



**Making and Breaking the Humanitarian  
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**Ripples can turn into a storm: Two stories of HIV intervention programs in China**

William Wong  
The University of Hong Kong

In 2004, I conducted a comprehensive literature review on sex work and found, of 462 relevant citations, half of them (232) carried words such as AIDS, HIV, safe sex or condoms in their titles and many more referred to HIV-related issues in their texts. Globally, the spending on HIV responses has increased to 4.1 billion USD in 2008 in 43 low-to-middle income countries alone. Given the amount of resources poured in the combat of the infection and the focus of intervention and research in the last two decades, it is not surprising to see many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and governmental agencies have delivered various interventions in the name of HIV preventions and beyond doubt many of these prevention strategies targeted at high-risk populations are effective in reducing the transmission and spread of the disease but not without a price to pay for.

In this synopsis, I would like to share with you the personal experience of two HIV prevention programs taken place in Yunnan, China at the turn of this century. Hopefully I can demonstrate to you how simple HIV intervention programs can have enormous socio-political consequences and repercussions. Save the Children, China program was the first NGO allowed into the drug and prostitute stricken Ruili at China-Myanmar border in 1999 and in order to access some trafficked girls and women for HIV prevention, the very Burmese (ex-communist) community leaders that had imported them were appointed as consultants for the NGO who would then use their positions to gain access to foreigners and international organisations for their own political means. The whole program had to be terminated abruptly when the Save the Children, Myanmar program team was arrested after visiting their Chinese counterpart and the Myanmar Government formally protested our activities as attempts to overflow their government.

In 2003, working at the university we were one of the earliest groups with the support of an UK-based NGO to look into the homosexual and HIV issues in a rural town of Dali, Yunnan. A gay bar was established in 2004 as an outreach base for HIV prevention which was subsequently taken up by the local CDC (a government agency in disease control). When we were congratulated the recognition of the project and celebrated its long term sustainability, this unique project was reported nationally and internationally and a social debate on how far would tax-payers money can support homosexual movement just because of the HIV infection, was initiated, let alone the exposure of the sexuality of these otherwise “underground” men and their families. These two individual stories may only represent snapshots of issues related to HIV but it may also provide an anchor point for further discussions on how far and to what extent could we change our society and value in the name of HIV.