

Liu Weibing

# STORIES OF CHINA'S REFORM

**A PHOTOGRAPHER'S  
PERSONAL EXPERIENCES**



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

# Stories of China's Reform

## a Photographer's Personal Experiences

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# Preface I

## A True-to-Life Account of China's Epic Changes – Thoughts on Liu Weibing's New Book

By Li Zhaoxing<sup>1</sup>

Liu Weibing, a senior photographer and a guest professor at the School of Journalism of Renmin University of China (RUC), is an old friend of mine though he is many years my junior. Here is his new book *Stories of China's Reform – a Photographer's Personal Experiences*, which I read at one sitting. The book is so dear to me – and also so new to me even though I am familiar with many events cited in it.

China has changed with each passing day since it launched the reform some 30 years ago. And never has life in the country been so lively and full of vigor like today. Basing himself on a wealth of experiences he has acquired through work as a photographer at Xinhua, the State news agency, Weibing has written candidly to provide a true-to-life account of those epic changes.

I experienced numerous events cited in the book. I was able to go to school only after New China's birth in 1949. Never had I dreamed that I would be able to stand on Tiananmen Rostrum watching the military and civilian parades marking new China's 60<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary on October 1, 2009, with tears in my eyes, I saw the characters reading "Long live the people formed by students in Tiananmen Square using flowers in their hands. I was deputy head of the Chinese delegation to the 1995 World Conference on Women and I was on the Beijing Bidding Committee for the 2008 Olympic Games. I was involved in the negotiations on Hong Kong's return to China, in the negotiations on China's accession to the World Trade Organization and in the rescue and relief operations after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake.

Despite my personal experiences in those events, I feel Weibing's narratives and photos new to me. I was at Shatoujiao announcing China's takeover of the Kowloon Customs on authorization of the Central Government at zero hour of July 1, 1997, a moment of nationwide jubilation for resumption of China's exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong. Despite that, I have found things new in Weibing's comparison between Border Street and Silk Alley, a business street in Beijing, which he does by transcending time and space and using plain language.

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<sup>1</sup> Li Zhaoxing was China's foreign minister 2003-2007. He is the current president of China Public Diplomacy Association.

As deputy head of the Chinese delegation to the 1995 World Conference on Women, I was able to listen to speeches delivered by delegates from various countries. Weibing's new book, which I read 18 years after the Conference, tells me many things of which I had no idea as a leader of the Chinese delegation – his amiable encounter with some African delegates, those “surprising discoveries” he made at Huairou, venue for the Conference's non-governmental forum. Just for one thing: the Chinese delegates were customarily reserved, busy taking notes while a leader of theirs was reading from a text in all seriousness on the rostrum, in contrast to foreign delegates who were vivacious and bold, never hesitating to air their views.

I was impressed by Weibing's interpretation of those events, Chinese and foreign, bygone and of today, which I found profound in meaning. The book tells about the progress Beijing has made, for example the transformation of Longxugou, once a notorious slum area, into what is now Longtan Park. Meanwhile, it provides a vivid account of the smog that shrouded the Chinese capital for days on end in early 2013, making “environmental protection” household words. Here is the author's conclusion: “Only by being friendly to environment can people enjoy an environment friendly to them.” It falls in line with the call of the Chinese government for attaching paramount importance to people's livelihood and to attainment of sustainable development.

Another example is the book's account of migrant workers in Beijing. The author, full of sympathy toward them, uses a host of facts to highlight their role in promoting the development of cities and improving life of city people. Meanwhile, he is relentlessly scornful of those “swollen with arrogance” toward migrant workers, those “holding a brief case in hand,” “with a conspicuously extruding beer belly.” Basing himself on his own observation, the author notes that city people of today may well be descendent of peasants or migrant workers. And proceeding from that, he dwells on some ups and downs experienced by foreign countries in the course of their development and pinpoints what China can learn from them.

I believe the book is of both historic and practical significance. It throws light on the road we have followed and helps us in our understanding of the path we are to follow. It makes us proud of the progress we have made while alerting us to the need not to be self-complacent, so that we'll be more resolved and confident in our march toward the future.

– June 25, 2013, in my office at China Public  
Diplomacy Association

## Preface II

### A Candid Account of an Era for Turning Dreams into Reality

By He Ping<sup>1</sup>

Everybody can be involved in history, either through involvement in a historic event or as an eye-witness to it. But people depend primarily on journalists for a record faithful to history. Journalists are duty-bound to use their pens to keep a record of events in history that are significant or important enough to inspire people of the generations to come or use their cameras to freeze-frame history for the same purpose.

Journalists of course do not report everything that is happening or has happened. They focus on changes – changes of events, changes in life and changes of the times.

In essence, reporting of news is reporting of changes.

As seen by journalists, what is immutable and frozen is worthless. For this reason, news reporting means a ceaseless pursuit of truth, an endless work to report changes.

“Great changes” is the key word for description of our times, particularly the 30 years of China’s reform and opening to the outside world. In China, the most profound change is that the Chinese now find themselves in an era that features a possibility for their dream to come true. Once shattered, the Chinese dream is being pursued again, highlighting a historic leap of the Chinese nation from independence to prosperity and then to an endeavor to become truly strong. In the wake of arduous struggle for what it is today, the Chinese people have come to realize that changes are the essence of history and that they are following a historic course leading to an eventual rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In the current historic torrent, the destiny of all Chinese is bound to change in this era of reform, through sharing a beautiful dream with their country and nation.

Here is what photographer Liu Weibing, a colleague of mine at Xinhua, presents to us: the historic era of earth-shaking changes in China.

It is more than 20 years since Liu joined Xinhua’s editorial staff after graduation from university. Those years have witnessed a constant deepening of China’s reform and a continuous development of the Chinese economy and society. As a photo journalist, he has recorded those events that have taken place, those changes in people’s life and society at large, using his camera and pen.

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1 He Ping is editor-in-chief of Xinhua News Agency.



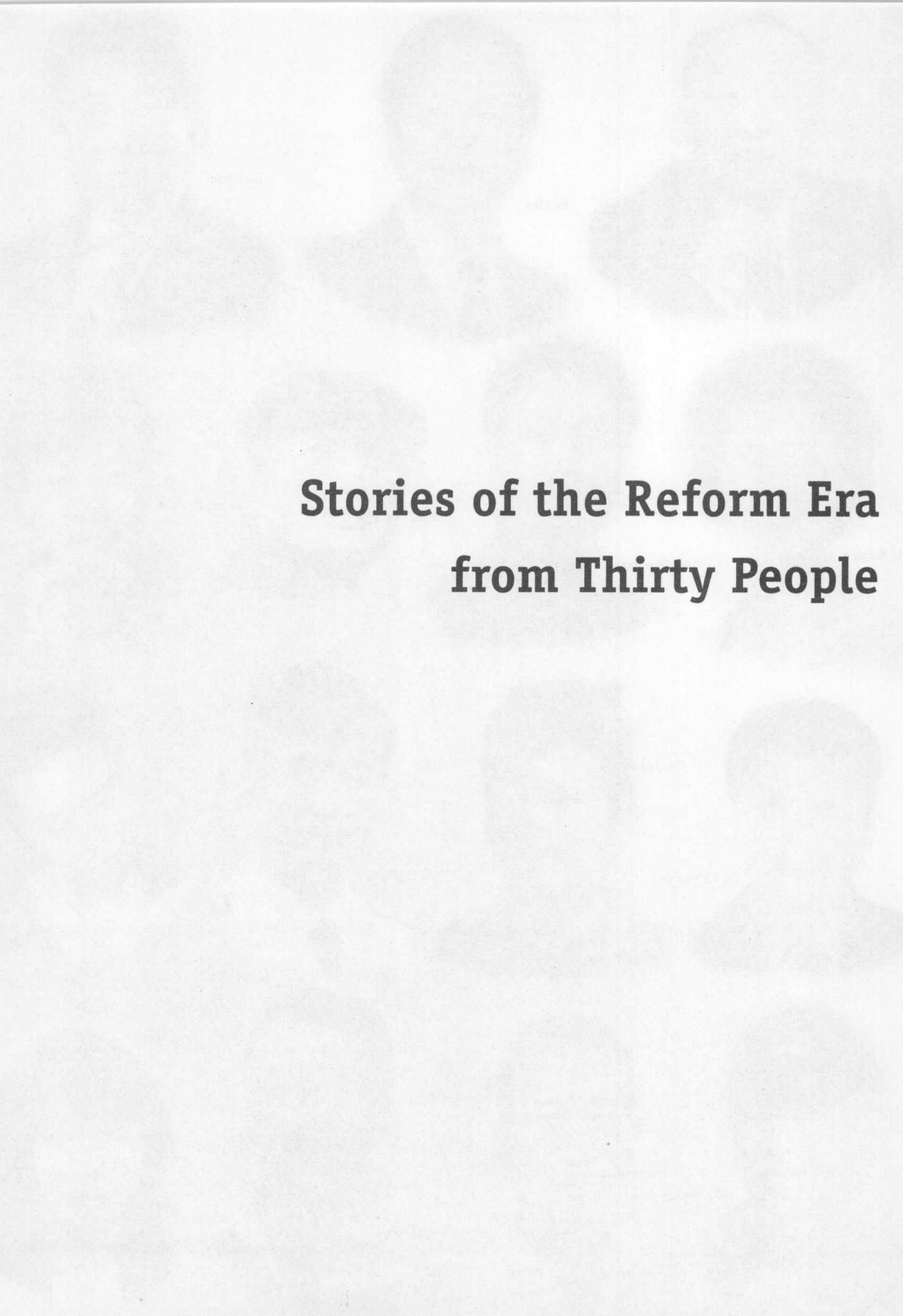
The author has taken the photos in the book, more than 200, in thousands of beats. Some of those photos enable us to review historic events such as Hong Kong's return to China in 1997, the 1998 floods and the 2008 Beijing Olympics. There are also photos showing the changes in people's life, for example the first test tube baby produced on the Chinese mainland when she was two years old and the disappearance of *hutongs* – backstreet lanes and alleys – from Beijing. Taken at moments of significance and assuming different perspectives, photos in this book allow us to trace China's progress in the era of reform and opening.

Particularly remarkable is that the author has built up a private archive comprising his diary, newspaper clippings and materials for reference. While a competent photographer, he has authored numerous articles, notes and blog articles on his own experiences in work, which run to nearly half a million words. He has also published three non-fiction books and a photo album. These suffice to testify his hard work, his pursuit of professionalism, and his thinking and understanding of his country and people.

Karl Marx once said to the effect that philosophers invariably interpret the world by different ways, but the point is how to change the world. The mission of journalists is not limited to recording history. For them, even more important is to play a role in promoting social transformation and progress of the times.

Memorable journalistic works, whether in writing or photographic, are invariably those that not only tell people what has happened but also what they can learn from it.

In my opinion, that represents the highest level of professionalism for journalists.

A faint, grayscale background image showing a group of approximately thirty people, mostly men, arranged in a loose circle. They appear to be in a formal or semi-formal setting, possibly a group portrait from the Reform Era.

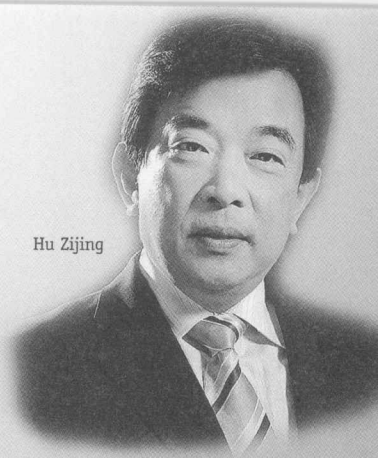
# **Stories of the Reform Era from Thirty People**



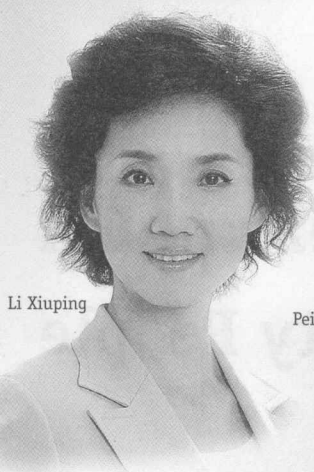
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Pei Chunliang



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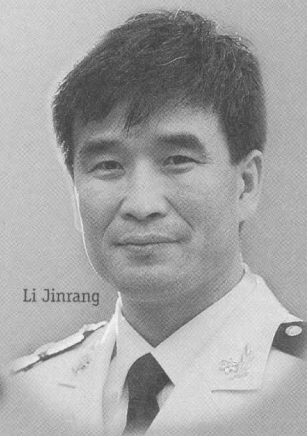
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Zhang Weitai



Zhu Jun



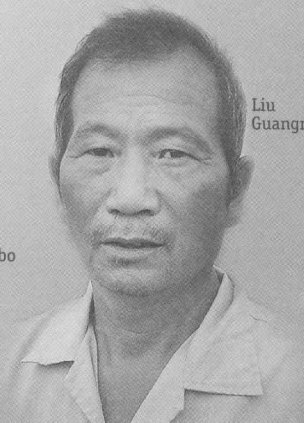
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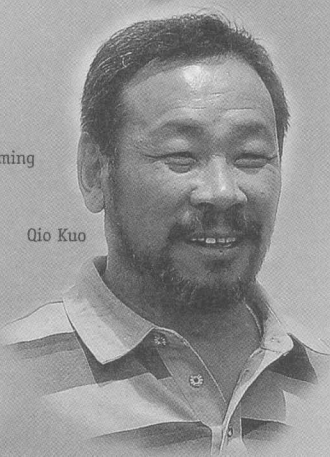
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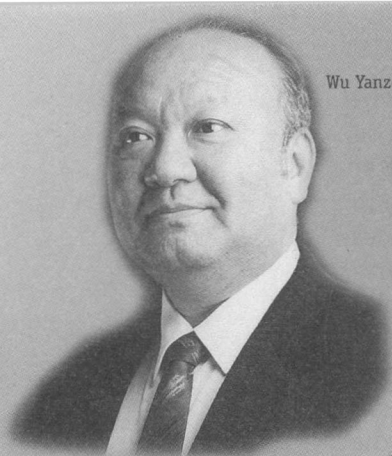


Qio Kuo



Zhang Lei

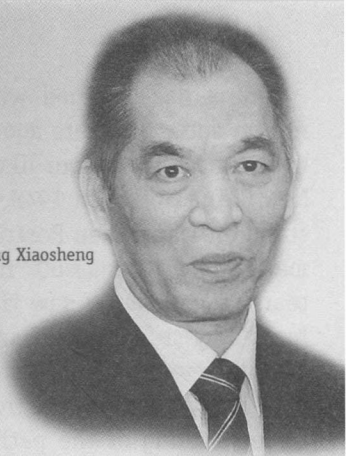




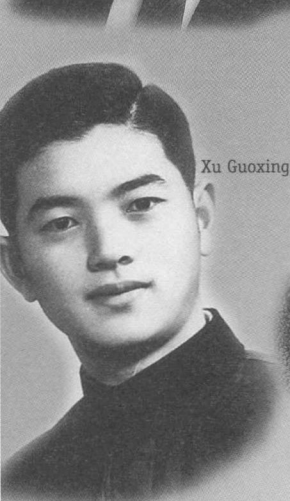
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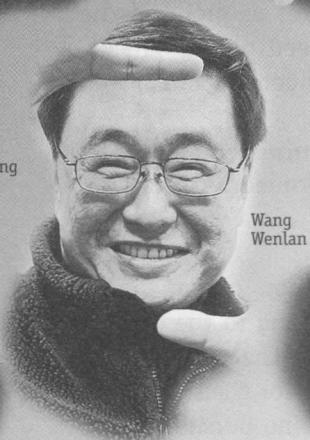
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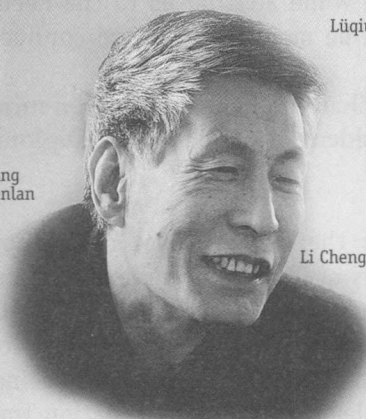
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Xu Guoxing



Wang Wenlan



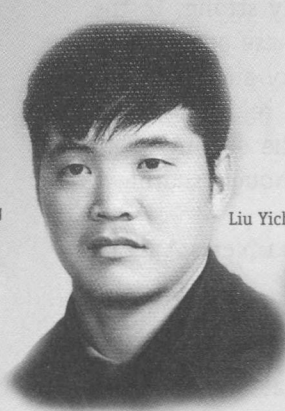
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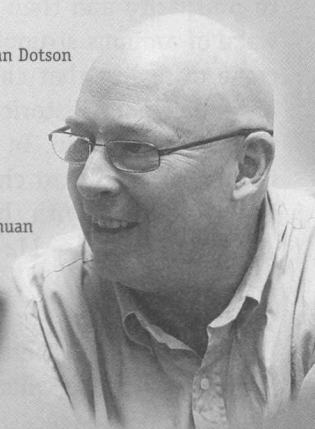
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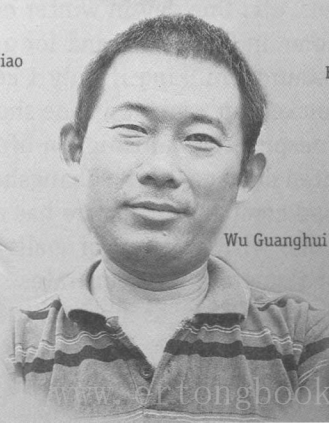
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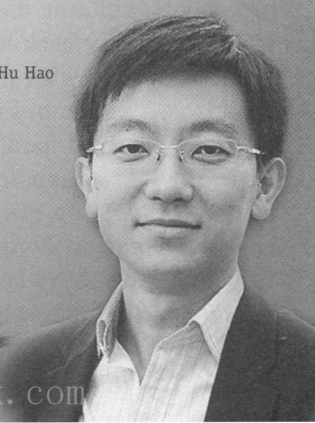
Ren Jiefeng



Zheng Yuejiao



Wu Guanghui



Hu Hao

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- Li Zhaoxing, China's foreign minister 2003-2007;  
president of China Public Diplomacy Association

"Great changes" is the key word for description of our times, particularly the 30 years of China's reform and opening to the outside world. In China, the most profound change is that the Chinese now find themselves in an era that features a possibility for their dream to come true. Once shattered, the Chinese dream is being pursued again, highlighting a historic leap of the Chinese nation from independence to prosperity and then to an endeavor to become truly strong. In the wake of arduous struggle for what it is today, the Chinese people have come to realize that changes are the essence of history and that they are following a historic course leading to an eventual rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In the current historic torrent, the destiny of all Chinese is bound to change in this era of reform, through sharing a beautiful dream with their country and nation.

- He Ping, editor-in-chief of Xinhua News Agency

Back in 1968, I left Changsha, capital city of Hunan Province, for Yuanjiang County where I was to stay for six years as an "educated youth" to be "reeducated" through back-breaking labor - transplanting rice shoots, building dams, etc. One day in winter of 1974, I missed the train on my way back home in Changsha, and for a lift, I climbed onto a tractor loaded with manure, thinking if only I could have a bicycle. Back from Yuanjiang, I picked up a job at a shoe shop, working there as a porter. I worked hard despite the hardships in life.

In 1989, I was appointed manager of the Changsha Friendship Store, a money-losing State-owned company. The store has developed into what is now Friendship & Apollo with a string of malls operating under it. This Changsha-based conglomerate now generates several billions yuan in annual sales, more than 100 times as much as it did in the first years

of its operation. My monthly wage was a mere 39 yuan (about US\$6) when I took over the old Friendship Store, and now I am board chairman of Friendship & Apollo. It may take a long time to tell the hardships and difficulties I had to conquer for all my achievements. For our success, we have won a State-level award for innovation of business management, top grade. Friendship & Apollo has donated more than 10 million yuan (about US\$1.62 million) to education and other public undertakings. I owe what I am today to China's reform. I'll continue working hard to repay the kindness my country has shown me.

- Hu Zijing, deputy to the NPC; board chairman of Hunan Friendship & Apollo

Back in the early 1950s, my parents went to work in Lanzhou, capital of Gansu Province, in response to a government call for people with expertise to support the northwest region in its development. My father, a bridge engineer, was often separated from us for work elsewhere. When I was a child, the happiest moment for me was to see him back for reunion with us.

After graduation from Beijing Broadcasting Institute in 1987, I was assigned to work as an anchoress at Gansu TV. I was to be transferred to Beijing for work as an anchoress for CCTV primetime news program. Due to my appearance at 7:00 p.m. day after day, I have become a friend of tens of millions who nonetheless may not know much about me. I prefer to lead a quiet life amid the rapid changes in China. I wore a ponytail when I entered CCTV. I had my hairstyle changed on request of my superior who hoped I would look a bit "steadier" on the screen. My life has indeed changed little over the past decades, but I always take pleasure in performing my duty of telling people what has happened and is happening in the world.

- Li Xiuping, CCTV anchoress

I was born at a poverty-stricken village that nestles deep in mountains in Huixian County, Henan Province. Before ten, I never had a pair of new shoes to wear. Misfortunes befell my family during my childhood as my parents and brother died in succession. Neighbors pooled their money for father's funeral, and I vowed to repay them for their kindness when I grew up. In the following 20 years I did various odd jobs for a living. I worked at a brick kiln and then opened some small businesses - a barber's, a domestic appliances repairs shop, a photo studio and a restaurant before I went in for mining on contractual basis.

China's reform came as a blessing for me, making it possible for me to become a successful industrialist. I was once commended as one of the ten model Chinese youths. I am now involved in charity, donating to projects of building roads, schools and hospitals, to poverty-alleviation programs and disaster relief operations. In 2006, I had new homes



built for all families in my village, at a cost of some 30 million yuan (about US\$4.87 million). Later I helped in the building of new, modern settlements for all the 14,000 people in my township. I am now rich, and I am resolved to help others to improve their lives. Prosperity for all is my motto.

- Pei Chunliang, deputy to the NPC; chairman of the Villagers' Committee of Peizhai Village, Huixian County, Henan Province

I was born at Shanghe Village in Lintong, near the site famous across the world for a huge army of terra-cotta soldiers guarding the tomb of Emperor Shihuang of the Qin, China's first feudal dynasty. My family was so poor that I had no money for a bus ride to my middle school in Xi'an several dozen kilometers away. So I went there on foot, walking for a whole day. While studying as an undergraduate and then as a graduate, I sent home ten yuan (about US\$1.3) I earned from a part-time job every month to help support my sister. Then I entered the Institute of Literature under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, where I was to rise from an assistant to full professorship.

China has indeed changed beyond recognition through some 30 years' reform. Gone is the moribund, ultra-left thinking, which for a time held back the progress of the reform. As a scholar, I have devoted my life to study and writing. The lilac tree in the courtyard was barely as thick as a finger when I planted it, and now its trunk is as thick as my arm. How time flies! I am now old, fortunate enough to live in an era of peace and prosperity. I hope the country will remain peaceful. Peace blesses everybody.

- He Xilai, art theorist and critic

I graduated from Beijing Normal University in 1976 and have worked as a teacher for more than 30 years. I was transferred to Beijing No. 8 Middle School in 1989.

Time has changed, prompting changes in schools and students. Today's kids are much clever than we were young and they have a much broader vision of the world. At a lecture given them by an economist, questions asked by students took me by surprise, questions about the revaluation of the Chinese currency renminbi and the influx of hot money into China. Today's kids have a much better material life to enjoy.

Problem is that some of them seemed to be disoriented, indulging in online games. I think kids must do more reading to benefit from good books. One spring morning I heard a girl reading aloud an article about her experiences in Britain during the summer vacation. Her writings about Britain were published in book form later. When writing the preface to the book, it occurred to me that China's basic education shouldn't be so pragmatic and more book knowledge should be taught.

I believe kids will be better prepared to change themselves and the country if they are more knowledgeable while morally sound.

- Zhang Fenglan, deputy principal  
of Beijing No. 8 Middle School

After graduation from the Department of Journalism at the Shanghai-based Fudan University in 1956, I was assigned to the Department of Journalism of Renmin University of China in Beijing. I taught at the RUC for more than 40 years. Political campaigns came one after another before the reform era began, culminating in the ten-year "Cultural Revolution." I cherished high aspirations as an academic but found it impossible to translate them into a reality as work at the school was often disrupted by political campaigns.

It was only after China kicked off the reform in the late 1970s was I able to concentrate on work. To be precise, I worked for some 20 years before I retired, during which period I rose to professorship. Though old, I was ambitious enough to play a role in setting up the China Correspondence Institute of Photography while teaching at the RUC. I was deputy director of the institute for 20 years, during which period I authored and compiled 14 textbooks. Some 100,000 students have received training through correspondence courses offered by the institute. I have realized my dream of contributing to development of education in photography.

- Xu Guoxing, professor at the  
School of Journalism, RUC

Believe it or not, the question of "who is supreme, the Constitution or the officials" touched off a hot debate in China in the early 1980s, at a time when China began to improve its legal system in part to eradicate abuse of official powers. In 1985, I picked up law as my major at university, which was hot with mass education in rule of law under full swing.

Over the past 20 years, I was involved in the formulation of the Labor Contract Law, the Patent Law and the Property Law, and also in the revision of the Marriage Law. I have gone through a historic period in which new laws are made and work is done to improve the entire legal system.

Thirty years ago, there were no laws governing many matters. In contrast, China now has built up a pretty sound legal system. The policy has shifted from one of putting officialdom above everything else to one of attaching paramount importance to people's rights and interests, from one of letting administrative powers assuming overriding importance to one of respecting human rights. Governing the country in accordance with law, a dream long cherished by the Chinese people, has become a reality.

- Zhu Jun, executive editor-in-chief of  
China Human Resources magazine.

I was born in the countryside. Thanks to the reform I was able to become a medical student. I picked up the profession under the influence of my elders who were doctors. I have worked as a doctor for 30 years.

More often than not, a stethoscope, plus a few other simple instruments, was the only thing available to a doctor in the past. Now doctors are equipped with state-of-the-art apparatus in work. Numerous diseases considered incurable in the past are now curable. A medical insurance system now covers the majority of the Chinese people. This makes it possible for rural residents to go to large hospitals in cities for treatment of their diseases.

People are becoming increasingly keen to health. Two years ago I was in some Central American countries for academic exchange while serving locals' medical needs. Some Chinese nationals living there told me that China was rapidly catching up with developed countries in medical services. In my opinion, China still has a long way to go to meet expectations of its people for medical service. I believe things will improve even further in step with the progress of the reform. As a medical doctor and a person in active military service, I'll do my best for that.

**- Li Jinrang, Ph.D., director of the Otolaryngology  
Surgery Center, General Hospital of the PLA Navy**

My grandfather, Ma Hengchang, was known across China as a model worker in the 1950s. What he did inspired industrial workers in their millions to work hard for the country's construction.

I have grown up in the era of China's reform. When I entered Qiqihar No. 2 Machine-Tools Factory in Heilongjiang Province in 1994, machines in use were mostly produced in the 1970s or even earlier. Over the past decade, program-controlled machines have replaced all the old equipment thanks to our cooperation with foreign companies. In 2010, I took part in the manufacture of a welding system for use in building facilities for China's lunar landing scheme, which meets the best technological standard applicable across the world. My dream is to play a role in producing the best machines in the world.

**- Ma Bing, national model worker at  
Qiqihar No. 2 Machine-Tools Factory**

I had worked as an electrician and a driver before I became leader of the transport team of Nanmofang Township, Chaoyang District, Beijing, in the 1980s. The team had a dozen trucks, and we worked day in and day out just to transport goods.

Since the early 1990s, we have shifted to modern logistics. We started by renting a warehouse with which we set up a logistics center. The center has developed into a large, IT-based company, what is now Beijing Hezhong Aoshunda Logistics Co. Ltd. We did our job with flying colors in service of the 2008 Olympic Games, the 1999 National Day

celebrations and the rescue and relief operations after the Wenchuan earthquake in May 2008.

To improve myself, I have attended on-job training provided to China's business leaders by the U.S. Stanford University jointly with some Chinese universities. Competition has become increasingly fierce on the Chinese market, compelling us to be innovative in work.

- Song Shaobo, president of Beijing Hezhong Aoshunda Co. Ltd.; vice-president of Beijing Logistics Association

Our family has lived on crop farming generation after generation. We were barely able to feed ourselves before the 1980s when crop yields were poor. Life was even harder during the "Cultural Revolution" from 1966 to 1976.

Things began to turn for the better in the late 1970s under a new policy that allows farming to be done by individual households on a contractual basis and the households to retain what is left of the annual harvest after paying taxes. Our life has kept improving thanks to a string of government policies in our favor, for example the abolition of the Agricultural Tax. Farming has been mechanized by and large, and crop yields now average eight tons per hectare. Besides, rural residents are now insured against diseases and old age. Domestic appliances are found in every home, the same as in cities.

Problem is that some farmers have lost their land as the process of urbanization gathers momentum. Troubles are bound to crop up if these people are not re-employed. Hope the government will do more to resolve the problem.

- Liu Guangming, Nanma Village,  
Renqiu City, Hebei Province

I was born at the side of the Namco Lake in northern Tibet. In 1987, I traveled for nearly one month from my native place to Beijing for study. I traveled for days to the county town on horseback. From there I went to Nagqu by truck. Seven days afterward I arrived at Liuyuan in Gansu Province - an exhausting journey on a coach. From Gansu I went to Beijing by train.

Today, the same journey may take one day or even shorter now that Tibet has air links with the rest of China and moreover, it is served by the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. Increasing numbers of Lhasa residents now fly to Chengdu for weekends and back in Sunday evening.

Benefits generated by the reform to the people are tangible, and the reform has strengthened the unity of the various ethnic groups of the country. I believe that so long everybody continues working hard, the country will be even more prosperous and life will be even better.

- Qio Kuo, senior photographer of Xinhua News Agency;  
vice-chair of Tibet Photographers' Association