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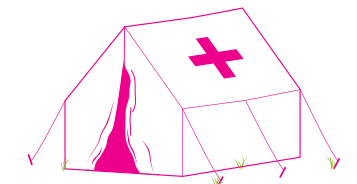
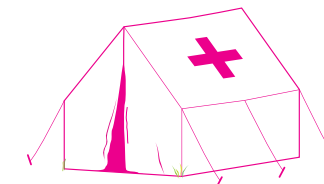
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AFTERMATH: an introduction

in the wake of the quake

Early on, we thought the biggest impact the earthquake would have on our work would be the temporary closure of our office. We had discussed the possibility of scrapping the issue that was halfway done and putting together an “earthquake issue.” No, was the consensus. “It’s just an earthquake.” But then the numbers started creeping out, surprisingly slowly given the epicenter’s proximity to Chengdu. Several hundred—several thousand—an entire city leveled—the whole of Wenchuan County in an immense crisis. And then we decided it had to be done—there was no way we could simply ignore it and move on.

In the hours following the quake the conversation revolved around “Where were you?,” “Was this your first time?,” and “Damn, that was scary.” And then: “So ... what do we do now?”

As we recovered from the shock of the event and the shaking itself, TEAM CHENGDOO decided that its most appropriate role in the legion of help efforts that were emerging would be to disperse information in English that would be relevant and useful to the community in Chengdu. Given the circumstances, we started receiving e-mail and website traffic from the world over, both from people who had been reading CHENGDOO and people looking for local information in English about the situation.

Days passed, and it became clear not only how much of a physical and psychological toll the earthquake was taking on our northwesterly neighbors but also the effect it is having on China on the whole and Chengdu in particular. We’re so near and yet in many ways still so far from the devastation.

Like many people we weren’t sleeping or eating well and had a lot of nervous energy to throw into work—and like everybody, we wanted to help. We ran around and gathered information on what people were doing, what people needed, and how people could help the situation. And it went on and on. While the earthquake was by all accounts a long one, in the grand scheme of things, the shaking lasted no more than three minutes. But the aftermath continues, even in fortunate Chengdu, through grief and mourning and panic over shortages, more aftershocks, odd weather phenomena; division in ideologies about helping. People thanked us for the daily e-mails and congratulated us for a job well done, but the task felt small and at times insignificant. Seventy thousand people had died, and we were sending e-mails and text messages.

We started hearing stories—from our friends, our contributors, our readers, and lots of people we’d never heard from before. We were receiving on-the-field reports via SMS from people we knew working on the ground in the disaster areas and e-mail, phone call, and in-person updates from those who were busy coordinating efforts within the city and beyond. Finally, as critical needs were met, we sent out an “earthquake survey” to our e-mail list, which met with more responses than any other single mail we’ve sent out. You’ll see these bits and pieces of stories scattered throughout this issue. We’ve published as many as we could, showing what we feel is a diverse spectrum of experiences, viewpoints, reactions, and reflections.

But there were so many stories, and it was a struggle to choose some over others and parse narrations word by word. Even now, as the issue nears completion we are still voicing reservations. Is the earthquake “old news” now? Should we just get over it and get back to normal life? Are we indulging our foreign, residing-in-safe-Chengdu selves too much by not providing more accounts of tragedies? Are we putting too much focus on some stories while not giving enough space to others? Should we be including more hard information and analysis and cutting back on some of the first-person accounts?

One reader mentioned that this issue will be a keepsake issue, something to remember this time period of our lives by. Another said that filling out the survey was therapeutic for her, in a way, because it forced her to reflect on things she hadn’t thought about. And to some extent that echoed our thoughts as well—hearing, reading, scrutinizing, analyzing all of these experiences helped give closure to the feelings of trauma and helplessness. (That’s not to imply, however, that there aren’t years of rebuilding still ahead, and we encourage readers who are interested in being involved in ongoing relief efforts to explore volunteer opportunities as they become available. Refer to www.chengdoo.com for updates.)

There are thousands of news reports by now on the earthquake and the toll of its devastation. There is website after website providing information on organizations working on relief efforts that you can donate to. We didn’t want to rehash what’s already been said or print information that’s readily available, worldwide. We wanted to showcase instead what happened and what’s happening, from a local perspective, in English.

Finally, we expect that this issue will garner interest from people all around the world who want something other than the usual news, who want to know what it’s like to be in China in 2008 during and after a monumental emergency. We hope that the issue helps sustain worldwide awareness about the situation as it progresses and fades from headlines, much like the “Myanmar cyclone” that hit only several weeks prior to the “China earthquake” and was insignificant to most of us outside of the region.

In the end, what we hope we have created is documentation of a life-changing event, of a region, of China, and of the city we live in.

Team CHENGDOO

National mourning period on May 19 at Tianfu Square. *Photo by Julien Rideller.*



Vulnerability: Time, Space, and Multiple Realities

a writer reflects on earthquake experiences

By Forest Venn

“The month after the quake was totally awesome!” said Yin Yimin, a businessman native to Xipu, a west-Chengdu suburb. “We covered our courtyard with four big tarps, and a lot of people came over and partied with us under there. That was totally awesome! *Basi de hen!*”

Yin was talking about the period in 1976 after the Tangshan quake when many residents of greater Chengdu, shaken from routine by rumors of imminent disaster, slept out in tents for an entire month. He was 6 at the time. Now his 10-year-old son is having a similar experience. The boy has been spending the nights rough-housing with friends and extended family on factory-wrapped mattresses at his father’s furniture warehouse. He lost his personal savings to quake relief, but otherwise has been thrilled with the long vacation.

My wife was on the 10th floor. But I was on the ground in the People’s Park, and it has therefore been hard for me to understand the sensation that even now distracts her through the day and keeps her up at night: the sensation of a building going liquid beneath her shoes.

Among our relatives we have only one uncle who was in the disaster zone, in Hongkou, Dujiangyan. If you saw the 10 of us eating together and were told that one had been near the heart of the quake, you would immediately identify him as the one. He is extremely pensive and also somehow giddy. Of course we all wonder what it was like, but he doesn’t talk about it. When I said, “So many deaths!,” he looked at me like I came from another planet.

“So many’ doesn’t touch it.”

We are so far from 1976 that many Chengdu natives no longer remember whether or not they felt the Tangshan quake, nor, if they do remember a slight shaking in that year, are they sure that it was in July from Tangshan rather than in August from Songpan.

We are 20 times farther from Tangshan than from Wenchuan, but according to Chengdu native Jing Lin, a wholesaler at Hehuachi, the panic here after Tangshan far exceeded what we have experienced recently. “... We didn’t have any news in ’76. Everything we heard came by rumor. Tangshan happened at night, so we assumed ours would happen at night. No one slept at home all month. The rumors said all kinds of things. Some said the earth would open up and swallow tents, so nobody knew where to pitch camp.” He slept near Beimen in the back of a Liberation Truck belonging to his father’s work unit. He was 11.

This May he has been sleeping with his wife and daughter on a bedroll on the dusty commons of a housing development in Xipu called the International Cosmopolitan.

“This time it’s completely different. Although Wenchuan is much closer than Tangshan, this time we see reality on TV. So we aren’t scared.”

Two Different Kinds of Truth

An older resident of the International Cosmopolitan, Li Houhua, 80, is more circumspect. He has no plans to move back into his apartment. Does he doubt what he sees on TV? He wouldn’t go that far. “Of course the TV is true. It says it’s safe to go back inside, and that’s the truth. But if I put water in a basin and set it there, I see it sloshing back and forth—well, that’s another kind of truth. There are two different kinds!”

There’s more to the story, Li suspects. “They say even the Americans can’t predict earthquakes. How ridiculous! The Americans put people on the moon. Our own government has put a man into space! How can they not know what’s under our feet? Impossible!”

From the second day, I felt that my wife needed advice on how to deal with fear. She was—and still is—keenly aware of the barking of dogs and the movements of roaches. On the fifth night, which we would again spend abroad, I was pleased to see the Pixian TV station announcing an interview with the director of the Mental Health Center of Huaxi Hospital. A specialist in post-traumatic stress, Dr. Sun was going to discuss the key points to psychological recovery. I shouted at my wife to come watch the interview. “The most important thing,” Dr. Sun began, “is to believe the Party, believe the government, believe the media.”

Do Not Believe Rumors

At 11 p.m. a van drove through the neighborhood broadcasting, “Do not believe rumors, do not spread rumors.” It came through the street again in the morning

around 6. My wife woke to an aftershock in the wee hours, but my slumber was so dead-pig-like that the propaganda van was both the last thing I heard before sleep and the first thing I heard after waking.

“If you think about it, we’re actually very fortunate,” says my uncle, who works at a tent factory in Xindu. “It isn’t many people who get to witness in their lifetimes the creation of new mountains and new river courses.”

The sense of profound vulnerability is an encumbrance to daily life. But it reflects a truth about the dynamic and perhaps illusory nature of our experience which, although it stands at the center of both physics and religion, is extremely difficult to gain an intuition for.

On this subject, A.S. Eddington in 1927 described the difficulty that a physicist faces in the simple act of entering a room:

“I must make sure of landing on a plank traveling at 20 miles a second round the sun—a fraction of a second too early or too late, and the plank would be miles away. I must do this whilst hanging from a round planet head outward into space, and with a wind of aether blowing at no one knows how many miles a second through every interstice of my body. The plank has no solidity of substance. To step on it is like stepping on a swarm of flies. Shall I not slip through? No, if I make the venture one of the flies hits me and gives a boost up again; I fall again and am knocked upwards by another fly; and so on. I may hope that the net result will be that I remain about steady; but if unfortunately I should slip through the floor or be boosted too violently up to the ceiling, the occurrence would be, not a violation of the laws of Nature, but a rare coincidence.”

Mianzhu. (photo: Leo Chen)



INTRO CHENGDOO 05



Dujiangyan



Mianzhu

May 12 ... Outbreak

giant earthquake visits Sichuan *all photos by: Leo Chen*

Readers recount the moment.

"When it started I thought it was a heavy car passing by; a moment later, I heard noise outside. The boss was yelling, 'Earthquake! Run!' Everybody inside ran out. At first I didn't think it was an earthquake because I always believed Chengdu doesn't have earthquakes."
—Stephanie Yan, from Chengdu

"I went to get a drink and then came back to the couch and nearly fell over. At first I thought that it might have been someone trying to take down our building with a bomb. After I realized that was untrue the earthquake made me think of all the movies that I've seen with buildings just toppling over. After the main shock, I grabbed my laptop and headed down 16 flights of stairs to the street."
—craig Nisbet, from Canada

"Since I was in a bank with a friend, the first thing we did was to run out, but we only went out of the bank, and did not go any further, because there was a big rush of crowds, and we didn't know where was safe."
—Betty, from Dujiangyan

"I knew what I should do but still didn't do the 'right' thing like hiding under a table, or not running back inside for my phone!"
—Jessie Brett, from Australia

"When the floor was shook, I knew it must be the earthquake. But I didn't speak out because I firmly believed Chengdu is a most safe city to live in ever since ancient times, and earthquake of this kind was impossible. Sitting in a daze for several seconds, I ran to an emergency exit door but it was locked! seemed we waited so long that when we could went through the door, the quake ended."
—Alonso Chen, from Chengdu

"When my room started to shake, I thought there was a gas explosion in my building. When I found other buildings acting the same, I thought there was a bomb exploding in this area. ... Then I realized this might be an earthquake. My roommate dragged me downstairs. Everything felt unreal, like a movie."
—Eva Hui, from Chengdu



Dujiangyan

selection for Newsweek, all photos by: Leo Chen



Mianzhu



Dujiangyan



Mianzhu



Dujiangyan



Dujiangyan



American Charlie Mosely, 26, was with some friends on a motorcycle daytrip on Qingcheng Shan on May 12 when "everything started shaking." He recalls the quake and his journey back to Chengdu.

"It just came out of nowhere. The shaking was really violent, and you could hear stones crumbling, and glass breaking. It sounded like an explosion—it felt like an explosion.

"People start coming out of the buildings, and some of the buildings are completely collapsing, and then some of them, just the second floor would collapse or part of a building would fall off. People are running into the streets, and everyone's confused, and no one's really talking or saying anything, everyone's just wandering around in a stupor.

"We sit there just looking around scared and shocked for two minutes or however long the shaking went, and then when it's finished my first thought was get on the bike and get the hell out of here immediately.

"I go down the road toward the bottom of the mountain, and you can't even see the road—there's a giant landslide. Like the road just goes into the mountain. It was just fresh dirt wall. So we turn around and go up the other way on the road, and we go past the spot where we were standing about 50 feet, and then a collapsed building had completely obscured that way of the road.

"More and more people start coming out of the buildings. We were trapped in front of this section [of road] in front of a hotel, and after about an hour there were about 100 people there. It's very hard to find information because immediately the phones were cut off. One person was smart enough to get to a car and turn on the radio, and then we figured out what had happened.

"We built a shelter and decided to spend the night there and then head out the next morning. But after the sun went down, it started raining really hard for 24 hours, so that made it really a lot more difficult, and we felt like the chances were kind of against us.

"The buildings were still coming down with the aftershocks, and the mountain was coming down. Landslides, avalanches, all over the place. Our plan was at sunrise to go down by the river and follow the river down to the foot of the mountain, but it

had rained so hard during the night that the river was too dangerous.

"There was definitely a feeling like maybe we're not meant to get out of here. It was a very helpless feeling, it was a feeling like maybe there's nothing we can do—just kind of a fate. It's like, it could happen now, and we're buried, or nothing could happen, and nothing we do could make a difference. I've never had that feeling before.

"A leader kind of emerges, one Chinese guy steps up on a table and gives a speech—I could understand about 30 percent, but basically the gist was, 'We're stuck up here, I know where we are, I'll get us out; who's with me?' Everyone cheers, so the morale was pretty high at that point. We decided to go with him because he's a local.

"We walked about 25 km from that point when we got on the road, and got to the bottom of the mountain—we managed to find a car but they can't take us to Chengdu because they don't have enough gas, and I tell them to get gas, I'll pay for the gas, and he says all the gas stations are closed. So we go to Dujiangyan, and there's military marching in the street and ambulances and police cars all with their sirens on.

"We found a car back to Chengdu, and as soon as we got back, we started looking for signs of damage because in Dujiangyan there were collapsed buildings everywhere and cracks in all the buildings.

"I was surprised to get here and see like, wow, nothing really changed. Then I'm looking around, and all the shops are closed, and then I'm like, 'OK, it's not normal here.' Everyone is in a complete state of panic, freaking out. I looked around and realized the state everyone is in, which is terrified.

"The feeling was like it was the apocalypse. Everything was exploding. I could see the mountains—there were huge mountains near me—and you could hear the mountains, landslides, and boulders coming down, and there were boulders as big as these buildings, and when they come down it's like a thunderous, explosion-like sound. And then it's echoed all around the mountain range. How do you describe the feeling of standing next to a mountain that's exploding and tumbling down?"

Charlie blogs at www.19thstep.com.
OUTBREAK CHENGDOO 07

Sichuan in the World News

china bloggers discuss media coverage of the quake

A Reluctant Eyewitness Reporter

By Kevin Morris

In the days immediately following the earthquake I was interviewed by Al Jazeera English twice. Both times, I listened to their live broadcast as it was fed through my phone line. On-the-scene reporter Melissa Chan was speaking to people deeply affected by the disaster or chasing down urgent stories, such as one about the Zipingpu Dam. There was an almost palpable sense of horror and immediacy in these reports; it was pure and utter tragedy, and it was also excellent reporting. Yet both times, when my short interview was over, I felt downright awful.

In the following days, three other representatives of major news organizations, including the BBC and the AP, contacted me to hear my thoughts on the earthquake—and that bad feeling got worse. Weren't there so many other people either much more affected by the quake than me, or doing much more useful things with themselves than me? Finally, I decided to refuse any further interviews on the disaster.

But how did I become such a popular commentator on the earthquake in the first place? Am I some kind of expert on the area? Did I take part in rescue operations?

Nope. I have a blog. In English.

In the age of new media, it seems that not only are blogs changing how people get their news, they are also changing how the news gets its news.

The journalists who found me did so with one simple Google search: "Chengdu earthquake blog." It's a quick and easy solution to a difficult problem—finding local, English-speaking people in times of crisis who are willing to talk.

Bloggers are accustomed to expressing their viewpoints in a short, concise way; however, that doesn't necessarily make them a good source of information on anything other than their own experiences.

But reporters from faraway places were scrambling to find any firsthand sources they would be able to communicate with, and so friends of friends, references of relatives, as well as random strangers online were all fair game. Josh Katz, for instance, was paid \$550 for four interviews with the CBC in Canada. How did they have his contact information? A relative, a former employee of the station, passed it along, knowing the station would want an eyewitness account of the quake. Katz is from Connecticut and has lived in Chengdu for two months. (He donated the money to relief efforts).

None of the people who contacted me had heard anything about the Bookworm's response to the disaster, nor had they heard of this magazine, both of which would have

been better sources of information on what was happening in Chengdu and, amazingly, both of which I spoke about and linked to on my website.

Firsthand accounts are useful for a quote a two, but the fact that I read nothing in major media about local relief groups, especially those in the foreign community, tells me that to a certain extent they were not doing their homework.

Chengdu-based Kevin Morris blogs at www.barking-at-the-sun.net.



Q&A with Shanghaiist's Kenneth Tan

Kenneth Tan is one of the principle contributors to popular English-language blog Shanghaiist.com. As soon as the quake hit, the Shanghaiist team worked 'round the clock to provide constant updates, sometimes beating the international media with updates. We had some questions for them.

CHENGDOO: A number of our readers said that Shanghaiist was the first source they turned to for earthquake news. We were also watching your site constantly. Can you discuss the decision to go from Shanghai blog to up-to-the-minute news source? How many people were involved in the live-blogging? What was that like?

KENNETH: Well, to begin with, Shanghaiist is not just a general Shanghai blog, but also a China blog. We try to cover a wide range of topics that we think would be of interest to our readers. There is still generally a dearth of English-language China information, and we aim to fill in the gap wherever possible. ... When the Wenchuan earthquake struck, many of our friends from around Shanghai felt the tremors, and we also observed people talking about it on Twitter. As soon as we were able to confirm several basic details of the earthquake, we went ahead to break the story, piecing together things that people were

telling us, things that we'd seen on Twitter, and information from the newswires as well as from the Chinese Internet. The immediacy of the Internet is an amazing thing. Each time we found a relevant tidbit of information relating to the earthquake, we would put it up and link it back to the source. Within less than an hour, China Twitter users hooked up with users in Chengdu (most notably @casperodj and @inwalkedbud). We also began to receive videos that people were uploading, and these were all duly plugged in as updates to our story. One thing led to another, and along the way, we realized that this was a terrible disaster and a big story. As the news trickled in from various sources, we continued to update the story. A lot of information at that time was only available in Chinese, and so we translated whatever we could find into English. And the news

just would not stop coming in. Over the next one-and-a-half days, we filed 133 updates to that story (four of us were contributing to the live-blogging, and we were doing it in shifts), and before we knew it, we became the go-to place for earthquake information. Over the next two weeks, another 60 earthquake-related stories or so would be filed.

CHENGDOO: Were you getting many calls from reporters in the West looking for information on the quake?

KENNETH: Shanghaiist's earthquake coverage has been highlighted in the BBC, the Guardian, the Telegraph, CNN, and many other non-English news media. My only interviews so far were with the Wall Street Journal and the International Channel Shanghai. Lots of journalists in the mainstream media have been asking us for help. We also have some reporter friends who went to Sichuan as soon as the earthquake happened, and many of them found in Shanghaiist a very important source of aggregated earthquake news while they were on the ground.

CHENGDOO: How do you see technology and new media as having affected the outcome of the quake?

KENNETH: As many people have observed, this was China's very first mass-media earthquake. During the Tangshan earthquake in 1976, there was no Internet of course. Television sets weren't as ubiquitous as now, and you were lucky if you had your own radio. I definitely think that if not for the TV and the Internet, we would not have seen such a huge display of grief and outpouring across China as we have observed in the aftermath of the earthquake. The Chinese government's newfound openness in its handling of the media this time is to be commended.

May 13 ... Emergency

an outpouring of support

"We got ur appeal and have donated rmb 20,000 directly to the red cross in cd. we have also sent your appeal to over 100 friends in china and abroad and pledged to match all donations 100 per cent."

—Donor, via SMS

"You know where we could donate blood?"

—Chengdu resident, via SMS

"It was my wife who first brought up the question of what was happening outside Chengdu – 'That was bad, wasn't it – I think there are people being killed.' She started crying—we wondered how we could help."

—Chengdu resident Sid Francis

"In the beginning, I did not know it is so serious. On the 13th of May, I woke up and watched TV and realized I had wasted 21 hours to rescue those people."

—Heather Zhao, nurse at Parkway Health Chengdu

It took many of us until late at night if not the next morning, to realize the scale of the earthquake's devastation. But once people in Chengdu learned their neighbors were in dire situations, they turned out in droves to help. And as soon as the stories, images, and, later, video, spread across the international media, the world was knocking at Sichuan's door.

In Chengdu, grassroots efforts cropped up over the days following the quake, many sending small teams to deliver supplies. So many self-organized relief volunteers swarmed the area, in fact, that obstructed traffic was a real concern. Others stayed in the city in anticipation of the influx of patients that would no doubt be sent into Chengdu's hospitals. Organizations already present in Chengdu were able to send professional search-and-rescue teams quickly. Chengdu's major disaster-relief organization, the Red Cross of Chengdu, was flooded with calls.

Meanwhile, Chengdu's foreign community began organizing small-scale fundraising events, spearheaded mainly by High Connections Café, the Bookworm, and Café Panam(e), who collected donations of supplies and money to send to the People's No. 1 Hospital as well as directly to impacted areas. The latter two venues quickly organized benefit concerts featuring lineups of local talent who played on a volunteer basis on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, pulling in approximately RMB40,000 in donations over the two nights. On Sunday, Jah Bar held a benefit jam evening, and the following Friday Hemp House collected several thousand RMB, which was donated to Sichuan Quake Relief, a group organized by local and foreign volunteers at the Bookworm to address needs in areas neglected by larger aid groups. Hundreds of e-mails poured into CHENGDOO's mailbox for days from people all around the world asking how they could help.

Across the globe, communities organized fundraising efforts. A Couchsurfing.com group in Shanghai contacted us to ask where they should direct the RMB10,000 they raised one evening. Shanghaiist.com pulled in RMB228,336 to donate to the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation. (See photo, opposite page.) Chengdu's sister cities, such as Phoenix (U.S.), and businesses and individuals with ties to China or Chengdu—business partners, family or friends, a past visit to the pandas—rounded up money collections to send over.

On the following pages we follow the stories of a few of the individuals who were working on the field, risking their own safety, to rescue people or deliver supplies where needed. Some self-organized; others sought out governmental alliance.

"you have shanghai couchsurfing support thanks For info little as it may be ll channel the money asap"

—Fundraiser organizer, via SMS

"For us, before we watch the news from TV, we couldn't feel the pain of those people at all. The number of the death was just a number. However, after we realize the reality which is not funny at all, we cried, and we feel happy to donate hundreds or thousands. I am not kidding, the videos on the TV do work. That is really a disaster... And people keep looking for a way to go there to help. Because we feel that pain..."

—Zhang Yan, via SMS

"Hi all, I have been speaking with a disaster relief organization, and basic relief kits are urgently needed for earthquake refugees in mianyang. These are essential for controlling the spread of disease. A friend and I are organizing these kits tomorrow at uni. If you can come and help or donate it would be great. 10 am tomorrow"

—Southwest University of Finance & Economics student, via SMS

WE CAME TO RESCUE YOU

A TEAM OF ISRAELI STUDENTS COMES TOGETHER

‘We have the same purpose, we have the same *mudi*, we have the same goal. Don’t worry, we’re gonna get there.’



Dobzinski (left), Hasan (right), and friends they met along the way take a brief rest. Photo courtesy Eliran Dobzinski and Nisan Hasan.

Shortly before half past two on May 12, two Israeli students on a daytrip out of the city phoned their friends in Chengdu to announce that they had arrived safely and were enjoying tea in Hongkou. Minutes later, the earthquake struck, and the Israeli community in Chengdu formed an impromptu committee to organize a rescue mission. On Tuesday, Eliran Dobzinski, 24, and Nisan Hasan, 25, students at Chengdu University, set out to find the women, Anat Bilu and Ma’ayan Segev, whom they had never met. The roof the women had been sitting under had collapsed on them, breaking Bilu’s jaw in three places and injuring several of Segev’s fingers. Both women have since returned to Israel.

CHENGDOO heard about the story and found Dobzinski and Hasan organizing relief supplies at Zoe’s. Several days later they recounted their experience to us.

Eliran: The story begins the day the earthquake happened. In the night, one of [my girlfriend’s] friends gave her a call and told her there are two Israeli girls missing. ... [The next day] she got a call from this girl who said we need two guys who can speak Chinese. So we volunteered.

Nisan: We were supposed to be like eight people, but they all chickened out, and no one wanted us to go. They told us there were a few ammonia factories [that exploded], you don’t know what’s going on there, the army can’t get in, you wouldn’t get in.

The driver was really afraid. We thought maybe on the way there would be police and army and they would stop us and we’d have to walk. No one stopped us. We just went up the mountain.

Eliran: We got to the end of the road. There was an avalanche, so we stopped there. There was a village, so we stopped, and at that time there wasn’t so much information. They told us the girls are inside Hongkou and you cannot get in. And they are villagers—if they can’t get in, no one can get in—not army, not special forces.

Nisan: We slept with the villagers inside their big tent because it was raining. Got up at 5 o’clock in the morning, ate fangbianmian, and we thought maybe we would just wait there because there were a lot of people who came to that spot, people who had lost their children, and no one could get in.

Eliran: At some point I was talking to one of the villagers, and I see somebody goes down from the mountain. Then I was like, ‘Oh, there is a way, because I saw him going down.’ I ran to him, started talking to him, he told me there is a way.

So we took our bags and started climbing. On the way all the villagers told us, ‘Yes there is two girls, and they’re in Hongkou hospital ...’

Nisan: I’ve been there a few times, so I know exactly where it is. Well, if I take the road, I know where they are! There wasn’t any road. [The mountain was] really steep, like 70 degrees up and 70 degrees down, and muddy.

Eliran: Then we got to one of the villager’s place, and they told us, we just saw them, so we started running. We got to a crossroad. In this crossroad there were two guys standing there—in the middle of nowhere, for no reason—and they told us, ‘Yes, we saw the girls about 10 minutes ago go up there.’ If they hadn’t been there, for sure we will go to the left side, but they told us go to the right side. So we went up, we get to one of the villager’s place, and they told us, ‘Yes, they went over there.’

Nisan: They said they were here five minutes ago. I collapsed, I had no power. There was a house that had collapsed, and the boy and the girl and the grandmother gave us food and water and drinks.

Eliran: After five minutes I got there, found them. They were with two Chinese guys who really, really helped us. They were their angels. ... They were carrying her up the mountain. When we got to the biggest mountain, on the top there was a connection. So I gave a call to my cousin and girlfriend because I know one of them has a connection to the Israeli Consul. I told him, ‘OK, arrange us cars for 6 o’clock.’ When we got to the road, we hitchhiked three motorbikes, and they took us to a car, and the car took us to [where] we could drive. Wednesday evening, we got to the Huaxiyuan at approximately 8 o’clock.

Before we went, there was a joke. I don’t know how we got to this topic, but we talk about the insurance stuff. We don’t have insurance. I’m like, ‘Oh, I don’t have insurance, and you don’t have insurance, also, and we’re going to rescue people in one of the worst places in the world now! That’s funny!’

Nisan: Before we got to the girls there was two choppers going in, I don’t know why. Before we got to the girls there were villagers who told us, ‘We saw the girls waving to the choppers.’ They were sure it was the rescue team come to pick them up because they have insurance [and] they didn’t exactly know what happened during the earthquake. We got to the girls, we started climbing, we met lots of people going in with medicine, just people like us.

Without the Chinese we wouldn’t get the girls out, no way. We had to carry one of them. The [villagers’] houses had just collapsed, and they did everything just to help us. That was amazing. Didn’t want money, didn’t want anything.

On the way back from the first mountain, on the other side of the river, there was noise. It was an avalanche, a big one. You know, it’s beautiful when you see it. But then I kind of said, but I’m also on a mountain, it could happen here as well! And this mountain the day before just collapsed. That was the first moment that I felt was a bit dangerous. It’s a beautiful place, and you got the river, you climb the mountain, you turn around, it’s like heaven! Except for the houses that were broken and everything, and the tents. It was a tent city.

We got to the ambulance, and the girl with the broken jaw just didn’t wanna let go of the Chinese guy. They were crying, both of them. I almost cried. She couldn’t speak any Chinese, couldn’t speak any English, but he helped her so much that she kinda felt attached to him.

She wanted to offer him money, and I told her don’t do it because he’ll never take it. And she did, he didn’t take it, and then she started crying, started crying really hard, and for 10 minutes, the ambulance just waited for them to stop crying! And she got on the ambulance, we got [to Chengdu] an hour later or something.

Eliran: We went to eat a hamburger at Zoe’s and passed out.

What if you’d listened to your comrades and not gone out there?

Nisan: Maybe [the girls] couldn’t find the way. One almost collapsed, she had leg cramps, everything. And water, they didn’t have any water, they had two bottles of half a liter. We had four or five liters on us, we had tents and sleeping bags.

Eliran: I carried a bag with two mattresses, two sleeping bags, two tents, a boiler, and cooking stuff, and fangbianmian, a lot, so we were prepared to survive at least a week with two bags. I had these crazy meals that I got from one of my friends. It’s a box like this, you eat a tablet, two tablets it’s like a meal, and we had like 16, 17. It’s for the army, it’s like space food.

Why do you have that?

Eliran: Why do I have that? For cases like this, I guess.

Hmm, OK. What did you see along the way?

Nisan: On the roads I thought we would see maybe bodies and stuff like that, but we didn’t. People taking old people who couldn’t walk, old mothers with their babies. I wish we could help them back then, but we didn’t have medicines, we didn’t have nothing.

Eliran: Saw really old, old ladies climbing up the mountain. Some of them we helped also.

Nisan: They’re like, ‘A foreigner! Where’d you come from!?’ Like you see an old lady who can’t go up—I help her, she looks, and it’s like, ‘Woah! Where the hell did you come from?’

Eliran: When we went up we were two groups. The other group there were four Chinese guys. They had approximately 40 people who were missing. So we went together. On the way, we were talking, and I think one of the sentences they told us was really powerful, really touching: ‘We have the same purpose, we have the same mudi, we have the same goal. Don’t worry, we’re gonna get there.’

On the way they found their friends, and we started climbing up with a crazy old guy—he’s 60 years old walking with a cane and he’s walking the most craziest roads there is, jumping, running—you can see that he is a villager. That’s his area, and he knows every rock and every bush there. I think he has names also for the bushes.

Have you done something this physically intense before?

Nisan: Never in my life! And I’ve climbed mountains, I did stuff like that, but not even close. My body still hurts.

Eliran: I did some stuff harder than that—36 hours of training martial arts without stopping almost, including night, day, night. All your body hurts. You break almost all your fingers. Your bones, your head, your ribs, everything hurts.

What kinds of emotions were you experiencing during this journey?

Nisan: When we found the girls, I collapsed 10 minutes before; I just had no power, no energy to continue. But when we saw them, when we saw the girl with the broken jaw and found out she didn’t eat or drink we knew we had to get her out, so you forget yourself in a way.

Eliran: In the night when we slept in the tent, there were aftershocks. And then you know you wake up in the morning, there was an earthquake. We didn’t say anything. But we thought about it—there was an earthquake in the evening, and we’re gonna climb up there? And then the villagers told us there is no way to get in. So we felt like useless—what are we gonna do, we’re just gonna sit here all day long; we’re not gonna do anything? We’re gonna sit here and wait? That sounds stupid. We cannot be there and not do anything. So we didn’t talk about it, but I think like that’s how we felt, we need to do something.

Before we knew that we could climb up, we felt like really useless. Like what the fuck are we gonna do here? We’re gonna stay here a day, two days, we’re gonna wait for them for a week?

Nisan: When we got to the girls, they thought we were the rescue team—the professional rescue team, like the government sent someone.

Eliran: One of the girls, her father is a really powerful man. Really rich and powerful. He really helped us from Israel. He just called everybody that he knows, and he knows somebody that works with people that works here.

Nisan: That’s why she thought the chopper was for her.

Eliran: So from Israel they got us the cars, and they got a really special driver. They came and picked us up with a Mercedes, a brand new one. It was like an SUV. And this driver, he was from Dujiangyan. He was a local guy, so he knew the roads and the shortcuts, he knew everything. The gaosulu was closed. [But] the car had a government card so they can go everywhere they want.

When I ran [to the girls, one] just looked at me. I said, ‘Hello,’ in Hebrew. ‘We came to rescue you!’ She couldn’t speak for two minutes, and then she was like, ‘OK, the insurance sent something,’ and I told her, ‘I’m sorry but we’re not from the government, we’re not from the insurance, we’re just two students that came. We heard there’s people in trouble—we came to rescue you, that’s all. We didn’t know anything; we’re just two students, we want to help. That’s all.’

* * *

And then you guys led collections at Zoe’s ...

Nisan: Well after that, my uncle had an idea. He called me and said, I know you’re tired but from tomorrow, we wanna help the Chinese people. He said something true: Chengdu gave us so much, now it’s our turn to give something back. So at Zoe’s we opened like a center, and lots of people came just from the street and gave clothes, money, medicine, whatever. We went to hospitals in Chengdu, we gave them clothes, and now I have my picture in a government magazine. It’s for the schools, and they say it’s the first time they have a foreigner on that paper.

Normally you’re just studying Chinese. Now you’re local celebrities.

Nisan: When we got [back], people were saying some stuff. I realized, OK, we did something good. Because when you do it, you don’t think about it. Now we’re like heroes in Israel, like in the news and papers. It’s funny. I wanna be in Israel when I’m in the news!

There are many more details that we had to leave out due to space considerations. However, because it’s such a touching story, we’ve made the full transcript of the interview available online at www.chengdoo.com.

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Knocking on the Dragon’s Gate

“Walked up Yingchang Gou in Pengzhou. Back at base camp. Very organised all things considered. Army here in force now and road being worked on. Not much left standing. Survivors walking wounded or out by air. Awaiting information on where to go next.”
- via SMS, May 16, 9:47:39

“We are back at our base camp in Longmenshan. Road up Huilong Gou very badly damaged by landslides. Walking difficult and a little dangerous; falling rocks and unstable ground in places. No-one has walked in very far, although helicopters have dropped supplies. Plan to start heading in early tomorrow morning.”
- via SMS, May 16, 20:19:26

“Back out at base camp – very long day, spent 15 hours walking ~60km and ~1800m of ascent, mostly no path at all in a dense forest, heavy loads and lot of landslides. Rescued 8 people and 1 dog though. Even saw recent panda shit, so at least one wild panda survived! We’re coming back to Chengdu tonight ... Very difficult to send messages.”
- via SMS, May 18, 00:51:53

>Last issue we met and interviewed Matt Ryan of Dragon Expeditions, a small, Chengdu-based outdoor-tours company, and asked why he would want to spend his spare time exploring caves and climbing rocks; the day after the quake, we put our foot in our mouth when we received a message saying that some of the Dragon Expeditions team was going on a rescue mission with the Chinese Mountain Rescue Team, organized by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The team of 22 set off toward Longmenshan Township, in the northernmost part of Pengzhou with the goal of getting to the areas inaccessible to the army—Yingchang Gou, Huilong Gou, and the mountains between them.

Working in favor of the team was the fact that this is the area in which Dragon Expeditions operates tours and that Ryan himself has considerable rescue experience, including aiding with efforts after the 7.6-magnitude earthquake that struck Izmit, near Istanbul, in 1999. “I could hardly sit in Chengdu and watch the pictures knowing I could be helping,” said Ryan. “After this quake it was pretty clear we could do something to help, but didn’t want to get in the way. This was still a worry even with skills, experience, and government blessing. The military has 100,000+ people mobilized and was clearly doing a very good job.”

But while a government-granted vehicle permit allowed the team to pass through checkpoints along the way and base-camp logistics were coordinated efficiently by local government, there were other difficulties to face. Risking further landslides on already-unstable terrain, the team members made intense physical demands on their bodies (described by Ryan in the text messages above). Dehydration became a serious concern. “At one point we came across and looted a water bottling plant. On our way back we went back and recovered several more cases for a military team heading the other way.”

Having been told by villagers along the way that there were people alive in the mountains with no way out, the team called out for hours until they received a response and were able to make a path to the eight stranded people and dog. “As soon as they realized that there was a route down the mountain they set off running down the path that we had spent the day clearing! It soon got dark though and everyone’s pace slowed somewhat. By the end we were all struggling,” Ryan recalled.

Despite having accomplished this heroic deed, Dragon Expeditions is still working to aid longer-term efforts, especially in aiding the families of the guides they frequently work with in the mountains. Of three, they have, at the time of this writing, heard from only one, whose home was destroyed.

To Stay or to Go

“Been workin at refugee camp [in Mianyang] last few days, kids section. Camp seems well organised. We r only seeing minor illness which is a good sign. We r ok 4 meds. Been working well alongside Chinese colleagues wich has bin cool. Last sat/Sun I went 2 villages w jeep teams + am really glad I am getting the chance 2 revisit these places. We will b taking a lot of tarpaulin as theyre worried about losing their crop, need storage” Dr. Cathy*, via SMS, May 23, 20:19:51

>Dr. Cathy moved from Chengdu to Beijing earlier this year. With extensive disaster-aid experience under her belt, the British doctor-turned-Chinese-student knew she had skills that could be of use but hesitated before buying a plane ticket to return to the Brocade City. Without the backing of a large organization and only intermediate Chinese-language proficiency, she feared that she “would be maybe more of a burden than a help.” From Beijing she encouraged donations

efforts and helped field medical questions related to the disaster. After several days, she coordinated with a medical company who operates in Chengdu, flew in, and joined a team of volunteers heading to a refugee camp in Mianyang. Alongside several other small groups of health professionals, the team set up a booth where the 15,000 refugees of the camp could receive medical assistance. Some of their time was spent making visits to the camp and talking with or simply listening to the survivors’ anguish, bewilderment, and grief.

Bringing in Light

“The scene wasn’t total collapse with dead and injured bodies everywhere. Lots of rubble sharing the streets with dark, make-shift tent-towns—there was no electricity, they had no lights. Many people walking, looking, obviously wondering—all very quiet. Here and there a crowd of onlookers watching some rescue work—they were going in with heavy machinery. Truckloads of soldiers standing about—there wasn’t much these guys could do here—bare-hands work seemed to have just about dried up. Ambulances waiting at certain building where rescue work was going on—shuttling the badly injured into Chengdu. Crowds of people gathering around aid lorries that were bringing in supplies—watching how fear and uncertainty caused certain people to compete for the supplies rather than working together in sharing them out. Lots of blank worried faces on victim and rescuer alike—but amid all the turmoil we still had an old rubbish-collecting grandpa who was hard at work picking up all those empty water bottles that had been pouring in via the aid convey.”

>Sid is a Chengdu resident who drove to Dujiangyan the day after the quake to help. Joining the large rush of independent volunteers, he and his wife found themselves not sure what to do. “I reckon the most important thing we did was give away a small rubbishy torch to a group of old folk who were sitting, in total darkness, close to ruins of their former home, as the rescue workers, searching for their relatives and friends, were about to pull out another survivor. They were sure glad for that light—I wish we had had more,” he wrote. Sid and his wife are now working with development and relief agency Oxfam Hong Kong to deliver cooking oil to villages around Deyang.

Doing Something Useful

“In the first few days after the quake, I was so excited about going out and ‘doing something useful’: volunteering my time and my sweat, possibly risking my life, not getting any sleep, helping out the quake victims, etc. So I thought that I was the luckiest person in the world when I got the opportunity to go as a Red Cross volunteer into Ground Zero. “My dad and I arrived at 9 a.m., 16 May. Unfortunately, the Red Cross was not quite as ready as we were, and I think that the whole group left Chengdu around 1 p.m., with a lot of waiting around before and after. Around 4 p.m. we reached a government checkpoint—all non-official vehicles were prohibited from going beyond—where more waiting around ensued while the leaders of our mission re-organized so that we would be allowed through.

“After driving for maybe 10 minutes, the whole caravan of about seven or eight cars and vans pulled over again. This time, the wait was three hours. The aftershocks had not stopped since the quake on the 12th, and conditions in Qingping Village—about 20 km from Hanwang Town and at this point accessible only by foot—were too dangerous for us to continue. So we sat by the side of the road, awaiting orders from Red Cross command. “Finally, around 8 p.m., it was decided that it was too late for us to actually go into Qingping, so we camped out at a military-supply post. The quake victims, whom we were supposed to help, brought us food! They had so little to give, and yet they were offering it all to us!

“We slept that night in those blue tents emblazoned with the words ‘anti-earthquake disaster relief’ until 3 a.m., when our tent of all females was woken up and ordered onto the vehicles. Without any explanation, we were whisked out of Hanwang and into Deyang, where we waited for two hours for the drivers to go back and pick up the rest of the stranded quake victims—er, volunteers.

“In the morning, another aftershock caused a landslide in Qingping, burying and killing 200 more. Had we left on time, had organizational and bureaucratic issues not kept us waiting for three hours on the side of the road— might we have been able to help at least some of those 200?”

>Volunteer Eileen Guo studies Chinese at Sichuan University. After this volunteer attempt, she joined a van from Parkway Health to deliver supplies to Mianzhu and later went to Dujiangyan.

*Name changed at request of interviewee.

Giving Back to Sichuan
several ongoing efforts



Sichuan Quake Relief volunteers prepare shipments of supplies at the Bookworm. Photos by Julien Rideller.



“People that we didn’t even know helped us out, both Chinese and foreigners. ... It was an amazing effort. ... In the long run, our purchase of 300 pounds of rice, some diapers, formula and other assorted sundries seem like a drop in the bucket, but it was so much more rewarding than sitting idle and staring at the computer screen all day. And I feel like I have been able to give back to the country of my daughter’s birth, a country that I am already sad about leaving in August!”

—Alyson vanderToorn “wanted to give ... time and money to the country that allowed us to live and work here,” so she organized donations and purchase of supplies to bring to the Children’s Orphanage in Chengdu.

There are a great number of organizations, domestic and foreign, large and small, formal and informal, assisting in relief efforts, and more are on the way. You can find the contact and wiring information for some on www.chengdoo.com. At this point most are accepting cash donations only. Because it is impossible to gather a comprehensive list, we’d like to highlight the following ongoing efforts that might be relevant to our readers.

+SICHUAN QUAKE RELIEF

This informal group of volunteers operates out of the Bookworm and has coordinated regular trips to affected areas to deliver supplies and assistance.

>For more information, go to www.sichuan-quake-relief.org.

>In-person donations can be deposited in the box at the Bookworm or Café Panam(e) 2-7 Yujie Dong Lu, 28 Renmin Nan Lu 老书虫 人民南路四段28号玉洁东街2号-7号

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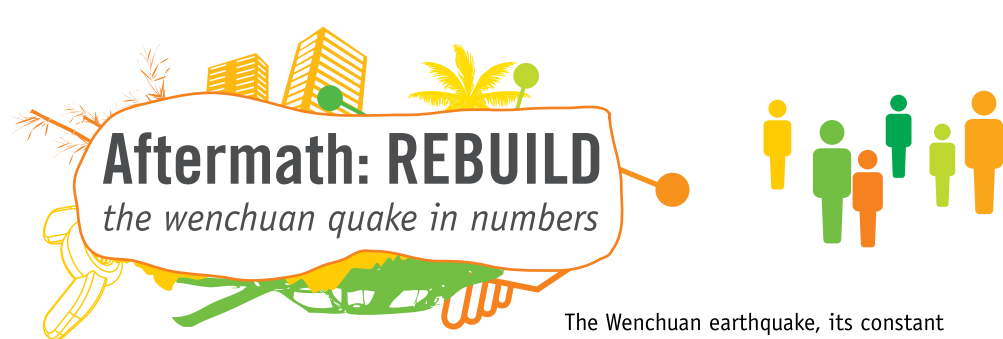
+An even smaller-scale organization has been formed by several volunteers who have used all their contacts to raise over RMB50,000, which has all been used to buy supplies to assemble basic-hygiene kits. In total the group has held four kit-assembling sessions on the Southwest University of Finance and Economics main campus and put together 2,200 kits that contain basins, towels, toothbrushes, soap, underwear, basic painkillers and other daily-use items that are often overlooked as non-urgent. The supplies provided in one kit cost about RMB30 in total, and the kits were given to the Chengdu office of Heart to Heart as well as the Sichuan Quake Relief to distribute. The group will continue assembling kits “as long as the money keeps coming in,” says volunteer Helena Chan.

>If you are interested in donating to this effort, contact Helena Chan at hsschan@gmail.com

+HANDS ON CHENGDU

Hands On Chengdu was set up days after the quake by Hands On Shanghai, an affiliate of the worldwide Hands On Network. The organization recruits, trains, and manages volunteers, matching them with appropriate organizations in need of assistance but oftentimes without the logistical capacity to train volunteers. Programs in Sichuan will begin in June in tent encampments, hospitals, and elderly-care homes, according to Richard Brubaker, executive director of Hands On Shanghai. The organization accepts volunteer registration from corporate and student groups as well as individuals. “We will work with local NGOs to develop their internal capacity, we will support the community through our volunteers, and we will develop the volunteer leadership of Chengdu,” says Brubaker.

>To register as a volunteer or learn more about Hands on Chengdu, go to www.handsonchengdu.org



Aftermath: REBUILD

the wenchuan quake in numbers

Lost and damaged cultural heritage

>2,000-year-old Erwang Temple built to honor Li Bing and his son for their contribution to the construction of Dujiangyan collapsed
>Several ancient buildings on Qingcheng Shan in danger of collapsing
>Bao'en Temple in Pingwu County—one of Sichuan's biggest Buddhist temples—had several walls collapse and its fresco ruined
>The 32-meter, 12-story landmark Ming Dynasty pagoda in Langzhong County, Nanchong, broke in half
>150-year-old church in Bailu Town near Pengzhou collapsed
>Roofs of some buildings at Dufu Caotang are broken and some walls cracked
>In the Jinsha Ruins Museum in Chengdu a small number of ancient pots in the No. 2 Exhibition Hall of the museum were smashed
>Sanxingdui Museum in Guangyuan, which was constructed to withstand a magnitude-8.0 earthquake had broken walls, damaged exterior ruins damaged, and 20 sets of 3,000 to 4,000-year-old ceramic utensils shattered to pieces
>4,228 cultural relics (the first shipment of 25,000) were transferred from Mianyang Museum to Sanxingdui Museum in anticipation of flooding in the area



Mianzhu
selection for Newsweek, all photos by: Leo Chen

The Wenchuan earthquake, its constant aftershocks, and heavy rainfall immediately following devastated an area of 100,000 square km that is home to some 20 million people.

The figures currently published by the government will likely see revision as extent of the damage is fully discovered. It will take further time to translate the entire impact of the disaster into numbers.

Still, official statistics and estimated numbers already published illustrate an incredible loss of life and infrastructure, de-emphasizing the personal tragedy of individual victims to highlight the struggle of an entire region larger than many countries with its present and future.

Rescue and relief were complicated as every highway into Wenchuan, as well as many others throughout Sichuan, were damaged in the initial shake. Power cuts hit the region, leaving almost 2 million people without electricity and, at times, half of Sichuan's mobile communication inoperable. Damaged dams, irrigation canals and other water facilities affected fresh-water supply for 3.6 million people, impacting regional agriculture and potentially leading to additional price hikes on food.

While a fraction of property damage was covered by insurance in urban areas, most victims in rural areas were not covered by life or health insurance. Vice Minister of Health Gao Qiang suggested that the government would pick up the costs of medical care for earthquake victims, and the China Banking Regulatory Commission asked banks to forgive debts owed by survivors as well as the deceased. The China Ministry of Finance is working on a plan to reduce various taxes, including income, real estate, import and export, in the quake areas.

China's centrally administered state-owned enterprises reported an economic loss of more than RMB30 billion. The combined loss of more than 14,000 industrial companies in Sichuan totaled RMB67 billion, or half a percent of China's 2007 GDP, says the Ministry of Industry and Information.

Premier Wen Jiabao announced on Wednesday the central government will allocate 70 billion yuan this year for a reconstruction fund for the quake-hit regions. He pledged to arrange funds for reconstruction over the next two years and also announced that the central government's spending will be slashed by 5 percent this year to fund quake relief efforts.

The post-earthquake reconstruction work is expected to take three years in most areas, according to Sichuan's vice governor Li Chengyun. Estimations by international economic analysts forecast a total of RMB200 to 300 billion needed to rebuild Wenchuan.

However, international consensus from business reports seems to be that the earthquake and aftermath effects have a less significant impact on the worldwide economy than the heavy snowstorms in January and February which affected larger and industrially more developed areas. Wenchuan's industry accounts for only a fraction of China's industrial output and GDP, but could slow national economic growth by up to 0.2 percent. Additionally, the infrastructural reconstruction could eventually lead to an acceleration of Sichuan's GDP and direct-investment growth.

Chengdu

The earthquake has left behind far less devastation in the city of Chengdu. Not a single collapsed building was reported and although many show minor cracks, few will have to undergo repair.

According to Roy Lee, general manager of real-estate firm DTZ Chengdu, the tourism industry has been particularly affected, especially with tours to popular destination Jiuzhaigou canceled until July. There has been a noticeable decrease in bookings at five-star hotels and air travel to Shuangliu International Airport. Over the short term Lee projects a negative effect on the real estate market with reduced transactions for residential and major development project being delayed due to re-evaluated risk perception and safety re-examinations.

But with the central government investing heavily in rebuilding the earthquake region, Chengdu's local economy will be stimulated with new growth and investment.

Damage in Numbers*

Human Cost

Fatalities: nearing 70,000
Missing: 20,000
Injured: 350,000
Children left orphaned: 5,000
Survivors rescued: 80,000
Houses destroyed or rendered uninhabitable: 10 million
People left homeless: 15 million

Infrastructure Cost

Damaged dams in Sichuan: 1,803
Dams at serious risk of rupturing: 69
Damaged telecom landlines: 10,000 km
Destroyed irrigation canals: 7,600 km
Destroyed and damaged highways and local roads: 17,000 km
Total cost to rebuild highways and local roads: RMB47.8 billion
Threatened farmland: 224,000 hectares
Livestock killed: 12.5 million
Mines closed for inspection: 200
Temporarily suspended mobile base stations: 3,000

*latest figures available at time of writing

Rumors, Panic, and I'm Outta Here >>>

Current communications technologies allow anyone with access to a mobile phone or an Internet connection to broadcast anything in a short time span, and this along with a public skeptical of official reports, an utter lack of anticipation of an earthquake in Sichuan and little or no previous earthquake experience among most residents in the province allowed rumors to start flying from the moment people recovered enough from the shock to get online. Claims, some founded and others not, spread like wildfire over online chat programs, via SMS, and by word of mouth (as well as one unfulfilled aftershock prediction that was announced on television), and it didn't take long for Chengdu to work itself into a state of confusion. Drinking water and, to a lesser extent, food, were in short supply temporarily not because waterways were contaminated but because they were rumored to be, resulting in panic and hoarding. Massive numbers of car owners trying to leave the region simultaneously contributed to major gridlock and temporary gasoline shortages while others simply flew out of the city the first chance they got. For weeks, clusters of tents have dotted the streets and open areas within the city, sometimes falling in numbers but shooting up again anytime a rumor of an aftershock surfaces.

"The earthquake broadcasting said: It may has earthquake tonight. Be careful!"
Anonymous, via SMS, May 20, 01:30:05

"Can I drop off more stuff today? im leaving 2morrow out of china."
Foreign donor, via SMS, May 18, 13:19:04

[Translated] "Notice from the Chengdu Earthquake Disaster Bureau: Neither the China Seismological Bureau nor the Provincial Seismological Bureau has announced that there will be a 7.0-magnitude aftershock in the coming days. Please do not listen to the rumors."
SMS from 10086, May 28, 20:00:01



Wolong

Finances, Trauma, and Cracks >>>

Of the long-term personal impacts of the earthquake mentioned by our readers, finances was one of the most often-cited. Work was canceled for most people for several days, and up to two weeks for teachers. Many business owners, especially those who operate in the affected areas, but also those in the city, have seen a drop in business. Readers also described psychological stress and trauma following the quake. But because many of us in the city—especially those of us not native to Sichuan—were not directly confronted with either the serious danger or the severe loss that millions of people so physically near us are enduring, we tend to relegate our own emotions to the back burner. On the next page, professionals give tips on dealing with some of the psychological repercussions of the quake.

"Work has been effectively cancelled for the past two weeks, relationships have been strained at times but brought closer together by and large Philosophically, it has reinforced the fragility and transience of life and encouraged me to appreciate those in my life more each day."
—Mark Hiew, from Australia

"Our workplace was in the mountains and so we effectively have no business. Most of our staff were involved in the rescue efforts in one way or another so we haven't had too much time to think about work. The office has also become a focal point for outdoor groups from elsewhere in China and Chengdu who want to help out. We'll have to diversify somewhat to get through the year. We've cancelled several trips."
—Matt Ryan (Dragon Expeditions), from England

"My cousin gave birth to a boy on the day of the earthquake; she fled home less than two hours after the operation. When I came back [to Dujiangyan] I paid her a visit [and] found that she lived outside without a tent. She caught a fever the day I left. It worries me a lot."
—Betty, from Dujiangyan

"My daily yoga practice keeps me grounded. Some days the practice is more intense, even aggressive, and I have to connect more with the breath to calm myself down. ... [T]here is a feeling of guilt because by going to yoga class we are taking time out for ourselves. ... The yoga is going to be beneficial for us in the long run when life goes back to normal."
—Natasha Devalia, from Zambia/India

"I think people are really fragile and sensitive about any shaking now and it will keep for a very long time. Few days ago I was in a restaurant just beside the road. The table was shaking a little; everybody stood up. It was actually a bus passing by."
—Heather Zhao, from Shanghai

"Those days after the quake, I felt nervous as soon as I entered my office where aftershock is a popular topic. Many people, including me, felt the floor still kept wobbling."
—Alonso Chen, from Chengdu

"I'll be happy when things get better and my life gets more of a routine. At the moment I'm bored and tired. It has made me see how real an event like this is when you are in it, and how seemingly unimportant it is to people who are far away from it. Something so big in my life is so small in theirs."
—Jessie Brett, from Australia

"I feel a little lost that Chengdu is no longer a safe place."
—Eva Hui, from Chengdu

How did you react during and immediately after the earthquake? What about in the days that followed? “Shock, interest and a certain heightened level of excitement and adrenalin during, then a restlessness for people to what I considered ‘over-reacting’ immediately after. I wanted to get back to life as usual, to working.”

—Mark Hiew, 23, Australian

Dealing with Trauma after a Disaster

___it's not just in your head

By Dr. Robert Blinn

1. What are typical immediate reactions to major natural disasters such as earthquakes? We see different reactions—some individuals show intense over-activation: rapid heartbeat, dizziness, headache, insomnia. stomach problems, loss of appetite, skin cold, racing thoughts, stomach tightening, difficulty thinking clearly or rationally. Others may show signs of shutdown or shock: eyes glazed over, feeling dissociated from their bodies, numbness, pale skin, lack of emotional expression, numbness, poor concentration.

2. To what extent are physical responses to both the event itself and the stress of the aftermath normal, and at what point should professional advice be sought for such reactions? The above reactions, especially the first category, happen to many people after a disaster, and it is very important to realize that they are normal reactions to a normal situation. Normalizing people's reactions is important and helps them realize they are not “going crazy.” Professional advice should be sought if the sensations do not show any sign of dissipating after one or two months.

A crucial part of managing trauma is “getting back in the body” through breathing exercises, grounding techniques etc. If we focus on physical sensations rather than fighting them, they will slowly dissipate.

3. Many people also noted that they are afraid to be in the location they were at the time the earthquake struck. For many, this location is work/school/home. What is the best way to overcome this fear? This is not likely to take place through any rational thought process but rather by focusing on bodily sensations. A person who has been through an earthquake knows that it is rationally safe to go back into the building, but does not feel a sense of safety in his or her body. As Peter Levine, founder of Somatic Experiencing, a technique used successfully with tsunami survivors, says, “Trauma is not in the event; trauma is in the body and nervous system.” Thus the key to resolution is in helping one regain a bodily sense of safety. It involves uncoupling the sense of fear from the sense of being in the building. This is done by focusing on the body and identifying what the feeling of safety feels like inside the body.

4. What are the best ways to address children's fears and anxiety, especially when the parents themselves are shaken up? It is important that parents focus on reducing their stress using breathing and centering



photo: Leo Chen

methods because they will be much more effective in helping their kids if they are centered and relaxed. I suggest if a parent is agitated that he or she spend a few minutes doing deep-breathing and progressive muscle-relaxation exercises. Once they are centered parents can lead kids through simple breathing exercises (“In with the good air, out with the bad”). When helping children overcome fear, it is much more effective to play a simple game like Hide and Seek and ask what it feels like to be safe once they are back to home base than to try and rationally explain why it is safe to go back in the building. A child needs to have the feeling of safety rather than an explanation of it.

5. Some readers, especially if their work was canceled, reported that they “felt useless” while the death toll was climbing. How can people deal with this feeling? It is extremely important for people who have been through a disaster to remain active after an earthquake. The worst possible thing is to sit watching media reports hour after hour. The activity centered around bringing supplies to the Bookworm was a good thing not only for those in the epicenter areas but also for those in Chengdu who were trying to help out!

6. For those who know people who have experienced severe losses, what are good ways to show empathy and support? Those working as first responders or debriefing need to talk to their peers if they feel they are becoming overwhelmed. It is also much better to focus on bodily sensations related to trauma than to focus on the traumatic event itself. Focusing on bodily sensations allows us to start to release the sensations while focusing on the trauma itself often leads to re-traumatization.

Dr. Blinn is a mental-health expert on dealing with post-traumatic stress. He works at the Beijing United Hospital and recently gave a seminar at the Chengdu Bookworm.

Breathing Techniques stressed out? just breathe

By Natasha Devalia

Breath work has been known to be a great stress reliever. With that in mind, here are three simple breathing techniques you can use daily to relax and center. They can be done first thing in the morning, before bed, or at any other suitable time. If you have space or time constraints doing one of the techniques is better than none.

1. Lay down on your belly. Make a pillow for your forehead by placing your hands face down, one on top of the other. Allow the legs to relax, and the heels to roll outward. Allow the breath to enter and leave the body through the nose. Observe yourself. Try to let the belly push into the floor as you inhale and move away from the floor as you exhale. Take about 10 deep breaths like this. Try to meter the breath. Inhale for a count of 4 and exhale for a count of 4.

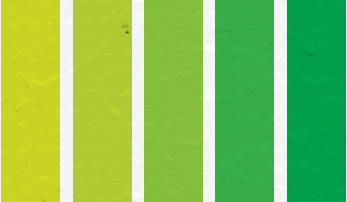
2. Roll over onto your back. Make sure you are comfortable. Let the shoulders, back, and legs relax. Place one hand on your upper abdomen and watch the belly rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out. Count another 10 deep breaths. Again try to meter the breath.

3. Sit up in a cross-legged position or on the edge of a chair with your back straight. Place one hand on your abdomen (above the navel), and the other on the chest. As you inhale the hand on the abdomen moves outward first, and then the hand on the chest. As you exhale, both hands move to the original position. Take 10 deep breaths. When you feel comfortable with the technique the hands can rest gently on the knees or thighs.

[General Tips]

1. Breathe in and out through your nose.
2. Focus on relaxing your upper abdomen below the rib cage and above the navel.
3. Meter your breath while inhaling and exhaling. You can also experiment with doubling the exhale-to-inhale ratio. If you inhale for a count of 2, exhale for a count of 4, and so on.
4. Try not to force your breath beyond your capacity.
5. Keep your eyes closed if possible.

Natasha Devalia teaches Ashtanga yoga at her home studio, Yoga House Chengdu, which is currently running open sessions in the park on Saturday evenings. For more information, see page 16.



Internet Detective: The Triangle of Life the buzz around doug copp

In the days following the earthquake, an e-mail was making its way around online communities in Chengdu, both in Chinese and in English. The e-mail was in one incarnation titled “Earthquake-tips for survival-triangle of life” and contained an excerpt from “The Triangle of Life” by a Canadian named Doug Copp.

The text advises people to shun the traditional “drop, cover, and hold” practice when an earthquake hits. Copp claims to have discovered through working on disaster sites around the world that the survival rate in earthquakes would be much higher if people sat or lay next to beds or desks rather than under them, as prescribed by traditional earthquake-safety procedures.

But a quick Google search of “Doug Copp” will turn up a number of sites disclaiming the self-described expert's credibility, including a Snopes.com analysis, which offers charges from various sources against Copp's recommendations as well as criticism of his professional authority and personal character.

A number of established organizations in the

U.S., including the American Red Cross and the Southern California Earthquake Center have published documents that dispute, directly or indirectly, Copp's advice.

“The Triangle of Life”—and Copp himself—became an item of Internet interest in the U.S. in 2004, after Copp gained entrance to Ground Zero during the aftermath of 9/11 and publicized photos of himself on site. He appealed to the September 11th Victim Compensation fund, was awarded \$650,000, and in June 2004 underwent investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice for fraud. A series of articles in the Albuquerque Journal covers the saga extensively.

The information in “The Triangle of Life” has been translated and circulated widely on Chinese-language websites.

But why did this document, which was all but shut down and silenced several years ago on the English-language parts of the Internet, resurface in Chinese anyway? The story gets more interesting: Doug Copp gave a speech in May 2005—in Beijing, for the “First International

Forum: China City's Disaster Prevention and Mitigation,” which was broadcast on Chinese television, according to the American Rescue Team website (www.amerrescue.org), the not-for-profit organization run by Copp. The website further states that this and two subsequent speeches given to governmental departments received coverage in print media in Beijing as well, although it provides only unreadable scans of newspaper clippings.

More recently, Copp has acted as spokesperson for a group of Canadians—under the umbrella of the American Rescue Team—who had just been rejected visas in Hong Kong to aid in Wenchuan. A May 21 report by the Canadian Press states that they had as of writing been issued visas in Calgary.

A Calgary Herald report on the same topic reveals that the rescue team were not granted visas on their first attempt in Hong Kong because they were unable to provide addresses of where they would stay once on the mainland. It also quotes Copp asserting that the Olympics take precedence over disaster relief.

CHENGDOO citylife Chinese Glossary earthquake version

Chinese	Pinyin	English
8级地震	bā jí dìzhèn	8.0-magnitude earthquake
余震	yúzhèn	aftershock
谣言	yáoyán	rumor
恐慌	kǒnghuāng	to panic
志愿者	zhìyuànzhě	volunteer (n.)
为了支持灾区人民 ...	wèile zhīchí zāiqū rénmin ...	in order to support people in the affected areas...
孤儿 (n.), 成孤儿 (v.)	gū'ér (n.) , chéng gū'ér (v.)	orphan
捐赠	juānzèng	to donate
捐款	jiǎнкуǎn	cash donation
慈善团体	císhàn tuántǐ	charitable organization
非政府组织, 民间机构	fēi zhèngfǔ zǔzhī, mínjiān jīgòu	NGO (non-governmental organization)
地震局	dìzhèn jú	Seismology Bureau
天灾	tiānzāi	natural disaster
抗震救灾指挥部	kàngzhènjiùzāi zhǐhuī bù	Earthquake Relief Headquarters
灾区	zāiqū	disaster area

WEI! Wenchuan Earthquake Initiative

The Wenchuan Earthquake Initiative (WEI!), with the support of CHENGDOO citylife Magazine and in conjunction with A-Star Sound, would like to propose a fundraising concert featuring Chinese, foreign, and mixed bands and artists to aid in long-term relief for the victims of the Wenchuan Earthquake. A-Star Sound, a local events company, has obtained permits and contacted appropriate authorities to stage an all-day, outdoor, live-music festival.

The aim of the event is to put international and foreign companies in direct contact with representatives of selected NGOs and relief projects in the Wenchuan region and facilitate close relationships between the two parties. For foreign companies it is an opportunity to show local involvement and social responsibility to a broad public.

WEI! is a group of Chengdu-based expatriates with extensive experience in events organizing, liaising with musicians, and public relations. With this benefit concert we have a target goal of at least 1 million RMB to be given directly to the NGOs and projects as well as create a launching point for further fundraising events. To finance equipment, rent, PR material, artist fees, and security we are seeking sponsors and donors.

Date
Sunday, June 29, 2 to 10 p.m.
Venue
Chunjiang Huayueyuan, Shuadu 成都市耍都春江花月园
Capacity
2,000 people standing or sitting
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For all queries, please contact
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CHENGDOO citylife Celebrates its First Birthday!

and now for the most awkwardly placed party photos in the history of the magazine

photos by Julien Rideller, Adi Tjahjono

Hundreds of readers, contributors, and supporters showed up at the evening-long event at the Bookworm, which included a chess tournament, buffet, an ongoing raffle, and live music by ARMiSSAN, Boss Ma Band, So Blue, and DJ Marty Be. Thanks to everybody who turned up to show support; Daisy Tang and the Bookworm for helping to make arrangements for the evening; Marek Majewski, Tan Juan, and Jessie Levene for helping with set-up, all of the musicians who played; Adi Tjahjono for still photography; John Cardenas for video footage; and a special thank you to the following businesses, who donated raffle prizes:

Carol's Too
Casa Mia
DT Asia
High Connections Café
Parkway Thai and Café
Peter's Tex Mex
Pristine Cuppa Coffee
Red Tomato Pizza
Sabrina's Country Store
the Shamrock



Additional photos can be seen on the CHENGDOO Facebook group and on www.chengdoo.com. Video of the evening is available www.dkar.com and on Youtube (search "Chengdoo").

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DOODOO CHENGDOO 41

E-mails to the Gmail

exactly as we receive 'em

Hi. Listen i really think you guys are doing a great job these days, and the quality of writing has improved enormously (my god, your competitors still write about "the relaxed lifestyle of Chengdu people!"). Yes, the earthquake was terrible. I don't wanna sound cold -hearted, but please get over it. The experience for the vast majority of foreigners is nothing to compare to the life-destroying experience of so many Chinese people. It's already so boring and trivial to hear our impressions of the earthquake. This is one of those times where we truly can't relate to their experience (and we should be so grateful for that). We can learn from the locals; yes mourn and remember, but get on with life. Please don't turn this into an endless 9/11 style process of mourning. I'm sorry if i sound like an asshole. i don't mean to be. Good luck with your issue and you guys have done a really terrific job with relief efforts.

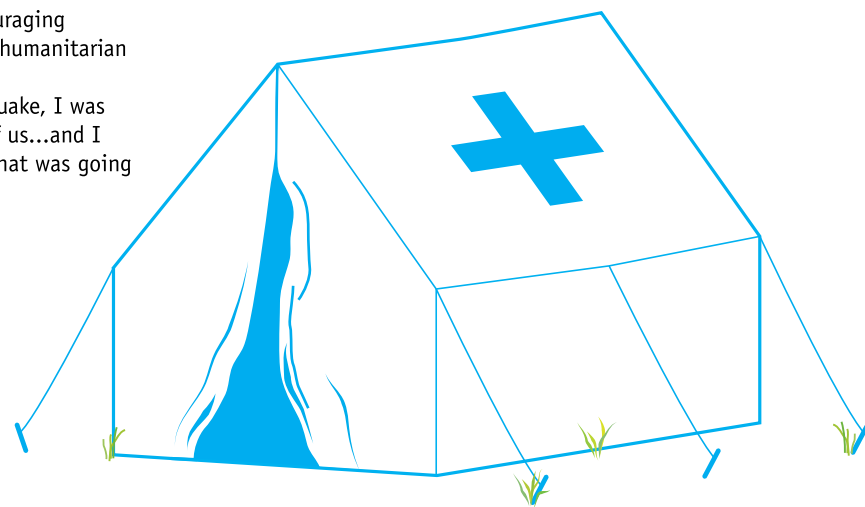
Ray Schoebel

Dear Chengdoo,
I am of curse too late for your "brief questionnaire", witch is extremely long for a short answer from a non English native speaker and I want apologize for this shameful retard, you had never being too late. I want to take the opportunity for congratulate your team for the efficiency during this days, keeping us informed and encouraging support and volunteering and having succeed in effective humanitarian relief.

I do have not a special personal history about the earthquake, I was and still not especially scared, I did volunteer like must of us...and I followed daily news, thank to your mails and others, on what was going on and in witch way we could go on helping.

You are doing a great work, Thank you!

Laura



announcements>>>

CHENGDOO Open Office

Thursday, June 5, 8 p.m. @ CHENGDOO office

(address on page 3)

want to know more about CHENGDOO citylife? interested in contributing toward the making of the magazine? join one of our open office sessions, meet the team, and discuss ways you can get involved.

Team CHENGDOO would like to thank the following contributors who made this issue sparkle and shine: Dr. Robert Blinn, Jessie Brett, Richard Brubaker at Hands On Shanghai, Dr. Cathy, Helena Chan, Leo Chen, Natasha Devalia at Yoga House Chengdu, Eliran Dobzinski, Eileen Guo, Nisan Hasan, Eva Hua, Roy Lee at DTZ, Charlie Mosely, Craig Nisbet, Matt Ryan and Dragon Expeditions, Kenneth Tan and Shanghaiist.com, Alyson vanderToorn, Forest Venn, vikuk, Stephanie Yan, Heather Zhao, Stephen for the relief dinner, the Wonderful World Wide Web, and everybody who responded to our earthquake survey with their thoughts.

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