

OPEN FORUM | On China

The heroes among us

By Kai-Fu Lee

On May 12, 2008, an earthquake of 8 magnitude struck in Sichuan. Everyone in China was shocked, and quickly became heartbroken as reported deaths climbed from 10,000 to 32,000 to more than 62,000 people. The death toll is still rising, and the number of injured and missing is many times more.

The Chinese people faced this disaster with compassion and courage. I was touched by the teacher who died forming a bridge with his body between two desks, protecting four surviving students under him, by the trapped child who told the rescue workers to save others first, and by the dying mother who texted her baby, "My Treasure: If you survive, always remember I love you." She died using her own body to shield her 3-month-old from harm. But don't worry about this baby growing up without a family. Thousands of families in China have already volunteered to adopt earthquake orphans.

And the Chinese people faced this disaster with resourcefulness and tenacity. A brave executive took his weekend SUV, drove hundreds of miles, started digging, and saved several lives. A child used his hands to dig out two fellow students. His hands were severely injured, but his friends survived. Cab drivers turned their cars into ambulances and delivery trucks. More than 100,000 brave soldiers risked (and some gave) their lives to find every survivor.

In the Internet Age, heroism need not be on location. At Google China, where I work, one team worked all night and built a "lost loved one" search to accurately find information about missing people in Sichuan. Another team put together a satellite image map to help the rescue effort, and to connect supply donors with rescue areas in need. Finally, a team made sure that when a user searched for "earthquake donations" or similar words, he or she could complete a donation in as little as one minute. Almost \$1 million was donated in one week.

These are the heroes among us, whether they use an SUV, a shovel, a phone or a keyboard. Their heroic



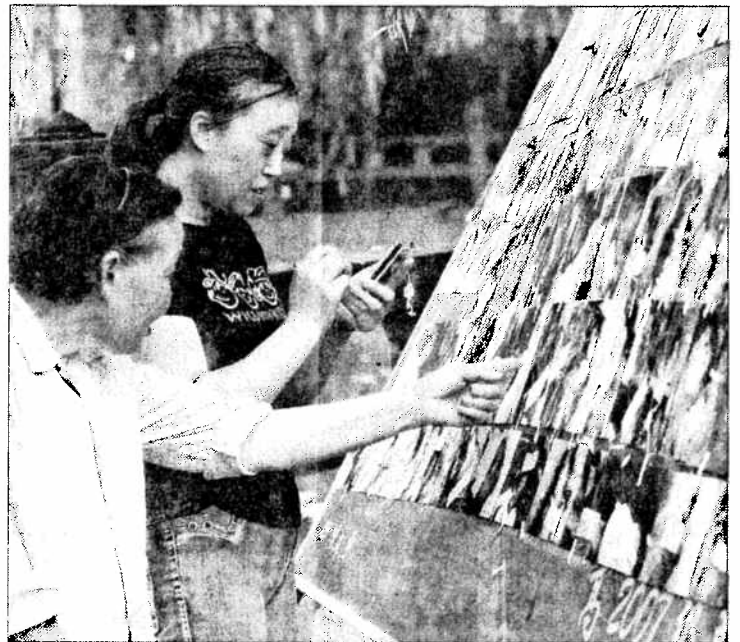
NG HAN GUAN / Associated Press

Earthquake survivors (above) hold up signs which read, "Sincere heroes," and "Give from the heart," and "We are on family," near Guanzhuang in Sichuan province five days after the May 12 earthquake. In Hanwang (below), relatives of victims of Dongqi Secondary School, look at photos of more than 70 unidentified corpses.

deeds and selflessness inspired me so deeply that I can recall only one other such occasion. It was 9/11 — I vividly remember the NYPD police officers, the firefighters, and of course the passengers and crew on United Flight 93.

As a Chinese American, I hope that the Chinese and the Americans will see that they have so much in common — their compassion, courage, ingenuity, generosity and grace. Amid recent differences between China and America, I hope that people will see that these heroic commonalities are much stronger than any differences, and will bind the two great peoples together. And I hope that these heroes from 9/11 and 5/12 will inspire all of us to turn our anxiety into courage, our misery into tenacity, and our sorrow into love.

Kai-Fu Lee is the president of Google Greater China, and the author of several best-selling books in Chinese.



EUGENE HOSHIKO/Associated Press