

Challenges and Opportunities of Rural Women in China

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Dear sisters from all corners of the Globe,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organizers of Women's Worlds 2005 for inviting me to participate in the conference and be a speaker. It is a great pleasure for me to share with you the challenges and opportunities of rural sisters in China.

We all know that trees are good symbols for the past and that we can't forget the past of a tree. Yet the life of a tree depends upon its roots. If you lose the roots, you lose the tree. But the nature of the tree is to always reach for tomorrow. It's in the branches. You can't separate branches from the tree.

The Roots

To understand the status of rural women in China, it will be useful to keep in mind the following facts. She is a country with a recorded history of over 5,000 years. Yet for more than 2,400 years, the feudalistic dogma of Confucianism has prevailed in China. Confucius, a Chinese philosopher and educator of the 5th and 6th centuries, had a great influence over Chinese society and the way the Chinese people think. But one thing is clear: he despised women. For all women, there are the three obediences – to father before marriage, to husband after marriage, and to son after the death of husband. There are also, according to Confucius, the four virtues: morality, proper speech, modest manner, and diligent work. For centuries, women essentially stayed in the kitchen or women's quarters. They were socialized and institutionalized to think and believe that women were inferior to men and that their sole task was to be an obedient daughter and learn how to do housework when young, to give birth to children, especially sons, take care of their in-laws, husband and children and show concern only in the interests of the family.

Marriage and family systems were characterized by arbitrary and compulsory arrangements in which women had no say, men were supreme over women, and children's interests were not considered. In the legal codes enforced during every imperial dynasty, there was always a portion dealing with marriage and family that was designed to uphold the interests of the ruling classes and the man. People in general took "parents' decisions and matchmakers' recommendations" as a legitimate form of marital arrangement. It was the head of the family rather than the two people involved who had the final say. The emperors, officials and landlords could practice polygamy through concubinage. Married women had submitted to the authority of their husband and their in-laws. When parents thought ill of their daughters-in-law or when their daughters-in-law failed to produce an heir for the family, they could force their son to turn her out of the home.

China is an agriculture-based developing country, with a huge population, and relatively inadequate resources. She has to support 20% of the world's population, relying on only 6.8% of the world's arable land. Besides, she ranks third in size, which means it is very diverse geographically, ethnically, religiously, economically, culturally, and historically. She is unevenly developed. There are marked differences between north and south, east and west, coastal areas and inland areas, rural and urban areas, among the Han and other ethnic groups. Yet it is rural and ethnic women who live in areas where the natural conditions are harsh and the infrastructure poor.

Though since 1949 Mao and the communist party have advocated equality between men and women and women holding up half of the sky, there have never been movements combating feudalism. Women have been encouraged to leave the home and work either in state-run factories and enterprises or collective cooperatives. They have come to see the importance of being economically independent. Yet they do not have the gender awareness to see that even if they do have a job, they are in dead-end jobs, with low wages, few chances of promotion and mono-skills. In fact, the jobs they are doing are the extension of housework. Women take care of the old, the young and the sick at home so they work as school and kindergarten teachers, nurses, cooks and street sweepers. Many women thought that having a job and monthly payment meant liberation and equality.

China has been ruled of man and by man for over two thousand four hundred years. Rule of law, supervision, democracy, freedom and transparency have never been part of Chinese culture. People usually pin their hopes on a kind and benevolent magistrate, who will take care of them like a father. Besides, China has a family-oriented and patriarchy culture. The father has the final say in a nuclear family and the grandfather in an extended family. The division of labor between men and women is very obvious; man the breadwinner and woman the homemaker. To the majority of women, rights were given to them in 1954 when the first Constitution was proclaimed. They hailed [this does not seem like the correct word, but I have no suggestions – are you saying that were pleased over the Constitution?], but didn't know anything about individual rights. But women have benefited from the 1950 Marriage Law in terms of political and civic rights. It was the first time for women to choose their own partners. The law stressed monogamy and the protection of the lawful interests of women and children. Yet due to the great gap between laws and implementation, the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women was approved by the National People's Congress and came into effect in the same year of 1992 with the intension of further protecting the rights of women. But the problem is that it doesn't have any teeth. Besides, there is no mechanism to implement the law. Few cases can refer to it in courts. But it is the best publicized law in China.

The concept of gender is totally new to us (as female social activists), let alone to men, especially those in leading positions. Therefore many existing public policies clearly violate women's rights and the rights of the girl child. I will cite some examples here. According to the land contract management system, land was redistributed in the late 70s, based upon the number of people in each household. China is a country with a large population, but not enough arable land. With the redistribution of land to each family, in many areas, there is little or no land left for newcomers, including brides, grooms and children. To encourage peasants to invest in land they contracted from the collective, there is the policy of "No redistribution within 30 years." There is the Regulation for Civil Servants. According to the regulation, women retire five years earlier and lose all the social benefits. There is also the policy of discrimination against the girl child. If the first child is a girl, after five years the couple can have a second child.

The present economic reforms in China started first in rural areas in 1978 and 1979. Since then, the economy has been undergoing rapid changes. Many rural women, who are better educated, more socially adapted, with multi-skills married with fewer children, in areas with good infrastructure have benefited from the reform. Many of them have become managers of township enterprises and family farms. They have shared the goal of the reform - bringing about economic growth, social prosperity, higher living standards and changes in people's ideas. But the outcome is not equally shared. With urban construction, the developers legally or illegally have taken away more and more land from the peasants, including high-yielding farmland. Rural women have to learn to survive on less and less land. Especially for women of some ethnic groups where natural conditions are harsh and where the infrastructure is poor, lacking water,

especially drinking water, roads, sanitation, education and medical care face more problems.

Rural women make up 65.6% or more of the farm laborers as many men have left the rural areas and farm work to earn cash in the mines, at the construction sites or doing manual work and small business in townships and cities. Rural women are overburdened. They now not only take care of the household, the old, the sick and the young, but they also have to work in the fields, doing all the farm work. With hard physical labor and psychological pressure, about 70% of rural women have psychological problems. They often do not know how to express their feelings, their sufferings and worries due to lack of education. Many of them are illiterates and semi-illiterates. Their productivity tends to be low and often live in subsistence situation.

Reaching for Tomorrow: Three Strong Branches

In China, like in so many other countries, rural women are never helpless victims. Since they have to survive in a physically, socially, legally and culturally hostile environment throughout their lives, they have developed particular strengths, determination and courage. As well, when they are allowed to do so, they have a major role to play in decision making, planning and implementation.

There are many success stories about women who live in poverty-stricken areas with poor infrastructure and little support from people around them. But they all have a mission and vision in life and they have the qualities of creativity, courage and sacrifice in their efforts at the grass roots to improve life and environment in the rural communities. They are role models, working against odds. They never assume things will work smoothly. Therefore they are always prepared to tackle problems and issues. During the process, they learn to work with other women and men as they know in unity there is strength. They also learn to be creative as they know when there is a will, there is a way. They know in the final analysis, they have to get into the decision making process to make better laws and policies with gender mainstreamed. Their undaunted spirit has encouraged many other women to learn from and emulate them, which further advances women's rights and opportunities. I will share with you three of many examples.

Jia Junqiao has the mission and vision to change not only the mindset of the villagers, but the physical environment. Jia, the only senior high school graduate in the village returned to her village, Longju, Hebei Province, upon graduation. She worked with the peasants, soon won the trust of the villagers and became Director of Women's Federation in the village. She encouraged women to diversify, making shoe pads/insoles and doing embroidery to earn some cash. But the income was very low.

Jia is a woman with a mission and vision and wants to do something to change the lives of the villagers. She knew to change the harsh physical conditions, she had to plant trees. She discussed her plan with the village party members and was approved. She organized 30 odd women decided to first plant trees on some mountains, 15miles away. When some men heard about this, they sneered at her plan and said that these women were indulging themselves in wild fantasy. But Jia said, "We should not just be homemakers, we should be breadwinners as well." Right after the Chinese Lunar New Year, these women got together with their tools, they marched on to the bare mountains in the bitter cold winter. The mountains were slowly eroding, with stones all around. They couldn't even dig a pit after a day's hard work. They decided to use explosives to blow up the mountain tops. Jia collected money from each woman and started the work. They used hammers and drill rods. After working for a month, they managed to dig pits all over the mountain top. They faced another difficulty. The pits were ready, but there was no earth around. They had to use the loose surface soil and wild grass to fill up the pits, replacing soil.

When planting season came, there was no money from the village for fruit tree seedlings. These women used

their own money to buy them. With the help of the County Women's Federation, they bought the seedling at the lowest price. Then there was problem of water. It seemed there was nothing that could force these women to bow their heads. When there is a will, there is a way. They carried water from a mile away to irrigate the plants. Again men asked whether they were growing trees in flower pots. Yet women paid no attention to what was said about them. They looked after the seedling with great care. But one day they found that some seedlings were stolen. They decided to guard the seedlings in turn and lasted for about half a year. Misfortune never comes singly. It was a year of draught. To overcome draughts and lack of water, they made up their minds to build reservoirs and ditches to store water. With their efforts, about 95% of the young seedlings survived. The outcome encouraged many villagers to contract bare mountains from the collective to grow fruit trees so as to improve their own lives instead of living on relief. Now there are trees and fruit trees all over the mountain, 100 trees per villagers. Jia said with pride that this has been the first success since I participated in politics. Men have started to look up to her for advice. All the villagers felt that they could get out of poverty.

1993 was an election year for village head. She won overwhelming victory in the election and became the village head. Though some men voted for her, others took a wait-and see attitude due to strong traditional ideas and conflicts between and among kinship in the rural areas. To prove her ability and accountability, she first tried to find out the major issues concerned by the villagers. Then she decided her agenda: first is to mend the roads so that the villagers could take their agriculture products to the market, two is to sink wells so that the villagers would have easier access to water; three is to renovate the grade school so that children would have a safe and good place to study and play and the villagers would not have to worry and concentrate on whatever they were doing

There had been just one dirt road leading to the outside world. Villagers used to use mule carts or hand carts for transportation. They built a dirt road along the bend of the river bed in 1986. But the road became bumpy and rough after rain and floods. Jia went to the Country government for help when there was not enough money. She managed to get cement from the government. As to cobbles, she mobilized the villagers to go to the river bed several miles away to get them. It took them two whole years to build a three mile road because whenever they had some money they would build a section.

To solve the problem of finding underground water, local policy was changed in Jia's favor. If a village could sink a well, producing 30 cubic of water, it would get 20,000yuan (\$2436) subsidies from the government. A member of the village committee said what if they couldn't reach the target. But Jia said that they should seize the opportunity. She invited a team of drillers to help. After two failed attempts, the villagers didn't want to try again. But Jia insisted. They tried again and found underground water. The quality of the water was good. With water, it is possible for the villagers to gradually realize their dream of turning the bare mountains into orchards.

When renovating the village school proved to be overwhelming, Jia decided to build the new school on a piece of flat land. She arranged with a construction team and was ready to raise funds when the County Women's Federation told her that the Office of Rural women Knowing All magazine was to sponsor a meeting in Zhengzhou entitled "First Forum on Development and Policies for Rural Women." Jia didn't want to go as she thought that being a rural woman, she had nothing to contribute. But when she heard that she might get some help from the participants to build the school, she went, her first time to participate in a forum. She shook all over while she read her speech. She was encouraged not to read the script, but to speak, she cried. With tears, she shared her stories - all the scenes coming back to her. After her talk, many people donated money for her school. She raised 360,000 yuan (\$43,850). The school was finished in the spring of

1995 and children moved in on June first, international Children's Day.

Jia continues her work, which has resulted in awards and recognition for her courage and good work. She received the Prize for Women's Creativity in Rural Life" during the Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing from Women's World Summit Foundation, a humanitarian, international NGO founded in Geneva in 1991. To get into the decision-making process to ensure better policies for women, she is now serving her third term as a People's Deputy to Hebei Province.

Wang Zhilan is a woman who dares to break the age-old tradition and work together with her husband to improve the ecological system in her community and help people to be economically independent and stand on their own two feet. Wang was born to a poor peasant family in Ding Xian County, Shanxi Province in 1960. She is clever, eager to learn and try out new things and care for others. But unfortunately she failed in the exam for entering college and soon became a schoolteacher in her village –Gaozaicun Village. The villagers only relied on farming and their annual income on an average was about \$50 in the eighties and early nineties, only barely enough to keep themselves alive. That was why Gaozaicun Village used to be one of the state-level poverty-stricken villages. It is because the area is hilly, the soil is poor and water scarce. Things hardly grew there.

Wang fell in love with a young, kind and capable widower with two young children and parents. They got married in 1983 despite strong opposition from her parents and friends to break through the age-old tradition. She then had to give up teaching and became a full time mother and wife as her husband was a carpenter, earning cash outside the home to support the family. But on top of everything she had to do farming as well. To improve their lives, the couple decided to start a shop in the village in 1986. But when they heard that raising sheep could bring in more income in 1989, they bought about 100 sheep with fine wool from Xinjiang Province. With knowledge, skills and care, the number of sheep was doubled within three years. Their annual income increased up to \$2500. Then she tried raising pigs, but failed in the first year. Yet she didn't lose heart. Instead, she learned from her failure, drew useful lessons from it and tried again. With better and more scientific methods, she started to profit from it. The net profit was about \$600 in 1989 and then went up to \$3700 annually.

Wang then tried something new. She started to grow corn on her 6 hectares of land with plastic sheets. The production was doubled. Then she bought a fodder grinder and made her own fodder. Gradually she diversified, combining farming, breeding and processing and became more successful.

In response to the call of the Central Government to plant trees, shrubs and grass to change the environment in 1999, she and her husband made up their minds to contract about 1476 hectares of barren hillsides and poor land. They used about 810 hectares to grow trees and economic forest and 660 hectares for grass because their dream is to turn their hometown into a rich and prosperous one.

During this whole period, Wang Zhilan has never forgotten other villagers and the community. Her dream is to make the village a better place for every single person. When she was raising sheep, she provided healthy young lamb and fodder for the villagers at a discount price and she patiently offered technical help to them. In the fall of 2001 she donated about \$1250 worth of saplings and grass seeds and 15,000 kilos of corn seeds to the villagers. She also provides part time jobs for over 40 people annually so as to help them increase their incomes. She also encourages the villagers to actively participate in planting trees so as to improve the local ecological system and increase their income. She has become a role model. Now with Wang Zhilan's help and endless efforts in the village, 350 households out of 530 have increased their annually incomes up

to \$125. She was a laureate of Women's World Summit Foundation in 2002.

Zheng Bing has a strong sense of social responsibility to help change the traditions of her villagers to follow blindly without knowing why. She has been a school teacher for ten years and knows that "Knowledge is power" and that power can generate more power. When she finds that peasants know so little about science and technology, she uses her own money to invite professors to train peasants so as to increase their incomes. She also knows the importance of getting the peasants organized. She has organized Zaizi Village Peasants' Association. With it, the members have cleaned up heaps of garbage and built new roads, linking up the village with the county and the city. Now they have formed several coops to produce different products so as to improve the livelihood of the peasants.

Zheng, born in Dec. 1968 is Chair of Zaizi Village Peasants' Association, Shanxi Province. When she was a school teacher, she often went to help her husband, Xie Fuzheng, Director of Zaizi Center of Science and Technology in her spare time. Soon she found that peasants didn't know enough about the basics in managing their land and production. They blindly followed their neighbors, thinking the more fertilizers they applied, the bigger the harvests. One sunny day in 1998, Su Zhangye, a male peasant came to buy 800 yuan worth of fertilizers for his 0.41acre of land, growing asparagus for export. Yet she said that 300 yuan of fertilizers would be enough and that overuse of fertilizers would not only be a waste, but would also harden the soil. Su wouldn't listen and said he would pay cash. Zheng Bing refused to sell, saying she would not support this kind of unscientific investment. Su got angry and went somewhere else to buy them.

Zheng felt frustrated as she thought that the Center should be worthy of the name, which should help raise the peasants awareness in using science and technology. She decided to invite three professors from universities to train peasants. But would there be enough audience to come and listen? In her spare time, she visited peasants in the close-by ten villages to find out about their needs and demands, to get them organized and come to the training session. It was finally decided to have the session on Dec. 24, 1998. The session was held on a road with more than 400 peasants. But there were only 300 stools. Many of them sat on the road or on their bikes in the winter cold. It was planned for a one- hour session, but it lasted for four hours as peasants asked many questions.

Then she decided to leave teaching and serve the peasants heart and soul. But the decision was a hard one. She had been a teacher for thirteen years with steady income. Her husband and parents were against it. They spent about one fourth of their money for the training. Could they go on doing the same thing? The impact of the training was great, but some people started to gossip, saying that Zheng just wanted to show off and become a local official. Once she has made up her mind, she wants to do a good job for the peasants.

Doing a good job is not easy. When she went to the Bureau of Agriculture to invite technicians to come and teach the peasants, she was told that she had to follow the proper process. When she needed a blackboard for training, the village committee would not lend one to her. She then went to the City Women's Federation to ask for help. With their help, she organized over ten different training sessions for women from 1999 to 2000 with technicians from the Association of Agricultural Technology, Bureau of Water Conservancy, Bureau of Agriculture, etc... The training has helped the peasants to understand more about the crops they grow and they demand better technicians to teach them to grow new economic crops so as to bring in higher incomes. She went to see Mr. Niu Yingjie, Deputy Mayor of Yongji in charge of agriculture, who then was looking for partnership for a chicken processing company. She wanted to help women in rural areas and organized thirty families to raise chickens for company, encouraging each family to borrow 5,000 yuan (\$609) from the local Credit Cooperative with her as the guarantee. She also tried to contact companies that

provided good feed for the chickens. While she was busy helping the women, one of the managers of a feed company changed the quality of the feed and that caused the women to lose money and stop raising chickens. Just at this time there was a change in personnel in the local Credit Cooperative. They demanded payment. Zheng and Xie had to use their own money and property to guarantee that they would pay everything back within five years.

Misfortune never comes singly. The price for asparagus fell. Peasants' incomes dropped sharply and they were unable to pay the bills for the fertilizers from her center. Yet the center had to pay its bills.

She started to go to peasant homes to collect bills in June, 2001 and found that many women had nothing to do and felt depressed. When asked, why couldn't they live like city people, learning how to dance in their spare time? They said they wouldn't dare to do so. Zheng said that if they wanted to learn yangge (a popular rural folk dance), she would go and find someone to teach them. She then organized 24 women to learn how to do yangge. First they did it in the side streets, and then Zheng rented a hall for them. More and more women joined them. Zheng Bing found that women stopped gossiping and danced yangge together. To participate in dancing, women became more efficient in doing their housework. And there were fewer quarrels among husbands and wives in the village. When she heard that women from other villages would also like to join them, she at once set up The Rural Women's Club in Yongji City and sent women to teach dancing in 35 villages around them. On the 15th of the first month of the Chinese lunar New Year, she organized 1,000 women to do yangge in a large gathering. It was a resounding success. The more peasants got organized, the more they wanted to do thing together. Zheng then organized rural women to form debate groups so as to change the mindset of rural women and men. For example, they debated topics like "Which is better, a boy or a girl?" which is better, bungalows or buildings?", "Which is better, to be a house wife or to develop your potential?" etc.

Zheng Bing participated in a training workshop sponsored by Beijing Cultural Development Center and was greatly inspired by the training. She was determined to do still better as she knew she was not alone, sharing love and care for others. When she went home, she called upon the peasants to clear all the garbage and they improved the village roads. 97% of the households participated in the work. They came to see the importance of getting organized. Women from 27 households got organized to weave cloth and make arts and crafts, women from 110 [what is this number?] other households organized to make steam bread to sell in the market; 120 households got together to grow wheat; 82 households put their resources together, donating 300 yuan each and formed a paint shares company. Now there are 3800 members in the Association from 35 villages. They are gradually taking their fate into their own hands. They are not only changing their individual mindsets, they are also changing their entire community.

Wang Shuxiu knew when young that she had to upgrade herself before she could help others. She also knows the saying that "Live and learn." She has walked her talk. Though she didn't finish second grade, she is studying on her own. She wants to build a school for the village children so that they can enjoy compulsory education in the village.

Wang, born in Mancheng Country, Hebei Province in Feb. 1963 was adopted by two poor peasants when she was 3 months of age. She attended school for only one year due to poverty. She had to help her parents with farm work and took care of her step brothers when she was young. To support the family, she had to leave home at the age of 15 and found work at a construction site in Beijing. She was hard working, eager to learn and was not afraid of difficulties. She first worked as an apprentice, later she contracted to build simply constructed one story buildings. Then she contracted to put up buildings. While she was working on her

projects in Beijing, she happened to visit a village, called Daying, in Tongxian County. The village is of the same size as her own, that used to be a very poor village, like her own, but now the villagers have moved into two story buildings with higher incomes. This has inspired her to want to go home one day to help make changes in her own village. She worked even harder. She grew with her projects both in Beijing and Baoding and became a millionaire after 16 years of struggle.

Wang thought it was time for her to go home and do something for her villagers. She went back to her poor village. One day she stood on the bank of Zao River and was shocked by what she saw there. Parts of the river bank had collapsed; the river was polluted, there were stone pits everywhere, and wild grass was growing. She said to herself: Are we and our future generations going to face this kind of environment forever? She was determined to change it and turn it into a piece of green land. When she told her husband and relatives about her plan, they were all against it. They said that she didn't know how to use her money and that she was just throwing her money away. Some villagers said that she might have gone crazy. But she had already made up her mind.

She contracted that piece of wasteland, put up a small hut on the bank and started a new beginning. She leased 4 bulldozers, provided jobs for seventy peasants and worked day and night for two months, leveling over 30 acres of land and spending 540,000 yuan (\$65 , 800). She sought help from experts and bought 1,100,000 yuan worth of seedlings on her land. By 2002 she had already built 20 greenhouses to grow crops like a variety of melons and vegetables. Just before harvest time, an exceptionally strong storm came and destroyed all her greenhouses. She lost over 300,000 yuan (\$36,500) worth of investment. She cried over the loss, but she knew crying would not help.

Wang started again. She planted dates on 13 acres of land and rebuilt 50 greenhouses to grow fruits and vegetables in 2002. To guarantee the quality of her products and create steady markets, she pays good salaries to people who have the expertise. Now she has steady markets in Beijing and Tianjing, both municipalities. To help villagers to get out of poverty, she subsidized 40 households to build greenhouses to grow fruits and vegetables for markets, 8,000 yuan (\$975) per households. Each household made only 1,000 yuan (\$122), but now their income has increased about ten times. About 70% of the households have moved into new houses. Wang has provided long term jobs for 20 women villagers and 50 temporary jobs each year. She has just helped build a one mile long road in the village for the villagers. Her dream is still some distance away, the dream of helping those who help themselves to get out of poverty in her village –Xiaoxucheng Village, Mancheng County, Hebei Province. She knows the importance of education. She is studying hard on her own in her spare time. One of her dreams is to build a school in the village so that children do not have to walk so far to go to school.

Nourishment for the Tree

The most important part of our mission is to empower rural women and change their mindsets, telling them they are human beings first and women second. They can be successful if they work hard and persist in doing so. We know that China is still a 3rd world country. To change China, it is necessary to change the rural areas. To change the rural areas, it is necessary to change women. If you teach a man, you are teaching just one man, but if you teach a woman, you are teaching the whole family and generations to come.

Being the first NGO that serves rural women and migrant women only, how do we learn their needs and demands? We have the “Rural Women” magazines, distributed in 16 provinces. Readers write to us, telling us about their frustrations, worries and successes. Our socially committed reporters with gender awareness

often go to different parts of the country to visit rural women, listen to their stories, and then share them with the readers. In fact, the purpose of all our projects is to meet with their needs and demands. It is a bottom up approach. Our center has been running projects like literacy, health literacy, Community Action to Prevent Rural Women's Suicide, women's political participation, and women and market. The literacy project on the center won the ProLiteracy Worldwide International Award in 2004 from ProLiteracy Worldwide, a non-governmental service organization in the United States. We also run a school, called "Changping Practical Skills Training Center for Rural Women." Our goal is to empower women and girl drop outs to become independent, self-reliant and responsible citizens. We also offer skill training to these girls and find employment for them. Through them we will be helping their families to get out of poverty. The school received the Award of Dedication from the Beijing City Government in 2004. For those rural women who have come to Beijing, we have set up the "Migrant Women's Club" to offer empowerment programs to raise migrant women's legal awareness so that they know about their rights and interests, to understand the importance of upgrading themselves in terms of knowledge and responsibility, and also provide some skills training for them; for example: English, Chinese, math and computer classes.

We believe every single person is a seed. Every seed needs nourishment and room for development. We think it is our mission to provide opportunities for seeds that have been denied the opportunity because we believe in every seed. We know that if a seed is strong and healthy, it will send its roots deeper into the soil to absorb nourishment, it will have a strong stem to stand straight, to blossom, to bear flowers or fruits and to produce good seeds. Seeds grow and form circles. We are a seed in a circle, the circle of sharing, equality, empowerment, and solidarity. We are both a seed and a circle, because only seeds of sharing can form circles. Every global citizen is a seed, and we form circles of equality, peace, development to make this world a better place for ourselves and for the future generations to come. We also know it is a new long march for us Chinese. But with the support and solidarity of sisters from all corners of the world, we know we will triumph.