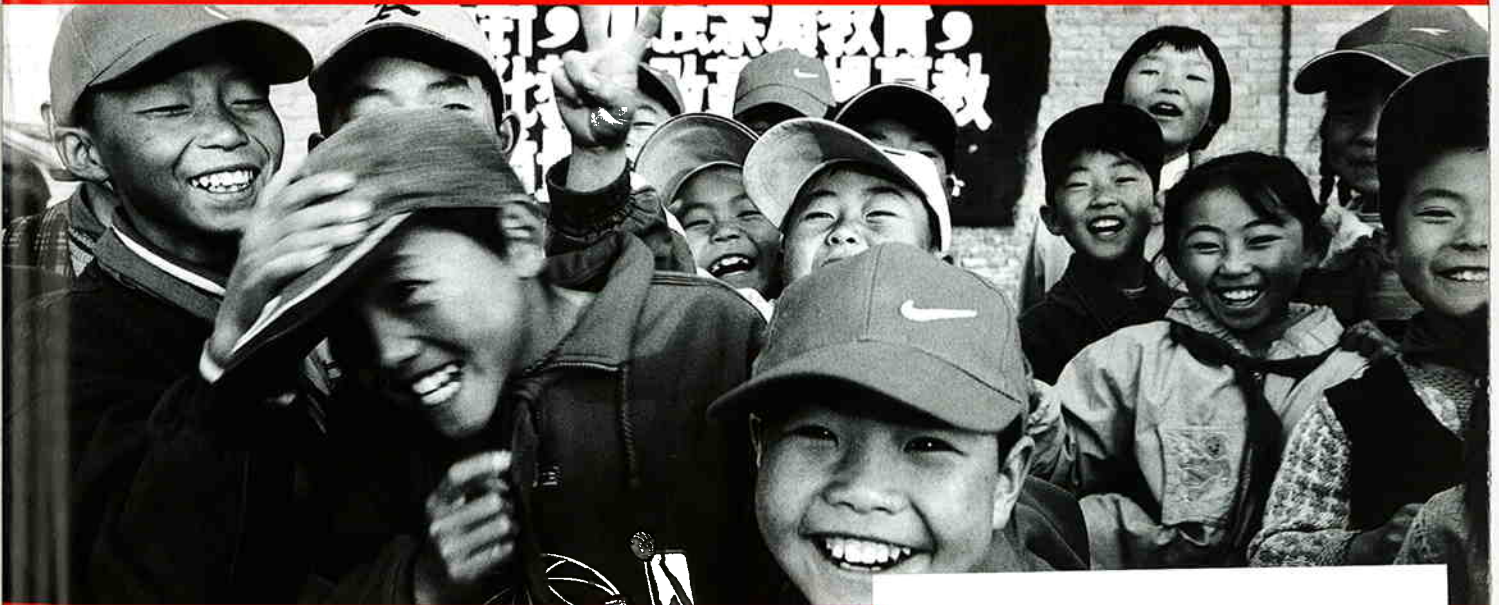


★ SPECIAL ISSUE ★

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INSIDE THE NEW CHINA



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where foreigners used to congregate in the 1920s. There, for a price, one can again drink champagne, eat a lavish dinner, and watch Chinese cabaret dancers pivot in their feather boas and stiletto heels as they descend the ornamental staircase. Even the once-condemned imperialist past can be repackaged as the harmless accompaniments to a night on the town.

FROM THE standpoint of job creation, the resurgence of the traditions of craftsmanship, which have survived long years of communist rejection of the past, may also prove significant. In the Forbidden City right now, craftspeople and carpenters from villages in central and northern China, under the auspices of the World Heritage Foundation, are rebuilding a section of the palace complex that burned to the ground in the 1920s. Every detail of each beam and bracket is flawlessly executed, every pillar handcrafted from hardy Harbin pine, coated with hemp and clay, and bonded with pigs' blood before being hand-smoothed and lacquered to a translucent beauty. Then the painters take over, decorating every inch of ceiling beams and balcony carving with the traditional blue and green and red designs that grace the other surviving buildings. And in many other towns and rural areas, temples and shrines are being restored with the same impeccable detailing.

Scholarly activism also has its place. In many cities the imperatives of hard-driving economic growth are still paramount. Yet in some parts of China, scholars and those with a larger view of the past have been fighting courageous and sometimes successful battles to save whole communities. In the Yangtze delta province of Jiangsu, for instance, most of the major cities have been irrevocably developed, and there is no chance of recapturing their lost charms. But a recent study of six smaller towns in the region around Suzhou by Ruan Yisan, a professor in the department of city and town planning at Shanghai's Tongji University, gives us a different picture. Ruan shows how sometimes the local Communist cadres can be persuaded that the preservation and renewal of past beauties—hand-cut stone walkways for the streets, exquisite lattice, ornamental shutters, carved doorways, and expanses of canal with stone stairs leading down to the water—can have economic rewards: They can be saved and made the ba-

The AIDS Bombshell

DR. DAVID HO

A native of Taiwan who came to the U.S. as a teenager, Ho, 51, is executive director of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center at Rockefeller University and coordinator of the China AIDS Initiative. He has made more than two dozen visits to China in the past three years.



VINCENT YU/AP

THE AIDS EPIDEMIC is a real worry for China, although its magnitude is still unclear. The Chinese put the official total of AIDS cases at about a million. The reality is, the data are so poor that it could be half a million. Or two million. UNAIDS has called China's epidemic the "titanic peril" because it could blow up to ten million or 20 million cases by the end of this decade. To me, that's very frightening.

In years past the Chinese health authorities did not place a great importance on the disease. There was a level of denial, a belief that AIDS would not affect China in a significant way because China is intrinsically different. Of course, those of us who work on these diseases know that viruses, bacteria, and other microbes do not obey artificial boundaries created by humans.

There has been a dramatic turnaround in the past year. The SARS epidemic had a big impact. It was a wake-up call for China. SARS revealed deficiencies in the health-care system—a disease-surveillance system that was inadequate, a health-care system that was not sufficiently transparent—and it led not only to a catastrophe for the country but to an embarrassment in front of the nations of the world. Cities were paralyzed, and the economy was severely affected. In April 2003, the Chinese made a midcourse correction and dealt with SARS quite effectively. They got it under control by the summer.

As they reflected, Chinese officials realized that they had serious health-care problems. That includes HIV/AIDS. It includes a health-care infrastructure that has broken down, particularly in the rural areas, where 800 million people live. Most people don't have insurance, and the costs of health care are rising. If the AIDS epidemic spreads, it could overwhelm the health-care system.

This is not to say that China has found the correct course. At the top, there's the political will to do the right thing. But China is a huge country with many layers of bureaucracy, and when you move down to local levels there's a great deal of resistance still.

A lot of work needs to be done. Prevention efforts should be expanded. China has a chance to avert millions of cases of AIDS. The effort is just beginning to take off. Henan and Yunnan provinces are launching large-scale testing efforts. That's commendable. We have a series of public-service announcements that will air this fall with Magic Johnson and Yao Ming, together, sending very potent messages about awareness and nondiscrimination. But there's a window of only a few years to get that work done before the epidemic growth curve takes off exponentially.

Because resources are limited, a balance must be struck between prevention and treatment. Lately the emphasis has been on treatment. It's robbing Peter to pay Paul. China has to realize that AIDS is a threat to its well-being and prosperity in the long term. Greater resources must be committed to the effort. — *Interview by Marc Gunther*

★ IMAGINING CHINA'S FUTURE

sis for an urban life of aesthetic richness adjusted to the needs of an educated and affluent middle-class lifestyle.

Sometimes Ruan lost his battles; he was even banned from studying some towns. But on occasion, he reports, it was possible to win over Communist cadres and enlist their help, not only to restore a town's past glories but also to remove the overlays of concrete and asphalt and demolish some of the ugliest of the carelessly erected new buildings. In Wuzhen, Ruan and the locals established storehouses where they could keep handcrafted materials that they provided at modest cost to those undertaking restoration work. Now and then, local officials helped Ruan and his colleagues get funding from agencies in Beijing for their work. Such examples suggest the possibilities of how the central government might link up with local communities, saving them from aesthetic destruction and creating beautiful environments where not only citizens can live with pleasure, but foreigners will also pay to visit.

It is not only tourist income, craftsmanship, and a bold urban aesthetic vision that are at issue as China begins to reaffirm the value of its past. There are elements in



some sites—especially in places that once were not considered Chinese, such as Tibet, Kashgar, or Harbin—that speak to the nature of China's identity. The way the sites are defined is central to the con-

cept of a "greater China" and can be a source of nationalist pride. That in turn can lead to government support for explorations in archeology and religious and political history, which can open up new

Building the New China

I.M. PEI

Born in 1917 in Guangzhou (then Canton), I.M. Pei came to the U.S. in 1935. The celebrated architect—the Louvre's glass pyramid, the Bank of China tower in Hong Kong—is completing his fourth major project in China, an art museum in Suzhou.

THERE ARE two Chinas: the China of Shanghai and the China of the farms. Architecturally, Shanghai is the new China—its entry into the world. Like my wearing a Western suit, it's appropriate. Shanghai has to suit up to do business with the world. When General Electric or IBM goes there, they want to move into a building not unlike a building here. Chinese architecture is not trying to convey a message or style. The skyscrapers are like ours because they are adapting to the Western way of business.

Today there are some young architects trying to search for a vernacular, but the wave of foreign-imported ideas is powerful; the force is difficult to resist. And so China imports talent. It seeks architects of great stature because they want to learn from us. Some of them are good, some are mediocre, but even the good ones aren't doing their

best work in China because they don't feel challenged—the client is still immature. It takes two to make good architecture—a savvy client and a creative architect. But a savvy client is not yet in China. The client is open—they say, "New, good, I've never seen that before, let's do it." There's a can-do attitude that is very good right now in China. But it is also a bit reckless.

It's easy for me to work there because I am Chinese. It was meaningful for me to build Hong Kong's Bank of China tower because the bank is part of my family. My father worked there since 1910; the bank chairman had to come to America to ask my father for his permission. Can you imagine? I was 60 years old, and he had to ask my father, would he consent to let his son design this building for us? It's the Chinese way to pay respect.

Architecture is a very primitive need—China needs it to expand. But architecture is also an art form, a cultural phenomenon, and China needs to develop confidence again in its own culture. Out of confidence will come a new life, new culture, and a unique architecture. But not until then. — Interview by Abraham Lustgarten



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