

Project Hope

Xīwàng Gōngchéng 希望工程

Operating under the auspices of the China Youth Development Foundation, a non-government, non-profit organization, Project Hope is considered by many to be the largest charitable project in modern China. Project Hope's ultimate goal is to provide affordable education to impoverished children in China from primary school through college and to help them help themselves.

Project Hope is by far the most influential charity project in China. It was initiated, executed, and managed by the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF), a non-government, nonprofit organization under Communist Youth League (CYL) Central Committee of China. Its goal is to assist dropout and at-risk children aged six to fourteen in poverty-stricken, rural areas of China in completing their primary school education with financial aid. At present, Project Hope has expanded its goals to help migrant youngsters in the cities and high school graduates who have been admitted to colleges but cannot afford tuition. CYDF has also increased its services to include enhancing educational facilities and teaching quality, establishing Stars of Hope Scholarships in high schools and universities. To qualify for the scholarship, a student has to (1) have excellent academic achievement, (2) actively participate in community activities, and (3) be in need of financial aid to finish

school (different places have different standards, CYDF is also carrying out distance-education initiatives (virtual education, that is, providing education through internet or a closed-circuit TV system), training rural teachers, and reinforcing the nine-year compulsory education law as well as other related subprojects.

Since its launch on 30 October 1989, Project Hope has attracted support from home and abroad, both in financial aid and volunteer work. China's top leaders, including Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng, and Jiang Zemin, have endorsed the project at different times to show their support.

By 2006, the CYDF had raised over RMB¥ 35 billion (about \$473 million) in total. The project provides its subsidization mainly through the following avenues:

- establishing long-term grant-in-aid programs;
- constructing and refurbishing schools;
- providing teaching aids, instruction materials and textbooks; and
- providing scholarships.

Within eighteen years, Project Hope has supported more than 2.9 million school children, built some 13,000 Hope Primary Schools (regular elementary schools) donated about 13,000 sets of Hope House of Books, trained about 35,000 primary school teachers in rural regions, and assisted more than 1,000 AIDS-affected children to continue finishing their education. Around 80 percent of the Hope Primary Schools and students aided by the project lived in China's less developed middle and western regions (CYDF 2007).

Chronology

1989: The Communist Youth League Central Committee established the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) with donations from the public to respond to the severe dropout situation in poverty-stricken areas.

1990: The first Hope Primary School opened in Jinzhai County, Anhui Province.

1991: Taiwan artist Ling Feng established the “Overseas Love and Care Fund for Project Hope” (希望工程海外爱心基金). Ling initiated and hosted “100 Charity Concerts” to raise the funds for this foundation for seven years. The actual amount of funds raised is not clear, but all the proceedings were donated to Project Hope. His efforts motivated many other artists and famous people, well as the general public, to contribute to the project in their own ways.

1992: The 1990s Development Program for Chinese Children promulgated by the State Council formally listed Project Hope as one of the main measures for ensuring the survival, protection and development of children. CYDF launched its first “Project Hope—Million Love and Care Action.” This was a public promotion action of fund raising for the project.

1993: CYDF sponsored the second “Project Hope—Million Love and Care Action.” The first Hope School funded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) opened in Humaying Village, Humaying Town, Fengning Manchu Autonomous County, Hebei Province.

1994: The Government Work Report presented at the Second Plenary Session of the Eighth National People’s Congress stipulated that Project Hope should continue with the support of the Chinese society. The Project Hope National Supervisory Committee was founded. CYDF also established the six-level network—national, provincial, prefecture, county, town and school—for the project.

1995: “Project Hope Management Year.” CYDF partnered with publishers to compile a five-hundred-volume series entitled “Hope House of Books” that consists of seven subject areas: famous literary works, history, culture and arts, science and technology, ecology, dictionaries and reference books, and daily life skills. In July, the project started the construction of the first Hope Middle

School in Wangcun Town, Yongshun County, Hunan Province.

1996: The China Administration of Posts and Telecommunications issued two million Project Hope phone cards. The funds raised from these cards went to the construction of fifteen Hope Primary Schools and the distribution of three hundred sets of the Hope House of Books.

1997: Project Hope received a registered service trademark from the Trade Mark Bureau of the State Administration for Industry and Commerce and became the first registered Chinese public charity organization with legally protected intellectual property rights.

1998: CYDF initiated a comprehensive audit of financial assistance to more than 1.8 million children.

2001: The project accomplished its initial goal of assisting dropout children in the poverty-stricken areas (Gu 2006). The new framework uses the Project Hope Distance Education Plan as its core, accompanied with election of Stars of Hope (students who have met those qualifications to receive scholarship) and their follow-up, teacher training, and construction of Hope School components, namely financial need. Most CYDF staff participated in the field research on the future direction of the project.

2002: The project expanded its financial aid to students at middle and high schools and colleges (Gu 2006). Meanwhile, a trust crisis broke out regarding CYDF’s investment and appropriate use of the donations for the project. In September, the first five graduates from the Stars of Hope Scholarship went to Canada for advance study.

2003/2004: CYDF launched the Project Hope Financial Aid Plan for Migrant Children, which offered assistance to more than twenty thousand migrant children, with each receiving an average of RMB¥600 (about \$70) (Gu, 2006). Educating migrant workers’ children in the cities had been a serious problem. These children were either rejected by public schools or were charged extra fees; since their parents belong to a low-income population and cannot afford the high costs, they had to attend substandard, less-equipped schools run by individuals or philanthropic organizations. CYDF also held the first Red Dragonfly National Hope Primary School Sports Game: Representing thirty-seven delegations

from thirty-one provinces and areas, 904 students participated in the game.

2005: CYDF partnered with China Central Television (CCTV) and launched “I Want to Go to College” fundraising drive. According to a 25 October 2005 report posted on a popular Chinese website (www.sina.com.cn), the drive identified five thousand college students who qualified for its financial aid, with each receiving RMB¥4,000, or about \$500.

2006: Partnered with more than one hundred news media organizations and provincial youth development foundations, CYDF initiated “Dream-Coming-True Action” to help financially needy college students. This action raised RMB¥152 million, which assisted 38,892 students to realize their dreams of going to college (CYDF 2007).

Looking Ahead

In its next six-year plan (2007–2012), CYDF will keep the core values of Project Hope and continue serving children whose families have financial difficulties in poverty-stricken regions. As the foundation increases fundraising, it will also expand the cultural development of Hope Primary Schools, create Project Hope volunteer services, and better help farmers’ children acquire academic and development abilities.

Project Hope has been widely acknowledged as China’s most influential public charity campaign in the twentieth century and has received numerous awards,

including the 2004 China Eliminating Poverty Award 中国消除贫困奖 and the 2005 China Philanthropy Award 中华慈善奖 (CYDF 2007). It promotes its activities to the international community and has established relationships with similar organizations in countries such as Japan, South Korea, France, Germany, Spain, and United States.

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Further Reading

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