



Translation of original Chinese version of article

## 安德烈·索罗斯的中国慈善路

### **Andrea Soros's Road of Chinese charity**

By Yi Wei, our Beijing Correspondent

When Andrea Soros was sitting in the lobby of the Beijing Hotel on a winter day, the entire world was plunging into a much colder winter of financial crisis. In bookstores across Beijing, the latest book by Andrea's father – George Soros's "The New Paradigm for Financial Markets", can be seen placed at a prominent position on the shelves of the financial sections. Many people want to read the views of this "financial predator" on the current crisis.

Andrea's schedule in China is extremely tight. The day after our exclusive interview she will fly back to New York. This is her first interview with the Chinese press. She has never felt good at talking about her own story, and most of the time, she smiles and talks about the work she and her partners have been doing in Tibetan areas of China - that is the region and the activities that are of most concern to her, rather than the financial tsunami sweeping from Wall Street across the world.

Many Chinese people do not know much about the NGO established by Andrea – the Trace Foundation – although it has been working in the Tibetan areas of China for 16 years.

#### **The Birth of Trace Foundation**

In 2007, a Tibetan woman, Kalsang Kyi, boarded a plane in Xining and left her homeland in Qinghai for the first time. Kelsang Kyi, an English teacher from Jenza County, Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province, was on her way to the United States.

She had taken part in a workshop on teaching methodology organized by the Trace Foundation in 2006, and now the Foundation has given her the opportunity for further study in the United States.

In Northampton, Massachusetts, Kelsang Kyi was amazed to find herself immersed in an English-language environment which she has never seen before. Her English listening improved rapidly, and at the same time she was delighted to discover the dynamic teaching methods used at her new college. "Teachers in China are used to just standing up at the front of the class to teach, but here more teachers demand that students express their own ideas and discuss problems."

Kalsang Kyi is one example, in Qinghai, from among the spacious Tibetan regions, of many Tibetans who have been benefited from the Trace Foundation.

Jinmei, a Tibetan woman whose hometown is in Qinghai, is grateful for Trace Foundation for helping Tibetans. She studied in the United States and she joined Trace Foundation upon her return. She is very happy to work for this foundation. "The Foundation has done a lot for Tibetan people and what it has done will have long-term impacts."

The "fate" between Andrea Soros and Tibetan regions can be traced back to the late 1980s. That year, to celebrate her university graduation, Andrea chose to travel to Tibetan areas of China.

In Tibet, Andrea visited many ancient cultural sites, factories, hospitals, and farms and participated in holiday celebrations. "I spent time with teachers, young people and their families and enjoyed their humor and enthusiasm, and admired the beautiful sceneries of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau."

At the end of the graduation trip, Andrea thought "One day I will come back".

In 1991, Andrea returned to Tibetan areas. In the next two years, she taught English at Hainan Normal School in Qinghai Province as a volunteer. "During that time, I was able to communicate with local people and to understand the difficulties in their lives and their education problems. I began to think about what I could do to help these communities." Since 1992, China has continued with its reform and opening up and it is under such circumstances, that Andrea established Trace Foundation in 1993 to promote culture and development in Tibetan areas of China. The Foundation focuses its work on four areas: culture, education, health and rural development.

Andrea thinks that the biggest portion of the Foundation's activity is in education. "We put emphasis on language teaching, teacher training and development of teaching materials."

Andrea always emphasizes the importance of being "open." She thinks the prerequisite for all undertakings is openness. "This is the basic human instinct that we follow in the development work. Without openness and good faith, how can we have common endeavor and chances of success?"

## **Unforgettable time in Tibetan Areas**

Even today, Andrea can't forget the time she spent teaching in Qinghai. During the time she served as a teacher, she lived in the school's administration building. "The condition were very basic, but the school took very good care of me."

The place where Andrea had her lunch was a in a little dining room next to the main

hall. At lunch time, she would always invite her students to have lunch with her and practice their English.

After a few weeks from Andrea's arrival in Qinghai, the school specially provided her with her own transportation means - a "Flying Pigeon" brand bike. Andrea enjoyed riding her "Flying Pigeon" to wander around in the small town. She particularly enjoyed visiting the local market where vegetables, fruits, wool, and other goods were sold. When students saw her, they would call her out loud "Auntie with the golden hair" or "there is the foreigner." "Actually my hair is quite dark, but they had not seen many foreigners, and in comparison to theirs, my hair is light."

When Andrea was in Qinghai, every month she would take some time to visit the capital - Xining City.

The main reason for Andrea to visit Xining each month was to call her family in the United States. She missed them. Later she discovered that she could call the US long distance directly from the Hainan Prefecture main town. In order to do so though, she had to wake up the staff on duty in the office in the middle of the night. "I was very happy to discover this shortcut but I caused a lot of inconvenience to the person on night duty."

At that time there were only two hotels in Xining—an older low-rise building and a new high rise. "I preferred the lower one. It had a garden inside of the hotel and each room had a big bathtub. Moreover, there was a noodle shop near by the hotel where you could enjoy very tasty noodles." Andrea would carry some teaching materials to read when she made trip to Xining. She would usually pick up some teaching materials or books to read—at the time she could find a number of Victorian novels available in English.

"At university my major was literature and literary theory in order to explore human experience—what makes us the same? What makes us different? And I love the different forms of human expression—literature, dance, art and song." Andrea thinks that she inherited her love for literature and art from her mother.

Andrea thinks that teaching and cultivating people is one of the good ways to contribute to society. However, she also has a deep desire to explore the world. "Time that I spent in Qinghai played a role in accelerating my personal sense of social responsibility and compassion. "It is wonderful to live in a world of different cultures, but at the same time we have common desires—at some basic level we all want to meet our own needs and to have some opportunities for betterment and prosperity. This is what the Foundation is about. "

Andrea made many trips on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. She traveled ~~to~~ all over Sichuan, the Tibetan Autonomous Region, Gansu, Yunnan and Qinghai Provinces. She had long and difficult journeys and on many occasions encountered landslides and snowstorms.

Once, due to landslides, Andrea and her companions had to abandon their vehicles and spent two full days on foot to bypass the landslide area. "These natural phenomena are merely part of the overall local environment. In good weather condition, the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau is a piece of the beauty of the world." Andrea said.

In the eyes of Paola, a staff member of the Foundation, Andrea is a person who can endure hardship. "When we go on field trips, she doesn't receive any special arrangement. Just like us, she doesn't mind cold and hardship. I respect her, because many people in the same position would not do the same."

Quite often, beautiful scenes of Tibetan areas appear in Andrea's memory. For instance, in a valley not far away from Laja Town in Golok Prefecture, she took part in the opening ceremony of the Foundation-sponsored cheese processing factory. "That day, bubbling sounds from a stream nearby could be heard and three eagles circled continuously in the sky over people's heads. It was a beautiful day, full of dancing and celebratory spirit. Of course, the cheese that was produced from the factory also was very delicious!"

Since its establishment in 1993, Trace Foundation has awarded 741 grants, and designed and implemented directly 14 projects. About 1000 professionals and more than 1000 teachers have been trained; and more than 1 million copies of books have been published. A total of 52 million U.S dollars have been invested so far.

"A lot of people are not quite clear about our foundation's work. They think money can solve all problems, but I think money only provides an opportunity and what finally solves the problem are the creativity of the people and spirit of cooperation. It is the people who solve the problem, rather than money." Andrea said.

## **"We are bound together"**

Trace Foundation's funds mainly come from Andrea's personal property. She is the foundation main funder. "My personal property was in fact allocated to me by my father, who is a very successful financier." Andrea said.

In China, when people learn she is the daughter of George Soros, their reaction is mixed. Some express great admiration to her for establishing such a foundation, viewing it as a very remarkable thing she has done to conduct charity work with her own money. Others doubt it. "Some people think of my father, they also see it is a western organization, one that works in Tibetan areas. For them, it is easy to start wondering things like: does such organization has some commercial purposes? Does it have a political connection? In reality, what we have done in Tibetan areas is nothing but helping local people."

Andrea believes that her father's success gives her the opportunities to help people. "If a person is lucky to be successful and is able to accumulate a lot of wealth, the person should also know how to use that wealth."

In terms of charity, a topic that Andrea and her father George Soros talked about is: charity is not an easy task.

According to the view of George Soros and his daughter, when engaging in social activities it is necessary to create an accountability system to ensure the flow of funds and the benefits are produced. ". Even more importantly, you need to know that what you are doing is really relevant to people, and that it is making a difference in the lives of people."

It seems like it should be easy to give assistance, but it isn't so obvious.. " If there is a need for water and one gives water, you could say this is charity. But water has to reach people—this is relief work." In Andrea's view, the concept and mission of development work is to develop local resources, build a sustainable system, so that the original need is no longer there. Such a job requires a flexible approach: one that is really based on local realities.

"Water is just one example, but it can be applied just as well to other areas and situation. I think I mention water because I I have been talking with people about the earthquake in 2008 and water was one of the critical needs in the aftermath. It was an unbearable scene, but people were so united and the spirit of solidarity was so moving." Andrea pointed out that after the Sichuan earthquake, Trace Foundation pledged 2 million US dollars to the disaster areas jointly with the World Care Organization.

As a New Yorker, Andrea has witnessed a similar solidarity. "In the case of 9.11, we have seen the darkest side of humanity, but it also brought out the best in people. . I think we all have this side of us—finding happiness in helping others and caring for people in times of need".

Andrea remembers reading about an "altruism gene," – that natural selection actually favors "helping others." "In this day and age, we are all interconnected, but the gap between rich and poor is growing, as are expressions of hate. It is important for society that we cultivate the side of us that wants to reach out and bridge divides". Andrea feels that in order to survive, we need mutual aid; this is a need not only for the continuation of mankind, but in reality is often one directly related to the question of life and death of individuals.