

Social Venture Partners (SVP) China

Ms Wang Gan is a serial education entrepreneur. Educated at Peking University and Yale University, she founded Little Oak Children's House in 2001 — a progressive, experimental preschool in Beijing. Ten years later she extended her educational model to serve low-income families and migrant workers through the non-profit Qianqianshu Equal Education Partners, which she founded and manages today. Through her role serving on the boards of the Leping Foundation and its associated research arm, Fuping Development Institute, Gan began a dialogue about the potential value giving circles could bring to philanthropy and non-profit capacity building in China.

She and her colleagues began reaching out to SVP Network in Seattle to find out more. Early on, Gan co-opted Xing Yan, the mother of a child attending Little Oak Children's House, who would become SVP China's co-CEO. Xing Yan returned to China in 1997 with an MBA from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, working in a variety of corporate roles before setting up her own business in 2010. In 2013 Yan joined Gan and other delegates from Leping Foundation on a study tour to SVP chapters in Silicon Valley and Phoenix in the U.S. Seeing

how the SVP chapters corralled resources, educated their partners and focused on strengthening non-profits, Yan quickly realised 'this is a model that would fit into the current environment in China.' Philanthropy in China is in a state of flux. 'There are many social imbalances,' says Yan, 'and there is quite a lot of negative feeling among people, and a lack of trust towards big philanthropic organisations.' Yan feels that the SVP model gives ordinary professional people a platform to give, which is 'small enough for people to know and trust each other, yet big enough to have an impact for non-profits.'

The Leping Social Entrepreneur Foundation and SVP's international board of directors have formed a strategic partnership to create SVP chapters in 10 of China's cities with the potential of 2,000 partners by 2020. SVP China will be a special project of the Leping Foundation and the umbrella for city-based chapters. The decision to launch SVP in China under the auspices of the Leping Foundation reflects both the regulatory hurdles in registering new non-profit philanthropy entities, and the benefits of being linked with one of China's most established and respected foundations. Yan says the partnership with Leping 'will benefit SVP in terms of credibility and giving us the ability to screen potential non-profits we will invest in.' The first chapter was launched in Beijing in November 2013, with plans to open the

second, probably in Chengdu, during 2014.

Yan and Mary Guo act as co-CEOs of both SVP China and the Beijing chapter. SVP Beijing already has some 50 partners, including spouses, giving it 25 committed donors. The annual pledge is set at RMB 30,000 (US\$5,000, as it is for most U.S. chapters) and so far the chapter has attracted a variety of partners from business professionals to full-time homemakers. Yan wants the partner base to be as wide as possible ‘so that when we begin supporting non-profits we will have many different skills and expertise to offer.’

Like the corporate structure for SVP India, SVP China will act as the single entry point for relationship with the Network Office in Seattle, and will handle communications and promotional work for SVP nationally, paying a single affiliate fee to the network. While SVP is setting up and has not yet made any grant investments, Yan believes that priority sectors for the chapters will include provision of care for elderly, the environment and education.

Yan readily acknowledges that the philanthropic cultures of the U.S. and China are very different, so while SVP China is committed to ‘learning from the successes of the U.S. experience,’ she says, ‘we will adapt to the particular local

needs of China.’ The strategic goal of 2,000 partners over the next six years is ambitious, but Yan is confident that the first chapter in Beijing will grow to more than 60 partners during 2014. The chapter is preparing for its first investments by holding regular monthly meetings with its partners to discuss the group’s governance and learn about the non-profit community in Beijing.