



SCALING A MOUNTAIN

His long-held dream is beginning to come true.

By Vicki Kwong.



The southern and coastal regions in China have, in the past two decades, attracted tremendous volumes of foreign investment and established themselves as the economic powerhouses of the country. Yet little of this prosperity has trickled to the northwest where, despite its abundance of natural resources, economic development has lagged behind the rest of the country.

Responding to the growing disparities in economic progress, President Jiang Zemin in 1999 announced a plan to kick-start the development of the western regions. Commonly referred to as the “go-west” programme, the plan includes measures to increase govern-



ment spending, lower tax rates, and widen participation by investors in a number of preferred sectors. While these measures — which officially began on January 1, 2001 — will be in operation for ten years, a drive to continually develop the west will remain a national priority for decades to come.

But economic measures alone won't necessarily be enough to ensure sustained growth. Mr Li Ka-shing, whose Li Ka-shing Foundation has funded many educational and medical projects over the years, believes that an educated and healthy workforce holds the key to the social and economic development of the west. To help raise standards in the region, the Foundation, Hutchison

REMOTE RURAL REGIONS LIKE GUIZHOU IN WESTERN CHINA (TOP) WILL BENEFIT FROM AN AMBITIOUS PROJECT TO DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION MATERIALS TO SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES AND CONNECT THEM VIA A CENTRAL SERVER USING WEB-BASED TECHNOLOGY.



Whampoa and Cheung Kong jointly made a HK\$300 million contribution to fund a series of education and health related projects in 12 provinces and autonomous regions.

To gain a better understanding of the situation in Northwest China, Mr Li in February led a team of Foundation staff on a personal visit to the region. In the past decade he has never left Hong Kong for more than four days — whether for business or leisure — but his enthusiasm for educational development on the Mainland prompted him to stay nine days for the trip, which included seven cities in six western provinces.

It will be a monumental task to transform the western regions into the Mainland's next economic powerhouse. Tough geographical constraints have helped keep the region in the dark, but Mr Li hopes that the projects will help illuminate even the most obscure corners. Mr Li strongly believes that knowledge is pivotal to raising the quality of life, both materialistically and mentally.

The series of projects sponsored covers a wide spectrum, including two components that rely on technology for delivery, which will benefit students in different age groups. The first involves co-operation with the Ministry of Education to bring tertiary institutions together via Web-based technology.

Under this scheme, students will enjoy Internet access in open classrooms that have computer facilities. To help institutions cope with the challenges of technological advancements, application solutions will be installed to enhance the efficiency of internal management and finan-

cial systems as well as facilitate the digitisation of library materials. Institutions in these provinces will be interconnected through a central server and have access to the China Education and Research Network (CERNET).

Web-based technology will empower institutions to share resources and raise the standards of research and development. Internet access will also make it easier for students to obtain materials related to their studies.

Mr Li also believes that the nurturing of talents starts way before university level and with this in mind he decided to contribute towards a project, the second key component of the series, that helps raise the quality of teaching in primary and secondary schools.

The scheme, initiated by the Ministry of Education, aims at using satellite technology to deliver information to students in underdeveloped areas. About 10,000 schools have been selected to pioneer this innovative project. These schools, many of them located in mountainous villages, will each have a computer and a satellite dish installed to receive multimedia programmes from the nation's education network, as well as access to the Internet. A group of teachers will also receive training on how to prepare themselves for a pending revolution in the education system.

The geographic and economic disadvantages of the west once meant that penetration of educational resources through traditional modes of delivery was extremely difficult. But now, through the information super-highway, schools and teachers will gain access to materials that were

FUTURE PROSPECTS: MR LI KA-SHING WITH A GROUP OF CHILDREN IN SHITOU WHO WILL SOON "GO ONLINE" AT SCHOOL THANKS TO A HK\$300 MILLION JOINT DONATION FROM THE LI KA-SHING FOUNDATION, CHEUNG KONG AND HUTCHISON WHAMPOA.

DIARY

Mr Li Ka-shing's trip to Northwest China February 17-25, 2001

February 17-18

Urumqi, Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Population: 17 million.
Mr Li met with officials of the autonomous region and paid visits to a secondary school and Xinjiang University. The Foundation will support the university's electronic library and network expansion projects. It will also sponsor both a mobile hospital service set up by the Xinjiang Medical Institute and free hospice care.

February 19-20

Lanzhou, Gansu Province. Population: 25 million.
Mr Li visited a rehabilitation centre for the disabled, where he observed training sessions for deaf children and met with disabled people who are aided by artificial limbs. He also visited Lanzhou University, Lanzhou Medical College and a primary school in Dingxi County. The Foundation will provide funding for Lanzhou University to set up an inter-college network, an agriculture laboratory and a teaching centre.

February 21

Xining, Qinghai Province. Population: 4.7 million.
Despite the risk of altitude sickness, Mr Li visited the elevated province of Qinghai in Western China. The Foundation will support the setting up of an inter-college network, and fund the Qinghai Medical University to train more technical staff.

February 22

Chengdu, Sichuan Province. Population: 83 million.
Mr Li visited Sichuan University and agreed to sponsor the construction of a building for research students. He also committed financial support for the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China to build an inter-institution network.

February 23

Chongqing Municipality. Population: 10.2 million.
Mr Li met officials from the municipality, and visited universities in the region. At the medical university, Mr Li encouraged students to grasp every opportunity to learn in this knowledge-driven age. The foundation will fund an infrastructure project at Chongqing University, a series of training programmes for students at Chongqing University of Medical Science, and a mobile hospital.

February 24

Guiyang, Guizhou Province. Population: 35 million.
Mr Li visited Guiyang Medical Institute and agreed to support its programme of providing healthcare to the poor. He also visited a primary school in a remote village in Guizhou, where he attended a ceremony to mark the activation of an education network via satellite technology.

February 25

Guangxi Autonomous Region. Population: 47 million.
Guangxi, famous for its scenic beauty, was the last stop for Mr Li and his team. The Foundation has committed its support for Guangxi University to expand its library. It will also sponsor Guangxi Medical University's research in liver cancer and rheumatic heart disease.

once out of their reach. These schools will become a source of practical knowledge to the community at large, which in turn will raise standards of living.

It is therefore most apt that the project name is "STAND" — Satellite Transmission Advance Network for Distance learning. It is the overall aim that, with education, the people in remote and underdeveloped regions can "stand on their own feet" and, armed with knowledge, change the fate of their community.

Mr Li also agreed to contribute towards medical projects for local residents (see *Diary*). At a rehabilitation centre for the disabled in Lanzhou city in Gansu, people whose recovery was made possible by past contributions from the Foundation shared their experiences with Mr Li. A group of deaf children, who acquired their ability to speak thanks to Foundation-funded training, crowded around their benefactor to express their gratitude.

Wherever he went, whether to a secondary school in snow-covered Xinjiang, or to a university in scenic Guangxi, Mr Li was greeted by groups of enthusiastic students and local officials. Himself a victim of war and poor health as a child, Mr Li was extremely touched by what he witnessed during his trip. "It is hard for people like us, who are used to living in a metropolitan environment, to fully understand the hardship that nature inflicts on human beings. During my visit here, I've come to realise the challenges in developing this part of the country," he told the audience at a primary school in a small village in Guizhou, where he launched the STAND project together with the Minister of Education, Ms Chen Zhi-li.

But Mr Li was optimistic about the future. "Talent is the key to the full utilisation of resources, and the solution to poverty. As long as there is talent there will be development, and this will lead to a better quality of life," he said.

The Ministry of Education's support of schools in the region would bring learning materials of the highest quality to students in remote areas, Mr Li added.

"With the help of satellite technology, even the highest mountains won't prevent the spread of knowledge. And once we are equipped with knowledge, we will have a clearer perspective of the world and a better understanding of dignity and values."

Mr Li also related a dream he once had: "Over the extensive territory of our motherland there were good access roads across the vast deserts, and the usually drought-stricken areas possessed abundant sources of water and fertile soil. The natural resources in all regions were put to very good use and there were nice, comfortable environments for people living in densely populated cities. Everywhere, we found fine sunny weather and economic prosperity. And people of different ethnicities lived happily together in health and harmony."

Then, with the click of a button, Mr Li activated an educational network, which sparked cries of delight from the village school children. It was a day the children will remember all their lives, and it must have been equally memorable for the beaming Mr Li.

