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To: Potential Project Funders

Re: Doctoral dissertation field research

**Project Title:** The decision-making of social entrepreneurs in China's urban villages

**Overview:** I am seeking funds to complete field research for my doctoral dissertation. I am studying how Chinese citizens are working to solve the many problems faced by migrant workers in their country's biggest cities. The results of my research will: (1) help the Chinese improve the impacts of their programs; (2) hold lessons for people working on similar problems in other countries; and (3) offer outsiders a new and productive way of engaging with the Chinese. I will provide a final report on my findings, and gladly present them in person upon request.

**What:** I am researching solutions to the many problems faced by migrant workers in China's mega-cities. China has more than 250 million migrant workers, a population that has doubled in the past decade. Previous research tells us a lot about the problems they face. Although migrants from rural areas move to cities in search of a better life, they remain a "floating population" and are ineligible for urban residency permits (known as *hùkǒu*). Occasionally, migrants fare better than poor local residents, for example by opening their own businesses.<sup>1</sup> However, lacking legal status generally denies migrants access to better paying jobs<sup>2</sup>, social services<sup>3</sup>, and education for their children<sup>4</sup>. Most migrants wind up living in dilapidated neighborhoods that are both unrecognized and unsubsidized by city governments – the so-called "urban villages".<sup>5</sup> These factors severely limit social mobility<sup>6,7</sup>, and exacerbate economic inequality<sup>8,9</sup>. Even after pending reforms to the *hùkǒu* laws that govern migrants' ability to live and work in cities, they are likely to suffer from the effects of multigenerational poverty.<sup>10</sup>

Despite all these problems, previous research reveals very little about how the Chinese are attempting to solve them. I have already investigated programs run by local governments and by non-profits. Both of these are hindered by enormous political and legal obstacles.<sup>11</sup> It seems that in China for-profit businesses that address this major social issue – aka, "social entrepreneurship" – may be the most effective way to help migrant workers. Because they are run as normal businesses, the government does not overly scrutinize their programs. Because they generate revenue, they are not limited by legal restrictions on charitable donations. I want to understand the decision-making of the founders and managers of these businesses. How do they deal with the authoritarian legal and political systems in China? How do they decide what goods and services to offer migrants? Are they achieving their goals? And what other goods and services could they offer that would further help the migrants? The answers to these questions will (1) help these "social entrepreneurs" improve the impacts of their businesses, (2) hold lessons for people working on similar problems in other nondemocratic countries, which remain

the norm across the developing world, and (3) offer outsiders a new and productive way of engaging with the Chinese.

**Why:** Increasing numbers of Chinese citizens feel such a strong sense of social responsibility that they devote an enormous amount personal resources to start businesses to help their fellow citizens.<sup>12-14</sup> In fact, I attended a conference on social entrepreneurship last summer in Beijing. I met and watched presentations from hundreds of Chinese social entrepreneurs working on a variety of major social issues in their country. So, why have so few researchers looked at this positive aspect of Chinese economic development? Unfortunately, China is often portrayed as having a corrupt government, and corrupt people, all of whom are to blame for its many economic<sup>15</sup> and social problems<sup>16</sup>. To a degree, this assessment is true. However, the most populous country on Earth is not so easily stereotyped. By looking at how the Chinese are solving social problems, rather than just blaming them for these problems, my research offers a unique and effective way of engaging with the Chinese. For example, whenever I post something about my research on Chinese social media, I get incredibly positive feedback. This suggests that individuals, businesses, and even government entities wishing to improve relations with the Chinese will benefit from understanding how and why the Chinese are working to improve their own country, and looking for ways to work with them on these problems.

**How:** I developed a survey for the social entrepreneurs, in order to gather information on how they design and run their businesses, as well as what obstacles they face, and their personal motivations. I will give this survey to 40 social entrepreneurs. From this group, I will sample 10 organizations, seeking to include a range of goods and services offered to migrants. I will spend one week at each organization, observing the daily operations, and conducting semi-structured interviews to gather more detailed information on themes revealed by the surveys. I also designed a short social capital survey to gather data from the migrants on what services are available to them, who provides these services, and what additional services might further benefit them. I will give this survey to 100 migrants, approximately half of whom are served by social entrepreneurs. Analyzing responses to this survey will help the social entrepreneurs improve their programs based on the real needs of their target population, and ultimately benefit the migrants by improving the goods and services available to them. I will get informed written consent from all participants, and make all personal information anonymous to ensure confidentiality. This process has been approved by my university's Institutional Review Board, and I will supply more information upon request, including full versions of the surveys.

**Where:** I will compare social entrepreneurs working on migrant issues in Beijing and Shenzhen. Both of these cities have significant migrant populations. Beijing is the most internationally visible city. Thus, programs that provide social services in the nation's capital tend to come under particularly strong scrutiny. Shenzhen was the first Special Economic Zone in the country, and remains a hub of direct foreign investment, manufacturing, and finance. It is the startup capital of China, and as such has become a center for both tech and social innovation. Comparing the experiences of social entrepreneurs in these two cities will offer a holistic perspective on the successes and failures of their solutions to the problems of China's migrant workers.

**When:** I will conduct this research in for thirteen weeks in June-August 2017. I will spend six weeks in each city, and leave one week as a buffer for travel and unexpected delays. I can provide a detailed research schedule upon request.

**How much:** I need \$12,000 for my final three months of field research. This amount is based on the budgets from my previous field research. It will cover my travel, lodging, and meals, direct research expenses (such as printing, and small gift cards for the migrants), as well as a stipend for my local research assistant. I can provide an itemized budget upon request.

**My bio:** I am a PhD candidate in cultural anthropology. I have completed 54 hours of graduate coursework in research methods, data analysis, and the social aspects of economic behavior. I have taken three years of college level Mandarin, as well as participated in a two-month language immersion program at Beijing Normal University. I designed and taught an undergraduate course on global economic development. During two years at the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture at Texas A&M University, I prepared field-based reports on sustainable agricultural projects throughout South and Southeast Asia. As part of an NSF-funded team, I helped assess the impacts of the 2014 Ebola scare on African refugees in Dallas. I have conducted seven months of research for my doctoral dissertation in Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. My prior experience and professional connections in China help assure the feasibility of the final phase of this project.

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