

**April 22-24, 2004. Field trip to Henan Province.**

**Shangcai county: Houyang village, Wenlou village**

**Shangqiu county: Shuangmiao village (Zhecheng township)**

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**April 22. First stop in Henan: Dr. Gao Yaojie's home.**

We luckily met with Dr. Gao, when she was on her way out to see a relative after waiting for us the whole day.

The next day, this 77 years old lady will again go to Cao County, Shangdong province, to see the six AIDS orphans that she has helped to be adopted by new families. The provincial Ministry of Civil Affairs has established a special office to be in charge of the AIDS orphan



issue since early this year. Dr. Gao has visited the office many times in person to find out the possibility of adoption or ways of helping orphans through non-governmental channels. Once time she was told that educational materials were in need. She immediately agreed to give them 10,000 copies of her own book. They refused. Another time, she was told that people are scared of AIDS orphans, and no one wants them. Lately, new rumors come out as the six orphans adopted by Cao County families are living in misery. It is said that they are laboring in the fields instead of going to school. Infuriated is Dr. Gao! She is a doer and fighter, indeed. She will be accompanied by some journalists to Cao County, to take the six kids on a tour and break the lies.

Some of us stayed with her until late. Once a while, she would ask for a hand. But most of the time, she keeps packing for tomorrow and organizing her files without any stop. People come and go, for information, for educational materials, or for interviews. Beyond her own outreach to remote villages and public educational work, even her house, with piles of AIDS related books and materials stocked against walls, has literally become an open house for anyone who cares about the AIDS issue in China.

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**April 23. Second stop: Shangcai County, Houyang Village.**

Thanks to Hu Jia, Mr. Cheng Xiangyang was waiting for us at the county center, and we met around noon time. Our bus driver started to feel a little bit uneasy. He asked about our

purpose of the trip this morning and particularly about whether we were planning to go to AIDS villages.

We decided to go to Houyang village first, where Humphrey could finally see the girl whom he has been supporting. Her name is ZHOU Jinyong, 14 years old. After her father died of AIDS, her family couldn't afford sending her to middle school anymore. She then taught at a (pre)school, founded by Mr. Cheng Xiangyang, for a while until it was shut down by the local government.



Jinyong came out to see us (a bold young man, two urban ladies, and some overseas Chinese with died hair). She looked so pretty in her blue jacket. Of course, in front of such a crowd, she was extremely shy. We “made” her smile, talk, and even speak in English. But, by the end, I believe she felt comfortable to be with us as she walked us out to see the closed “school” where she was a “teacher”.

Mr. Cheng Xiangyang, a native of the Houyang village, could not be easily spotted out among his neighbors. He has had same life experience as any normal Chinese farmers nowadays – after middle school, go to cities for work, and be part of the “floating population”. If he stayed at hometown during early 1990s, he probably would have also sold his blood at local blood stations. His wife did and now HIV positive.

After Cheng returned home in late 1990s and found out about the “strange disease” that took away many neighbors’ lives, he started going to local medical clinics, and started studying about HIV and AIDS. From 2002 to 2003, he opened a (pre)school in his brother’s frond yard, where 10-20 AIDS (or one parent) orphans can come and study. When we were there, Cheng’s younger brother and some other friends and neighbors were always around.



Cheng brothers are mostly well liked guys in the village. Mr. Cheng also showed us maps of Henan and Shangcai, in which he circled out the 22 national-level focused villages for comprehensive AIDS care, decided by the State Council. He has been traveling on his own to most of these villages and trying to document every single AIDS patients in Henan, either sleeping under the ground or still struggling for life – a quietly disappearing history.

### **April 23. Third Stop: Wenlou Village – The Most Famous AIDS Village in China.**

Wenlou was the first to be exposed, and therefore, it is the most visited AIDS village in Henan these days. There are people who prefer to show Wenlou, and there are people who prefer to only talk about Wenlou.

Newly paved roads made the ride to Wenlou much easier than Houyang. Many villagers were along the side of the new main road to the village. A new – the first in its history – cemented parking lot has been finished by the village committee yard. We didn't go straight to village offices, instead, we sneaked into some villagers' houses.

The first patient we wanted to visit happened to be out for medicine. It is a woman, who has lost her husband, and become psychologically disturbed sometimes. Her house was in very bad shape, to the degree that she slept on the ground outside as the weather went warmer. Empty medicine bottles, trash, broken house ware scattered all over the place. We finally were not able to speak to her in person to find out her every day's life. Our imagination occupied our minds.



A young man later came and joined us. His name is Cheng Dongshan, one of the first HIV patients diagnosed by Prof. Gui Xi'en in 1996. At that time, he encountered strong reaction from the community. Neighbors burned the chairs where he sat before. Luckily, he remains not AIDS until today. Many patients who were tested HIV positive years after him have already died. He has not yet been on any HIV medication.

Surprising to us, Dongshan has an optimistic attitude, maybe because he sees himself a luck one. He told me that he doesn't want to start medication since he heard that many of his neighbors who have been taking such medicines got various pains and side effects. He believes that he is healthier than them. He now rents a vehicle and runs taxi service at the



county center. With 10 yuan a day, he lives contentedly. In those darkest days, when few people in the village knew about this disease, and he was almost isolated, he bought a TV and stayed at home day and night.

I asked him about his wife. He was honest to tell me that she didn't get HIV from selling blood but from him! She was diagnosed positive in 2001. Their two children are healthy. (I wanted to remind him about some basics of AIDS, but didn't really know how to start without hurting his feelings or expressing my reaction toward his wife's case.)



We also visited two other patients, and both are in their late stage of life. The first is a man, in his 40s. Very thin, almost not conscious. His 15 years old daughter was standing beside him and feeding him water and food. She has stopped going to school for three years. Obviously she was not happy, or even maybe resentful. We were not allowed to take any pictures. (During the long ride back to Zhengzhou city, she was the main focus of our conversation. How are we going to help those care-takers? They are ones who are devoting their own life for the patients. They are the second generation victimized by AIDS.)

The last house we visited in Wenlou now is only lived by an old woman and her grand children. She is in her late 60s (younger the current Minister of Health), and has lost her husband, son and daughter in law. Mdm. Wu Yi held her hands when she visited Wenlou in Dec. 2003. Now, she is so sick that can hardly get out of her bed. "Not a single village official has visited me." She murmured to us.

By then, I had to agree with Mr. Cheng Xiangyang that new roads, new buildings, new parking lots, and newly nominated officials are NOT the keys to solve the problem. Nor do the promises of free medicine, free education and life compensation. Patients are still left alone in beds. (The brief meeting afterwards, with village committee members and village AIDS prevention association reconfirmed my impression. One of them said in a firm tongue: "None of our patients cannot get out of their bed, and walk to the village clinic to get medicine. If not, their relatives can help them to walk there." Five minutes after we visited the old lady laying in bed.)

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**April, 24. Fourth Stop: Shuangmiao Village – Where is the Home for Orphans?**

Mr. Zhu Jingzhong, a friend of Hu Jia, used to be a dad of 55 AIDS orphans. Sadly, his “Home of Care and Love” (*guan ai zhi jia*) was shut down on Jan. 31, 2004. All the kids were sent to a government-run orphanage ever since then. Latest news says that Mr. Zhu is building new houses and preparing to re-open his “Home” for more AIDS (or one-parent) orphans. Therefore, we decided to visit him.

Many of us have seen the picture of Zhu Jingzhong’s home from different reports. But this new two floored school building was indeed a shock for us. It is said to be donated by a private company in Beijing.

Zhu himself was not at home, but in Xi’an for a conference. His brother and many helpers (relatives and friends) greeted us. They were happy to tell us that 48 new orphans (or one-parent orphan) will arrive soon. When I asked why the kids cannot go to local schools (we passed by one on the way), their answer is that the kids will be living and studying at the same place, and this will make their life much easier. I was also curious about how the local government’s reaction to this big move. They told me that governmental official are now in quandary. They opened the “Sunny Home” orphanage after shutting down Zhu’s Home of Care and Love, but they couldn’t raise enough funding to sustain it in a long-run. For Zhu, he wants to help more orphans in any case. Even if the government would shut down this new school one day, and take over all the children, Zhu and his helpers believe in that this is still better than doing nothing. Local governmental official came and showed “moral support” for the opening ceremony of the new school building. (very puzzling situation.)

Kids were called back, because of us, the visitors. It was a Saturday, so most of them came back from the Sunny Home for weekend. They told us about their life inside the Sunny Home. A lot of unhappy stories. They clearly like Zhu’s home better. (Since they have met Hu Jia before, they were not too shy.)

I asked a girl: “Do you write letters?” “Yes, I do.” “Whom do you



write to?" "...” No answer for a long while.

They were lively, huddling together at one moment; and sad, quite, suspicious another moment. Their clothes were so different from each other, because most of them were donated from somewhere. Looking at their crowded bedrooms with simple (or broken) furniture – double beds after double beds – I was speechless. Where is a real home for these boys and girls? (Honestly, this is an easy way to end this field report. I am not at all helpful in thinking of solutions. Rural China and farmers are always the recipients of certain social movements led by city people. AIDS prevention might be another case.)