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The Institute of Current World Affairs

THE CRANE-ROGERS FOUNDATION
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

DBW-4 1998
EAST ASIA

Daniel Wright is an Institute Fellow studying the people and societies of inland China.

Leading on Poverty's Front Line Leadership and Poverty (Part II)

GUIZHOU, China

January, 1998

Mr. Peter Bird Martin
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, NH 03755 USA

Dear Peter,

From my previous newsletter, you'll remember the inspiring tale of Daguan Village — the rocky, poverty-ridden hamlet that literally carved its way into development history (and China-wide legend) by chipping and blasting productive terraces and niches into its hardscrabble hillsides.

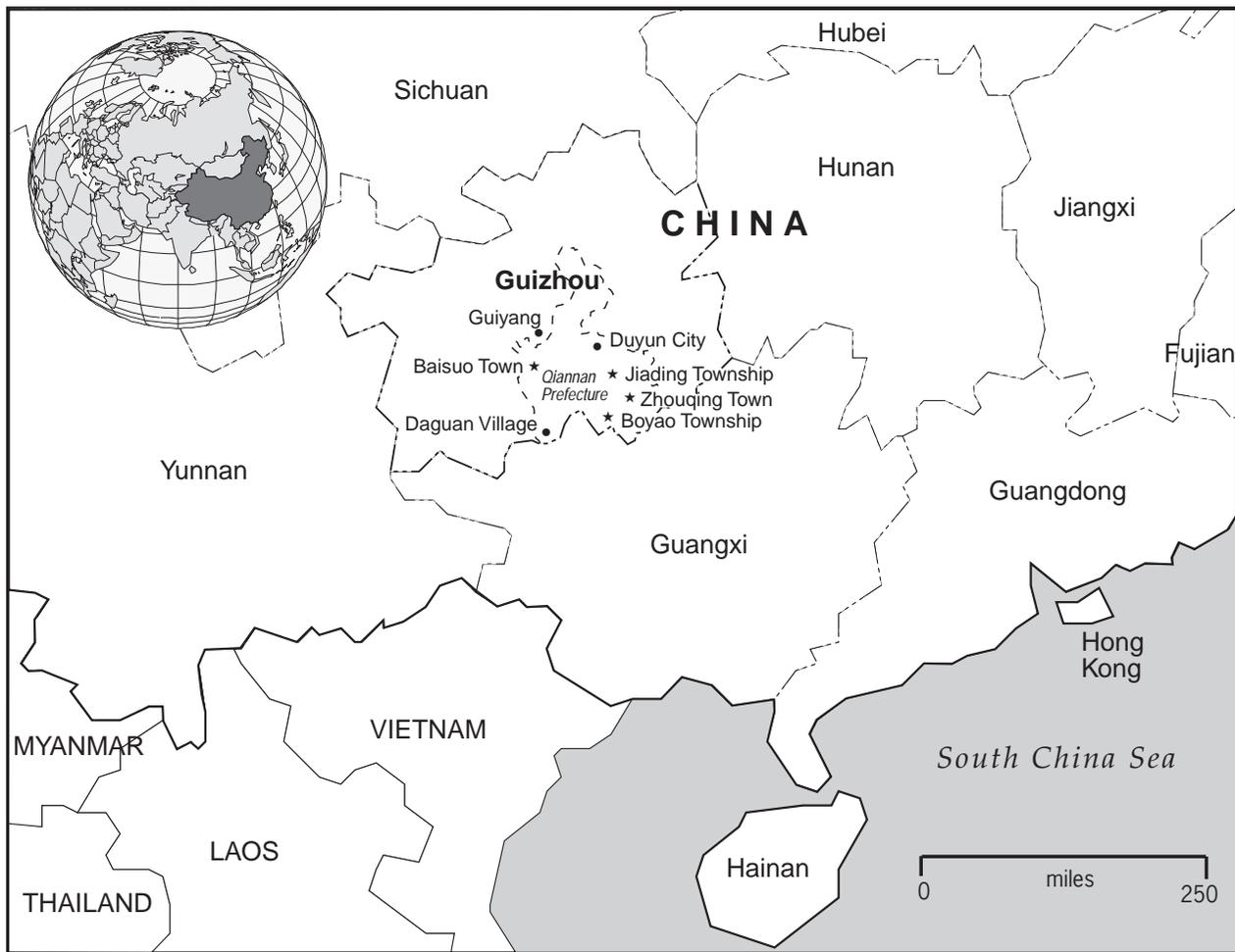
"Emulate Daguan Village in our work for 20 years," said President Jiang Zemin, "and there would be no one in our country that lacked food to eat."

You'll understand my puzzlement, then, over the lack of interest on the part of Boyao Township's Vice Mayor Ni in what I thought would be a fascinating topic of conversation — the spirit of Daguan Village. I decided to test his reaction to one final statement: "It seems like the spirit of Daguan doesn't mean very much to you."

"Don't get me wrong," Vice Mayor Ni replied politely as we hiked along the red-clay mountain road overlooking a river that snaked through the valley below. "The spirit of Daguan Village is raised at almost every meeting we hold. The spirit of Daguan encourages us; after all, we know they used to be much worse off than we are." Even so, the mayor's flat tone implied that the Daguan Village message had neither captured his attention nor influenced his efforts to lead his township.

The responses of two other local leaders I visited were remarkably consistent with that of Vice Mayor Ni: they could recall (more or less) the story of Daguan Village, and when pressed appeared to believe and appreciate Daguan's accomplishments. But the message hadn't penetrated their motivations; there was simply no interest. Instead, the mayors seemed consumed with the challenging realities of their own impoverished towns and villages. Voices of local despair and apathy, the appeal of the relative wealth of county-towns (*xian cheng*; the next higher layer of government administration), and the distant treasures of China's coast — as seen on television — spoke much more loudly than a village success-story they had been instructed to emulate.

But neither did these leaders deny Daguan's success or dismiss the government's use of Daguan Village as a model. The "spirit of Daguan Village" just didn't stick. Whether this was due to political culture or because of lack of



funding from above (or both), these town (*zhen*) and township (*xiang*) leaders appeared to be basically left on their own to govern the villages under their jurisdiction.¹

Visits with these local leaders on their home turf provided access to grass-root realities of China's rural interior that foreigners rarely see. During a two-day outing to one mayor's village-home, the village leader told me as we sat circled around dimming embers of an evening dinner-fire that I was only the second foreigner to visit his village. The first had been a young U.S. Air Force pilot in 1944 whose plane had gone down on a nearby mountain; the American survived the crash and wandered into the village.² The village leader recalled that as a boy, he and the villagers escorted the surprise visitor to the township government-seat (*xiang cheng*, at the time called *yamen*) where they handed him over to the authorities.

We joked that this time, 54 years later, instead of the villagers marching the American to the local *yamen*, the mayor had led this American to his home. The mayor and

I were comfortable being together; even the rats seemed happy as they squeaked and scurried among the shadows. Just before I left the village the following morning, the mayor's elderly mother presented me with a beautiful, bedspread-size sheet of plaid cloth she had woven by hand on her loom.

Relationships between people anywhere in the world take time to develop; trust is rarely instantaneous. And while I did not expect these leaders in rural southwest China to disclose all of their struggles during my first visit, I anticipate that the visits will be the beginning of ongoing relationships, contacts that will provide valuable insight into the lives of local officials tasked to lead on poverty's front line. In this regard, I was not the least bit disappointed.

BAISUO TOWN, CHANGSHUN COUNTY

Baisuo Town confused me. Mayor Lei had telephoned me the previous week to invite me "to observe our poverty and to offer your insights" on a new project they had

¹ Though they function on the same administrative level, towns (*zhen*) are usually more populated than townships (*xiang*) and are said to enjoy more clout and authority with the county government. In the four counties I visited in southern Guizhou, however, differences between towns and townships were not significant.

² 1944 was an important year for U.S. military involvement in southwest China to help the Chinese deter a Japanese offensive. In the effort, General Claire Chennault's Flying Tigers, General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell, and the Burma Road played important roles.



The author was the second foreigner to visit this village in southern Guizhou Province — the first was a lost U.S. Air Force pilot in 1944. The village, which sits perched on a hill overlooking a bend in the river, was established over 80 generations ago. Today, all 800 villagers have the same surname.

begun — an agricultural cooperative foundation (*nongye hezuo jijinhui*), which in its short three months of operation had already placed 46 small loans of about 1,000 yuan (U.S.\$121) each. Mayor Lei was not bashful about saying that he was eager for my support (read: find a way to get them money). I reminded him that I was a researcher, not an international development organization

representative, but that I very much welcomed the opportunity to become familiar with his town's situation and to brainstorm with him on their poverty alleviation efforts.

I had no idea what to expect; I had never been hosted by town or township officials in rural, interior China — especially in an area closed to foreigners. A friend in

THE ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE OF TOWNS (ZHEN) AND TOWNSHIPS (XIANG)

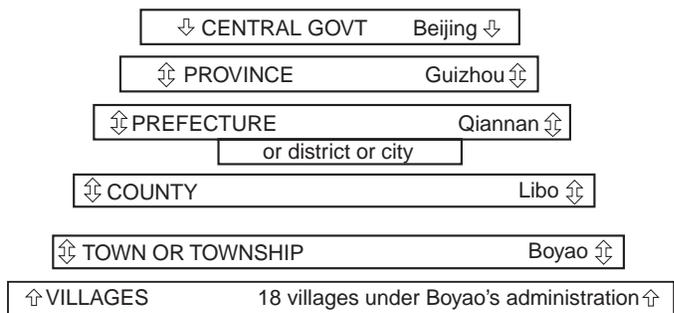
Towns and townships have always occupied a critical position in China's government hierarchy — as the first administrative level above the village, they are where the rubber has (or has not) met the road in efforts to govern rural China. Continuity and change at the town and township level throughout the 20th century have provided a significant weather vane to observe political winds of change in rural China.

Following the Communist Revolution in 1949, towns and townships (as well as districts, or *qu*, at the time) were the loci of shattering change as the Communist government sought to totally restructure power relationships at the local level. The tumultuous process included class warfare and the destruction of the power of village leadership groups (e.g., struggle sessions against local landlords). As China's Communist government reorganized rural society — from land reform (early 1950s) to agricultural producer cooperatives (mid-1950s) to communes (late 1950s through 1970s) — town and townships provided center stage for rural change.

Again reflecting the times, communes were changed back to townships in the 1980s. Since then, as the ideals of communism gave way to reform and the possibilities of a market economy, a dampening of ideology has been reflected in an increasingly diverse political-economic rural landscape. This is especially visible in the difference between the wealthier (coastal) and poorer (interior) areas of rural China.

For the more wealthy coastal provinces like Jiangsu, differences between township and town are relatively clear — the move from township and town shifts the location from the rural into the urban hierarchy. In China, which has a legacy of policies that discriminate in favor of urban areas, the rural/urban divide is a critical. In the townships and towns I visited in impoverished Guizhou, however, the rural/urban break does not appear to exist until the county-town level (*xian cheng*; or county seat).

BASIC LEVELS OF RURAL CHINESE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION





Baisuo Town consists of eight villages and 12,300 people. The town government-seat (pictured) sits at the bend of a road along a narrow river valley.

Duyun (the prefecture capital) had told me that Changshun County is closed to foreigners, but that with a travel permit I could still make the trip.³ Curious, and wanting to make sure I was doing the right thing, I telephoned Mayor Lei a few days before departing Duyun. Mayor Lei said the travel permit was not important: “Once you’re in my area you’re fine.” Another friend in Duyun, however, told me that local officials are often not familiar with policies at higher levels; the travel permit is a serious matter; failure to comply could result in a heavy fine. I got the permit.

Sure enough, the first morning after I arrived in Baisuo, I was led by a few town officials — Mayor Lei, Party Secretary Wen, Police Chief Wang, Armed Police Chief Li and Assistant Police Chief Chen — to the police headquarters to “rest a bit.”⁴ I was introduced to an important-looking policeman who wore a uniform noticeably cleaner than the rest of those I had seen in Baisuo. The town officials sat respectfully on the sofa as the officer showed me his identification: Mr. Lu, head of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Changshun County Police Department. Knowing this was my cue to produce my identification, I pulled out my passport, school identification, and most important, my travel permit. Officer Lu looked the documents over, welcomed me, told Mayor Lei to take good care of me, and drove off towards the county-town (*xian cheng*), 18 kilometers up the road. As the car disappeared around the bend in the road, I could see the town officials breathe a sigh of relief. How he knew I had arrived, I’ll never know — even the local officials seemed surprised by his visit.

Baisuo’s town leaders — Mayor Lei excluded — seemed ambivalent about my presence, even before the unexpected visit by the county foreign-affairs officer. On

the one hand, they were very hospitable; on the other, they handled me with a soft glove and seemed hesitant to disclose very much.

Because Mayor Lei had specifically asked me to visit Baisuo to observe their poverty, I asked him when we were alone together the first afternoon if he would arrange visits to the poorest and to the most well-off of the town’s eight villages. I thought this would be a good way to get a sense for the lives of Baisuo’s 12,000 people. Mayor Lei responded favorably and briefed me on the villages and how their *annual* per capita incomes ranged from only 250 yuan (U.S.\$30) to 450 yuan (U.S.\$55). The lower figure is considered destitute; even the higher end is below the absolute poverty line.

The next day, however, we did not make it to either village. Though six of us bounced around mountain roads in an old army jeep, Baisuo’s only vehicle, for an entire morning we stopped short of going all the way up to the poorest village — Party Secretary Wen said the road was too muddy. Instead, we dropped in for a brief in-and-out visit with a family halfway up the mountain. We exchanged a few polite words and then jumped back into the jeep. Disappointing.

We never made it to the most well-off village, either. Party Secretary Wen, a lanky, good-ol’ boy who seemed to call the shots around town, decided as we headed toward the village that it was lunchtime. It was time to eat the wild rabbit we had bought from a woman and her son along a mountain road that morning. It appeared the mother and son had just shot it — the cottontail’s body was still limp when the party secretary tossed it onto the jeep’s floorboard. It was almost noon, the local restaurant that doubled as the officials’ dining hall would have the

³ During the 1990s, Qiannan Prefecture’s ten counties have slowly opened to foreigners. Changshun and neighboring Huishui are the last two counties to remain closed. I was told these counties remain closed because they are so poor.

⁴ Baisuo Town, with a population of over 12,000 people, has only six policemen.

Local leaders, including Town Mayor Lei (fourth from right) and Party Secretary Wen (second from right), and author sitting around before dinner. We ate out of a common pot, which cooks over burning pieces of coal and doubles as a heater.



rabbit stew ready for us to eat. We couldn't delay.

Why didn't we make it to either village after Mayor Lei had agreed and appeared so enthusiastic? Was it because the area was not open to foreigners (especially after the county foreign-affairs official visit)? The leaders had different agendas? The leaders were corrupt and didn't want me to know too much? It was difficult for the officials to allow a foreigner into the struggles of their poverty? All of the above? I could not figure out why they were so hesitant — especially in retrospect, as my experience in two other towns was so different.

My intuition that something was wrong was confirmed the last afternoon when the police chief's wife stopped to talk to me as I stood by myself on the bridge, observing the hustle-and-bustle of market day below me.

"We're very poor here," she began.

"Well... but you're better off now than before, right?"

"Yeah, but..., we're in bad shape. Our town is going to have at least a 700,000-yuan shortfall this year; even construction on the new school has ground to a halt."

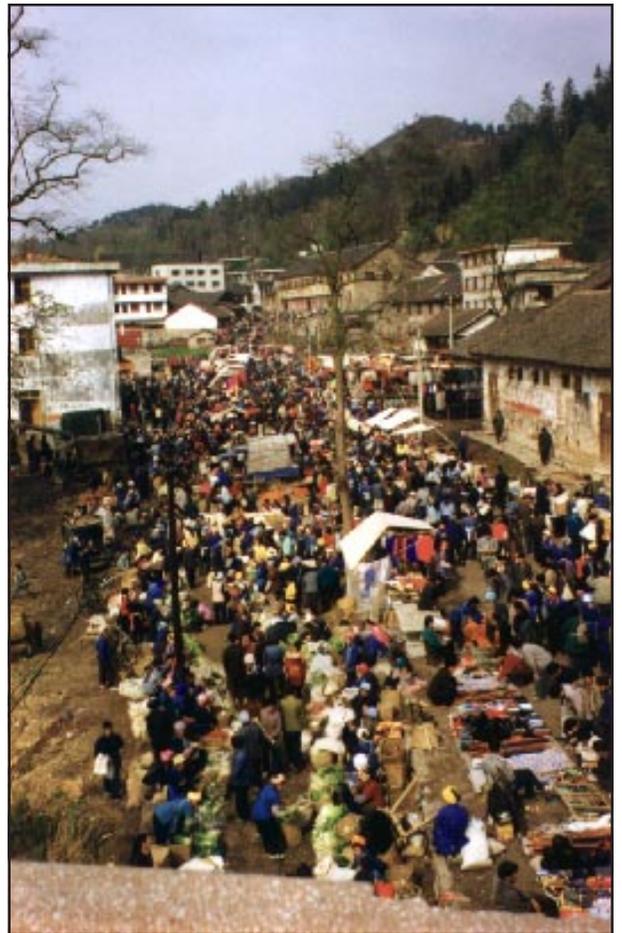
In the two days I had been there, no leader had hinted of these problems. Even the police chief (the woman's husband), during a walk we had taken together, had proudly pointed out the "new school under construction."

"What's going on?"

"It's hard to say." I could tell she didn't want to continue.

"Doesn't the county provide poverty assistance to town's like Baisuo?"

She was finished talking. "Good to see you. Thank



Towns and townships serve as an important center for trade. Baisuo Town, with normally about 500 residents in the town center, swells to over 10,000 people on market day each week, pictured above. Villagers trek for hours to buy and sell at the market. A town official told me that a similar-size market in the provincial capital of Guiyang produces one million yuan in annual tax revenue; Baisuo, in 1997, yielded only 70,000 yuan.

you for coming to visit Baisuo." She turned and walked off.

That evening, my last night in Baisuo, Mayor Lei, Party Secretary Wen and the head of the agriculture cooperative foundation asked me to meet with them. They wanted to hear my opinions on their poverty-alleviation efforts, especially the agricultural cooperative foundation. I told them that while I felt privileged to visit Baisuo, quite frankly, I had not seen enough to give them much feedback. Restating my status as a researcher (and wanting to preempt another request for "support"), I affirmed that providing small loans to the poor has been proven around the world as an effective method of addressing poverty. I also shared some suggestions from research I had done that seemed appropriate for the agricultural cooperative foundation.

They complained about the lack of funding for the foundation.

"Doesn't the county provide financial assistance to poverty-relief efforts at the town level?" I asked.

"We have good relations with the county..." Mayor Lei began.

"Actually," Party Secretary Wen interrupted, "the county government promised us 180,000 yuan when we set up the agricultural cooperative foundation three months ago. They haven't delivered. We, the three of us, have put in 60,000 yuan of our own money to get started."

"Why didn't the county come through on something they had committed to?"

"It's hard to say. Things are difficult all around," said Party Secretary Wen.

"We hope you'll be able to think of ways to support our agricultural cooperative foundation," Mayor Lei reminded me.

"You know I am just a researcher, but I'd be very happy to come back and to keep up with how you all are doing. In only three months you've given out 46 loans. Think of the difference even that much can make."

"You're always welcome to come back," they said in unison.

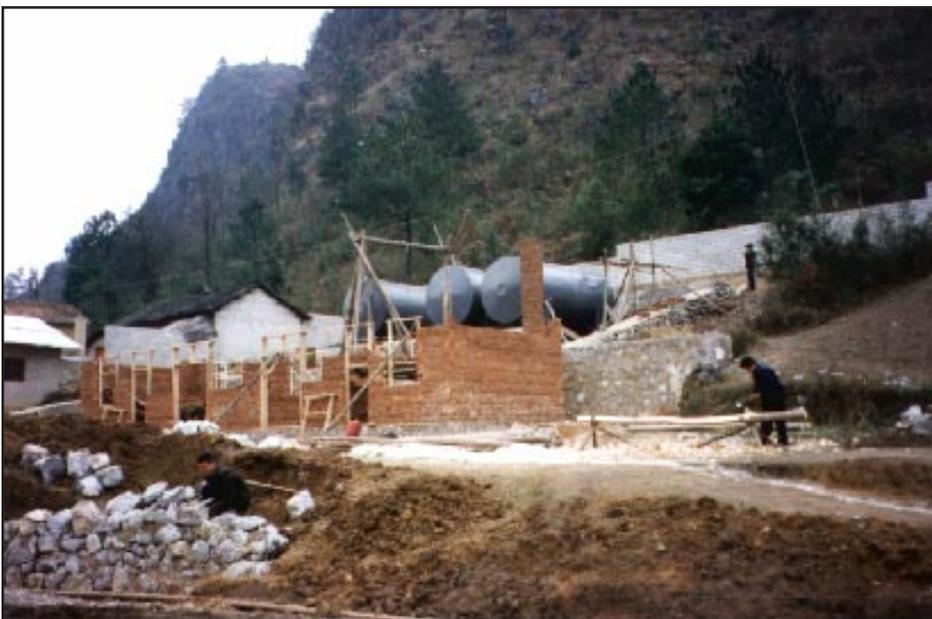
"I'll be back."

BOYAO TOWNSHIP, LIBO COUNTY

As I bounced into Boyao Township, squeezed into the cab of a pickup-truck-turned-taxi, I noticed a group of men standing around a construction site. Three flatbed trucks, each supporting a 500-gallon drum, sat adjacent to the lot. Laborers slapped trowels of wet cement on to a brick foundation. The place hummed with activity. When I got out of the taxi, Vice Mayor Ni, another of the local leaders I had met at the Duyun seminar a month earlier, bounded down the hill toward me. "Welcome to Boyao Township!"

"What's going on? It seems exciting," I said.

"Just before you got here, the three 500-gallon drums arrived from the provincial capital, Guiyang. We had them specially made. We pulled [together] township resources, got a loan and are developing a township enterprise — a filling station! With all of the coal-trucks that drive down this road on the way to Guangxi Province, we may be able to get some of their business. The next filling station is an hour's drive in either direction." Vice Mayor Ni was in charge of the project. He was very proud, as he



Three large drums that arrived just hours before me portend good things to come for Boyao Township. The filling station — a township enterprise — is a centerpiece of the township's development strategy.

should be. Township and village enterprises (TVEs) are rare in Guizhou.⁵

The project was two months behind schedule, but the township leaders who crowded around the 500-gallon drums could taste success. The township enterprise was the centerpiece of a development strategy Boyao's leaders had devised. Another vice mayor, Mr. Xu, explained to me as we stood on the roof of the township government office-building: "Besides the filling station, we're going to pave the 500-meter stretch of road that runs through town [all roads in Boyao are dirt]. After that's done, we're going to relocate the market day plaza [a cement area the size of six basketball courts] across the road to the fields over there. Education will get a boost when the elementary school — Hope Elementary — is finished on the top of the hill over there to the left; Shenzhen Airlines Co. donated the money for its construction.⁶ Another Shenzhen company, an investment firm, made a separate grant to build a multi-purpose building for the township's junior high school, directly across the road over there."

"What are the basic facts of Boyao?" I asked.

"Eighty-ninety percent Buyi ethnic minority, 18 villages, 17,000 people, and an annual per-capita income ranging from 500 yuan (U.S.\$60) to 700 yuan (U.S.\$85). The government has classified us as an 'impoverished township' — not everyone has solved the problems of enough food to eat and clothes to wear (*wenbao wenti*). We have no industry. We rely on coal, tobacco, oranges and chili peppers."

Vice Mayor Ni walked up as Xu spoke.

"Seems like you all are on the move." I was impressed.

"We're trying hard. We've got a leadership that is united and we've got ideas." Vice Mayor Ni replied.

Ideas. Vice Mayor Ni was a man full of ideas.

"Each township cadre is responsible for overseeing the affairs of one village. When the weather warms I want to take you to the village I'm responsible for. On a visit two years ago, I heard of an elementary-school student in the village who had to drop out of school because his mother had died and his father, already struggling just to feed his family, did not have the money necessary to keep his son in school. I had an idea. I would 'adopt' this stu-

dent and make sure his school fees were paid and that he was getting enough to eat. I began to drop by occasionally to encourage him as well. Little Li re-enrolled in school and became a star student. He's now in his second year of junior high. The principal says Little Li is the smartest student in the entire school; he just returned from a province-wide English competition."

"Could we drop in on him during lunch break?" I asked.

"Sure. Little Li would remember a conversation with an American all of his life. Little Li has done so well that I decided to push the idea with the other township leaders. Now, each township cadre must adopt one student and provide at least 30 yuan a month from his own salary for the student's living expenses. The cadre can select the student himself, or the school can recommend a student. It has worked quite well.

"The township enterprise was my idea as well. I had the thought for this enterprise after an official educational visit I made to the country's coast."

Vice Mayor Ni had an enthusiasm that would not stop. He walked with a spring in his step.

"Do you get much financial support from the county?" I asked.

"Actually, in the six years I've worked in the township government, we have not received one penny from the county for poverty work. When I attended the seminar in Duyun that was sponsored by our prefecture's Poverty Alleviation Office — when I met you — I heard for the first time that the central government provided so much money for poverty alleviation, over one billion yuan. I shared an idea with one of the organizers: At future seminars, they should include a representative from each county that has town and township officials present. In this way, we can approach the county official directly at the meeting with our ideas on how to use the funds that are supposed to come to us. Otherwise, if there is no county official present at these kinds of meetings, when we approach them after returning home, they would deny there are any such funds available."

Vice Mayor Ni and Boyao's leaders appear to be in the process of reversing a vicious cycle. From a poor local village himself, Vice Mayor Ni does not harbor any illusions about the challenges that lie before him and his township. There is a long, long

⁵ In 1993, the total value produced by *all* of Guizhou's TVEs equaled only 1/3 of the value produced by TVEs in *one county* in coastal Jiangsu Province, Wuxi County. Though a powerful economic engine on China's coast, TVEs are but a distant dream for most poor areas in the interior. For an in-depth discussion of the origin and development of TVEs, see former ICWA Fellow Cheng Li's ICWA Newsletter CL-18.

⁶ China's central government has directed wealthy coastal cities to adopt poor prefectures, counties and towns in the interior. Wealthy companies must also give to development projects in the interior. Coastal Shenzhen, the economic boomtown near Hong Kong, was assigned Guizhou's Qiannan Prefecture as a development partner.

Little Li, the elementary school dropout-turned-star-student (to author's right), discussing his studies with the author while Vice Mayor Ni (to Li's right), school leaders, and other students look on.

Creative ideas are making the difference in Boyao Township. The school principal says Li is the best student in the school because he works the hardest. He works hard, I believe, because someone believes in and encourages him.



way to go, he freely admits, but “we are on our way.”

As I climbed into the bus to leave Boyao, Vice Mayor Ni shouted, “You’ll have to come back when the weather warms up. You can see how our filling station is doing. Also, remember, we’ve got our fishing places all scouted out now, too!”⁷

ZHOUQING TOWN, SANDU COUNTY

Zhouqing Town is a four-hour bus ride to the northeast of Boyao Township. It sits on the road that connects the county-towns of Libo County and Sandu County. I got off the bus at Zhouqing’s town center and asked directions to the town-government office building. It was raining — a cold rain. I tiptoed down main street, navigating my way through mud thick as a bowl of chocolate cake-batter.

The town-government office building was an unimpressive, dingy concrete structure. As I entered, I poked my head into the receptionist’s office to ask directions to the mayor’s office; no one was there except a dead hog, easily weighing 200 lbs, stretched across an interior desk. Oh, the surprises of life in rural China!

Zhouqing Town does not have a phone, so there was no way I could contact the mayor before arriving. When I finally found his office, Mayor Chen was sitting at his desk. He seemed a bit surprised to see me, but I suppose that without phones, people show up unexpectedly all the time. He prepared some tea and we began to talk.

“How have you been?” I asked.

“We’ve been very busy lately wrapping up our ad-

ministrative year, preparing to break for Chinese New Year vacation, and most importantly these several days, preparing to elect six people to represent Zhouqing at the county-level People’s Congress.”

“Seems like a very busy time.” I could tell Mayor Chen had a lot on his plate. I also knew that he, like most Chinese officials I have met, was too polite to allow me to leave without at least acting like he really wanted me to stay.

“I was just down in Libo County and am returning home; I couldn’t pass by your town without at least stopping in to say hello. I told my wife I would be home this evening; I’ll need to be on my way in just a bit.”

“At least stay for lunch,” Mr. Chen replied. “Let’s go. We can talk as we walk.”

As we crossed the muddy road, Mayor Chen explained that he had been a teacher most of his adult life. Two years ago, he responded to the invitation to be mayor out of what he said was a duty to help his town. “Life as a mayor is more complex than I had expected — so much going on everywhere all the time, always needing to put out fires.”

“What is Zhouqing’s greatest challenge?” I asked.

“We don’t have any capital. It takes money to make money.”

“It seems that Zhouqing is in a great location to set up a filling station, or some other business venture that could benefit from the trucks and buses that file through here.”

“You’re right. In fact, we’ve given a lot of thought to

⁷ The weather was too cold to fish in either Boyao Township or Zhouqing Town — it actually sleeted some of the time. Like any serious fishermen, however, we spoke at great length of past fishing heroics and of future times together when the weather turns warmer.

a filling station. We've also thought about other businesses, but each time we come to the same conclusion: not enough capital. Our county government, Sandu, is poor as well. We just haven't been able to find a way to reverse our cycle of poverty.

"I hope you'll come back when the weather warms up a bit. I'd like to discuss our town's issues with you further, see if you have any ideas. I'd also like to take you out to some of our villages, maybe even to my home village, so you can get to know the issues we face. And remember that reservoir I told you about when we met at the seminar in Duyun? We'll have to spend at least a couple of days out there fishing."

We had a nice lunch and I got on the bus for the five-hour trip home to Duyun. Though the visit was brief and I had time to learn but a little, Mayor Chen, the educator-turned-mayor, seemed stuck.

JIADING TOWNSHIP, DUSHAN COUNTY

Like Zhouqing Town, Jiading Township has no phone. Worse, it doesn't have a road. A failed attempt to even get to Jiading was frustrating, a stirring reminder of where Guizhou's poorest live — in inaccessible mountain communities.

I got on a bus at the Duyun Bus Station that was headed in the general direction of Jiading Township. Jiading was the closest to Duyun of the towns I visited, so I thought it would be the easiest to get to. I was wrong. Once the bus had started down the road, I asked, in a voice loud enough for every passenger to hear, if anyone knew how to get to Jiading Township.

A young father, holding his son in the back of the bus, held up his free hand, five fingers extended, and exclaimed: "To get to Jiading you've got to hike at least five hours from Tuchang Town."

"Please tell me when we get to Tuchang," I asked the ticket collector. A five-hour hike wouldn't be all that bad. It was another cold rainy day. A hike would warm me up. I got off the bus in Tuchang and called my wife, Guowei, from a roadside convenience store to tell her not to worry if I was gone longer than expected.

"Which direction is Jiading?" I asked the shopkeeper.

"What do you want to go to Jiading for?" She

looked at me as if I was a bit strange.

"The mayor invited me."

"It's at least a five-hour hike from here, and that's if you know the way. Jiading is very poor."

The shopkeeper's husband walked up and asked, "You want to go to Jiading? I saw an overland vehicle come from that direction the other day, they said they would pass back through here today. Maybe you could get a ride with them."

I waited five hours in that shop with the shopkeeper and her husband, staying close to their charcoal fire. The shopkeeper's husband, the retired chief of Tuchang Town's armed police, and his wife were very kind to me — they even fed me lunch. But no vehicle was to be seen anywhere.

"We really do not think it is wise for you to try to hike in by yourself," they insisted. I agreed that they knew best in this situation.

Three o'clock, still no car. I decided to head back to Duyun. Guowei was surprised to see me.

When the weather turns warmer, I'll return to Tuchang Town on a market day — when the poor of Jiading wind their way through the mountains to Tuchang Town. I'll make the

five-hour trek with the villagers as they return to Jiading at the end of the day.

As the most basic level of governance above villages, towns and townships play a central role in leading China's 800-million-strong rural population. Apart from national and provincial policies and periodic meetings at the county level, a major share of the burden of governing rural China falls on the shoulders of small groups of town and township leaders. For better or for worse, they are in charge. Indeed, "the heavens are high and the emperor is far away."⁸

In impoverished, interior regions like Guizhou Province that face extremely scarce resources and challenging physical constraints, local officials I have observed and heard of fall somewhere in the broad spectrum between sacrificial agents of creative change and heavy-handed officials who abuse their power and siphon off limited resources for personal gain. In a politi-

⁸ An ancient saying describing the high-degree of autonomy local leaders have over their areas of governance. In the last few months, I have heard this saying many times from officials at various levels in Guizhou.

cal system with little accountability, the personal quality of the leader becomes all the more important. Either way, the common person — the villager, the farmer — pays the price, or reaps the benefits, for the quality of his/her town and township leaders.

As an outsider, how can I move beyond initial impressions to deeper, more meaningful insight into this critical level of governance in rural China? How to enter their world more fully? How to continue to gain their trust? Perhaps it will be best done through fishing together. But certainly not with one of the fishing methods I have found to be common in these parts....

Vice Mayor Ni of Boyao township pointed to a bend in the river as we hiked along: "Not long ago my cousin was killed down there while fishing."

"What happened?"

"Sometimes around here people fish with dynamite. They throw the explosive into the water, wait for the

ka-boom, and then paddle out to collect the fish that float to the surface. Poor cousin, the fuse burned quicker than he expected; the stick of dynamite blew up in front of his chest." I winced.

Return visits to see these leaders will feature rod and reel, not explosives. I will return to visit the men who welcomed me into their local realities. There is much to follow through on: Baisuo Town and the agricultural cooperative foundation; Boyao Township and the filling station; Zhouqing Town and Mayor Chen's efforts to develop a money-making idea; and Jiading Township — just to figure out a way to get there. The lives of four local leaders in obscure rural areas of Guizhou Province, and their efforts to lead on poverty's front line, are stories worth continuing to tell.

Sincerely,



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Institute of Current World Affairs

FOUR WEST WHEELLOCK STREET
HANOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03755

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Institute of Current World Affairs Fellows and their Activities

Adam Smith Albion. A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is studying and writing about the republics of Central Asia, and their importance as actors within and without the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. Degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Christopher P. Ball. An economist, Chris Ball holds a B.A. from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and attended the 1992 International Summer School at the London School of Economics. He studied Hungarian for two years in Budapest while serving as Project Director for the Hungarian Atlantic Council. As an Institute Fellow, he is studying and writing about Hungarian minorities in the former Soviet-bloc nations of East and Central Europe. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Chenoa Egawa. An enrolled member of the Lummi Indian Nation, Chenoa is spending two years living among mesoAmerican Indians, studying successful and not-so-successful cooperative organizations designed to help the Indians market their manufactures, agricultural products and crafts without relying on middlemen. A former trade specialist for the American Indian Trade and Development Council of the

Pacific Northwest, Chenoa's B.A. is in International Business and Spanish from the University of Washington in Seattle. [THE AMERICAS]

Marc Michaelson. A program manager for Save the Children in The Gambia, Marc has moved across Africa to the Horn, there to assess nation-building in Eritrea and Ethiopia, and (conditions permitting) availing and unavailing humanitarian efforts in northern Somalia and southern Sudan. With a B.A. in political science from Tufts, a year of non-degree study at the London School of Economics and a Master's in International Peace Studies from Notre Dame, he describes his postgraduate years as "seven years' experience in international development programming and peace research." [sub-SAHARA]

Randi Movich. The current John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, Randi is spending two years in Guinea, West Africa, studying and writing about the ways in which indigenous women use forest resources for reproductive health. With a B.A. in biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz and a Master of Science degree in Forest Resources from the University of Idaho, Randi is building on two years' experience as a Peace Corps agroforestry extension agent in the same region of Guinea where she will be living as a Fellow with her husband, Jeff

Fields — also the holder of an Idaho Master's in Forest Resources. [sub-SAHARA]

Daniel B. Wright. A sinologist with a Master's Degree in International Relations from the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University, Dan's fellowship immerses him in southwest China's Guizhou Province, where he, his journalist-wife Shou Guowei, and their two children (Margaret and Jon) will base themselves for two years in the city of Duyun. Previously a specialist on Asian and Chinese affairs for the Washington consulting firm of Andreae, Vick & Associates, Dan also studied Chinese literature at Beijing University and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary of Pasadena, California. [East Asia]

Teresa C. Yates. A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a juris doctor from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. [sub-SAHARA]

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Author: Wright, Daniel B.
Title: ICWA Letters - East Asia
ISSN: 1083-4265
Imprint: Institute of Current World Affairs,
Hanover, NH

Material Type: Serial
Language: English
Frequency: Monthly
Other Regions: Sub-Saharan Africa; South Asia,
Mideast/North Africa;
Europe/Russia; The Americas

ICWA Letters (ISSN 1083-4265) are published by the Institute of Current World Affairs Inc., a 501(c)(3) exempt operating foundation incorporated in New York State with offices located at 4 West Wheelock Street, Hanover, NH 03755. The letters are provided free of charge to members of ICWA and are available to libraries and professional researchers by subscription.

Executive Director: Peter Bird Martin
Program Administrator: Gary L. Hansen
Publications Manager: Ellen Kozak

Phone: (603) 643-5548
Fax: (603) 643-9599
E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net

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