

Public Intellectuals Program Round Two

The Public Intellectuals Program is designed to nurture a new generation of China specialists who have the interest and potential to play roles as public intellectuals. Through a varied set of activities, the program helps twenty young American China scholars and specialists deepen and broaden their knowledge about China's politics, economics, and society, and encourages them to use this knowledge to inform policy and public opinion. The aim is to upgrade the quality of the American public's understanding of China by strengthening links among U.S. academics, policymakers, and opinion leaders. The two-year program includes two meetings in Washington focusing on the D.C.-based China policy community; a meeting in the San Francisco Bay Area; trips to China as a cohort; participation in National Committee programs as scholar-escorts; and a requirement that the Fellows organize local public education programs. The first two rounds (2005-07 and 2008-10) were generously funded by The Henry Luce Foundation and The Starr Foundation. The National Committee recently received funding from the same foundations for a third round of the program (2011-2013).

The last plenary meeting of the second round of the Public Intellectuals Program (PIP) came to a close in November 2010 with a visit by the fellows to Washington, D.C. Sessions were held with senior officials, policy makers and other public intellectuals, including a discussion on Sino-Japanese relations with PIP advisory committee member Alan

Romberg, director of the East Asia program at the Henry L. Stimson Center; a talk with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs Derek Mitchell; a roundtable with Congressional staffers on Congressional views of China; and a State Department briefing with Assistant Secretary for China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mongolia David Shear, among other meetings. Fellows built on the broadcast media training they received during the first D.C. program via a meeting at the Washington Post with former Beijing-based reporter John Pomfret and Executive Editor Marcus Brauchli. These program components are essential for preparing the fellows to act as resources for the media and to write and speak to general audiences about China.

The group also had the opportunity for a dinner with the head of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office, Ambassador Jason Yuan, followed the next

evening by dinner with the PRC Ambassador to the United States Zhang Yesui.

Eight fellows also gave presentations to the group on topics ranging from China's criminal law system to the Chinese leadership's response to demographic challenges. The fellows also had many opportunities for informal discussions throughout the weekend, helping to further the useful connections among this network of accomplished specialists.

Earlier in the year, from June 19 to 29, 2010, the second cohort of fellows visited Beijing, Chongqing, Guang'an (Deng Xiaoping's birthplace), Chengdu and environs (including areas affected by the 2008 earthquake), and Hong Kong. The first cohort went to the PRC and Taiwan in June 2009.

On their first night in Beijing, the PIP fellows met with participants in the National Committee's Track II economic dialogue, including National Committee Chair Carla Hills, President Stephen Orlins, Director Nicholas Lardy and former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin. The group also met with Madame He Liliang, a diplomat and the wife of former ambassador, foreign minister and vice premier Huang Hua, at her courtyard home. (Sadly, Huang Hua, an old friend of the

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Public Intellectuals Program fellows at the November 2010 conference in Washington, D.C.

even made tremendous progress, much more than they had expected.

Study is always a serious matter and it is never a joke. As time went on and as the education situation developed, more and more pressure was added and students began to suffer. “Competition is fierce. If you don’t study hard, how can you survive in the future competitive world?” “If you play with time, time will sooner or later play with you.” “If you don’t study hard to get knowledge today, you will try hard to get a job tomorrow.” That is what teachers and parents always said to kids. Time is as precious as gold. Time is as precious as life. Evening classes began in several schools, and then in all schools. Weekends were almost fully occupied as precious time to study. More and more work was assigned; more and more test papers given out; and less and less leisure time given to kids. As national tests approached, the situation became even more serious. Kids, parents, teachers, administrators, and directors of Education Bureaus were driven crazy by the competitive tests. “We have to be responsible for all the kids, for all the parents, for the society and for the development of our nation. The only way for us to survive in the future is to get as much knowledge as possible while we are young,” teachers often say to their kids.

So what is the use of what we learned in the U.S.? Shall we follow others and put just as much pressure on those poor kids? Some say yes while some say no. Or sometimes we say yes while sometimes we say no.

Several years ago, I did a bold experiment: when winter or summer holidays came, I said to my kids, “I will assign no homework to you during the holidays. When you are free and feel really bored by your idleness, do some English reading.” When the holidays were over, the test results proved no different from those of kids in other classes. I always believe all gold glitters so long as it is gold, but if you polish gold too much and too often, it will perish or

disappear.

During the last summer holidays, I, as an expert teacher, attended a so-called advanced class for teacher development. When a question was raised about which we should choose between quality education or examination-oriented education, Mr. Chen, former director of our provincial teaching research organization, said, “We always stand for, push and promote quality education and try to abolish examination-oriented education, but obstacles are so strong that we sometimes find it hard to walk ahead. When there is a contradiction, what we should do is hold our ground.” I couldn’t agree more. ■

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Committee’s from his time as China’s representative to the U.N., died a few months after the visit). Her lively discussions—ranging from her life as a young revolutionary to views on Chinese history and present-day politics—are a perennial highlight of PIP visits to Beijing.

Contemporary developments in China were the focus of the discussions during a dinner hosted by Sebastian Wood, Great Britain’s ambassador to China. Other Beijing meetings included Tong Lihua, a public interest lawyer working with migrant workers and children (and a former National Committee program participant); a discussion on the Internet in China with pop culture guru Kaiser Kuo; and a conversation with Wang Shuo, managing editor of Caixin Media, and his colleagues.

The visit to Guang’an, Deng Xiaoping’s birthplace, was arranged through his daughter, Deng Rong, a longtime National Committee friend, and enhanced by esteemed senior scholar-escort and Harvard professor emeritus Ezra Vogel, who was finishing a long biography of Deng and is well known to the family. Deng Rong’s personal assistant joined the party secretary of

Guang’an (along with photographers and a camera crew from the local television station) for the group’s tour of the city and the Deng Xiaoping Library. National Committee Vice President Jan Berris presented the hosts with materials from the National Committee archives, featuring Deng’s visit to the United States and various occasions when he met National Committee delegations.

Highlights of Chengdu were a dinner in the homes of families displaced by the 2008 earthquake who were living in temporary housing; a lunch and meeting with Ren Xuping—also known as the Rabbit King—an entrepreneur who, with a few rabbits and some assistance from Heifer International, has built a lucrative business and continues to work with Heifer and others to spread knowledge of rabbit husbandry to poor families in Sichuan; and several hours with Fan Jianchuan, a Chengdu real estate mogul who has created a large multi-building museum complex with extensive Cultural Revolution artifacts, in addition to vast collections on many other subjects and periods.

During the Hong Kong portion of the trip, the group discussed regional politics with Christine Loh, a former Hong Kong legislator who now runs the NGO Civic Exchange; had a meeting with U.S. Consul General Steve Young; talked with upcoming Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma about rule of law and legal interaction between the mainland and Hong Kong; and had dinner with a group of Hong Kong journalists including the publisher of Zhao Ziyang’s memoir.

As a very successful second round of PIP closes and fellows complete their public outreach projects and make use of the contacts they have made, preparations for round three are underway, with a new pool expected to be announced in June 2011. ■