

Dr. James Yen Institute and Contemporary Chinese Rural Reconstruction Movement

Jing Wang

Jing discussed the McArthur grant proposal she co-authored with Wen Tiejun. The proposal titled “Empowering Rural Migrants in the PRC: The Study of a Chinese NGO” was centered on the Migrant Youth Arts and Performance Troupe, only an offshoot of the larger project of rural reconstruction movement conceived by Wen. The larger project has diverse organizational goals and multiple human resources while the Migrant Youth Arts Performance Troupe has limited goals. The McArthur proposal was initially written by Jing with the aim of seeking support for the MIT Critical Policy project. To justify for the McArthur Foundation the collaboration between herself and Wen Tiejun (an agricultural economist), she inserted a strong cultural component into the conception of rural reconstruction as laid out in the grant proposal. In the following, she summarized what the Troupe is all about, and went on to describe Wen Tiejun’s larger project of rural reconstruction in Hebei.

Migrant Youth Arts and Performance Troupe

The troupe is an NPO made up of migrant workers (about 25 of them) who travel to county towns in Hebei and neighboring cities like Beijing and Tianjin to perform skits and other pop cultural shows with the purpose of teaching fellow migrant workers how to enrich their cultural lives, learn about their rights, develop self-governing consciousness, spot and train artistic/musical/literary talents from among the migrant workers themselves.

The troupe plays multiple cultural roles. It serves as a vehicle that links illiterate migrant workers with the public, a spokespersons for them when needed, a cultural service provider, and an explorer-creator of a new form of migrant popular culture. Each performance is a multi-media presentation built on a central theme. Thus, folk ballads with contemporary content specific to the needs of migrant workers are interwoven with talk shows, folk games, *xiangsheng* 相声, spoken drama, skits, one-act plays, and lectures. Well-developed performance themes include “how to negotiate for being paid on time,” “status discrimination,” and “how to spot spasm created by job agencies.”

James Yen model

Release, not relief.: The Hebei based James Yen Institute follows the original goal of James Yen. They train and nurture migrant “elites” from among the rural migrants themselves with the purpose of releasing their creative and organizational energy in self-governance.

Dr. James Yen Rural Reconstruction Institute (晏阳初乡村建设学院)

Founded in July 2003.

- I. Organization: Registered under the Hebei Province Education Bureau
6 partners: Village Committee of Zhaicheng Village, Hebei

James Yen Popular Education and Rural Reconstruction Committee
China Reform Journal
China Social Services and Development Research Centre (HK)
Action Aid China Office
Committee of Rural Community Building (Society for Promoting Village
Development in China)
Registered under the Hebei Province Education Bureau

II. Mission

1. carry on the ideas of popular education and rural reconstruction as envisioned by James Yen & others, through community development in rural villages
an important element for building civil society at the local level
2. train actors at the village level
3. link those efforts in China with the wider rural transformation movements in Asia and Latin America

III. Goals

1. to conduct training courses for peasants and peasant workers on different themes
(2004-05, the central theme is cooperative economy, organic farming) to conduct research related to rural reconstruction
2. to build demonstrative organic farming and cooperatives (both producer and consumer cooperatives)

IV. Funding : Oxfam (HK); Asia Foundation (Beijing); small NGOs in the US and Hong Kong; personal donations

V. Training

models: both institute-based and village-based. The Institute serves as the coordination and physical center for day-to-day operations. It is also a resource center housing archives of documents, books and resource materials

number: 50 people for each training session. Made up of three different pools of peasants:

参加人选 – 初中毕业，有想法，不是干部身份，也非村委

(1) 办中国改革杂志农村版时，来稿的农民

(2) 大学生调查研究在做调查报告时 (农民之子计划) 发现的
有积极意识的农民

(3) 自己给乡村建设学院来函，来电话的农民

他们有一定的号召力；有过与有关部门、单位打交道的经验。

在地方上有经验 --这样的人占 50%

duration: 10-20 days;

re-entry program: they select learners who will be given seed money to start rural cooperatives, credit union, or other social/cultural organizations back in their own localities. The Institute will follow up, monitor, and facilitate exchange of experience. Mutual feed of experiences from locale to locale through reentry training sessions at the James Yen Institute.

training project objectives:

1. to enable peasants and peasant workers to acquire understanding of rural development skills and to empower them for rural community building
(to select those participants who will be willing to go back to the villages to start diff levels of rural development initiatives)
2. To design and practice a training curriculum, and model of operation that addresses the need of local rural activists
3. to build a web of local contact points in China among those who are working on diff collective initiatives. Those contact points could continuously give feedback to the improvement of training courses. Share with the old and new trainees opportunities and problems they faced

rural coops already built

Rural cooperatives already established after the Institute training program:

河北省定州市东亭镇翟城合作社

重庆綦江县石角镇丰岩村综合经济合作社

四川西昌市裕隆乡兴付村互助组

山东省莘县徐庄乡史河口合作社

安徽阜阳市颖州区三合镇南塘村合作社

山西汾阳市栗家庄乡栗家庄合作社

山东鱼台县谷亭镇姜庄合作社

河南兰考县贺村合作社

Those new cooperatives received micro credits (小额贷款) from the James Yen Institute : RMB 30,000-50,000/per coop

小额贷款：AID，HK，中国改革杂志三家平均出资。由温铁军领出钱，以个人名义出资。这样他们讲信义，会小心花。如果知道是公家钱，他们一定会乱花。

training curriculum

1. knowledge about rural cooperatives (economic organization of rural cooperatives, & 农业协会)

2. environmental sustainability: environmental protection and eco-diversity
(“自然与人” ; “环境保护概论”)
3. rural administration and rural governance: fiscal matters, agricultural economy
(“农村财务手册” “市场与营销”)
4. History and theory & practice of rural reconstruction in other countries
(“中印乡村建设交流会资料”)
5. agricultural science, applied technology for villages (“果树减枝技术”
“安全使用农药”)
6. common knowledge for citizenship (policies related to villages, rights of peasants,
rural self-governance) (“农村常见政策法规解读”)

volunteers: college students (College-student-back-to-hometown project started in 2000)

2nd time training curriculum

1. cooperative governance
2. financial accountability and transparency
3. community building (团队建设)
4. marketing skills and knowledge about the market
5. economics (contractual laws)
6. agricultural economy (using local resources to develop local economy)
7. history of cooperatives
8. comparative studies and case studies of foreign cooperatives