

Presented by Tianjin TV "China Right Here" Program



CHINA RIGHT HERE

by Yin Chang & Laurence J. Brahm

This is not a memoir. It's just a conversation record of the world and China in the eyes of the authors and their friends.

Those we've talked with are all "road hitters" of the times; 19 fascinating interviews link up several Chinese and foreign generations' profound recollection of the 30 years of reform and opening-up.

China Intercontinental Press

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A large, stylized map of China is rendered in red and white ink. The map is positioned in the upper half of the image, with its outline and internal features suggested by the ink strokes. The red ink is used for the main body of the map, while white ink is used for the surrounding areas and some internal details.

CHINA

RIGHT HERE

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CONTENTS

Preface	4
Foreword	6
Introduction.....	8
Laurence J. Braham	12
Chinese Dragon	
Khalid Malik	46
China and the UN's Future	
Carter Malik	58
Forever Shangri-La	
Peter Wilson.....	66
Win-Win Partnership Between China and the World	
Fernando Reyes Matta	78
Old Friends, New Consensus	
Sidney Shapiro	92
China, A Nation You Can't Write Enough About	
Wu Wei	100
Presenting China to the World by Books	
Li Xiguang	116
Open the Door to the World	
Allen T. Cheng.....	132
An Important Role for China	

Paul J. Mooney.....	144
Make China a Better Place	
Caroline Puel	154
Live in China	
Ma Ling	160
“Third Eye” of the Press	
Flora Cheung	170
Love in China	
Yang Liping	180
Enigma, Search	
Ai Jing	190
Love Is a Productive Force	
Cheng Xindong	204
The Three Decades of Art and the Times Going Together	
Jim Zhang	218
Confident about the Chinese Market in the Long Term	
Daniel Fung.....	230
Baleno – Designer Brand	
Rueybin Kao	244
21 Years of Motorola	
Epilogue	256

PREFACE

The year 2008 marks the 30th anniversary of the launch of China's reform and opening-up initiative. To commemorate this special occasion, a large number of TV programs and publications have been produced. The China TV Artists Association has also selected the best ones of the 108 documentaries themed around the reform and opening-up. The interviews of "China Right Here", the documentary which has received the Grand Prize as a masterpiece, has drawn my attention, and triggered my fond memories of the 30-year journey of reform and opening-up.

The 30 years has been a period of time in which China opens her arms to the world, draws upon the world's experiences, and creates a brand-new development model on the basis of the nation's actual conditions. The foreigners' observation and description of the enormous changes in China over the 30 years are not only vivid, but also valuable information for Chinese and foreign readers alike.

Yin Chang, the producer of Tianjin TV's "China Right Here" Program, has done an excellent job in exploring this topic. She has not only successfully hosted the TV program, but also adapted the "China Right Here" Program into a book, using 19 fascinating interviews to link up several Chinese and foreign generations' profound memories of the 30 years. The long name list of the featured interviewees alone would arouse readers' interest: Paul J. Mooney, Caroline Puel, Ma Ling, Allen T. Cheng, and Li Xiguang, who frequently appear on the forefront of Chinese and overseas press reporting on China's development. The list also includes Khalid Malik, UN Resident Coordinator in China, and his wife Carter Malik; Fernando Reyes Matta, Ambassador of Chile to China; and Peter Wilson, Political Counselor of the British Embassy in Beijing, all of whom are passionate friends of Chinese people. Also on the list are Ruyebin Kao, Daniel Fung, Laurence J. Brahm, and Jim Zhang, who are international business elites riding the tide of economic globalization; and Flora Cheung, Cheng Xindong, Yang Liping, and Ai Jing, who are celebrated Chinese stars in the global art community. The list also contains a name that I admire so much – Mr. Sidney Shapiro, who translated *Outlaws of the Marsh* into English and received the highest

translation award of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles; as well as Madame Wu Wei, an active facilitator of the publishing of Chinese books for global readers. The personal success of these prominent personalities has also reflected the achievements of the 30 years of reform and opening-up.

“Reform and Opening-up” is a term that summarizes an era in China. Many foreign nationals, who live in the era of China’s reform and opening-up, especially those who are long-term residents in China, tend to synchronize the pace of their life with that of Chinese people. As a documentary recording the life experiences of foreign nationals in China, the “China Right Here” Program features a level of originality rarely seen elsewhere in China. The down-to-earth and passionate production team has transformed the creative idea into a program featuring strong visual impact.

I really like the title shared by the program and the book – *China Right Here*. The reform and opening-up have dismantled barriers and opened China to the entire world, and more and more foreigners have found themselves in China. China has also been working hard to elevate herself, to be more observant of the world, and to communicate with the world with more confidence. I’m convinced that the transformation from strangeness and familiarity, from doubt to trust, from confrontation to cooperation, and from rivalry to win-win partnership, is the direction of global harmony and the progress of the times.

Zhao Qizheng

Chairman, Foreign Affairs Committee, Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference

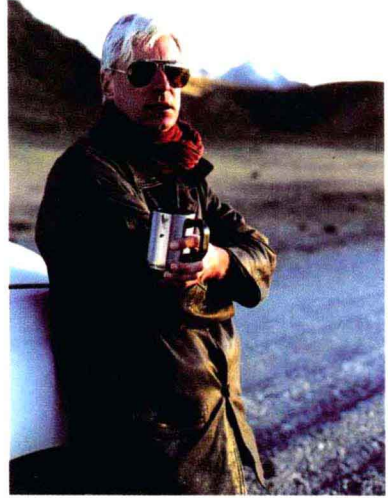
Dean, School of Journalism and Communication, Renmin University of China

January 2009

FOREWORD

I have witnessed China's three decades of reform and opening-up. I witnessed it as a student, lawyer, investment consultant, entrepreneur, filmmaker, author and now social philanthropist. So, one might say that as an individual I have transformed with China. So it would seem not only appropriate, but perfectly natural to co-author a book and co-host a program on the thirty years of reform and opening-up which I have not only witnessed, but been a part of.

This past autumn the decision was made to produce a documentary and write a book about China's thirty years of reform and opening-up. Now the last thing one might imagine is that the spark of this idea came from India. I was making a documentary with Hong Kong film director David Lai in a crowded section of Old Delhi. Commenting on the relevance of China's economic reform experiment in lifting so many millions out from poverty, and the road that India now must take following its own economic development trajectory, the three decades of change that I had witnessed in China flashed before my mind. David Lai must have been thinking the same. The next morning at 6:00 am he knocked on my hotel room door explaining he hadn't slept the previous night. He wanted to make a documentary about China's reforms, and asked me to co-host the program with Tianjin TV Station presenter Yin Chang. During filming we found the interviews so compelling, we felt it necessary to accompany the program by turning their content



into a book commemorating China's thirty years of economic reform and opening-up.

Now only a few months later, both the documentary and book are complete. It could not have possibly been done without the strong support provided by Tianjin TV Station, Madame Wu Wei of the State Council Information Office, and David Lai himself who directed the production. I want to especially thank them for making this program and book a success.

Throughout the filming of this documentary and writing of the book version, people asked me what I thought of China's past three decades of reform and opening-up. I could only answer, I have walked hand-in-hand with the Chinese people, "crossing the river by stepping on one rock at a time," to draw from the famous quote that Deng Xiaoping once used to characterize China's gradualist reform process, that sought to change systems and ideas through evolution rather than shock. That was looking back. Now thirty years later, it looks like we will continue crossing the rocks one step at a time. And the road ahead will be long.

Laurence J. Brahm
Beijing, January 2009

INTRODUCTION

This is not a memoir.

It is a record of dialogues between the world and China in the eyes of the authors and their friends.

When it comes to the “30 years of reform and opening-up”, both a natural time period on the calendar and a vital juncture in history, a lot of people would like to say something. Yet, before they can open their mouths, the 31st year has arrived.

In the powerful current of the times, people keep pressing ahead, with no time to pause to catch their breath or to voice their feelings.

Yet, in moments of solitude and peace, we may wonder that over the five thousand years, which era has given people the same room for being tolerant and for sharing as the contemporary era? And which era has given self-examiners and even spiritual rebels the same room for being accommodated and for communicating as the contemporary era? – What on earth is this era?!

With the passage of time, the stories that happened yesterday are being forgotten today? Over the past decade or decades, the life of Chinese people has rapidly changed with a virtually maniac order. In particular, the digitized order of life has made Chinese people, who are accustomed to thousands of years of poetic narration, less receptive to the solidness of realistic narration.

“The present” has kept us fully occupied. Who would have the time and energy to take serious stock of “the past” and to think about “what on earth this era is” in peace and quiet?

Of course, unless it is used as diversion or entertainment, since its creation, the word “history” has never been labeled as “cautious and prudent”. Anyone is free to interpret or define the past while laughing merrily, cursing angrily, chatting or clamoring. This



has nothing to do with right and wrong, as history never stands out and says “no” to any comment.

Never in history have Chinese people been moving forward with so little on their conscience. Bid farewell to the past and look ahead into the future. History requires a climax, and the times need a dominant theme. And, we are becoming increasingly aware that no voice can sound independently of this era. What’s the dominant theme of this era?—The symphony of the convergence of tens of millions of voices.

So, we’re coming back to the question above —

What on earth is this era?!

At the scene of our discussions, the atmosphere is hectic. Language, accent, background, occupation, angle, and dimensions; all of their labels read “me”; those whom we talk with are the road hitters of the era. If you insist on characterizing them, we prefer to call them “Global Road Hitters”. They’re not simple visitors, nor hurried travelers. They hit the road; they dispel the clouds to reveal the sun; they erect signs for those who are lost; they blaze trails for those who are timid. They fall down from time to time, but they never fall out; they often run into blocks, but they always press ahead fast to stay at the forefront of the times. Laurence J. Brahm, Sidney Shapiro, Wu Wei, Rueybin Kao, Khalid



Malik, Carter Malik, Peter Wilson, Fernando Reyes Matta, Li Xiguang, Cheng Xindong, Yang Liping, Flora Cheung, Allen T. Cheng, Paul J. Mooney, Caroline Puel, Daniel Fung, Ma Ling, Jim Zhang, Ai Jing... These familiar or unfamiliar names, or vivid or vague memories, link up our interview journeys.

We also attempt to search for a symbol of history and a sound of the times from our interview experiences, through the eyes of the “Global Road Hitters”, in order to capture the 30 years of most meaningful changes in Chinese history.

I know that all of them have stories. I had heart-to-heart talks with them in front of the camera, beyond the camera, under neon lights, with wine glass in hand, when the city lights come on at night, in downpours, on snowy mountains and plateaus, and in rain-drenched alleys in the south. On all journeys where it was possible to exchange thoughts, my friends told me many of their stories. They were sincere, straightforward, and unreserved to the largest extent possible, yet their remarks left enough room for imagination. A few minutes into the conversation, I always felt their insights, knowledge, and passion.



As the interview progressed, I became increasingly eager to rub my eyes so that I could catch a clear glimpse of the 30 years of reform and opening-up. This also made me reluctant to alter or leave out so many valuable materials, and served readers a fast hodgepodge. If I had done that, I would have betrayed my new and old friends who took the interviews and failed to live up to the expectations of the readers. Thus, I will try to reproduce the scene – a heated, interesting and promising scene of discussions – on the pieces of paper. Should you be willing to join us, we will halt our production and wait for you...

Yin Chang
January 2009

Laurence J. Brahm





Laurence J. Brahm

Laurence J. Brahm, a lawyer and political economist by profession, serves as CEO of Naga Group, and resides in Beijing. He is author of over 20 books on China, including *China as No. 1*, *Red Capital*, *Reengineering China*, *Negotiating in China – 36 Strategies*, and *China's Century*. Fluent in Mandarin and Cantonese, he is a leading commentator on China's current economic reforms and business environment. In addition to advising Fortune 500 companies on their China investment strategies, he has served as government consultant on enterprise and financial reform issues in China, Vietnam and Laos.

LAURENCE J. BRAHAM: CHINESE DRAGON

Braham:

For 27 years, people have been asking me why I came to China. I came here in 1981, about 27 years ago. Many people asked, “Why did you come and have stayed for so long?” I answered, “I don’t know.” Then they asked, “It must be like this – when you were a little boy, your parents were diplomats, so you came.” I said no. “Then, your parents must be missionaries, so you came.” I said no again. Even today, many people are still asking me, “Why did you come to China?” I still don’t have an answer. Honestly, 27 years on, I still don’t know why.

Yin Chang:

Have you asked yourself the same question during the 27 years?

Braham:

Never. It’s destiny; it could be karma. I don’t know. Could it be that I was a Chinese in my previous life? I don’t know.

Yin Chang:

You came to China 27 years ago. Back then, there were few foreigners here, so you were a forerunner.

Braham:

You may say that I was a pioneer. I came early, but today, they come to a different China. When we arrived, we drank tea and ate baked sesame seed cake. Now if you come, you can drink coffee at the Starbucks; it’s different. In fact, there is virtually no difference between the Chinese and Western ways of living now. China is such a place. An Eagles song, *Hotel California*, has a lyric saying “You can check out anytime, but you can never leave.” I think when you come here, you must have a goal and something in mind; but don’t just goof off aimlessly.

Yin Chang:

In the 1980s, China’s reform and opening-up just began. For many Chinese, especially the young generation, it was definitely an era of great emancipation of the mind, because China had previously lived in isolation and depression for so long. I understand



Laurence J. Brahm and Yin Chang in Lhasa

you have a lot of friends in the cultural and arts circles. Maybe they have a deeper understanding and experience of all this.

Brahm:

Right. I still clearly remember an event in 1981 on the campus of Nankai University where I met an artist. He said, “Wait for me at the entrance to your dorm building tomorrow evening, and bring your bicycle.” Back then, interaction between foreigners and Chinese was not common. The next evening, he was waiting for me on his bicycle at the entrance, whistling. He shouted out and rode his bicycle to me. Back then there were no lamps out there, and it was very dark. He said, “Just follow me and keep quiet!” Then we rode off to a very, very faraway place.

Yin Chang:

It sounds like an undercover operation.

Brahm:

Exactly. I had no idea where I was riding to. We ended up in front of a house; they opened the door for me and kept me in a small room, just about the size of the room. There were paintings all over the floor. “Since you’re a foreigner, make a comment. How can we paint better?” I said, “Would you please turn on the light? I can’t see the paintings.” “We can’t turn on the light. We can’t let others know you are here.” A couple of years later, the same painters came to me and showed me their paintings. In the 90s, they ventured out. Today, paintings fetching the highest prices at auctions around the world are from these Chinese painters.