

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We are pleased to present this issue of *China Rights Forum*, “Chineseness: Continuity and Change,” with special contribution from Nick Young, veteran China observer and analyst and founding editor of *China Development Brief*. Founded in 1995, *China Development Brief* is an independent, non-profit publication devoted to increasing communication and strengthening constructive engagement on development issues.

Nick’s concept of examining China’s civil society and his idea of talking to young Chinese abroad have now shaped an issue richly populated by voices from different vantage points about what it means to be Chinese, and very moving reflections on the differences between Chinese and Western cultures.

“Is the Past a Foreign Country?” is a discussion among a scholar, a historian, a journalist, a poet/novelist/painter, and a writer, on the meaning of “Chineseness”—which in different contexts can be either a geographic identification, a cultural and linguistic identification, or a political identification. Among the other issues discussed are whether the entire 5,000 years of Chinese history is indeed Chinese history, and the changing political status of neo-Confucianism in modern Chinese history.

“Culture as Ideology” is an essay about the tug-of-war between the Chinese youth and traditional culture. “Mobilizing Youth, Molding Minds” outlines the Communist Party’s efforts in shaping the thinking of China’s children and youth.

“Perspectives: China’s Youth Abroad” consists of two “focus group” discussions that HRIC conducted in New York and Hong Kong among students, activists, and scholars from China. They were asked to share their insights and experiences of studying, researching, or traveling in China and abroad. The answers they offered went far beyond their educational experiences to include keen observations on the differences

between China and the West. What they said is by turns refreshing, surprising, and moving, and reveals a lot about what the young people think of themselves as Chinese as well as their view on China’s place in the world.

“Corporal Punishment and China’s Assertive Only Children” is about China’s new breed: a generation born under China’s one-child policy. Brought up by parents whose efforts centered on them and them only, they are more assertive than children have ever been in Chinese history: they talk back not only to their teachers, but to their bosses as well!

“HRIC Talks with Hong Kong Activist” features Christina Chan Hau Man, a 21 year-old philosophy student at Hong Kong University who catapulted to both fame and infamy—depending on how one views activism—on May 2, 2008, by leading a protest during the Olympic torch relay in Hong Kong. She is idealistic, thoughtful, and a true believer in the individual’s right to speak.

In this issue, we also offer a selection of poetry written after the Sichuan earthquake that reminds us of the necessity of poetry for enduring grief and tragic loss.

As China emerges strengthened from the spectacularly staged Beijing Olympics and as it continues to grow in economic and political clout, human rights organizations such as HRIC are now facing the challenges posed by a more complex and dynamic terrain. It is a new field of action that calls for ever more effective and constructive ways to engage both the Chinese authorities and people to promote change. The challenge of bridging the vast information and understanding gaps between different individuals, communities, and societies also calls for greater humility and optimism as we continue our efforts to promote a more open China.

Sharon Hom
Executive Director, Human Rights in China
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