China

Since 1999, the Foundation has supported hundreds of thousands of migrant workers to access critical rights and services.

LAW AND GOVERNANCE

Over the past 20 years, China has undertaken a series of milestone administrative law reforms to promote more transparent and democratic governance, including mechanisms for increasing public participation in lawmaking at the national and subnational levels. Administrative law regulates the actions and procedures of government agencies—and dictates how citizens can influence or appeal official decisions—making it central to citizens’ everyday interactions with their government, from provision of public services to local land-use decisions. China’s reform initiatives have resulted in the passage of several landmark administrative laws and regulations that have benefitted ordinary citizens and provided a sounder basis for domestic and international business and investment decisions, helping to fuel China's tremendous economic growth.

PROMOTING TRANSPARENT AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

Working with prominent Chinese law schools and government partners, the Foundation is facilitating the implementation of these important measures. Asia Foundation programs explore innovative mechanisms—such as posting draft regulations in taxi cabs and helping to improve government information centers and “government gazettes”—that make it easier for citizens to access information and participate in government processes. To complement these efforts, the Foundation and its partners educate the public about administrative procedure rights and open government information, and have built capacity and commitment for implementation through in-depth trainings and workshops for hundreds of officials, staff, judges, and legal aid practitioners. By supporting the establishment of administrative law clinics at law schools, the Foundation is also helping to foster a new generation of legal professionals committed to the ideals of participation, transparency, government compliance, and public interest law.

Drawing on these law and governance programs, the Foundation is also supporting a major research initiative—the Chinese Governance Assessment Project. This study examines changes in public participation, transparency, and accountability across provinces and assesses whether these changes correlate with key governance outcomes such as reduced corruption and improved legal compliance. Ultimately, the project aims to spur discussion of governance trends in China among academics, policymakers, and development practitioners, and it will provide valuable insights to guide reform priorities.

The Foundation is working with governmental agencies and nongovernmental organization on various disaster risk reduction initiatives in China, training over 600 officials, 800 academics and school teachers, and 1,000 homeowners since 2005.

China’s economic transformation presents new challenges both for the country’s rapidly changing society and for the government, which has undertaken reforms to promote the rule of law, curb pollution, and encourage more broad-based development. To help address these challenges and contribute to reforms, The Asia Foundation’s China program supports programs related to law and governance, environmental protection, women’s empowerment, disaster management, and constructive U.S.-China relations.
In October 2012 the Foundation began implementing a four-year project aimed at strengthening the rule of law in China. The Justice Under the Rule of Law in Society (JURIS) project aims to decrease barriers to access to justice by making citizens more aware of their legal rights, increasing their access to legal assistance, and improving the capability of legal professionals to protect rights. Under this project, the Foundation is working with law schools and legal aid centers to support reform processes in administrative law and administrative procedure in several cities and provinces across China.

Rapid growth over the last 30 years has positioned China as the world’s second largest economy—and contributed directly to its status as the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases. China’s economic rise has had a profound impact on other aspects of its environment as well. For example, China’s Ministry of Water Resources recently estimated that 20 percent of the country’s rivers are now too toxic for human contact. One of the biggest challenges facing China today is the need to balance the economic growth that has lifted 500 million people out of poverty with environmental protections that ensure such growth does not come at the expense of the country’s environment and, ultimately, the health of its people.

The Asia Foundation’s environmental strategy aims to build local environmental protection capacity and to encourage policy and technological innovations through increased dialogue and communication among stakeholders. The Foundation’s programs in China have trained officials from municipal environmental protection bureaus (EPBs), judges from people’s courts, and representatives from environmental organizations on the use of alternative dispute resolution for the increasing number of conflicts over environmental pollution. Other programs support work in southern China to better engage small and medium-sized enterprises in low carbon economy planning at the city level.

Partnering with research institutes, local EPBs, civil society organizations, and business associations, the Foundation is also helping to implement milestone directives on environmental information transparency and public participation in environmental decision-making, which the central government issued in 2008 and 2009. In four diverse pilot cities, the Foundation and its partners are working to foster constructive collaboration among government, civil society, and business. Drawing on the Foundation’s extensive work to strengthen good governance in China, the project aims to develop and test practical mechanisms by which the public can access information about local pollution or make their voices heard in decisions about local environmental issues.

Floods, droughts, earthquakes, and typhoons continue to pose serious threats to life and property across China. The 2008 earthquake that struck Sichuan province, for example, killed at least 69,000 people and left 15 million homeless. Officials estimate that in 2012 alone natural disasters killed 1,338 people, displaced over 11 million citizens, damaged or destroyed more than 5 million homes, and caused damage valued at over US$66 billion.

While the risks posed by natural disasters cannot be entirely eliminated, preparation and risk management are key to minimizing immediate and long-term damage. From 2006 to 2011, the Foundation worked with national and local agencies, Chinese and American business associations, and Chinese charity organizations to strengthen disaster management at the community level, mobilizing private sector contributions and involving stakeholders from across sectors in training courses, drills, and awareness campaigns. Recognizing the success of the project and the potential of its approach, the Chinese government named several of the project’s pilot communities as models for the development of a nationwide system of community-based disaster reduction. By the end of 2012, there were over 1,200 such communities around China, and the central government aims to develop a total of 5,000 by the end of 2015. In the wake of this project, the Ministry of Civil Affairs also issued Regulations on the Relief of Natural Disasters, which encourages village committees, community centers, businesses, NGOs, and the public to assist in natural disaster relief efforts.

In Sichuan and Gansu provinces, site of the devastating 2008 earthquake, the Foundation has both assisted in recovery efforts and helped prepare communities for future disasters. The Foundation is now refining and
replicating community-based disaster management practices in several provinces, particularly in rural communities. Many activities focus on schools, where improvements can have a significant impact both by increasing the immediate safety of students and staff and by serving as a catalyst for similar efforts in the wider community.

The Foundation also works closely with the recently established National Institute of Emergency Management (NIEM), which is tasked with leading China’s efforts on disaster management training, policy research, and advisory support. Collaborating with key institutions like the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Foundation is helping to build NIEM’s capacity through curriculum development, training of NIEM faculty, and courses for national and local officials that are led jointly by newly trained faculty and their American colleagues.

**SUPPORTING CHINA’S ROLE IN REGIONAL DISASTER ASSISTANCE**

As China develops the capacity of its disaster management system at home, it is also assisting other countries to do the same. China’s experience responding to a wide range of severe natural disasters provides valuable insights for planning, response and mitigation strategies across the region. The Asia Foundation has supported the participation of Chinese foreign aid experts in a multi-year dialogue series, Asian Approaches to Development Cooperation, that addresses disaster management and other development issues. The Foundation is now supporting Chinese efforts to examine the country’s approach to foreign disaster assistance in particular—introducing Chinese policymakers to international disaster assistance models and exploring mechanisms for coordination and increased communication between China and other donor countries. Building on this work, the Foundation is also working with NIEM to enhance China’s engagement on disaster management in the ASEAN region. The new program facilitates triangular cooperation between U.S., Thai, and Chinese experts on training programs for officials and practitioners, and increased networking of disaster management experts and training institutes across ASEAN countries.

**CHARITY SECTOR STRENGTHENING**

One direct outcome of the 2008 earthquake – dramatic philanthropic growth in China – highlighted both the vast potential and institutional weaknesses in China’s charitable sector. Taking advantage of recent developments, including government policy initiatives, The Asia Foundation is building on its longstanding work to strengthen the charity sector in China. With the China Philanthropy Research Institute at Beijing Normal University, the Non-Profit Incubator, Peking University, and other partners, the Foundation is working to improve the sector’s regulatory framework, strengthen the governance and financial management practices of charitable organizations, and build societal capacity to oversee charitable sector development. To facilitate these efforts, the Foundation has helped launch platforms that encourage mutual learning among the charitable sectors of Mainland China, Hong Kong, and the United States.

**EMPOWERING WOMEN AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS**

**SUPPORTING MIGRANT WORKERS IN THEIR RECEIVING COMMUNITIES**

Each year, millions of rural Chinese migrate to China’s major manufacturing hubs in search of employment and a better life. Half of these migrants are young women. Most are in their twenties, have limited education or work experience, have limited knowledge of their labor rights under Chinese law, and are unaware of social services and networks available to them. These conditions leave migrant women vulnerable to labor exploitation and abuse.

Since 1999, The Asia Foundation has implemented pioneering programs that support and protect migrant workers in China (particularly women) by increasing awareness of labor rights and occupational safety, improving worker-manager communications and grievance channels, providing legal aid, strengthening enforcement of existing labor laws, facilitating integration of migrant women into their new communities, and giving migrant women the opportunity to enhance their professional skills and continue their education. Using both in-factory and community-based approaches, our innovative programs have reached over one million migrant workers in more than 20 provinces/municipalities across China.

For the children of migrant workers, access to public schools and critical college entrance exams in their urban “receiving” communities is often limited, creating another challenge to the wellbeing of migrant workers and their families. This issue is the subject of increasing attention and debate in China, as some long-term residents of cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou worry that migrants are overwhelming the capacity of local social services. As a contribution to this important discussion, the Foundation is conducting public and expert opinion surveys on policy reforms in...
this area piloted by Guangdong province, and developing policy recommendations based on the research findings.

**INCREASING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

Recognizing that economic empowerment is key to poverty alleviation, the Foundation also supports women and other disadvantaged groups to explore new economic opportunities, improve their livelihoods, and identify and address long-term development issues in their own communities. For example, the Foundation has worked with local partners in the aftermath of natural disasters to increase women’s income-generation opportunities and to establish women’s groups that help lead planning and implementation of community recovery and rebuilding. The Foundation’s programs also foster entrepreneurship among migrant women, supporting them to start or improve small businesses through provision of training and micro-credit.

**BILATERAL EXCHANGE AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

The Asia Foundation has long supported programs to improve U.S.-China relations, focusing on exchanges and dialogues. Since 1980, over 90 emerging leaders from China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs have taken part in the Foundation’s Young Diplomats Program, completing a one-year master’s degree in international relations at a prestigious American university. This fellowship program has enlarged the community of Chinese foreign policy practitioners who understand the substance and process of U.S. foreign policy, including its domestic determinants, and has contributed to better informed and more constructive engagement on bilateral issues over time. Program alumni have gone on to serve as Vice Ministers, Directors General, and Ambassadors around the globe.

Through a distinguished visitors program, the Foundation also organizes short-term study tours that are custom-designed for senior government officials. One program participant from the Ministry of Environmental Protection focused on the role of government and the media in promoting environmental awareness and education. Since 2000, the Foundation has also supported ten Chinese journalists as L.Z. Yuan Fellows to pursue media and foreign affairs studies in the United States.

In recent years, the Foundation has introduced reciprocal program elements that increase opportunities for Americans to visit and study in China. Study tours and internships in China for American graduate students, as well as research affiliations in China for young, up-and-coming American professors, build understanding and commitment to two-way exchange among the next generation of “China hands.”

The Foundation’s China program also organizes conferences and workshops to enhance regional cooperation and improve U.S. relations with China and its neighbors. These have included annual dialogues on “Sino-United States Relations: Regional Security and Global Governance,” which have alternated between Shanghai and Honolulu and gathered prominent experts from China and the U.S. to examine key issues affecting bilateral ties—including such global governance topics as climate change, foreign aid policy, and regional disaster management.

**BOOKS FOR ASIA**

As China emerges as a dynamic player in the world economy, with a more mobile and educated workforce and advancing research capabilities, the demand for English-language books is multiplying. The Asia Foundation’s Books for Asia program has delivered more than 3.8 million books and journals to China since 1980. Each year, donations reach hundreds of colleges and universities across all of China’s provinces. The vast majority of the books are university-level, professional texts related to critical development topics—such as economics and finance, business, engineering, medicine, nursing, architecture, and computer science.

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, D.C. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.