2025 EGRC 20TH Anniversary Celebration
Reflections from the alumni

Ma Yan, Class of 2017 (Dongxi)

When I entered Dongfanghong High School in 2017, my mother had just ended her second marriage. It was a critical time in my high school years, and by chance, I was fortunate enough to join the EGRC family. Back then, Daisy who is the EGRC alumni often visited our school to see me. Beyond caring about my studies, she gave me immense emotional support. She allowed me to pour out all my grievances and would hold me in her arms when I choked up with tears. It was in those warm embraces that I found the strength to keep going.

I've only met Auntie Tien in person once; most of our interactions were online, so I knew very little about her. That's partly why I was so determined to attend the 20th-anniversary event in Chiang Mai.

"*When a girl receives an education, her children will too.*" What a visionary belief! People around me used to say, "Girls just need to know how to read and write their names—they don't need to support a family like boys do," or "If you don't want to study, go work and earn tuition for your brother." EGRC gave me the courage to defy those voices. I was determined to finish high school, to go to college, and to see what lay beyond the mountains!

Reflections on EGRC's 20th Anniversary

This gathering brought together EGRC's sisters from the 1980s, '90s, and 2000s, along with Auntie Tien. To me, Auntie looked exactly the same - serene yet full of quiet determination. Though I met many sisters for the first time, they felt as familiar as family.

Each morning, we shared memories of EGRC's 20-year journey. In the documentary, Auntie amazed us by recalling every girl's name and story. She has used all her resources to lift up every girl who ever weighed on her heart. In those moments, she was less a founder and more a mother, listening intently to her daughters' growth and struggles.

We laughed together over joyful memories and held each other through tears. EGRC isn't just about educating rural girls - it's about companionship and love that nourishes our spirits. As EGRC sisters, we say, "*No matter where we go, we'll find family.*" Because we've been sheltered, we now want to "hold the umbrella" for others.

My story with the EGRC family continues, and the power of women like us keeps growing. With gratitude, I'll keep striving to become the best version of myself.

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Xiaoyan Li

Two days of sharing left me with two words to describe the experience - profound and real. Growth happens through the process of breaking down and rebuilding oneself, and the pain endured is often proportional to the rewards gained.

Compared to my sisters, I realize I've been lucky yet unaware.

First, the unaware part: Though my family struggled financially, we never lacked love. The adults shielded us children so well that I grew up forgetting opportunities must be fought for. I hesitated to say "no" to unfairness around me out of timidity.

Then, the luck: Meeting Auntie Tien became the light of my life. She opened doors to a broader world and extraordinary people. At the Shanghai FMC event, Tracy's advice carried me through my darkest hours: "*Don't doubt yourself – do what you believe is right. Every ounce of effort you invest today will prove its worth in the future*."

Years of growth have repeatedly confirmed the truth of these words, and their value only grows. This reunion also fulfilled three long-held wishes:

Finally meeting Auntie Tien - proudly showing her the confident, poised woman I've become. That seed she planted has taken root: I've grown into an independent New Era woman courageously pursuing her dreams (exactly as Auntie hoped!). The highlight? Sweeping her into a giant princess carry!

Taking my mother traveling - to Chiang Mai, Kunming, and Dali - so she could see her once-fragile daughter has now become her steadfast support. (Just typing this brings tears.)

Breaking free from outdated influences for deep talks with my sisters. Exhausting? Yes. Electrifying? Absolutely.

Three key takeaways:

From Auntie: "*Depth comes from asking questions. To understand anything, identify its core logic and the forces sustaining it*."

From Juanxiong: "*Be like water.*" I had armored my heart against the world, believing hardness was my only shield. That night, Juanxiong awakened me: Gentleness is power. Auntie exemplifies this - her tenderness lifted 2,000+ girls' dreams. That strength will now guide me through storms.

From Xianglan: "*Be yourself (love yourself first). Strong core → conviction →*

choices. Your life's priorities flow from being yourself before becoming someone's someone."

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Zhaoqin Wu

My Journey with EGRC

My connection with EGRC began in 2012. What struck me first was its unique focus—supporting only girls.

In China, especially in rural areas, cultural traditions have long dictated that girls are often sacrificed, overlooked, or left behind. Yet here, my identity as a girl became the very reason I was chosen. That was my luck - my moment of grace.

EGRC gave me more than just financial support during university. Beyond education, it introduced me to sisters with shared struggles - women who walked beside me at every stage, broadening my horizons, guiding me through society's complexities, and helping me uncover my inner strength. Piece by piece, their support shaped who I am today.

I remember Yunxia-jie's fable of "The Little Horse Crossing the River," shared with gentle confidence. It taught me: No matter the obstacle, don't rely on others' opinions - test the waters yourself.

I recall Coach Gaolin's words: "*Everyone is the hero of their own life - compete only with yourself.*" I'm grateful to Coach Shen Hong, who sat with me in my darkest valleys during my gap year chasing dreams. Her safe listening space turned my doubts into fuel.

When lost, EGRC sister Yunxia's philosophy of lifelong learning became my compass—a practical way to transform anxiety into momentum, ensuring I never stagnated.

Every ounce of strength in my growth seems to have flowed from EGRC. This is my extraordinary fortune.

"*Educate a woman, and her children will be educated.*" This founding vision of Auntie Tien's still awes me. An educated woman gains wisdom to understand her parents - filtering cultural pressures before passing values onward. My mother, shaped by her era, believes arranging marriages is her duty: "Just marry anyone - preferably my pick." I've borne her pressure but reject this thinking. My child? I'll respect her choices if she has courage to face the world. This is education's power - breaking cycles.

What Auntie Tien and EGRC Gave Me

The second most precious gift EGRC gave me was forward-thinking values - the vision of a woman's second career curve, the "Say No to Workplace Harassment" campaigns, mental health awareness for girls, and tools like the "Life Flower" framework. The energy from these initiatives has become part of my very being. By conventional standards, I may not count as "successful," yet I am profoundly content: I can recognize beauty, feel it deeply, and even create it within my reach. This is how education has transformed me.

But EGRC's third and greatest gift is this: a sanctuary of resilient, tenacious, and radiant souls.

How many lives that might have blossomed lie buried under the struggles of rural womanhood?
How many opportunities were suffocated behind terms like child marriage, bride exchanges, child brides, or infanticide towers?

Against the backdrop of 1.4 billion people, I am blessed to be one of EGRC's 2,000+ nurtured lives. The weight of existence, compounded by being female, forms layer upon layer of hardship—material deprivation, ideological constraints, spiritual confinement.

Yet these lives, watered by education, have cracked their shells and intertwined roots. Here, you hear:

> "Come, sister - I'll take you home," a lifeline thrown in the dark;
> "You're extraordinary," words that stitch broken confidence back together;
> "My heart aches for you - here's a hug," warmth that melts isolation;
> "Need me? I'm here," the ultimate safety net.

Strangers by blood, we are sisters by choice - huddled close in Auntie Tien's embrace, in this family called EGRC.

Why I Needed to Meet Auntie Tien

As my mom reached a certain age, the societal pressure to marry weighed even heavier on her than on me.

"Their family has a good son, perfect for you," people would say. My mother obediently passed along his contact, but my messages would vanish like stones sinking into the ocean, leaving no trace. Every phone call became an outpouring of her grievances:

> "You never listen! I regret ever letting you study so much - it made you restless and defiant!"
> "You force me to endure everyone's judgment and gossip!"
> "Wasting your prime years on strangers instead of settling down!"
> "An unfilial daughter—refusing to work in our hometown, choosing a boyfriend from god-knows-where!"

"You see me as a burden, fleeing far away, utterly useless. Raising you was a mistake."

I understand now - she was a victim of her era, trapped by expectations. With time, I've made peace with it all.

I asked Auntie: How do you view this? Her answer: "*Tend to your joy first. Societal 'success' doesn't guarantee happiness. Choose growth, savor life's tiny wonders, and contribute your light.*"

This is what EGRC gave me: Strength to live, love, and hope.

Reflections on EGRC's 20th Anniversary

Rarely do life and work offer such safe spaces to share our stories. We've armored ourselves thick - safe but isolated. This gathering shattered those shells. In vulnerability, we found embraces, awe for life's grit, and renewed belief in ourselves.

Who says heroes stand only in the spotlight? Every soul fighting to thrive is heroic.

The future is luminous.

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Xianglan Wang, EGRC Class of 2013 (Longxi, Gansu):

After completing the National College Entrance Exam (Gaokao) in 2013, I followed my elder sister to Kashgar, Xinjiang, where I worked as a waitress in a Sichuan restaurant. When EGRC conducted home visits that year, I wasn't there - I first met Auntie Tien at a student gathering in Longxi county. Looking back, that marked the year my life's trajectory began to change.

Studying in Tianjin afterward - just a 30-minute high-speed train ride from Beijing - my university life became deeply intertwined with EGRC. I organized EGRC's first rural women's college student teaching initiative in Longxi, coordinated Lunar New Year gatherings, joined EGRC sister Haixia on home visits to Guizhou, participated in fundraising events across Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin, and completed an internship at Wellington International School... Every opportunity and ounce of strength EGRC and Auntie gave me allowed me to keep struggling forward through life's quagmires, never abandoning kindness or gratitude, and never forgetting my roots or original aspirations.

Reflections on EGRC's 20th Anniversary

At the start of this year, I set a firm goal: No matter where it's held, I will attend EGRC's 20th anniversary to see Auntie. That resolve never wavered.

The first day's sharing by Auntie stirred me profoundly. Though I'd heard her story many times during joint events, when she began with "I want you all to know me better," tears instantly welled up. I, too, long to truly understand and embrace her - this trip was just a small step.

Every sister's story moved me deeply. Each hardship was so visceral, so raw - yet met with tenacious struggle. We've repeatedly pulled ourselves from the brink; we are remarkable. Believe unshakably in the power of belief itself. Love yourself fiercely, even if it requires thorns.

Whether connected to EGRC for 20, 15, 10, or 5 years - each defines it differently. But I'm certain: Auntie's two decades of steadfast dedication have taken root in every EGRC girl. The ripple effects of women's education will stretch infinitely.
EVERY STEP COUNTS.

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Fangxia Li, EGRC Class of 2011 (Longxi, Gansu)

I first met Auntie Tien in the summer of 2011. By the time we reunited in Chiang Mai for the 20th anniversary, fourteen years had passed - I'd transformed from a bewildered young girl into a mother myself. When I realized Auntie still remembered the story I'd shared about my mother all those years ago, I was overcome with emotion: Two decades, over two thousand girls, countless stories... yet she remembered mine.

The depth of this love and touching moments cannot be measured, but for me, it has become an unshakable foundation - fueling me to live each ordinary day with purpose, fullness, and resolve. It taught me to give selfless kindness in every possible moment, expecting nothing in return. This is just one of countless lessons Auntie has taught through her actions.

Reflections on EGRC's 20th Anniversary

Those four fleeting days overflowed with laughter, tears, and moments so profound they made every hour priceless. As a jaded middle-aged woman grinding through life, such raw vulnerability - staying up all night sharing hearts - had become rare. Witnessing my sisters' metamorphoses, I marveled time and time again at the immeasurable impact of Auntie's 20-year mission.

We're still growing. This love still ripples outward. Our stories are still being written. Next time we meet, I'll make sure to give Auntie an even bigger hug!

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Yufei He
#EGRC20thAnniversary – We Made It!

After graduating from university in 2022, I rejoined EGRC's activities. I came to this reunion out of my expectations, yet within just three days, we forged connections deeper than I could have imagined.

Hearing my sisters share their EGRC stories stirred a whirlwind of emotions - heartache, gratitude, inspiration... their journeys left me profoundly moved.

More than feeling fortunate, I'm filled with gratitude. Grateful for this sacred space where we can:
• Bare our true selves without fear of future betrayal
• Shed all masks that the world demands
• Be met with warmth instead of indifferent responses

Here, we find only trust, unwavering support, and that unspoken understanding between kindred spirits.

Once more, I give thanks to fate for bringing us together, and to this extraordinary sisterhood we call EGRC.

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Jinpeng Cao

At EGRC's heartwarming 20th anniversary gathering, I experienced profound emotions beyond words. In those soulful moments with my sisters, even as an introvert who typically keeps to myself, I found myself opening up completely for the first time.

Listening to each sister's life story, I was deeply moved by their resilience blossoming through adversity. And when I mustered the courage to share my own journey, what I received in return were unreserved embraces, heartfelt advice, and healing strength - this precious bond of trust makes me believe we'll walk our future paths with even greater conviction.

To all my fellow sisters who, like me, struggle with self-expression: Take that brave first step to connect. You'll discover here a safe harbor of unconditional acceptance!