

## PROMOTING PEACE

The political atmosphere between Tibet and China has historically been a volatile one. Differing religious and cultural perspectives, and not to mention conflicting roles on the world stage, have all attributed to the still tense situation. However, given the surge in international relations efforts, and a persistent emphasis on peaceable relations, it is all the more essential that grassroots efforts aid this progressing movement. Being a Tibetan girl who grew up in western China, I am too familiar with both sides of the story, and have concluded, through experience, that education is undoubtedly an effective answer. Education privileges a student to understand the two sides, and helps him or her realize that an intermediary solution through economic sustainability, can effectively quell the tension.

On the world stage, China still ranks second-to-last in educational equity, in part because of parental preference for sons, but also because of China's rich-poor gap, which is especially wide between urban and rural populations. In the Tibetan regions, these statistics are all the more polarized, with a paltry number of females ever receiving a decent education. Providing opportunities for young Tibetan women in remote villages then, is an empowering act. With such opportunities, they will be equipped to take on active roles in their communities. Improvement of women's education has been shown to lead to positive change in other social issues, such as the maternal mortality rate, health issues related to hygiene, children's education, and household stability<sup>1</sup>. These social improvements answer a number of issues that plague Tibetan and Chinese political relations, of which there are no answers to but grassroots ones. These educated women have the potential of bridging a gap between Tibetan and Chinese communications that does not exist in the political spectrum. We can promote sustainable livelihoods in Western China through these women, which in turn can only have a positive effect on the opinions that the two interdependent societies have of one another. Allowing for this middle ground to occur answers the question of how to bring peace to the currently volatile situation. To bring even a modicum of relief to a situation so historically known for conflict is a venture of absolute necessity.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Mekbo Village, a village 4 hours away from my hometown, is situated at the northwestern part of Qinghai Province. Made up of 180 Tibetan households, comprising 700 people in total, the village suffers from extreme isolation from the outside world, and lacks basic amenities such as electricity, running water, clinics, and schools. Its inhabitants subsist solely by herding yak, sheep, and horses. It takes 2 hours by jeep to reach the nearest town, and 5 hours to reach Xinghai County town, where the schools are located

Although a former village official sold his yaks to finance Mekbo's first school in the 1990s, all village schools were demolished in 2008 due to the Chinese government's recent education policies. Distance and language – country schools are taught in Chinese to boost competitiveness in regional exams – have discouraged most students from pursuing education, especially girls, whom parents do not believe are worth the time and money to send to school. In 2010, only 4 male students from Mekbo Village enrolled in college, while female participation in college was zero.

## SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSAL

I intend to use the funding to set up a Davis Peace Scholarship in Mekbo Village. I propose to implement a Sheep Loan Program in Mekbo Village in collaboration with Pentok Institute (PI), which would provide sustainable annual income for impoverished families while simultaneously generating

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<sup>1</sup> Alsan, M. Westerhaus, M, Herce, M., Nakashima, K. and P. Farmer. 2011. Poverty, Global Health, and Infectious Disease: Lessons from Haiti and Rwanda. *Infectious Diseases Clinics of North America*. 25(3): 611-622.

scholarship for five girls to complete up to a college education. This program will enable the community to support girls' education through local means and to set up social entrepreneurs in a home-based, community context. The funding from the Davis Project for Peace will help initiate the program in the first year. By the second year the program will be fully self-sustained, mainly run by local nomads with help from PI. The Project will proceed as follows: **1)** *selection of 1 local family to raise 50 sheep; 2) after one year, based on average breeding rates, the 50 sheep will have increased to 65 sheep, which will be returned to PI; 3) of those 65 sheep, 15 will be sold, to produce  $800 \times 15 = 12,000$  RMB (1,905 USD) net income; 4) of that income, 6,000 RMB (952 USD) will be divided among 5 scholarship recipients from Mekbo, selected by PI based on their dedication, sense of giving back to the community and performance at school, 5,000 RMB (800 USD) will be the annual income of the family, and the remaining 1,000 RMB (157 USD) will be used to support administrative costs for PI; 6) finally, the remaining 50 sheep will be used to begin a second round with a new family in Mekbo Village.* In summation, the project will encourage local economic viability via its small business model, even as it reduces education gender-disparities in Mekbo Village, producing female leaders in rural Tibet, and at the same time procures PI's administrative costs for future maintenance of the program.

#### BACKGROUND OF THE ORGANIZATION

The Pentok Institute is a Tibetan grassroots non-profit organization established in 2009 whose goal is to produce female leaders through continuous support to girls' education. Over the past 4 years, PI has supported 125 orphans and girls in Xinghai County. PI's work to improve girls' education and women's leadership in remote Qinghai has been internationally recognized by the Global Fund for Women and Global Women Leaders. In 2010, PI was invited to the Clinton Global Initiative and was awarded for its commitment to improving rural education via economic incentive. As co-founder of PI, I have spent the past four years dedicated to fostering educational opportunities for women and have had sustained interaction with both the fellowship recipients and Mekbo villagers.

#### PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- [Week 1] Meet with PI staff in Xining City; contact the Mekbo Village leader, Samdam, a highly respected monk in Mekbo who has worked with PI on various projects in the past; coordinate vehicles for the trip. (*location: Pentok Institute*)
- [Week 2+3] Field trip to Mekbo: 1) Organize meetings with village leaders; 2) Select the family who will receive the 50 sheep; 3) Choose recipients for Davis Peace Scholarship; 4) Demonstrate the logistics of the project to the villagers. (*location: Mekbo Village*)
- [Week 4] Purchase 50 sheep from local market. (*location: Mekbo Village*)
- [Week 5] Set up a contract for Davis Peace Scholarship with PI to ensure smooth continuation of the Sheep Loan Program. (*location: Pentok Institute*)
- [Week 6] Send report to Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College. (*location: Dartmouth College*)

#### PRACTICAL CONSIDERATION

There are two major potential obstacles: *1) constant flooding preventing us from going to the village; 2) unforeseen natural disasters or animal diseases affecting the animal breeding.* However, these potential setbacks can be readily accounted for and worked around.