterprises in China relies on the efforts of people who run the enterprises and the people who make policies for the development of private enterprise and the economy as a whole."

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By James Liu

Spring is traditionally a season of hope. But it brought little cheer this year for a number of farmers in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. For the past several years, the farmers have been borrowing money to maintain their crops but they've been ravaged again and again by a merciless enemy: the Mongolian gazelle.

On January 20, two days before the Spring Festival, farmer Wu Changcai wept in front of a photo of his wife at their home. "It's the Mongolian gazelle that killed her," Wu told reporters from *Xinjiang Dushi Bao*.

Wu Changcai works in a plot at Hongqi Farm which is owned by Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps and is 150 kilometers northeast of Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. He borrowed 20,000 yuan and rented 100 mu (6.67 hectares) of farmland and planted several crops in 1999. Disaster struck when a number of Mongolian gazelles, a state-protected animal, descended on the crops and ate everything Wu and his family had planted. Next year, Wu again borrowed 20,000 yuan and hired two young men to guard against the gazelles 24-hours a day. However, once again, the gazelles raided his farm. The guards could not keep them at bay and the harvest was devastated again.

In 2001, Wu borrowed 20,000 yuan from the bank once again and planted crops, desperately hoping he would be able to repay the banks. When the crops and watermelons ripened, groups of gazelles swept down on the farm again and ate them all. After just one night of feasting, only stems and a few leaves were left. Then Wu's creditors came to him for the repayments. As the family didn't have any money, Wu was sued in court for delayed payment of the land rental fees. "My wife sold our only horse to get some money for the Spring Festival. But we had to pay what little money we had so we were left with only six yuan. Then my wife committed suicide by drinking pesticide," Wu told the newspaper, sobbing.



Photo by Photocom



Ma Xianmin

Overprotected? The gazelle, a typical hoofed animal of the desert, enjoys state protection. The gazelles are mainly distributed across the deserts on the southern and northern slopes of the Tianshan Mountains in Xinjiang. In the 1950s, the number of gazelles in Xinjiang topped 450,000. By the

1960s, this number rapidly decreased because local people, desperate for food, started eating them. Since China implemented a law on the protection of wildlife on March 1, 1989, people's awareness of the need to protect the environment has been enhanced and the hunting of the gazelle has been restricted. Today, there are about 50,000 gazelles in Xinjiang.

Gu Jinghe, director of Xinjiang Wild Animal Research Center, told *Beijing Today* that the gazelles are now becoming perhaps too numerous. "There are few natural rivals for the gazelle and their reproduction rate gets faster and faster," said Gu. "A result of the overpopulation of the

gazelles is there is no food for them," Gu added.

60-year-old Ma Xianmin had a similar experience to Wu Changcai, as he explained to Xinjiang Dushi Bao. "I rented 130 mu (8.67 hectares) of land and on each mu I invested 300 yuan per year. However, I barely got a penny for the last seven years and I became a defendant as Hongqi Farm sued me in court." Ma showed the court verdict to the reporter. It read: Ma Xianmin, the defendant, signed a contract with Hongqi Farm to

rent land of 130 mu from 1997 to 1999. The rental fee amounted to 7609.47 yuan. The defendant's argument of economic losses caused by Mongolian gazelles' intrusion should be resolved by the relevant government department. Ma Xianmin must repay Hongqi Farm the above money within 30 days and court fees of 674 yuan should also be undertaken by the defendant.

A lot of other people have had the same problem, reported *Xinjiang Daily*. Many of them have to manage a living by borrowing money from relatives and friends. Ma Xianmin said he could not find an effective way to protect his crops. "Scarecrows, shouting, even fireworks are useless. It seems that they know we cannot hurt them," Ma said with a wry smile.

The Commissar of Hongqi Farm, Xiang Yilai, told *Beijing Today* that since 1997 more than 70,000 mu of land had been affected by hungry, marauding gazelles and direct economic losses



All that was left.

added up to 30 million yuan. "Gazelles are protected by the law. But who will protect us when our interests are damaged?"

Who should pay the bill? The leaders and farmers of Hongqi Farm are used to making way for the gazelles, but land resources are limited and farmers cannot keep renting new plots. "One day we will have no space to move to," said Xiang Yilai. "We are trying to get compensation for the farmers. But the local government just puts the issue to one side," Xiang shrugged.

According to the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Wildlife, farmers who suffer economic losses from state-protected animals can get compensation from their local government. So Ma Xianmin and six other farmers from Hongqi Farm applied to the Department of Forestry of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and Jimsar County government for compensation. However, they soon found that it was easy for different departments to dodge responsibility. As the Hongqi Farm is administrated by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, the Jimsar county government gave the cold shoulder to the farmers' request for compensation. Xinjiang Dushi Bao reported that the Department of Forestry turned the request to Jimsar county Bureau of Forestry to investigate. Jimsar Bureau of Forestry decided that the Corps should be responsible for compensation.

However, Xiang Yilai argued that the farms are a collective ownership unit and they have no funds for tenants who suffer economic losses. The application for compensation continues to roll between the different sides.

Compared with Ma Xianmin, farmer Wang Jiansheng in Yanqing County, Beijing was lucky. Last spring, wild boars ate the corn seeds planted in Wang's land and Wang was paid 4,280 yuan as the wild boar is on the list of Protected Wildlife of Beijing. Besides Wang, 252 other farmers who suffered similar losses were also paid.

What can be done? Assistant Researcher Li Weidong of Xinjiang Environmental Protection Research Institute proposed that ecological immigration might be an effective and long-term resolution. "If human beings just move away from the wildlife's habitat, there would be no conflict between nature and the people," he told *Xinjiang Daily*. Li also suggested that the government should give more support to the ecological refugees.

Xiang Yilai suggested another plan for the problem. "We can establish fences and dig wells for the gazelles," he told *Beijing Today*. "When the gazelles have no water supply they have to move around to find water and food. Thus if we provide them with enough water, things will be different. And the fences can protect the crops," Xiang said. According to his plan, the cost of establishing 140 kilometers of fences would amount to five or six million yuan. "But all we can afford is 1.93 million yuan," said Xiang. "We need the state to invest".

Australia dealt successfully with a similar problem. When the number of koala bears got out of control, the administration and scientific organizations carried out operations such as sterilization, and koalas were moved to different areas. The measures had the desired effect. The farmers in Xinjiang are in need of similarly direct action.

They might look pretty...

Photos provided by Cui Xuechun

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By Zhang Bo

Amid a storm of controversy, Liaoning has claimed the final ticket to China's new football Premier League. The new league replaces Division A, of which Liaoning was already a member. However, Changchun Yatai club recently presented evidence that Liaoning was in breach of several of the stringent new Premier League rules intended to clean up the scandals which have afflicted Chinese football. Yatai, which finished top of China's Division B league last season, would have graduated to the Premier League had Liaoning been thrown out.

Yatai alleged that Liaoning had presented fake land and property certificates to the football authorities. The Chinese Football Association held a vote on the dispute on March 14. They decided Liaoning should retain its position in the top flight, but that it would be punished by the CFA and sports administration of Liaoning Province, according to a report from last Friday's Soccer Weekly. The CFA held a news conference last Thursday to reveal their decision. They were immediately denounced as autocratic and corrupt by angry fans in Changchun who took to the streets to protest against the decision.

Nevertheless, while the Premier League is due to kick off on May 15, Yatai began another season in the second division (now called China's First Division) last Sunday. Their match with Guangdong Dongguan ended in a 0-0 draw.

Referee! Over the last 10 years, China's Division A has been plagued by scandals and disputes. Setting up the Premier League was considered to be the best remedy for this unhealthy PR. But just after the governing committee for the Premier League had been set up on February 26, a new soccer storm blew up.

On March 5, Changchun Yatai, champions of the 2003 Division B League, alleged that Liaoning club did not reach the prerequisites for entering China's Premier League as defined by the CFA, because the land use certificates and house ownership certificates they present-

Tough at the Top



A disgruntled fan

Photo by Photocom

ed were fakes, according to a report in Beijing-based *Beijing Times* on March 19.

The standards for a club's accession to China's Premier League formulated by the CFA state that a club must have its own training base and facilities. So if Yatai's allegation was true, Liaoning should be deprived of its qualification for the Premier League, even though it finished in sixth place in Division A last season. Under these circumstances, Division B champions Yatai would be bumped up to the top league.

The CFA immediately carried out investigations on the dispute. Liaoning Football Club acknowledged in a letter submitted to the CFA on March 12 that it had used improper documents to apply for qualification to the premier league. But they said this was due merely to limited time, and they insisted that the faked certificates were provided by one of their partners who were not that closely connected to Liaoning football club, according to last Monday's *Titan Sports*.

Put to the vote

The CFA was desperate to recover and maintain an upright and healthy image, so it had repeatedly emphasized it would make the Premier League operate according to strict, fair and

open rules. Liu Yuming, chairman of Yatai, told *Titan Sports* last Wednesday that the CFA's president Yan Shiduo had told him the CFA would review every club's credentials according to the set standards. It was this that prompted Yatai's action in exposing Liaoning.

This left the CFA with a tricky choice, as it could not ignore the immense following and soccer resources Liaoning possesses in China. Liaoning, meanwhile, had come out fighting. Zhang Shuguang, executive director of Liaoning club, had revealed that some other clubs who had qualified for the Premier League also failed to meet some of the criteria, according to last Monday's *Titan Sports*. Zhang also denounced Yatai, saying they must have obtained their evidence about Liaoning through illegal and immoral means.

Facing this dilemma, the CFA decided to resort to the nascent premier league committee, consisting of 11 clubs of the Premier League. After a joint vote held by the committee on March 14, Liaoning made its way to the premier league with support from nine clubs.

Later, on March 15, a joint presidents meeting of the CFA passed a resolution to approve and respect the vote result of the committee.

Reactions after the vote

After the CFA made Liaoning's qualification public last Thursday, Yatai club released a statement at a news conference the next day. The statement said shareholders of Yatai club demanded that the CFA compensate for the financial losses Yatai suffered due to unfair treatment. The statement also condemned the CFA's conniving action and other areas of misconduct, and promised an appeal about the incident to FIFA and the Asia Football Confederation, according to a report last Saturday in Nanjing-based *Yangtze Evening News*.

At the news conference, Yatai again presented the faked

data Liaoning had submitted to the CFA, such as the land use and house ownership certificates. The club also revealed evidence of Liaoning's default on wages and bonuses for players. At a second press conference yesterday, Yatai also demanded an apology from the CFA.

Liu Yuming revealed that the evidence displayed was only a part of what the club had gathered. He said the club would hold a second news conference at a proper time, according to last Saturday's *Beijing Youth Daily*. Liu also revealed Yatai was considering launching a lawsuit.

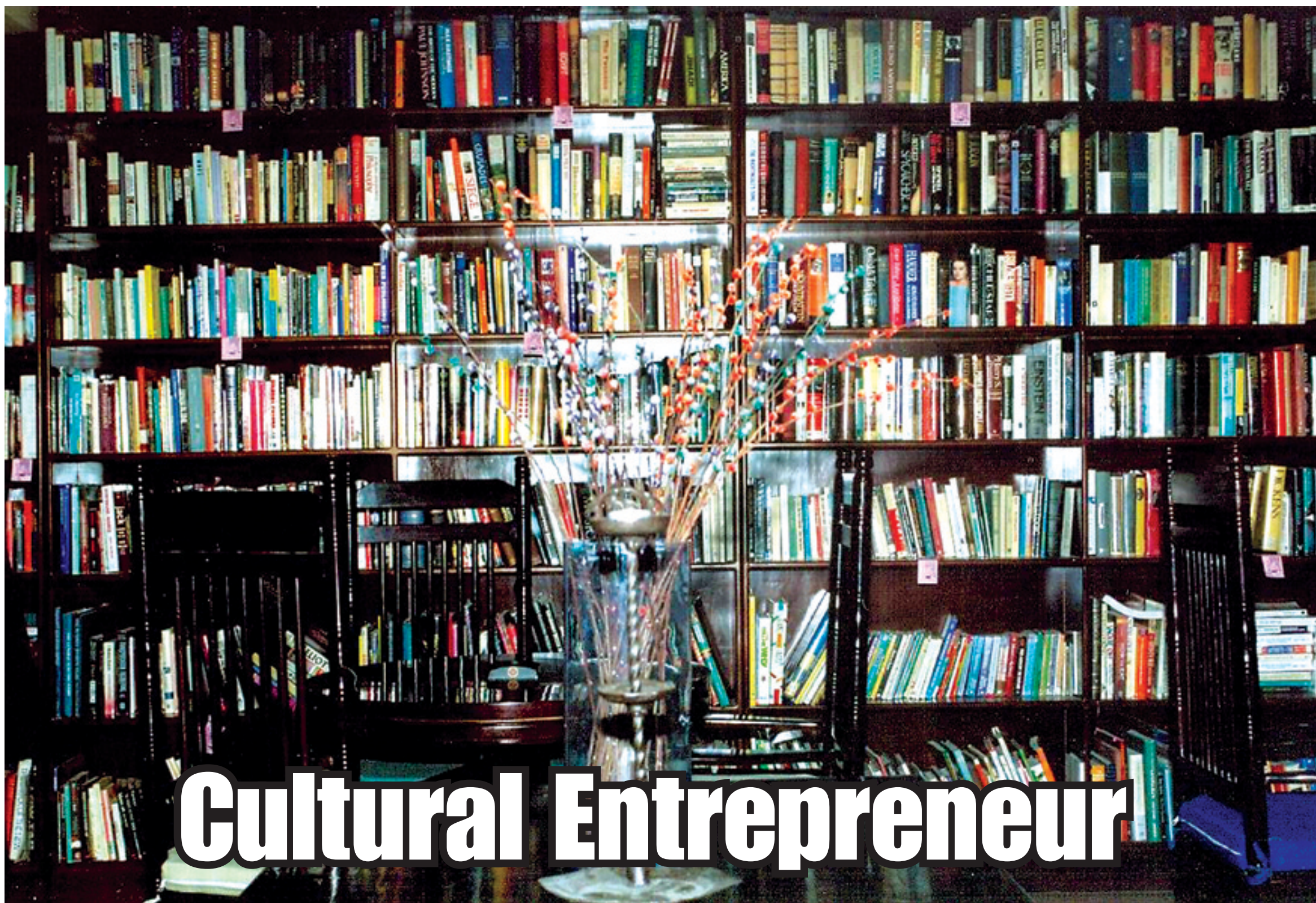
Liu told the media that Yatai would not give up its effort to enter the premier league and he was confident that Yatai was the first and also the last victim of this kind of affair. He said he was confident the club would get a fair result in the end.

Liaoning softened its stance after the news conference held by Yatai. Still, Lu Feng, general director of Liaoning club, told *Soccer Weekly* last Friday that Liaoning fully respected the CFA's decision and cared little about any actions Yatai might take.

Meanwhile, Lang Xiaonong, a top official from the CFA, said that allowing Liaoning to retain its position was the discreet and correct decision. As to the denouncement from Yatai at the news conference, Lang said the CFA would not change its decision and Yatai would have to play in the First Division, according to last Friday's *Beijing Youth Daily*.

In Changchun, capital city of Jilin Province, hundreds of soccer fans demonstrated against the CFA's decision last Friday. An organizer of the demonstration told *Nanjing Daily* that the CFA was an autocratic and dishonest organ, which would definitely lead Chinese football into chaos.

Liu Yuming told *Soccer Weekly* that although his club had lost its deserved opportunity to play in the Premier League, Yatai was not discouraged and the team would simply win the first division league this year and finally claim its rightful spot in the Premier League.



Cultural Entrepreneur

By Philomena Cho

“One of my beliefs is that if I lose everything material, including current earning opportunities, I can still survive, and I believe this gives me the strength required to run my own business,” says UK-native Alexandra Pearson, owner of the largest English-language lending library in Beijing, The Bookworm. “A lot of fear of failure disappears,” she says. “I think that many people live in a material trap where greed plays a bigger part than they actually realize.”

Entrepreneurship runs in her blood. “My mother started her own business at the age of 50, having done all sorts of smaller things up until then, helping disadvantaged people like the mentally and physically handicapped and battered wives.” Her two brothers and one sister are all “self-employed and pretty much always have been,” she adds.

Mind your tones

Pearson started touring the world early. Her father was a naval attaché and his work took the family on extended sojourns to Hong Kong, China and Singapore. Not only is her father fluent in putonghua, says Pearson, “he continues to correct my tones!”

Later in her life, it was music, rather than the lure of riches, that brought Pearson back to Beijing in 1992. After earning a degree in English Literature and Chinese Language from the University of Westminster, Pearson landed a British Council scholarship to study at Beijing’s Central Conservatory of Music. “I knew that I wanted to come back to China and I wanted to keep studying. I loved music so the scholarship was a natural choice,” she explains.

“I came to study contemporary Chinese composers but found that it would be difficult to do, so I changed tack and studied a couple of Chinese instruments with the idea that I’d understand Chinese music better by being able to play,” Pearson says. Now she’s able to play several classical Chinese instruments.

After finishing her music studies, Pearson helped in starting Poacher’s Inn in 1993. “I was responsible for organizing the musical events,” she says. “Tuesday was choir, Wednesday was slow club jazz, Friday was a DJ and Saturday was live rock. You have to remember, those were the early days of Chinese rock, so any names of older bands you’ve heard of now - they all played

there,” she adds with a smile.

She then joined the Island Club in 1996 and took full advantage of its ground-floor conversion into a theatre in 1998. “For the next year, Beijing had its first fully-fledged experimental theatre, she says. “I set up productions for some and produced others myself by getting corporate grants. The British Council also sponsored some shows. We had some great production companies like Mad City and Peking Players and we did some fantastic shows,” she says proudly.

Though Pearson stopped conducting for the Beijing International Choir, which she did from 1993 to 2001, she now jams with other musicians every couple of months. “They’re mostly at my house,” Pearson says of the impromptu concerts, “though next month, we’ll have a classical music concert at The Bookworm.” About two dozen musicians show up for each of these fun-filled musical evenings. Styles range from classical to bluegrass with banjo or jazz, depending on who shows up.

Business owner

“Obviously, I’m very pro small businesses and always wish for more,” says Pearson. “It’s so much more exciting than standard branding. I cannot



Happiness is a good book.

understand why anyone would want to go to anywhere that is everywhere. I am much more turned on by the unique and the interesting than the cult and the branding. And yes, I would walk an extra mile to pay a little more for a coffee or a hot pot or a piece of clothing in an independently run business!”

Having helped set up the China branch of multinational consulting company I Will Not Complain in 1993 as Deputy General Manager, Pearson continued her evening work at Poacher’s. She recalls that period with a laugh. “In the daytime, I’d be busy setting up IWNC and then at night, I’d have all the music at Poacher’s to take care of. So, for those couple of years, I basically slept during the commute - about an hour and a half each way in the taxi.”

Along with two partners, Pearson established Key Consulting in 1996 to provide business training. With trainers who are themselves lawyers, PhD candidates or other highly-trained professionals, the company has built a market reputation for their top-notch people. “The thing I like best about the company is that everyone is very independent, self-contained. The three partners each bring something different to the table. So, it’s about mutual respect and reliance; about really needing and supporting each other.” The company runs seminars in Creativity & Thinking Skills as well as Outdoor Training.

Pearson thinks this helps introduce “western culture and a level of wackiness.”

“The key to effective training is about getting trainees to internalize rather than just intellectually understand the material. And this is what each trainer must be able to do,” Pearson says. Today, Key Consulting has major clients like Nokia, AstraZeneca and Motorola as well as the Ministry of Commerce and the United Nations.

“I have heroes and I try to emulate some of their qualities that I believe make them strong. Richard Branson, Charles Handy and Leonardo da Vinci come to mind. Interesting that they are all challengers of the status quo,” she observes.

Accounting for her success as an independent business-owner, Pearson says, “Positive thinking is paramount. I once lost a business that was very dear to me emotionally. Although it hurt, I think it was my biggest success of that year - losing graciously. The opportunities that arose because of the way in which I lost the business were enormous. Plus, I learnt a great amount about myself and about doing business.”

Bookworm

Though Pearson’s love affair with books started much earlier, she first purchased a collection of 1,500 books for the Island Club’s member library in 1996 as part of the set-up team. Though leaving the books behind when she quit the Island

Club in 1999, she was offered the chance to purchase them by the owners when they sold the business in 2002.

“But I didn’t have a place to put them,” says Pearson, despite being happy to be reunited with the collection. “So, I talked to the owners of Poachers and they gave me the space in the back. The Bookworm was born in October 2002.” For members, 250 yuan a year allows them to borrow two books within any two week period. Wireless internet is also now available at The Bookworm. As for the name, Alex smiles and says, “The simpler, the better.”

The space was needed in 2003, so The Bookworm moved out in October and re-opened on November 1 in its current location as part of Le Petit Gourmand on Sanlitun North Street. Pearson has worked with Le Petit Gourmand owner Tom Cui before at the Island Club. “We have a great working partnership. We really support each other. It’s such a relief not to have to think about the service, food and drink or opening hours.”

“I’m continuously buying non-fiction,” she says, “though we get a lot of donations as well.” So the Island Club’s little collection has now swelled to nearly 7,000 books. With Chinese titles on sale at reasonable prices, Pearson’s latest brainchild of a monthly themed event will add about 100 new titles for sale each month. The three-day Indian fest last month packed the house. Next is China in April, Adventure and Exploration in May, Mystery & Crime in June, French in July and Latin American in August. Later this month, a selection of non-fiction from McGraw-Hill will also be on sale.

A firm believer in the “diversity of places, events and people as well as self-reliance,” Pearson has created a life for herself in the capital that is culturally diverse, financially rewarding and best of all, filled with fun. “I have a motivation to enjoy life, and this far exceeds the motivation to earn money. But money seems to come when you are doing things you love, and that’s a good perk!”



Alex on her travels

Photos by Gabe Hurrish



Mysterious Ancient Kingdom

By Wang Xiaoxiao

Unearthed treasures on show at the National Museum give visitors a glimpse of life in the remote, ancient Dian Kingdom.

Among the over 30 sites excavated, Shizhanshan, Lijiashan and Yangfutou tombs in Yunnan Province are the largest in scale with the greatest number of cultural relics unearthed. Archeologists have carried out numerous excavations of the three tomb areas over the years. The widely recognized double-layered bronze cowry container decorated with hunting scenes, the gold seal of the Dian King, the bronze tiger and oxen table were all unearthed from these tombs. Besides the bronzeware, excavation at Yangfutou tomb from 1998 to 2001 unearthed for the first time large quantities of lacquer artifacts.

The 179 exhibits, mostly bronze, jade, lacquer and gold, represent only a small portion of the over 15,000 articles unearthed in the past 50 years, but are sufficient to provide a rich introduction to the ancient Dian Kingdom, providing some insights into its economy, customs, military affairs, religion and art.

While little is known about the Dian Kingdom, it is known that it lasted from around the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) to the early Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 AD). Centered around Dianchi, a large lake near present-day Kunming, it encompassed what is now central and eastern Yunnan Province. A major stop along the southwestern Silk Road, Dian was once an important cultural and commercial center.

Its sudden, and so far unexplained, disappearance left many puzzles for historians, such as how such a high standard of bronze casting techniques was achieved. Part of the mystery is due to the fact that with the exception of one gold seal, none of the artifacts thus far unearthed bore any written inscriptions. However cowry containers decorated with various scenes from life, as well as those four characters on the gold seal, provide a fascinating glimpse of history.

Figurines on cowry containers, buckles in a variety of shapes and designs depict scenes and events in the lives of the Dian people.

Since cowrie shells were used as currency, cowry containers have only been found in tombs of rich or noble families.

Among the four cowry containers on display, one decorated with a hunting scene design is the most precious. It is the only double-layered container excavated



Bronze cowry container with figurines in hunting scene, unearthed at Shizhaishan.



Gold seal of Dian King, unearthed at Shizhaishan.



Gilt bronze buckle with monkey design on the rim, unearthed at Shizhaishan.



Lacquer Hu (wine vessel), unearthed at Yangfutou.



Gold bracelet, unearthed at Shizhaishan.



Bronze male figurine, unearthed at Lijiashan.

so far. The scene shows three men, two horses, a dog and a deer, exquisitely illustrating the hunting methods of the Dian people.

Moreover, the lacquer vessels, painted pottery boxes and the bronze ox head all revealed the diversity of the ancient Dian culture, and highlight apparent influences from the cultures of the central plains.

The Dian people used bronze to make a wide range of articles, including ornaments, weapons and coffins. Archeologists believe it was the abundant copper resources in the area that helped raise the standard of the Dian bronze culture.

A bronze table in the shape of a tiger and ox unearthed from Tomb 24, Lijiashan, 80 kilometers south of Kunming, is an exceptional example of both the technical mastery of the ancient artisans and their design skills. The back of a standing ox serves as the table top, its heavy head and shoulders counter-balanced by a tiger attacking its hindquarters.

The cowry container with a sacrificial scene has altogether 129 small figures on a top about 32 centimeters in diameter. Each figure has its own expression and gesture, showing a magnificent sacrificial scene in the ancient Dian Kingdom. Sun Ji, a member of State Culture Relics Appraisal Committee noted in his article *On Dian's Cultural Relics* that bronzeware with such a large scale patterning of figures has never been seen among the cultural relics of the central plains from the same period.

The gold seal is said to have been presented to the Dian King by Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty in 109 BC, after Dian surrendered to West Han. There is some dispute over the authenticity of the seal. The lack of smoothness of the strokes of the inscription indicate the seal itself was engraved, rather than cast in a mould, which was the usual way for such seals to be made in the Western Han Dynasty.

Some scholars suggest that the seal was made in a hurry in order to present it to the king as quickly as possible after his surrender. Others suggest that the gold seal could be a replica of the real one, which would not normally have been buried with the king, but passed down to subsequent generations.

Furthermore, the seal is made of a gold and bronze alloy. If it was the original gift from the Western Han emperor, it would have been pure gold.

Nearly 50 years has passed since the excavation of the seal. Since then, archeologists have been searching in vain for similarly inscribed artifacts. Without further written evidence, the precise dates of the establishment and fall of the Dian Kingdom, its dimension and exact location, will continue to puzzle coming generations of historians.

The exhibition at Beijing's China National Museum will run until April 5.

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By Darlene Lee

The debut of the new issue of *Artlink* magazine titled "The China Phenomenon" was the subject of an event on March 20 at Beijing's Red Gate Gallery and showed the spotlight still shining on Chinese contemporary artists in the international art media.

Brian Wallace, owner and founder of Red Gate Gallery, said of his decision to host the launch, "*Artlink* is one of the top two art magazines which has been publishing for many years. As it is government funded, it is less commercial and therefore more independent... an ideal situation to objectively comment on the art scene."

Executive Editor Stephanie Britton said, "We felt it was important to close that feedback loop, so people here could see it and learn why we'd done it this way, as well as to get back to us about where we fell down or what we could do better next time."

Tackling the multi-dimensional and rapidly evolving world of Chinese contemporary art is not a task for the faint-hearted. Britton notes in her editorial for the special issue, "It is not easy to get a fix on the reasons for the rapid success of Chinese contemporary art. Rarely does one attend an international visual art event in which Chinese artists are not participating. It is equally rare that the art presented by those artists is not also amongst the most challenging of the art on offer. The question must be how do we approach an understanding of where this art is coming from and how such a new player on the world stage became so important so quickly."

Co-edited with Huangfu Binghui, director of Gallery 4A in Sydney, "The Chinese Phenomenon" issue of *Artlink* features a diverse mix of Chinese and international art critics based in both China and Australia. Britton said, "We spent a lot of time researching to select the writers,

Art Media Splash



The cover of *Artlink*'s new China issue features a photo by Yang Fudong.

who in turn selected the artists they covered, so strictly speaking, we didn't choose the artists to feature. Though obviously we had a good idea of what would be covered from knowing the writers, we didn't know exactly what we'd have until we saw the pictures!"

The idea to feature Chinese contemporary art in this edition "came to me very suddenly," said Britton. "This was not a committee decision that took hours. There were a range of reasons, but mostly it felt like it was just time."

She continued, "The evidence through the international bien-

nales and big shows was that Chinese artists have started to hit the high spots and yet there was very little coverage in the English press. I scanned for resources to check if my gut feelings were right, and they were."

Other than *Art Asia Pacific's* (an Australian art quarterly) feature on contemporary Chinese art in 2000, Britton found little else in the way of recent resources. "A lot of change has happened in the three years since *Art Asia Pacific* came out with their China issue. The situation of artists being able to react to the enor-

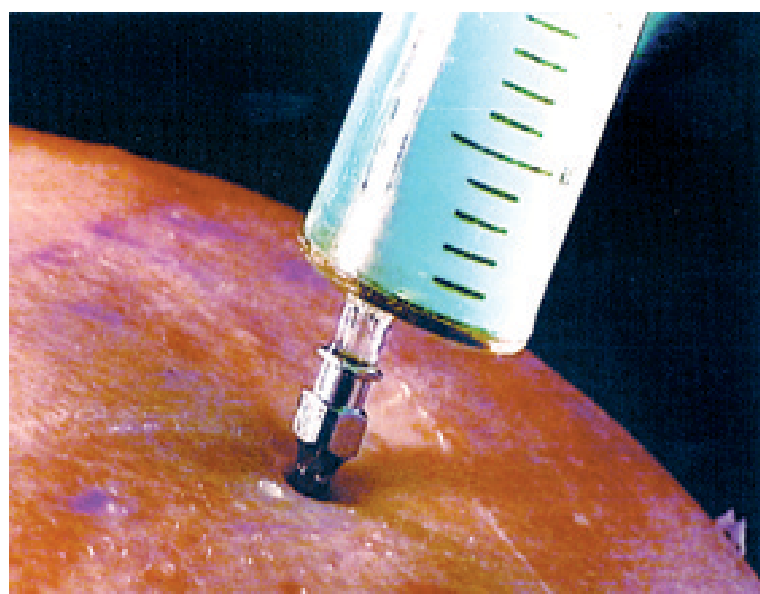
mous changes during that time was particularly interesting for us to look at," Britton added.

Covering a broad range of topics from returning Chinese artists to contemporary calligraphy, the magazine ambitiously attempts to give readers a complete history and update of the current Chinese contemporary art scene. Therefore, it may be a bit simplistic for those in the know, Britton cautioned. "It's designed for people who aren't that familiar with Chinese contemporary art. Hence, the overview format of the issue. It lays out the recent history, across genres, so that readers can see this unfold in front of them," she said.

John Clark's piece entitled "Alors, la Chine," about last year's show at Paris' Centre Pompidou of the same name, is a delight to read. Professor in art history and theory at the University of Sydney, Clark goes beyond the hype to draw some penetrating conclusions about the implications of the show.

Independent curator Huang Du's "A Lens on Diversity" lays out a knowledgeable and incisive history of Chinese contemporary photography, complete with fold-out reproductions of Wang Jingsong's *Night Revels of Lao Li* (an ironic take on contemporary life based on the famous 10th-century scroll painting *Night Banquet at Han Xizai's* by Gu Hongzhong).

Gu Zhenqing and Yang Li's article about Chinese women artists is disappointing in its omission of Xiong Wenyun, Cui Xiuwen, He Chengyao, Lin Tianmiao, Pan Ying and Liu Liping. It is also unfortunate that seminal curator Liao Wen was not interviewed for the article, considering she put together the first ever show of female Chi-



Chains 2000, Cao Fei, video still

nese avant garde artists in 1995 and has authored several books on feminism and art. The photos accompanying the article also seem to miss an opportunity for diversity, with four out of six featuring Chen Lingyang's work (three of those from the single *Twelve Flower Month* series) even though the piece cites a dozen female artists.

All in all, the articles in *Artlink*'s new China issue present a broad and informed look at what's happening on the Chinese contemporary art scene today. The depth and breadth of coverage makes this issue

valuable towards helping "increase awareness in Australia, Europe and the US, where it is widely distributed, about contemporary Chinese art in China," Wallace noted.

The issue is certain to also be an important resource in the future. "I am sure it will be required reading in the Chinese art world, as one of the most up to date overviews available. At the same time, it will not lose its significance over time - people will hang on to it as a reference. As a significant reference, its impact will be powerful and long-lasting," Wallace said.



(Right to left): Fan Di'an, dean of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Stephanie Britton and Huangfu Binghui at the ceremony for the release of the issue at the Red Gate gallery.

Photo by Miao Yajie



Detail from *Night Revels of Lao Li*, Wang Qingsong, 2000, C print

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New Sound New Style Folk Music

By Xiao Yingying

Dubbed the "12 Girls Band," this versatile folk ensemble presented two performances of folk music collected, composed or arranged by Wang Luobin (1913-96) at the Beijing Exhibition Hall Theater last weekend.

Established in 2001, the group is made up of a dozen classically trained young players of Chinese traditional instruments, such as the *erhu*, *guzheng*, *pipa*, *dizi*, *yangqin*, *tuliang* and *hulusi*. Each member plays at least two or three instruments. After touring Japan and Hong Kong, they have returned to conquer the Chinese mainland.

The 12 play a new style that combines traditional Chinese instruments, pop beats, a touch of jazz and elements of other music



The 12 Girls Band

Photo by Cui Jun

forms from around the world.

Of the 1,000 or so folk songs composed by Wang, the band focused on the most typical pieces, such as *Zaina Yaoyuande Difang* (*At a Place Far Away*), *Alamuhan*, *Huayu Shaonian* (*The Flowers*

and *Young Men*) and *Dabanchengde Guniang* (*Daban City Girl*).

The first of the two concerts coincided with that of Liu Huan, to the detriment of ticket sales.

While debate continues

over the group's mixing of traditional instrumental music with modern methods, the group has undeniably achieved commercial success, and helped widen interest in traditional Chinese music both in China and abroad.



Liu Huan (left) and Na Ying

Photo by Lu Beifeng

Pop King Wows Fans

By Zhang Ran

Liu Huan, the elder-statesman of China's current crop of pop singers, gave the first solo concert in Beijing of his 20-year career last Saturday.

The wildly enthusiastic response of his fans at Capital Gymnasium suggests that it will not be his last.

The venue was filled to capacity by 7:00, half an hour before the show started. Liu opened with a crowd-pleaser, *Haohan Ge* (*Song of the Heroes*), the theme song from the popular TV drama *Stories of Three Kingdoms*.

He performed 24 songs in total, including two in English, one in French and one in Italian. Other highlights were *Shaonian Zhuangzhi Buyanchou* (*Never Say Distress*), the theme song from the 1980s TV drama *Bianyi Jingcha* (*Plainclothes Cop*), *Qianwancide Wen* (*Ask a Thousand Times*), the chart-topping theme song from the popular TV drama *Beijingren Zainiuyu* (*Beijingers in New York*) in 1990s, and *Congtou Zilai* (*Start From Scratch*).

Liu was accompanied by the China

Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by San Bao, and was joined on stage by a host of guest celebrities, including Sun Nan and Na Ying.

Born in 1963, Liu is something of a household name in China. A graduate of the University of International Relations with a major in French literature, he manages to juggle his career as a pop star with teaching the history of western music at the University of International Business and Economics.

He became popular after singing a string of TV series' theme songs. "I was not interested in performing a solo concert two years ago. However, as I turned 40 years old last year, I started thinking about a concert to mark the conclusion of my singing career and to reward my fans," Liu said in an interview with *Beijing Youth Daily* before the concert.

The Postal Administrative Bureau has issued two 80-fen stamps bearing Liu's portrait to mark the event. Liu is the first pop singer to be accorded such an honor.

Zhang Yimou Chooses US Diva for Theme Song

By Guo Yuandan

Renowned soprano Kathleen Battle is singing the theme song for Zhang Yimou's new film *Shimian Maifu* (*Ambush from All Sides*), producer Zhang Weiping told *Beijing Youth Daily* last Friday. Zhang Yimou has just completed the sound remixing in Japan.

This is the first time Zhang Yimou has used an international star to sing the theme song for one of his films. Battle's pure voice and technical artistry have made her one of the most acclaimed singers of her time. She will also perform at the opening ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens this August, just one month after the worldwide release of the film, Zhang Weiping noted.

Although she sings the theme song in English, Zhang Weiping said the music could be understood no regardless of the language.

Shimian Maifu has attracted considerable media attention since shooting started last September with an all-star line-up including Andy Lau, Takeshi Kaneshiro and Zhang Ziyi.

Most of the shooting was done in Ukraine, with additional outdoor scenes shot in Yongchuan, in south western China.

While the details of the plot are being kept a closely guarded secret, the film is a love story in which every character, Xiao Mei (Zhang Ziyi), Officer Jin (Takeshi Kaneshiro) and Officer Liu (Andy Lau), has some unspeakable secret.

"Compared with *Hero*, this story has a more profound theme and a clearer and smoother plot," Zhang Weiping disclosed.



Kathleen Battle

WORLDWIDE



Michael Jackson

Michael Jackson Sues Over Sale of Property on Web

Michael Jackson has sued a New Jersey man for more than \$10 million, claiming that he is illegally selling private property belonging to the beleaguered pop star and his famous family on the Internet. The lawsuit claims that Henry Vaccaro obtained the letters, pictures, song lyrics and other items belonging to Jackson through a bankruptcy sale involving the entertainer's parents and has no right to sell them. Jackson is shown after being booked on charges connected with child molestation in Santa Barbara, California November 20, 2003.

wish to make a movie for children came from watching his own small children, he said.

The story tells the tale of a boy who runs away from an orphanage in Victorian England and joins a gang of young pickpockets working for a thief. David Lean's 1948 version starring Alec Guinness remains a film classic.

Valenti to Retire from Motion Picture Assoc.

One of Hollywood's most powerful men said goodbye to the silver screen on Tuesday after an almost 38-year-long career in which he never acted, directed, produced or wrote for the screen.



Jack Valenti

Hollywood's chief lobbyist Jack Valenti, the chief executive of the Motion Picture Association of America, announced he will retire from the powerful industry group in a few months, confirming speculation he would step down.

Valenti, 83, and a former aide to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, has run the MPAA for nearly 38 years and is one of Washington's most powerful lobbyists on entertainment and media issues.

The MPAA is the lobby group for Hollywood's film and television studios. Valenti said the group has hired a search firm to find a replacement, and added he was "hopeful to have somebody in place in the next two or three months."

Average Hollywood Movie Cost Tops \$100 Million

Hollywood's major film studios saw the average cost to make and market a movie rise 15 percent in 2003 to a record \$102.9 million even as they faced a dip in ticket sales and admissions, industry representatives said on Tuesday.

The average cost to produce and promote a film in 2003 rose above \$100 million for the first time ever with the average cost up 8.6 percent to \$63.8 million and advertising and other expenses up a whopping 28 percent to about \$39 million, according to the Motion Picture Association of America which released the figures at the annual ShoWest convention.

Reuters, edited by Guo Yuandan



Roman Polanski

Roman Polanski's Next Project - Oliver Twist

Oscar-winning director Roman Polanski says his next film will be based on Charles Dickens' classic novel *Oliver Twist*.

Shooting is scheduled to begin in the Czech Republic by midyear. The book has been adapted for the screen by Ronald Harwood, who also wrote the screenplay for *The Pianist*. Polanski told reporters at a Sao Paulo movie theater on Monday night.

"A comedy? A police movie? To me, it seems impossible to go back to doing that kind of thing, to tell a trivial story." The

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By Hou Mingxin

It is a race unlike any other, taking the world's bravest drivers from the romantic comfort of Paris through the grueling sands of the Sahara Desert and finally, 11,000 kilometers later, to beautiful Dakar beach in Morocco. Since it was established in 1979, the Paris to Dakar Rally has attracted racers and racing fans from around the globe with its unrivaled combination of driving bravura, natural beauty and pure spectacle.

In the past 26 years, 37 drivers have died during the races, but the ranks of drivers that sign up keeps swelling and this year included two Chinese.

Chinese drivers Lu Ningjun and Luo Ning not only took part in the 2004 race, they ended among the hardy few who finished the entire rally.

Last Friday, Lu spoke with *Beijing Today* over the phone about his experiences during the grueling 18-day rally.

Beijing Today: What drove you to take part in the Dakar Rally?

Lu: For me, the Paris to Dakar Rally is like my first love. Driving in it is a dream I have cherished for nearly 20 years. I first learned about the race in 1985, when I was selected by the country to go through driving training in Japan and saw it on TV. I was shocked and asked myself, 'Good Lord, how could anyone run such a crazy race!'

Since then, I wanted to be a part of it. Later I got chances to participate in similar rallies, like the Paris-Beijing Rally in 1992, but in my eyes none could compare to the Dakar Rally.

Beijing Today: So why did it take 20 years for you to realize your dream?

Lu: The key point for me has been sponsorship. When I first participated in the Hong Kong to Beijing Rally as the only Chinese driver in 1985, total annual auto production in China was just around 200,000 cars. At that time, for most people, buying a car was an impossible dream, to say nothing of buying a car for competition driving.

Today, China produces millions of cars a year, but few Chinese people know about the Dakar Rally. It took me about six months last year to convince the Zhengzhou Nissan Company to support me. It was very difficult and they thought it would be a big risk to sponsor me to drive in that kind of race. Fortunately, in the end, I managed to convince them otherwise.

The company gave me a total of 17 million yuan to participate the rally. That is hardly a small amount of money, even for a car maker, but according to a rough study done by CCTV, the company actually made about 300 million yuan from my participating in the Dakar Rally. It was a good deal.

Beijing Today: Did you feel pressure after you found the sponsor?

Lu: Yes. When I visited one of the company's plants, a lot of workers said, 'Look, that's the guy who's driving in the Dakar Rally. Lots of them looked skeptical. I often thought of those workers'



Lu relaxes with a few new young fans.

Photos provided by Zhengzhou Nissan Company



Paradise Earned

— An interview with Lu Ningjun, Chinese Dakar Rally driver

At the finish line: (from left) Lu Ningjun, French navigator Denis Schugert and a crew member.



Lu's minorly-modified Nissan Paladin proved up to the race — barely.

doubts when I was in trouble and wanted to give up. On the other hand, the pressure proved to be a good thing.

Beijing Today: What were the biggest problems you experienced during the race?

Lu: Two things troubled me. One was my car. Compared with other drivers, I had a very poor car that had barely been refitted for racing, hardly a professional car for such a rally. For example, other racers had cars with

engines with 280 to 300 horsepower, while my car only had 170. When they got a look at my car, a few other drivers patted me on the back as to say, 'You better be careful in that thing, buddy.'

Because of the car's limitations, I had to slow down considerably before trying to cross over the high dunes, which reached up to 100 meters tall, while other drivers could just sail right over them.

I have to thank a friend of mine from Hong Kong — he is a real professional and advised I use some caution during the race. I did and it worked. I don't think I would have made it to the end if I didn't control my speed.

The other problem was my pilot. He was French and I had trouble communicating with him. A number of accidents took place during the race because of failures of communication.

If I had a pilot I could communicate with, he could tell me where to go and what to do next. But I didn't have that in this race.

Beijing Today: Did you ever think about giving up during the race?

Lu: Sure. For one thing, because I had a less powerful car than most other competitors, I faced huge challeng-

es in crossing the dunes.

Due to the lack of power, I had to drive up and down and up and down in order to cross each big dune. It really taxed my will. The thought of giving up crossed my mind several times.

Under that pressure, my pilot wanted to give up in the ninth stage, an over-700 kilometer stretch of road surrounded by desert. He said he wanted to go back home and asked me to give up and come back next year. But I held on and fought all the way through.

Beijing Today: What is the real attraction of the Dakar Rally, to you?

Lu: Dakar is like paradise, but you have to drive across hellish roads to reach it. Every year, less than 40 percent of the cars that start out complete the whole race. I'll never forget the desperate eyes of the drivers I passed who had to give up for all kinds of reasons.

The whole race is like a symbol of the triumph of the spirit. All the drivers are challenged by the environment and their personal demons, but hard work and endurance is eventually rewarded.

I met one Hungarian driver who had participated six times but only reached the finish line once. He told me he would definitely go again next year.

Beijing Today: How did you feel when you got to the end?

Lu: When I entered the last stage there were only 27 kilometers left. The plains of Africa are very flat, and I couldn't wait to drive straight at the horizon and leave the rest of the 11,000 kilometer journey behind me.

When I saw the sunset, I knew it was over. We had won, we had arrived in Dakar. We had reached paradise.

Beijing Today: You finished in 57th place, 60 hours behind the winner. What would happen if you could drive a better car?

Lu: If I had a good car, a good pilot and a strong maintenance team at my disposal, I could bridge that 60-hour gap. My driving skills are better than those of many drivers. Making it through the whole race is not a miraculous achievement — a Chinese driver could win the Paris-Dakar Rally.

Zhang Makes Chinese Golf History with Masters Invite

Zhang Lianwei is set to open a new chapter in China's golf history when he makes the first Chinese appearance at the US Masters tournament, scheduled for next month, domestic media reported last Thursday.

Hootie Johnson, chairman of the Augusta National Golf Club and the Masters Tournament, announced through the tournament's official website that Zhang has been issued a special invitation.

Zhang, 38, first rose to fame when he humbled Colin Montgomerie in the Dunhill Cup nations event in 1998.

In 2003 he became the first Chinese golfer to win on the PGA European Tour when he birdied the final hole to win the Singapore Masters by one stroke over Ernie Els.

(Xinhua)

LeBron May Go to Olympics

LeBron James did not make the cut for the NBA All Star team as a rookie, but may win a nice consolation prize with a starting spot on the US Olympic squad.

James is a favorite of Team USA coach Larry Brown and has responded to his All-Star snub by leading Cleveland on a surge that has taken the Cavs from the lottery into sixth in the Eastern Conference.

There are at least three spots on the roster for Team USA still open as the Athens Olympics, set for August 15 to 28, approaches.

It is also possible that additional spots could open up at key positions, with the availability of stars Kobe Bryant and Ray Allen in question. Vince Carter, who replaced Bryant on last summer's Olympic qualifying team, is favored as a first choice to fill one of those slots but may not be able to play due to a recurring ankle injury.

(ESPN)

Egypt Hopes to Net 2010 World Cup

By Sun Ming

Since FIFA officially decided to hold the 2010 World Cup in Africa, football fans throughout that continent and the world have been anxiously counting down to May 15, when the organization will announce which country gets hosting honors.

There are five candidates, Egypt, South Africa, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya, among whom many consider Egypt the early favorite.

According to Egyptian Ambassador to China Ali Hefny, Egypt has a strategic location, a long and proud football tradition, great fans and experience in organizing regional and international contests.

Particularly since 9/11, safety and security are major concerns for any major event of this kind and Egypt is up to the task, he added. The country's stability is proven by the huge number of tourists from all over the world that comfortably travel to Egypt's many great ancient sites every year.

Another key criteria by which FIFA chooses World Cup host nations is the presence of needed infrastructure, stadiums, hotels, hospitals and telecommunications systems to handle the event — requirements Egypt can already partially meet.

By Hou Mingxin

The ceremony for the naming of the 2003 Laureus China Top Ten Athletes was held in Shanghai last Thursday.

Athletes on the first Laureus list for China were ranked in terms of their performance in 2003 and came from a wide spectrum of sports. The honored are:

1. Guo Jingjing, diving, defended her 3-meter springboard title at the 2003 world championships in Barcelona, Spain.

2. Wang Nan, table tennis, swept the women's singles, doubles and mixed doubles titles at 2003 world championships in Paris.

3. Yang Yang, short-track speed skating, clinched the women's 500-meters and 3,000-meter relay gold medals at the 2003 world championships.

4. Luo Xuejuan, swimming, won three women's events at the swimming World Championships in Barce-



Some of the honorees of the Shanghai awards ceremony last Thursday.

Photo by Photocom

lona, Spain, last July

5. Zhang Yining, table tennis, won the women's doubles gold medal at the 2003 world championships in Paris in May.

6. Liu Xiang, track and field, came in third in the men's 110 meters hurdles at the track and field world cham-

pionships in Paris.

7. Shen Xue and Zhao Hongbo, figure skating, defended their pairs' skating world title last March in Washington and won the ISU Grand Prix finals nine months later.

8. Zhao Ruirui, volleyball, led the Chinese team to their first victory in

17 years at the Women's World Volleyball Cup in November.

9. Li Xiaopeng, gymnastics, won three golds at the World Gymnastics Championships in California last August.

10. Yao Ming, basketball, had an All-Star season with the NBA's Houston Rockets.



Photos by Lou Ge

Sukhotthai Imperial Thai Restaurant

Heading off the street into the Sukhotthai Restaurant is like being transported into a Thai palace. The doors and ceiling are covered in bright gold foil embossed with decorative patterns and golden Buddhas, small elephant

sculptures and traditional stringed instruments stand in prominent posts.

That level of authentic feel extends to the kitchen, which is manned by five Thai chefs. According to general manager Lydia Li, the head cooks were all drawn from five-star hotels in their native Thailand. The restaurant has been open since September and met with success thanks to its combination of impressive decoration, experienced chefs and surprisingly reasonable prices.

The tantalizing appetizer fried chicken wrapped in herb leaves (*xianglangye zhaji*) is 42 yuan and ever-popular papaya salad

with chili and lemon juice (*qingbugua shala*) is large enough to serve five and costs 45 yuan. Among the entree options are a range of curries, featuring chicken, pork, beef and seafood, all priced at 60 yuan.

Diners can also choose to hit the extensive daily buffets, which go for 58 yuan a plate for dinner and 38 yuan per person for lunch. March is a month of extra savings, as the restaurant is running a promotion in which every customer that spends 100 yuan or more gets a coupon worth 30 yuan on a next meal.

Evenings are spiced up with one-hour performances of Thai dances by the Golden Peacock Troupe starting at 6:45 pm (except Sundays). The restaurant also serves afternoon tea daily from 2 pm to 5 pm, offering a line of drinks, snacks, salads and desserts for low prices. Menu in Thai, Chinese, and English.

Add: Second floor, Zhongdian Xinxu Building, 6 Zhongguancun Nandajie, Haidian **Open:** 11 am - 10 pm **Tel:** 6250 1398 **Average cost:** 70 yuan per person

Lemon Leaf

The Lemon Leaf, which opened last July, is the only Thai restaurant tucked among a strip of more than a dozen eateries lined up on Xiaoyun Lu. It manages to stand out from its local competition by focusing on one of this city's great culinary loves - hotpot, here done Thai-style.

The menu offers 10 different kinds of intriguing hotpot broths, such as the recommended curry hotpot (*thaishi gali huoguo*), priced from 20 yuan to 50 yuan. After picking a pot, diners can then order from a variety of fresh dunkable items such as beef, shrimp, vegetables and noodles to make complete meals.

Diners after more solid fare can choose from a variety of Thai dishes, including house specials made with lemon. The steamed weever fish with lemon juice (*qingzheng ningmeng luyu*, 69 yuan) is at the head of



Spicy crab, 58 yuan, at Lemon Leaf

that selection, but its price is a bit hard to justify considering that *luyu* is hardly expensive on its own. The spicy crab (*lasini pangxie*, 58 yuan) is a hand-sized crab cooked with hot peppers, chili and curry, the last ingredient giving it a slightly different bite than similar dishes at Chinese restaurants.

Sofas with backs that extend a full two meters tall serve to divide the space and give it a casual, yet somewhat intimate feel. Service could use more work and the wait staff do not speak any English, though the menu is bilingual.

Add: 15 Xianyun Lu, Chaoyang **Open:** 11 am - 11 pm **Tel:** 6462 5505 **Average cost:** 80 yuan per person



Deep fried chicken wrapped in pandan leaves, 30 yuan, at Yan Wei Die

Yan Wei Die Thai Restaurant and Bar

This small Chinese-run restaurant and bar is home to the cheapest Thai in the city, according to food and beverage manager Liang Qing. Liang told *Beijing Today* that his experienced cook had worked with a master Thai chef in one of the city's first Thai restaurants and knew his way around the cuisine.

One dish that shows the impressive levels of authenticity and quality, especially for the prices, is the steamed glutinous

rice with papaya salad (*qingmugua shala*, 35 yuan).

"Most other Thai eateries in the city don't serve steamed glutinous rice. In Thailand, grab some cooked rice in one hand, some shredded papaya in the other, mix them together and then dig in," Liang explained.

Another specialty of the house is deep fried chicken wrapped in pandan leaves (*xiangye baoji*, 30 yuan for six pieces), which consists of curried chicken in fragrant, herbal leaves. Also impressive is the *tom yam goong* soup (*dongyingong tang*, 38 yuan), sour and hot as it should be and laden with shrimp and mushrooms.

Customers who rack up bills of over 100 yuan can receive VIP cards granting them to 15 percent discounts on future meals. For now, the little restaurant is running another promotion in which all lunch and dinner guests get a free bowl of red beans with coconut milk, normally priced at 12 yuan.

Add: 58A Sanlitun Nanlu,

Chaoyang **Open:** 11 am - 1:30 am **Tel:** 6502 5118 **Average cost:** 50 yuan per person

Phrik Thai

By Ian Provan

One of Beijing's longest established

Thai restaurants, Phrik Thai is a name that often comes up on lists of favorites. Maybe that should be amended to past favorites.

A recent visit showed that, ambience-wise at least, little has changed over the past couple of years. Phrik Thai has always been a pleasant place in which to dine. The owners have done a great job of turning a section of ground floor in a nondescript office block into a welcoming, comfortable dining space.

Service is not terribly friendly, but efficient and quick - perhaps a little too quick, at times. Most of our mains arrived well before the soup (*tom kar gai*). Fine for Chinese food, but not quite right in a Thai restaurant.

The first dish to arrive was a pomelo salad - fresh, well-presented and way too much palm sugar! As subsequent dishes emphasized, the chef clearly has a sweet tooth.

The salad was followed by *pad gra-moo-sab* (minced pork fried with basil), *kaeng-kari neua* (yellow curry beef brisket with potato) and *gai ho bai-tai* (chicken wrapped in pandan leaves). The pork was the best of these, with a satisfyingly high spice quotient.

Next came the *tom kar gai* (sour spicy soup with chicken and coconut milk), *chu-chi pla* (whole fried curry fish) and finally, *pad thai* (fried noodles). The fish was the most anticipated and the most disappointing dish. It was fresh, the curry was tasty, but the oil used to fry the fish was too old, giving the whole dish an unpleasant, somewhat rancid flavor.

Overall, the dishes we chose were marked by a distinct lack of, or at least inadequate use of, lemon and lemongrass, two of the essential ingredients in Thai cooking, and heavy-handedness with the palm sugar, also an essential ingredient but to be used in moderation!

Perhaps our expectations were a little high, given Phrik Thai's reputation. Hopefully, a subsequent visit will show that this particular dining experience was an aberration.

Where: 10 Yabao Lu, Chaoyang **Open:** 11:30 am - 2:30 pm, 5:30-10:30 pm **Tel:** 8561 5236 **Average Cost:** 60 yuan per person

Beautiful fruit carvings, like these at Red Basil, and other artistic touches are trademarks of Thai cuisine.

Red Basil

By Joel Kirkhart

Since opening in 1996, the Red Basil has staked out a secure spot at the high end of Beijing's Thai dining spectrum. This restaurant continues to shine on some levels, but the rise of real competition has stolen some of its limelight.

Red Basil is hard to miss while driving along the northeast Third Ring Road



Tom yam koong, 40 yuan

thanks to its bright yellow walls and large sign proclaiming simply: 'Thai Restaurant.'

Inside, the spacious main room is tastefully subdued with white walls lined in dark wood panels the same color as the solid furniture.

The extensive menu contains familiar Thai classics along with a few surprises, including the cost. Prices start at around 40 yuan, even for relatively simple fare such as noodle dish *pad thai*, and go up considerably.

Quality, however, is beyond question. The papaya salad (40 yuan) was brimming with fresh-cut shreds of green papaya and had a complex dressing that started out sweet and light but then came on with a turbocharged hit of lasting heat that might be too much for some diners.

A similar level of spice was noticeably absent in the *tom yam koong* (40 yuan), less sour and hot than normally expected for this classic Thai soup. Chili and lemongrass fans are likely to be more satisfied with the chicken with coconut milk soup

(40 yuan), made with tender chicken breast and straw mushrooms in a bracing broth tempered with coconut milk.

The red curry roast duck (60 yuan) was a tasty bowl full of tender chunks of duck and eggplant in a silky sauce

redolent of coconut. The dish was heavy on oil and light on curry flavor, but still a winner, as was the vegetable with salty fish (40 yuan), the *jielan*, or Chinese broccoli, peeled to soak up more of the salty sauce's flavor.

Red Basil does brisk business, due in no small part to impressive attention to detail and quality of ingredients, many brought in from Thailand. Now that there are so many other good Thai eateries in town, however, the prices seem a bit hard to justify.

Where: Sanyuan Dongqiao, Sanhuan Beilu, Chaoyang **Open:** 11:30 am - 2 pm, 5:30-10 pm **Tel:** 6460 2339 **Average cost:** 120 yuan per person

Recipe: Mussels Steamed in Spicy Thai Curry

2 1/2 kilos mussels
3 limes
1 can coconut milk
1/3 cup dry white wine
1 1/2 tablespoons Thai red curry paste
1 1/2 tablespoons minced garlic
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 tablespoon sugar
2 cups fresh cilantro sprigs

Scrub mussels and remove beards. Squeeze limes to get one-third cup of juice. In a large pot, boil lime juice, coconut milk, wine, curry paste, garlic, fish sauce and sugar over high heat for two minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the mussels and mix to coat with sauce. Cover pot and cook mussels, stirring occasionally, until opened, about five to eight minutes. (Discard any unopened mussels.) Mince cilantro and toss with mussels, then serve, accompanied by lime wedges.

Siamese Dreams

Dining Thai-style in Beijing

By James Liu

Other exotic cuisines have perhaps been trendier in the capital the past couple years, but by sheer number of restaurants alone, Thai remains this city's favorite choice for dining Southeast Asian-style.

There are more than a dozen Thai restaurants in Beijing, ranging from classy, hip joints to more humble, straightforward establishments. Many manage to maintain credible levels of authenticity in their food by importing fresh ingredients, and even chefs, from Thailand.

Thai cuisine combines elements of Indian, Chinese and Western cooking into something uniquely its own. It has a well-earned reputation for blistering levels of spice, but offers much more. Good Thai food is beautifully presented, sophisticated and delicious, using fresh ingredients and lots of spices to create dishes with far more layers of flavor than found in most Chinese fare.



Cats Stalk Capital Audience



Paycheck
Directed by John Woo, starring Ben Affleck, Aaron Eckhart, Uma Thurman and Paul Giamatti. Michael Jennings is a brilliant computer engineer hired by high-tech corporations for specialized top-secret projects. After his job is completed, Jennings must undergo a voluntary mind erasure to protect the interested parties. But things pan out differently... English with Chinese subtitles.

Where: UME International Cineplex, (Huaxing Guoji Yingcheng), 44 Kexueyuan Nanlu, Shuangyushu, Haidian **When:** from April 9 **Tel:** 8211 2851

Baober in Love (Lian Ai Zhong De Bao Bei)

Directed by Li Shaohong, starring Zhou Xun, Huang Jue, Chen Kun. Liu Zhi is bored with his modern materialistic life. His only relief is to videotape his confessions and to search for true love. Then he meets Baober, a young romantic woman who suffers from childhood traumas and is unable to adapt to the fast changes in China. They fall in love and move into an empty factory. Chinese with English subtitles.

Where: Cherry Lane Movies, 29 Liangmaqiao Lu, Chaoyang **When:** March 26-27, 8 pm **Admission:** 50 yuan **Tel:** 13901134745

Jams

Hot Bands
Frog (Qing Wa) and Q-Ki Band perform tonight. Saturday afternoon, Da Da Band, and Saturday night, Second Hand Rose (Ershou Meigui).

Where: Get lucky, Dongfang Qicai Dashijie, Laitai Jie, Chaoyang **When:** 9 pm **Admission:** 50 yuan **Tel:** 8448 3335

Glorious Pharmacy and Ping Pong

Glorious Pharmacy (Meihao Yaodian) will play on Saturday night and next Wednesday, Ping Pong Party play their funky-up free jazz.

Where: Loup Chante, Chengfu Lu, Shiweiying **When:** 9 pm **Tel:** 6276 7355

Stage

Andrew Lloyd Webber's Cats, the longest running musical on Broadway and the West End, will debut here next month, at the Great Hall of the People. Based on Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats, a collection of poems by T.S. Eliot, the musical revolves around the antics of such feline characters as Old Deuteronomy,

Jennyanydots, Mr. Mistoffelees, Rum Tum Tugger, Skimbleshanks, Griddlebone, and Grizabella who sings the hit song Memory before ascending to feline heaven at the end.

Where: Great Hall of the People, Tian'anmen Square **When:** April 27 - May 3, 2 pm and 7 pm **Admission:** 120-1,680 yuan **Tel:** 6406 8888

Sports

Beijing Hikers Vulture Rock Park to Meigui Shan (Rose Hill)

Starting from vulture rock park, we follow one of the pilgrim trails. It is a two hour hike up the mountain to a lookout by the pagoda. Half an hour further to the top of the hill and the fire watchtower. Another half hour stiff climb to the ridge. Walk along the ridge, descend through the woods and follow the pilgrim trail to Meigui Shan.

Where: Mentougou District, west of Beijing **When:** March 28, 8:30 at the Lido Hotel outside of Starbucks Cafe **Admission:** 150 yuan for adults and 100 yuan for Children **Tel:** 13910025516

Exhibitions

Zhou Yan Solo Exhibition

Zhou Yan's latest paintings reflect her interest in relationships between animals and human beings and concern for the environment.

Where: Blue Dream Gallery, 46 Sanlitun Beilu (inside Kebab Cafe) **When:** April 1-30, 9 am - 10 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 13901244283



Loveliness Sunshine

Over 30 oil paintings by Xiao Qian and Gao Mingde. The subject matter is natural scenery, grassland, mountains and villages the two have encountered during their journeys.

Where: Fa Fa Gallery, 2 Xiangjiang North Road, Chaoyang **When:** April 1-27, 9 am - 10 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 8430 2587



Modern Traditional Chinese Paintings

Traditional Chinese paintings by Li Li. She uses tradi-

tional materials, such as thin silk and yuanshu paper and adds a modern technique and a strong sense of humor to classical styles.

Where: Qin Gallery, 1-1E Enjoy Paradise, Huaweili, north of Beijing Curio City **When:** April 1-16, 9:30 am - 7 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 8779 0458



Oil Painting

Oil paintings by Wen Lipeng, Bo Liya, Cao Li, Xiaoqing, Yuan Zhengyang, Cui Guoqing, Cheng Linxin, Liu Yaming and Xia Junna.

Where: East Gallery, Deshengmen Watchtower, North Second Ring Road, Xicheng **When:** March 28 - April 16, 9 am -

5 pm (except Monday) **Admission:** 2 yuan **Tel:** 82014962

Touring Oil Painting Exhibition
An exhibition of oil paintings by a dozen outstanding contemporary Chinese artists, touching on a wide range of topics from natural scenery to social phenomena.

Where: Wanfung Art Gallery, 136 Nanchizi Dajie, Dongcheng **When:** March 27 - April 13, 10 am - 6 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 6523 3320

Language exchange

Chinese female, 26 years old, works in a trade company, speaks mandarin and English, wants to find a native Spanish speaker to exchange lessons.

Email: weiweifufu@263.net
Chinese student, 25, wants to find an authentic English or German speaker for language exchange.

Email: eq14@sina.com.cn

We are glad to receive your feedback. We will print employment, language exchange and accommodation info for individuals. Feel free to email us at bjtodayinfo@ynet.com or call 6590 2521
By Guo Yuandan

Music



Back in Mauve

It was only a matter of time ... 1970s heavy metal heroes Deep Purple have reformed, minus original guitarist Ritchie Blackmore (another one of those "Not until hell freezes over ..." situations, apparently), and are preparing to unleash themselves on Beijing. If the mention of album titles like *Machine Head* and *Made in Japan* makes you reach for your air guitar, this is your chance to hear live a whole bunch of songs that probably didn't get a lot of airplay here first time around (and *Smoke on the Water* is guaranteed!).

Cui Jian, clearly still disgruntled about last year's Stones no-show, is joining the band on stage for a song, whether they like it or not.

Where: Capital Gymnasium, 54 Baishiqiao Lu **When:** March 31, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 180-1,500 yuan **Tel:** 6833 5552

11th Chinese Songs Billboard Awards

The ceremony will be held tonight, bringing together top pop stars from the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan, including Jay Chou, Pu Shu, Han Hong and Zhou Xun amongst others.

Where: Great Hall of the People **When:** March 26, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 400-800 yuan **Tel:** 6605 6847

China Philharmonic Orchestra Concert

Yu Feng will conduct the program, which includes Prelude to the Afternoon of a Fawn by Debussy, Bartok's Viola Concerto and Sergey Koussevitzky's Double Bass Concerto in F sharp minor. Viola by Cao Fei and double bass by Zhang Xiaodi.

Where: Forbidden City Concert Hall, Zhongshan Park, Tian'anmen Square **When:** March 26, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 50-380 yuan **Tel:** 6559 8285

China National Symphony Orchestra Concert

Under the baton of Li Xiaolu, the orchestra will be joined by guest violinist Philippe Quint. The program includes *Symphonic Fantasia* by Zhu Jian'er, Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E Minor and Brahms' Symphony No. 1.

Where: China National Library Concert Hall, Zhongguancun Nandajie, Haidian **When:** March 27, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 30-280 yuan **Tel:** 8854 5501

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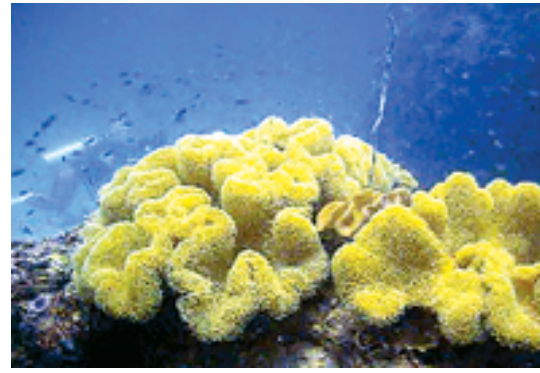
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Close-up views of coral and tropical fish are what scuba diving is all about.

Thai Dive

Vacationers often fall into two categories — people who just want to chill out on a beach reading a novel and not do a thing, and people who are incapable of relaxing unless they are doing something. For the latter, scuba diving can be a great way to spend vacation days and money, and get that feeling that both were well spent.



Photos by Elisa Miller

By Elisa Miller

Thailand, with its beautiful beaches and coral reef islands has long been one of the best places to get a PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) open water certificate. It is also one of the cheapest, attracting 75,000 aspiring divers a year. The average price for PADI open water certification in Thailand is between 6,500 and 8,500 baht (US \$150 and \$200).

Our adventures began in Bangkok, where we tried to determine where the best scuba diving was, where the best conditions to do a PADI open water was, and what we were looking at in terms of money and bargains. We were also hoping that the recent chicken flu related travel warnings would work in our favor.

A 650 baht, 12-hour train/bus/ferry later, arrived on Koh Tao, an island off Thailand's south east coast. We got a room for 300 baht that would be reduced to 200 baht a night if we signed on with that resort's PADI open water course. We said we would think about the course, but exhaustion combined with the weight of our bags pushed us into saying yes to the room, at least for the first night. After putting down our bags and changing our clothes we walked up the strip, checking out the other beach resorts. Every single dive shop/resort had the same deal - 8,500 baht for the course and a 100 baht discount on the room if we went with that resort's dive center. Prices were what they were and non-negotiable.

Apparently, the many dive shops of Koh Tao had been entrenched in an ugly price war in which people were being offered dive instruction at ridiculous prices and no one was making money. So every dive shop on the island got together and signed an agreement setting the price.

When we continued to try and coax a better price out of one guy, he told us that if anyone found out about it, he would probably be shot. He was serious.

Eventually, we settled on a dive shop called New Heaven, where the chummy, easygoing, non-uniform wearing attitude of the owner and the other instructors won us over.

"Yeah, we like to make money and all that, but not to the point where it interferes with what we really like doing," said the owner.

We should have realized that "really like doing" meant drinking and smoking copious amounts of marijuana, but we just laughed and signed on for the course.

My confidence began to flag when I showed up for my first class, to find that the owner of the shop was giving us our theory lecture instead of our scheduled instructor. The instructor, he informed us, had gone on a bender the night before and would be in late.

We sat about for two hours and learned the basics - hand signals for underwater communication, safety procedures, and the names and functions of the equipment. This,

I thought to myself, is beyond me. Then we broke for lunch.

Two hours later I returned from lunch and was promptly handed a wet suit, mask and fins, an inflatable jacket called a buoyancy control device (BCD) and an octopus. Ok, not a real octopus - the octopus is multi-hosed device that delivers air to the diver, to the BCD, to the spare regulator (the thing a diver breathes out of) and to the gauge that tells a diver how much air is left in the tank. "No," I said to myself, "we can't actually be going in the water already." Well, maybe we were just going to practice on the beach in front of the shop.

We loaded the equipment into the dingy. The dingy left and came back in about 15 minutes. We were told to get in. No, we can't be going into the ocean already - aren't we supposed to start out in a swimming pool or something like they do at the other dive resorts?!

One of the guys leaned in and chuckled, "I was just over at the other place - they have the students all in a pool, doggy paddling around doing a swim test! A lot of hand holding at the other places!"

"How unfortunate for them," I nervously replied.

We were soon on our way to the dive site, a quiet lagoon with little to no waves, a sandy bottom and very good underwater visibility. This is the very thing beginner scuba divers needs to start out in if no pool is available.

We were told originally we would be in two groups of four, but the other instructor, the one with the hangover, still hadn't shown up. So we were now one group of eight. Our instructor, a cool French guy named Jerome, discussed the four exercises that we would do once we were under the surface of the water, on the ocean floor. The first exercise was to fill our masks with water, then clear it. The second was to take the regulator out of our mouths, purge the water out of it, and then put it back in again. The third was to drop our regulator, then retrieve it and put it back in our mouths. The fourth would be to "buddy breathe" for two breaths with the instructor. Buddy breathing is when a diver shares one regulator with another diver.

After everyone was suited up, we got a demo from the instructor on how to jump off the boat. Jump off the boat? Frantic, anxious thoughts raced around in my head as I imagined all the things that could go wrong.

Visibly nervous, I turned to one of the other students, "Umm, what did he just say to do?"

The man smiled down at me, "Put your right hand on your mask and regulator, put your left hand on your weight belt, then take a giant leap...of faith."

In my ambivalence, I managed to be the last one off the boat. With a huge splash, I landed in the water. No problem. I turned myself over, put my face in the water, and for the first time, began breathing through a regulator. The first breaths felt labored and inadequate. I felt like I was

suffocating, but after five breaths, I was much more comfortable. I finned along with my group until we came to our underwater classroom. We let the air out of our BCDs and sank slowly beneath the surface of the water.

As we sank down to six meters, I felt an intense pain in my ears and in my head. This, I had learned earlier from the lecture was called "the squeeze". Water exerts pressure on the body, but the air pressure in certain cavities, like the ears and sinuses, can take longer to adjust and become the same as the pressure outside the body. The resulting pain can be almost unbearable, especially when a person first starts diving and his or her ears are not used to equalizing. As I looked around at the rest of the group, many others were frantically pinching at their noses trying to pop their ears and equalize. Nearly all of us were having our first experience with the dreaded "squeeze".

After each of us completed the exercises, Jerome took us for a dive around the reef. I was astounded by all the colors - the different kinds of coral, the fish - it was like swimming in a giant aquarium or underwater rain forest. As we swam, the instructor pointed out the bizarre wildlife that was completely new to us: lion fish, moray eels and sea slugs are just a few of the strange creatures we came upon. Schools of fish representing every color of the rainbow darted about catching the sun like little shards of brightly colored glass. Just astounding!

After that dive, I was hooked. Four dives later, I had my PADI open water certificate. By the time I left Thailand, I was Advanced Diver and Rescue Diver/Emergency First response certified and had logged over 20 dives.

However, if I could do it again, there are a few things I would do differently. First, I would have asked to see the equipment before signing on. It's important for a dive shop to reinvest money in equipment. If the wet suits are torn, or if they don't have the right sizes, diving can be really uncomfortable.

Second, I would have insisted on meeting my instructor. My open water instructor was wonderful, but when I took my Advanced certification, the instructor had a terminal case of grumpiness. I didn't gel well with his teaching style and his English was not fluent, resulting in a lot of communication problems.

Third, I would have been more conscientious about signing on with a Thai owned, Thai operated dive shop. The Thai operations are generally very well organized. The dive instructors are often fluent in many different languages and very professional. Also, it's good to put money into the local economy.

Speaking of money, by the time I returned to Bangkok, the price of PADI open water was being advertised at 6,800 baht (US \$170). Perhaps the chicken flu was taking its toll, or the price war was back - just remember, everything is negotiable.

Zhihua Temple

By Guo Yuandan

Zhihuasi Temple, in Lumicang Hutong, north west of Jianguomen, was built in 1443 by Wang Zhen, chief eunuch during the reign of Emperor Zhengtong of the Ming Dynasty.

Though the temple was repaired and rebuilt many times during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the crossbeams and corner brackets in the main halls date back to the 15th century. The scripture cabinets, Buddhist images and decorative carvings preserved in the temple are all in Ming Dynasty style, making the temple one of the

best examples of Ming Buddhist architecture in Beijing.

The temple contains a fine octagonal revolving scripture cabinet (zhuanlunzang), made of wood and resting on a marble base. The exquisite workmanship of its caisson ceiling alone make the temple worth a visit. Its relief decorations of birds, deities, human figures, lions, and flowers reveal craftsmanship of a very high level.

Rulai Hall, also called the Hall of Tathagata Buddha, is the largest building in Zhihuasi. The hall contains a statue of Sakyamuni Buddha, attended face to face

by a guardian king and warrior. On the walls both upstairs and downstairs are niches containing 9999 tiny statues of Buddha. The ceiling panels and lattice windows with their gilding and multicolored decoration are exquisite examples of temple art.

Zhihuasi Temple is renowned for its Buddhist music. Monks there perform musical scores dating back to the 16th Century, giving visitors an idea of what they might have heard at Buddhist rituals during the Ming Dynasty. The instruments used include various gongs, sheng, or bamboo mouth organ, di, a kind of flute and taigu, or drum.



Rulai Hall, also called the Hall of Tathagata Buddha

Photo by Sun Miao