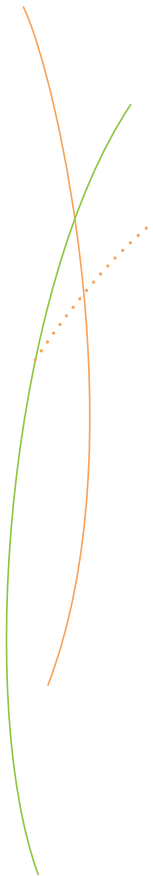


WILDFLOWERS INSTITUTE

EVALUATION OF THE 2003 WILDFLOWERS PROGRAM IN CHINA



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In 2003, the author of this report continued to serve as an external evaluator of the Wildflowers Institute's ongoing program of community culture and community building in the People's Republic of China. The author and Dr. Hanmin Liu, president and chief executive officer of the Wildflowers Institute, visited two Chinese communities (Meiyuan in Shanghai and Guangwai in Beijing) in September 2003, December 2003, and February 2004. These weeklong site visits provided the author with excellent opportunities to observe the Wildflowers process in action, which features, among other activities, Dr. Liu's lectures on theories and methods of community building in American society, the actual research work of Chinese teams sponsored by the Wildflowers Institute, and the training sessions of community leadership. During the visits, the author conducted open-ended and semi-structured interviews among participants in the Wildflowers program, asking them to reflect on the various Wildflowers projects, their learning experiences, and the actual applications of the learned knowledge and tools in community work. The author also used techniques of structured interviews in cognitive anthropology, such as free listing, ranking, and mapping, to ask interviewees to offer their assessments of the effectiveness and usefulness of the Wildflowers projects.

The author was invited to participate in some site visits and other community activities organized by the Wildflowers Institute in its social labs in the United States. These site visits and community activities enabled the author to closely follow the rapid development of the Wildflowers theory of community construction and provided him with another reference point when evaluating the China program.

Based on information gathered during this process of participatory evaluation, this report evaluates the Wildflowers program in China from February 2003 to February 2004.¹ In the first section, the author will review the outcomes of the three community research projects. It is noteworthy that one research project, using the Wildflowers theory and tools, led to an important discovery: a hidden cultural premise that to a great extent contributed to obesity among children in a Beijing community. In a different direction but with equal importance, another research project on the isolation and alienation of elderly people in a Shanghai community established a new model of community work that is based on Wildflowers' trademark both/and approach and involves close collaboration among university researchers, public health professionals, and local government.

The second section evaluates the leadership training project, which consists of three components: the training sessions in China, the leadership seminar in San Francisco, and the curriculum development for a sustainable training project in the future. During the training sessions, which were added in 2003, Dr. Liu gave formal lectures and hosted informal discussion sessions. Both proved to be quite effective and necessary in terms of disseminating the Wildflowers theories and creating a Wildflowers space for the cultivation of informal leader-

1. The 2002 Wildflowers program in China was evaluated in a separate report. See Yunxiang Yan, "The Wildflowers Processes and Tools in China: An Evaluation Report," 2003, at www.wildflowers.org.

ship in communities. The San Francisco leadership seminar in October 2003 was successful and highly appreciated by the Chinese participants. The Chinese delegates discussed their experiences in learning and applying the American models in the Meiyuan community during the site visit in early 2004, which will be used as case study materials for the development of leadership training curriculum. The new partnership between the Wildflowers Institute and the Shine Stone, a grassroots NGO in Beijing, has laid out the institutional base for the development of curriculum in 2004.

In the third section, the author will briefly review the impressive development of the Wildflowers theory on social change and community construction based on Wildflowers' work in five American communities, featuring an emphasis on youth leadership, the new understanding of the both/and approach, and a systematic account of power relations and cultural resources within a community. These new theoretical developments have made the Wildflowers theory and tools more relevant to China and, potentially, to other societies as well. The author will discuss the effectiveness and replicability of the Wildflowers theory and tools at the end of this report.

In general, the Wildflowers Institute achieved its goals in almost all projects in China in 2003, which is quite impressive given that the SARS epidemic in the first half of the year interrupted social life and work in the entire country for several months and thus made it virtually impossible to carry out any community work. More importantly, while continuing the close collaboration with government officials at the lowest level of the bureaucracy, the Wildflowers Institute was able to expand and deepen its influence through a local NGO, which probably made Wildflowers the only foreign organization that could conduct projects directly at the community level in China.

I. Community Research

Starting community construction through a research project is one of the strategies that the Wildflowers Institute used specifically for its China program, in order to deal with the local political-social conditions in Chinese communities. In the five Wildflowers community labs in the United States, a group of core informal community leaders takes the initiative in carrying out various projects of community construction, ranging from the search for collective identity and the claim of social space to the research of community culture. More important, the leaders also appreciate greatly the opportunity for personal growth in a sociocultural sense. In contrast, the Wildflowers programs in China have to initially go through two channels from outside the community—the lower-level government cadres, who manage the community and prioritize their political career over community culture, and the scholars, who live outside the community and carry out community research projects.

Although the Chinese state has tried to promote a market-based society in recent years, it still regards any organized social forces, including sizable civic engagement or community self-organization, as a serious challenge to the political regime and thus insists on the centrality of government leadership in community work. To find the right niche for community building and the most effective way to promote societal forces in China, the Wildflowers Institute started its China program with community research projects conducted by university professors, graduate students, and medical professionals. These research projects were designed to map the community labs and to uncover the underlying cultural premises or hidden notions/assumptions that inform people's choices and drive their behavior. Through these research projects, the Wildflowers Institute intends to present the American way, the Wildflowers way in particular, of addressing issues of sustainable community to Chinese leaders and local residents.

Three research teams were active in 2003, and all of them submitted their final reports to the Wildflowers Institute during the February 2004 site visit to communities in Shanghai and Beijing, with detailed descriptions and insightful analysis of the social issues under study. It is fair to say that the research teams completed all the research projects and reached the initial goals, although the significance and implications of the research outcomes vary from one team to another.

The study on obesity among children in the Guangwai subdistrict, Beijing, conducted by a research team from Capital University of Medical Sciences (CUMS), is particularly noteworthy because it successfully uncovered the hidden cultural premise of obesity. Through a series of household visits, in-depth interviews, and small-scale surveys, the CUMS team discovered that most residents in the subdistrict believe that to be fat is to be strong. Such a belief derives from the life experiences of these residents, especially the older residents, who worked in either manufacturing or agriculture as manual laborers until the 1980s. Transferring their appreciation of physical strength to child rearing, these local residents tend to identify fatness, especially fatness at a young age, as a sign of physical strength. In order to reach this ideal, parents and grandparents feed their single child and grandchild as much as possible. Such a cultural premise might have played a positive role under previous social conditions, but it has now become a negative factor contributing to obesity. Although general nutritional standards have improved in the past fifteen years, children are engaging less and less in physical exercise. Behind the long-held notion that “fatness is strength” are complex and interlocking relations among local governments, agriculture, manufacturing, schools, health facilities, and families, all of which work together to inform and form the local patterns of feeding children. Such a cultural premise is rooted in the everyday life of local residents, and it can easily be understood by anyone once it is uncovered and lifted up to the surface, as shown during the meetings with local government officials, community leaders, and ordinary residents.

Before applying the Wildflowers theory and tools in their research, the CUMS team, like many other research teams and health institutes in China, regarded obesity among young people as merely a health problem and thus addressed it from a medical perspective, focusing on children’s food intake and daily exercise. The finding of “fatness is strength” revealed that misinformed parental (and grandparental) love has directly contributed to the obesity problem. To fight against obesity among young people, therefore, one must mobilize the entire community to reform the basic cultural ideas regarding physical strength, health, parental love, child rearing, family bonding, and community support. As several CUMS team members reflected, what they benefited most from in the research was a paradigm shift, or breakthrough in thinking patterns, in public health work. Based on their findings, CUMS team members are currently working on a proposal to expand their study by uncovering the positive cultural premises in child rearing, which will ultimately help them to establish a cultural intervention program to fight against obesity among children.

The theoretical significance of the CUMS research project lies in the simple fact that the Wildflowers approach to uncovering hidden cultural premises has proved to be both applicable and powerful in China, despite the different political-economic context. The research findings may also have wider implications beyond the boundaries of China, as obesity among children has increasingly become a serious public health problem in many countries around the globe. Although the notion that “fatness is strength” is perhaps very Chinese, or is typical only of communities like the Guangwai subdistrict in Beijing, the fact that certain cultural premises are hidden behind the widespread obesity among children is likely universal.

Another noteworthy research project was on social alienation and isolation among the elders in the Sitang community, Baoshan district, Shanghai. Although it has yet to uncover the cultural premise that directly causes this social problem, the research project has successfully revealed the various structural factors that have contributed to alienation and isolation at the individual level. An unexpected and potentially very important achievement of this project, however, derives from its own operation. This research project evolved from an early survey of public health issues in the community conducted by medical professionals at the Sitang Community Hospital. When the alienation and isolation of elderly people emerged as an urgent problem, a new pattern of collaboration was established under the encouragement of the Wildflowers Institute. A sociology professor from Fudan University and his graduate students were invited to help the Sitang Hospital team to carry out new and focused research through both general surveys and in-depth interviews. The local government also played an active role in the new research, sending community cadres out to help the research teams in household visits, general surveys, and interviews. The close collaboration among the three parties, namely, the university researchers, the hospital professionals, and local officials, brought out their respective strengths and, more important, ensured the smooth operation of the program at the grassroots level of local

community. Because of its direct involvement in the program, the local government has become more eager to learn the American way of community work and has opened up for future collaborations, while the community hospital has become convinced that public health is also a cultural and community issue.

It is rather common that in their efforts to help local communities, academic researchers tend to stop short at the level of advocacy, professionals (medical and others) tend to be technically oriented and thus blind to sociocultural factors, and government officials can hardly perceive community needs from a bottom-up approach, which often leads to unnecessary conflicts with local residents. Consequently, despite their good intentions, none of these groups can find an effective way to reach the people they want to help, much less empowering the people to help themselves. An important implication of the Sitang research project is that the close collaboration of the three parties may be the best way to achieve both vertical alignment of local government leaders and horizontal connections with various resources of human capitals and thus to establish an effective, non-confrontational model of community work.

The third research team, which consisted of faculty and graduate students from Tsinghua University, completed five subprojects, including a general demographic study of the Guangwai subdistrict, two case studies on the new patterns of filial piety in family life, a study on the formation of identity among migrant children at a private primary school, and a study of poor families on social welfare, all in the Guangwai subdistrict. Together these studies provide a picture of the community under rapid social change and lay a good foundation to carry out further work. However, unlike the CUMS research on obesity or the Sitang research on elderly isolation, the five sociological studies in Guangwai have yet to uncover any hidden cultural premises or develop a systematic account of a social phenomenon that can be used as a point of entry for the next step in community construction. The lack of a strong leadership and coordination appears to be the major reason why the Tsinghua team has not been able to reach a higher level in community research.

In retrospect, it is clear that although necessary and effective in the early stage, the strategy of relying on university research teams may need to be modified when the Wildflowers Institute expands its China program in the next step, for several reasons. First, university researchers—faculty and graduate students alike—do not live or stay in the community for a substantial period of time and thus cannot carry out their work from an inside-out, bottom-up approach. Moreover, the researchers only conduct research and do not (and probably cannot) carry out any specific work in community building. A related issue is that none of the researchers can devote a substantial amount of time to the community under study, much less fully commit themselves to community work. In this aspect, the Chinese researchers operate in a way that is opposite to that of the Wildflowers fellows in American communities.

An urgent need, therefore, is to identify and establish a counterpart to the Wildflowers fellows group in China. To do so, Wildflowers must find a way to create a new relational space whereby the Chinese participants can rediscover themselves and experience personal growth in the same way that their American counterparts have done. Equally important, Wildflowers must first find a small group of people who can work full time with ordinary people within a community. The Wildflowers meetings that were held during Dr. Liu's site visits functioned as the new relational space to a certain extent, but the question is how to make the Wildflowers space homegrown and self-sustainable in China. The cultivation of local Wildflowers fellows seems to be one of the answers.

A good indicator is that both Professor Jing Jun of Tsinghua University and Professor Zhang Letian at Fudan University have expressed strong interest in working more closely with the Wildflowers Institute, helping to train Chinese scholars and graduate students, and assuming more responsibilities in future research projects. Another promising and potentially very important development in 2003 was the establishment of a new partnership between the Wildflowers Institute and the Shine Stone, a grassroots NGO in Beijing that aims at promoting participatory work in community construction, which will be discussed in detail below.

II. Leadership Training Program

The leadership training program in 2003 consisted of two parts: the training sessions held in communities in China and the intensive International Leadership Seminar in San Francisco that was tailored to visiting community leaders from China. In addition, the new partnership between Wildflowers Institute and the Shine Stone, a local NGO, has set a new direction for the development of a training curriculum.

1. The Training Sessions in China

Four training sessions were held during Dr. Liu's site visits in Shanghai and Beijing in September and December 2003, respectively. Dr. Liu gave lectures on the general state of community work in the United States and the Wildflowers theory and tools. The audiences in the training sessions included government officials in charge of community work, community leaders in the two social labs, university faculty and graduate students, and selected community leaders from other communities. As the Wildflowers theory continues to develop based on the Wildflowers work in American communities, Dr. Liu's lectures played a key role in keeping the Chinese partners informed and closely involved in the development process. The lectures also provided up-to-date guidance for the community research projects, especially in the new direction that emphasizes the both/and approach in dealing with the core and interface cultures in a given community. By discussing the trends in community construction and philanthropy, Dr. Liu was able to effectively introduce the basic paradigms of public participation, voluntarism, and community solidarity in American society to government leaders at both the district and subdistrict levels.

In addition to the lectures, Wildflowers organized several VisionBuilding sessions in which ordinary residents and youth from the two Chinese communities participated. As in the past, the process of VisionBuilding instantly created an open channel by which the participants were able to communicate some deeply held ideas about their life and community to community leaders and among themselves. In one session, for instance, the headmaster in a vocational school was shocked by a student's interpretation of her ideal model of community; the headmaster confessed to Dr. Liu that in her entire teaching career of more than thirty years she had never been able to reach so deep into a student's inner world. As a result, a new relational space was created whereby the participants felt connected and also experienced personal growth through their search for the best ideas and strategies to build their community.

Indeed, the creation of a Wildflowers space constitutes the third designed aspect of the training sessions. During each of the 2003 site visits, Dr. Liu spent at least a half day with the Chinese partners, several of whom have been appointed as Wildflowers senior fellows, to reflect on their experience in community work and to discuss the specific plans to expand the Wildflowers work. These debriefing meetings brought people of different institutional backgrounds together, enabling them to learn from one another as well as furthering their understanding of the Wildflowers theory and tools. Although the Chinese partners have yet to take more initiative and to learn more from the Wildflowers fellows in the United States, they have become more actively involved after attending these meetings.

The on-site training sessions in China proved to be cost-effective and powerful because they could transmit the much needed theory, methods, and knowledge in community building to a much wider audience in a well-defined time frame. It should be noted that most Chinese leaders are keen on learning the American ideas and models in community work, which creates a favorable context for these training sessions. Another advantage of the training sessions is that they also formed a useful channel by which Dr. Liu could learn first-hand about the applicability of the Wildflowers theory in particular and the American models in general, which in turn has informed the development of the Wildflowers theory.

These training sessions, however, have depended on Dr. Liu's personal leadership thus far, which is hardly sustainable in the long run. The key to leadership sustainability is to find the right way to train trainers and to establish a training institute in China that will transmit the theories, methods, and knowledge of community construction to a much wider audience. The author will come back to this point below.

2. The International Leadership Seminar in San Francisco

The second Meiyuan delegation of community leaders visited San Francisco in October 2003 and participated in a three-day training seminar. Based on follow-up interviews with four members of the delegation and a close reading of the final report that the delegation prepared for government leaders in the Pudong district and Shanghai city, the author of this report can say with utter confidence that the 2003 training seminar was very successful and will very likely have profound impact on leaders in the Meiyuan subdistrict and beyond. Among others, the following achievements of the leadership seminar are particularly noteworthy.

First, the intensive program created a valuable space where the Chinese community leaders concentrated on learning the basic concepts, theories, and working experiences in community building in American society. Both their final report and oral reflections show that, after this program, most of them have widened their perceptions of community and community culture and learned the basic notions of the Wildflowers theory. In their report to the Shanghai municipal government, they effectively summarize the latest development of the Wildflowers theory that was presented to them by Dr. Liu and other Wildflowers fellows during the training program. Their report also discusses the operating model of the Wildflowers Institute and its role in promoting various community projects. The report concludes that community culture is a much richer and wider concept than what the Chinese leaders understood before and that community work must rely on public participation from within the community.

Second, the Chinese community leaders have learned new concepts of community work and management, especially the American notions of public participation and voluntarism. Both Mr. Tao Liming, director of the Meiyuan subdistrict office, and Mr. Wu, a senior researcher at the Pudong district government, commented that “putting people first” has long been a practice in American society but it remains by and large a slogan in China. They all asserted that in order to put people first they should adopt the Wildflowers’ bottom-up approach. Ms. Xia Yizhong, head of the Personnel Department in the Meiyuan subdistrict, reflected that public participation in America differs from the “mass line” in China. In the United States ordinary people are involved in decision-making processes whereas in China the mass line is merely a strategy to mobilize the masses to realize the decisions made by leaders. Both Ms. Xia and Mr. Liang, who is the head of the General Office in the Meiyuan subdistrict, have tried to apply some American approaches to their own work, and the results are positive and rewarding. However, they also pointed out that they could only try out these new ideas and methods within the narrowly defined space of their own work. As grassroots-level cadres, they also worked within a much larger system and thus could not do much. In conclusion, all interviewees expressed strongly that the leadership training program should be extended to government officials at higher levels.

Third, the delegation members were deeply impressed by the various civic associations that play crucial roles in American communities. They all pointed out that American community leaders are devoted to the public good and that ordinary citizens are proud of their community. How to educate and train devoted and responsible community workers, according to the delegation members, is one of the important issues that they must address in Meiyuan. It is in this connection that they have come to appreciate Wildflowers’ notions of community culture (core and interface), center of gravity, and leadership training. All four members who were interviewed reflected that their previous understanding of community culture as merely folk performance and entertainment was too narrow and misleading. To effectively cultivate and mobilize the social capitals of the community, it is also necessary to identify the informal community leaders and to help the growth of intermediate organizations (that is, NGOs or civic associations that have been permitted by the government). Government cannot integrate all resources within the community and thus needs the assistance of the intermediate organizations.

In short, a new perspective on community leadership and the recognition of the importance of public participation seem to be the two major points that the Chinese participants learned at the Leadership Seminar. More important, the Meiyuan leaders indeed have applied what they learned from the seminar to their work in community. It should also be noted that, in order to maximize the effect of the next training seminar in San

Francisco in May 2004, Meiyuan community leaders brought participants from the past two seminars and the candidates of the upcoming seminar together to discuss their learning experiences, provided feedback to the Wildflowers Institute and prepared a long list of inquires for the next visit.

3. Curriculum Development and the Role of the Local NGO

In late 2003, the Wildflowers Institute was able to establish close contact with the Shine Stone, a small yet very active NGO in Beijing formally known as Community Participation Action. The two main leaders of the Shine Stone, Ms. Song Qinghua and Ms. Li Liya, received training in community work at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom and have been organizing training programs to promote public participation since 2002. Ms. Song and Ms. Li have expressed a strong wish to learn the Wildflowers theory and tools and are eager to collaborate closely with the Wildflowers Institute. Upon mutual agreement, the Wildflowers Institute decided to offer systematic training to Ms. Song and to recruit the Shine Stone as its major partner in China for future community work.

Wildflowers' decision was wise and strategically important for three reasons. First, the Shine Stone is one of the very few NGOs in China that devotes itself full time to community work at the grassroots level. Unlike university faculty and graduate students who carry out research projects from a top-down approach and rarely engage in actual practice of community building, the Shine Stone has always positioned itself as part of the communities that it works with and is action-oriented (as opposed to research-oriented). Second, unlike university faculty and other professionals in the Wildflowers project (such as the medical professionals) who can spend only a portion of their time in community research, members of the Shine Stone work full time on community issues and consider community construction as their sole mission. Third, the Shine Stone has offered a series of training seminars on public participation among grassroots-level government officials and informal community leaders and has accumulated rich experience in both compiling training materials and executing training programs.

Once the members of the Shine Stone learn and master the Wildflowers theory and tools, they will likely be the ideal candidates to form a sustainable training institute that systematically transmits knowledge, theories, and methods in community construction and provides training at a much larger scale. It is highly feasible that the new training institute will draw on the community research projects that have been completed in 2003 and develop a curriculum that addresses the issues of community construction in light of the American model and Wildflowers theory. More important, the growth of local NGOs like the Shine Stone is in itself an integrated part of the development of civic society and public participation, which in turn provide the necessary social conditions for sustainable communities. In this sense, the collaboration between the Wildflowers Institute and the Shine Stone may create a new model of community construction in the Chinese context.

III. Wildflowers Theory and Its Applicability in China

In 2003, the Wildflowers Institute refined and developed its theory on social change and community building, featuring a reemphasis on the both/and approach in community mobilization, a balanced view of the relationship between core and interface cultures, and a structural analysis of social capitals in communities. The development of the Wildflowers theory benefits to a great extent from the collective effort of the Wildflowers fellows, who are actively and simultaneously engaged in two processes: (1) exploring and strengthening the collective identity in their respective community and (2) searching and experimenting with the best ways to build a socially sustainable community. A brief review of this theoretical development is thus in order.

In early 2003, the Wildflowers Institute began to explore new ways to deepen and expand its community work while capitalizing on its major achievement in previous years, that is, the successful effort to uncover cultural premises that hold people together and define their collective identity in a given community. It is against such

a background that the Wildflowers fellows reached a consensus in a March meeting that the Wildflowers process consists of three important elements: uncovering cultural premises, naming the core culture, and claiming the center of gravity. The effort to create a Wildflowers space through site visits and fellow meetings was also institutionalized during this early stage.

The first important step in theoretical development is the recognition of the indispensable role of youth leadership in community construction. The search for and the promotion of the core culture tend to be more appealing to the elderly and middle-aged people in a community; but how to make the core culture not only understandable but also attractive to the youth emerged as a challenge to community leaders. Without the involvement of youth, community work can hardly continue and the community can hardly engage actively with the outside world. However, the more successful youths are most likely tempted to leave the community if they are under the pressure of both the pulling force of market values and the pushing force of a backwardly oriented core culture within the community. By mid-2003, it has become an accepted wisdom among the Wildflowers fellows that the sustainable development of community relies on the cultivation of youth leadership and the involvement of community youth. To address this urgent issue, the Wildflowers theory calls for the creation of various training programs for youth leadership, including a new program of junior Wildflowers fellows.

The effort of cultivating youth leadership led to the second refinement of the Wildflowers theory, that is, the rethinking of the both/and approach. In their previous work, this approach enabled the Wildflowers fellows to discover the inner strength of both individual leaders and the community as a whole. At this level, the both/and approach functions as a powerful tool to balance out the dominant influence of the market ideology by readdressing the values of the core culture and revealing the structural relations among the core, the interface, and the market values. The achievement at this level is obviously the construction of the collective identity.

Nevertheless, the key to the both/and approach is to strike a good balance between the core and interface cultures within the same community, which means to discover both the core players and the interface players and to find a way to unite them to work for the healthy growth of the community.² In other words, once completing the first stage of identity search and construction, the both/and approach calls for the reevaluation of the interface culture as part of the community strength. The effort to cultivate youth leadership only opens the door to this reevaluation of the interface culture (and its players in a community), as shown in the several major community events in the second half of 2003.

The discourse in a fellows meeting in September 2003 focused on how to engage with the interface culture in community building. The central question that was pursued by many Wildflowers fellows at this point has changed from who we are to who they are and what we can do to engage them. Depending on the specific context of discourse, the category “they” can stand for the other ethnic group, the other community, the market force, or the political-economic system that dominates the entire American society. In one way or another, the fellows have taken the initiative to engage the interface culture and have gotten closer to confronting the practical issues of community development.

Based on the actual experiences of community work, the Wildflowers Institute deepened its understanding of community while increasing its operational capacity at the same time in 2003. By late 2003, a structural analysis of community resources and social capital was completed that includes (1) the mapping of the four sectors in a community, (2) the valuation of the players in community core culture, (3) the promotion of convergence of the different sectors in a community, especially the convergence between the core and interface cultures, and (4) the strategy of bringing the sectors together through a learning process on a Wildflowers space, namely, an open and equal social space created in light of the Wildflowers theory.

² See Hanmin Liu, “Vision Building: Discovering Invisible Culture Premises,” Wildflowers Working Paper, 2002.

At the operational level, the Wildflowers theory specifies the three steps in the construction of sustainable community. The first step is to help community construct its collective identity by uncovering the cultural premises and self-organizing principles and by reclaiming the center of gravity and community virtues. The next step is to help community to *embrace* both the core and the interface so that the community can effectively and positively interact with the market force, the political system, and the variety of ethnic cultures in the larger society. The third step involves the development of economic and socially sustainable projects that will bring together the leaders from all sectors of a community and in turn reinforce the identity and solidarity of the community.³

Through the on-site training sessions in Beijing and Shanghai, these new developments in Wildflowers theory were introduced to the Chinese audiences in a timely manner and were enthusiastically received. Chinese community leaders instantly embraced some ideas, such as the emphasis on the values of socially disadvantaged groups who tend to uphold the core culture in a given community. As Mr. Tao Liming, director of the Meiyuan subdistrict office, points out, the recognition of the value of disadvantaged groups in a market society helps the Chinese community leaders to maintain a balanced view of human resources in the pursuit of community solidarity and sustainable development. The Chinese leaders also expressed strong interest in learning how to cultivate youth leadership in community work and how to bring together medical professionals, government officials, and local community leaders for close collaboration in community work, establishing a good example of how the interface culture reaches out to the community core culture.

In 2003, both the VisionBuilding tool (now known as the Wildflowers process of cultural discovery) and the key notions of the Wildflowers theory, such as the core and interface cultures, center of gravity, the naming/claiming of social space, and the search for hidden cultural premises, have been applied at a wider scale throughout the various research projects. A small number of Chinese partners have actively participated in the process of testing the Wildflowers theory and tools in the Chinese context and some have made important contributions, as in the cases of the CUMS research and the Sitang hospital research. This is in sharp contrast to the previous year when the Chinese merely followed the request from the funding agency without a good understanding of the Wildflowers theory in particular and community work in general. Again, the frequent and intensive on-site training sessions have played an important role in pushing the development in this front.

It should also be mentioned that the Wildflowers Institute made some important adjustments in management during 2003, terminating collaboration with one research team due to its incompetence, changing the funding method from grant-making to contracting, recruiting a small number of Chinese scholars and NGO leaders as Wildflowers fellows, and establishing a close working relationship with a grassroots NGO. It became clear by early 2004 that these efforts of management change were both necessary and effective, as shown in the outcomes of community research and leadership training programs. More important, these changes enabled the Wildflowers Institute not only to continue its ongoing work, but also to find new ways to move deeper into the communities and thus better exercise its unique strength in community construction, that is, to uncover the hidden cultural premises and capitalize on the social capitals in a given community from an inside-out, both/and approach.

To reiterate a point that was made at the beginning of this report: given the political regime in China, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any foreign organization to reach to the grassroots level and carry out community work there; thanks to its bottom-up approach and culturally sensitive theory, the Wildflowers Institute has been successful in the two communities, which is an astonishing achievement. The achievements in 2003 show that the Wildflowers theory has indeed made an important contribution to the ongoing work of

³ See Hanmin Liu, "A Theoretical Framework and Approach to Socially Sustainable Communities," Wildflowers Working Paper, 2003.

community construction in China and also has drawn from its China application to enrich itself, thus becoming a more universal theory that, with modifications to address local needs, can be applied to different cultures and societies in the world.

IV. Two Additional Suggestions

First, it seems to me that the Wildflowers Institute's China program in the immediate future should focus on public participation, voluntarism, and informal leadership. The work in 2003 shows that all three issues are widely recognized by government officials and community leaders as critical to the healthy development of community, but no one in China can come up with better ways to promote them among the ordinary people because of the limitations of the political system. Members of the second Meiyuan delegation to San Francisco, for instance, expressed strongly their desire to learn more about the promotion of public participation and voluntarism in America. Therefore, this is the best time for the Wildflowers Institute to expand its influence and educate the government officials and community leaders. Among the three, informal community leadership is a more sensitive topic than the other two; but the governments at various levels have gradually realized the positive role that informal leaders can play in the community. This is particularly important for Wildflowers because only informal leaders in a community can truly work from an inside-out and bottom-up approach and, with their exemplary power, build a center of gravity in social life.

Second, the Wildflowers Institute may want to continue its effort to develop a self-motivated group of Wildflowers fellows in China so that its China program will not rely on the direct push from America. Although constant guidance in theories and methods will remain necessary and important for the Wildflowers projects in China for years to come, direct involvement from America for each step in practice is not only too costly but also against the original purpose of the Wildflowers programs, which is to empower the people to find and exercise their strengths. This work has been started in 2003, but it needs to be deepened and strengthened in a timely manner. The recruitment of the Shine Stone is certainly a plus for addressing this issue, and the Wildflowers Institute may want to speed up its investment in training the leaders of this local NGO.

WILDFLOWERS INSTITUTE MISSION STATEMENT

For more than a quarter of a century, Wildflowers Institute has focused on leadership development and community building in the United States and abroad. We help communities uncover and utilize the strengths of the various cultures within the community. Wildflowers helps them plan, grow economically, and be more socially sustainable by:

Discovering the virtues, self-organizing principles, and formations of family and community and applying that understanding to the planning and development of programs, services, and policies

Developing leaders among youth and adults rooted in the cultures of the communities

Designing social spaces for civic engagement

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