



## **Responses from the Helen Foster Snow Foundation to Media Questions**

February 9, 2022

### **What is the Helen Foster Snow Foundation?**

The Helen Foster Snow Foundation (HFSF) is a Utah-based, non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve, promote, and continue Helen Foster Snow's legacy of building bridges of understanding between China and the rest of the world. Our vision is that by continuing this legacy, the relationship between the U.S. and China will become one of increased mutual respect and cooperation.

We are currently registering an NGO in China to further expand these efforts. We extend our hand of friendship to all who share the Gung Ho (work together) spirit as we look for ways to build bridges of understanding and promote peace across the world.

### **Why did you start the Helen Foster Snow Foundation?**

As a child growing up in Utah, I heard many stories about my great-aunt Helen and her adventures in Asia. Helen kept mostly to herself after she returned to the United States, but she helped pay for some of my father's education while he attended Brigham Young University, and I thought that was so kind of her, especially since she was not wealthy and lived a humble lifestyle.

When I was 19 years old, I served as a volunteer for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Southern France. While there, I met a young college student named Ge Yi from Beijing who was studying art at the university in Marseille. He was the first person from China I had ever met. I told him I was related to Helen Foster Snow and he said, "Wow, your family is very famous!" I didn't really know what that meant at the time since I had never been to China.

Although he was a poor college student, Ge Yi made dinner for us in his small apartment, and we quickly became good friends. The most astonishing thing was how alike we were. His sense of humor was similar to my own. He was honest, hard-working, and very hospitable. These were values that I was taught at a young age growing up in the culture of Utah, and I marveled how someone who lived on the other side of the world could be so similar to the people I grew up with.

When I returned to the United States, I went to college and worked in Salt Lake City, Utah. In my downtime I began reading Helen's distinctive book *My China Years*. I was spellbound learning about 1930's China, Helen and Edgar Snow's courtship, the December 9th Movement, the Xi'an Incident,

Helen's escape from her hotel window to visit Yan'an, and the Chinese Industrial Cooperative (Gung Ho) Movement. It had romance, adventure, and intrigue; I remember thinking, "This should be a movie!"

A few years later, a statue was placed on Main Street in Cedar City, Utah where Helen was born to honor her life and accomplishments. I was living near Chicago at the time and was happy to hear that our dear relative was being honored in such a way. I then got married and returned to Utah for work and to start a family.

In 2016 an event happened which changed my life forever. My family and I attended a celebration at Southern Utah University honoring the life and legacy of Helen Foster Snow. During one of the speeches, a picture of Helen appeared on a large screen at the front of the auditorium. At that moment, it was as if Helen was looking directly at me. It was as if she was saying, "Adam, what are you going to do about this?"

For months I pondered Helen's question. What was I going to do? My great-aunt had done so much in her life to build bridges of understanding between China and the rest of the world. She had sacrificed so much for the good of others. What could I do to honor her legacy? I am just one person; what difference could I possibly make in the world? I was encouraged by Helen's words in her book *My China Years*, "It is only at the point of maximum contradiction that the individual can have an active role in history."

In 2016, I was invited to China by Northwest University in Xi'an and spent several days traveling to various sites of Helen and Edgar Snow's past. We attended conferences, visited the famous Terra Cotta Warriors, and toured the 8th Route Army Museum where Helen's contributions are beautifully displayed. We also visited the caves of Yan'an, then strolled down the historic streets of Xi'an near the Bell Tower. It was wonderful to walk in the footsteps of my ancestors.

Everywhere we went the people were so hospitable and kind. They spoke of the incredible impact which Helen and Edgar had on the Chinese people and throughout Asia. There were video cameras and people taking pictures at every turn. I finally understood what Ge Yi meant when he said, "Wow, your family is very famous!"

When I returned to the States, I made it my life's mission to learn everything I could about Helen's life. I visited her collection of 11,000 photographs and 60 books and manuscripts at the library at Brigham Young University. I read her book *Inside Red China* about her visit to the caves of Yan'an, and *Red Star Over China* written by Edgar Snow. These books by two American journalists had a profound effect on me and helped me, as an American, to better understand the Chinese people.

In 2018, I again visited China during the dedication of the Gung Ho Museum in Fengxiang, Baoji. A dear family friend, Professor An Wei, invited me to speak about Helen's involvement with the Gung Ho movement. Industrial cooperatives were quite common in Utah because of Brigham Young, Utah's first governor. He proposed them in the 1800's to boost the local economy. It was wonderful to see how

Helen took up her Utah roots from the hardened soil of the Rocky Mountains and planted them across the ocean in the loess plateaus of China, then on to India, and throughout Asia.

Once again, I felt the power of Helen's question in my mind, "Adam, what are you going to do about this?" This time, I knew exactly what to do. When I returned home, I started the Helen Foster Snow Foundation to continue this remarkable woman's legacy of bridge building.

### **Why did you write a letter to President Xi?**

As a Foundation, we looked at our accomplishments over the last four years and decided it was important to emphasize the spirit of international friendship which Helen Foster Snow embodied. It was extremely important to Helen that people on both sides of the Pacific understand each other, despite our differences.

We feel this spirit was echoed by Pres. Xi's letter to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations in which he wrote, "Following the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, China stands ready to work with the United States to enhance exchanges and cooperation across the board." We believe that these principles are also what motivated Helen Foster Snow to bridge systemic or ideological differences among different nations.

Also, our letter from the Foundation and the Foster Family to President Xi was to thank the Chinese people for the way in which they have honored Helen's work during this past year, and in previous years as well.

The year 2021 was the 90th anniversary of Helen's arrival in China and there had been increased interest in her life story in both the U.S. and China. We thought it would be in the best interest of both countries to reach out, as she did so many years ago, in a spirit of friendship. Her work on the Gung Ho movement in the 1930's exemplified this spirit. As part of this work, Helen encouraged her friend Rewi Alley to establish the Bailie school which helped underprivileged youth obtain an education. She then traveled with her husband Edgar throughout Southeast Asia raising funds for this important effort to be successful.

In 2016, I visited several historical landmarks in China, including Liang Jia He where President Xi lived as a youth. Later I learned that Rewi Alley invited President Xi's father to serve as an honorary principal of the Bailie School in Shandan, Gansu Province. Since Helen and Rewi worked together to develop the Bailie School, and with Helen and President Xi's family both spending significant time in the same areas of Shaanxi Province, I thought that was an interesting historical connection between the Foster and Xi families. And so the spirit of international friendship which Helen began so long ago continues today.

### **How did you feel when you received the reply letter from President Xi?**

I felt very pleased to see that people in both China and the US are recognizing Helen's contributions to US-China relations. I am grateful that the leaders of our countries understand the importance of

people-to-people relationships, working together, and building bridges, and I am hopeful that the next generation of Americans and Chinese will continue to share this vision.

It is wonderful to see that President Xi acknowledges the special role people like Helen Foster Snow have played in the relationship of our two countries. I am grateful for the support from Ambassador Qin Gang and the Chinese Embassy in Washington DC for Helen's work and the Foundation. The Helen Foster Snow Foundation and its important work has also received tremendous support from people across the United States and China. This is international friendship in action.

As Utah's U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch once stated, "Mrs. Snow built a bridge of goodwill between the hearts of the Americans to the hearts of the Chinese people. Let her life stand as a reminder that what lies behind the very different political systems of the world are real people whose hearts and minds are not so far apart."

**What contributions have been made by the Helen Foster Snow Family to develop the relationship between the U.S and China over the years?**

Helen arrived in China in 1931. Since then, the Foster Family has been involved in US-China relations at the people-to-people level over multiple generations. When Helen returned to the United States in 1941, she moved to Madison, Connecticut. She spent the next 60 years of her life continuing the relationships she developed while in China and wrote over 60 books and manuscripts.

The Foster family were among some of the first visitors to China after the US-China relationship was normalized. Helen made two trips to China in the 1970's, visiting old friends such as Zhu De and his wife, as well as places from her past. She also had many visitors to her home in Connecticut, including her good friend Huang Hua, the first Representative to the United Nations from the People's Republic of China. Because of Helen's influence, many of her nieces and nephews traveled to China to continue these relationships. Several of my cousins have spent time living in China to learn more about the culture, language, and people. The Foster family in the US consider Helen's life and work as a precious legacy that will forever connect our family to the people of China.

Upon her death in 1997, Helen received a special memorial service at the Great Hall of the People. Helen's 11,000 photographs and 60 books and manuscripts are currently housed at the library of Brigham Young University. Students, scholars and visitors from the U.S. and multiple delegations from China have visited this historic collection over the years. Her life and legacy continue to be studied and valued today. Helen is a notable Utah woman whose work deserves to be celebrated.

This legacy lives on in my children. In 2021, my daughter Makenna Foster was chosen as a young ambassador to represent the United States at the Silk Road Children's Emissary for the Chinese New Year. She sang in an international choir of children from around the world to promote international peace.

**Do you have plans to expand the historic bridges between the people of the US and China which Helen built 90 years ago?**

We feel the best way to honor Helen is to continue the work she was engaged in, adapted to current conditions. As Helen said, “I call my life ‘bridging’. All my thinking and writing provides a bridge to the future.” For both sides to build the bridge to a future of peace and prosperity between China and the US, we should increase interactions and people-to-people exchanges.

The Helen Foster Snow Foundation is committed to use our events and activities to create a platform for dialogue, engagement, and practical cooperation in 3 focus areas:

- Education and Culture
- Business
- Subnational Relations

Within these areas and others, we are working to create the trust between parties and conditions necessary to produce mutually beneficial outcomes. We are considering creating a high-level award in Helen’s name to recognize those who contributed to bridging the people of China and others. These people should be role models for us and future generations. We are currently in the process of registering an NGO in China to support these efforts, and welcome dialogue with those that share our vision.

In Education and Culture, we work with universities, museums, and other institutions to promote language learning and education & cultural exchanges. For example, we are working with partners in Jiangxi Province to create a Ceramic Cultural Center based in Utah, to share this amazing cultural tradition of ceramic artistry with Americans; with Northwest University in Xi’an, we are working to promote the Helen Foster Snow Translation Award to be a world-class translation competition; and with China Foundation for Peace and Development and affiliate of Invention Convention Worldwide, we are bringing the K-12 students from China and abroad to invent together.

In Business, we use our platform, events, and activities to promote common-sense cooperation to increase trade & business connectivity between the two countries. For example, U.S. companies can explore export opportunities at Shanghai’s CIIE. Extensive sister cities and sister states between the U.S. and China can benefit from increased commerce. We hope to facilitate these and other opportunities to increase trade and business activity.

Of course, to accomplish any of the above it is essential to have healthy Subnational Relations so governments on each side can meet, build trust, and find ways to work together. We are committed to contributing to outcome-based subnational relationships between the US and China. To this end, we have held several events in Chinese provinces this year to share Helen’s work as a photojournalist in 1930’s China with the Chinese people. Events like these create a chance for subnational governments to engage and dialogue with each other on non-sensitive topics.

### **Why are people-to-people exchange and education important for US-China relations?**

I feel it's essential for both countries to learn more about each other, and people-to-people exchanges are a real benefit to each side. These grass-roots efforts play a stabilizing role when the two countries may have disagreements in other areas. Many State and local governments have found very effective relationships. I've benefited from relationships with counterparts in China and the Helen Foster Snow Foundation is looking for ways to help build those kinds of beneficial connections.

Helen understood the importance of people-to-people relationships. As she said goodbye to her bodyguard Guo Shenhua who accompanied her during her return trip from Yan'an in 1937, Helen stated, "The great wall between China and the rest of the world seemed very far away. Here was the scrutable Chinese man in tears, as if leaving his dearest relative. This was grass-roots Chinese-American friendship. Never would I do anything to break this special relationship woven of such a few, fragile threads in a world where merciless swords cut at international understanding and natural human identities."

### **Did you have any celebrations during this Chinese New Year?**

Yes, my wife and I feel it's important to have our kids understand different cultures & countries, and with Helen's connection to China, our family enjoys learning about Chinese holidays together. Since Utah has over 18,000 K-12 students learning Mandarin, schools across the State have Chinese New Year celebrations this time of year.

We're so lucky that in our neighborhood we have a great bilingual school with an excellent Mandarin program which parents are lining up to sign their children up for. The students and teachers put on a fantastic Chinese New Year celebration which our community really enjoys. I'm sure Helen would be thrilled if she were able to see these Utah kids speaking Mandarin and learning about the culture & traditions of the Chinese people that were so close to her heart.

### **Did you watch the Beijing Winter Olympic Games kick off? How do you feel about the event?**

Yes, we watch the Winter Games as a family. Ever since the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics 20 years ago, and with Utah's winter sports traditions & training facilities located here, it's like the Winter Olympics are in our blood. There are nearly 80 athletes with Utah connections competing in the Beijing Games, so my family and I will be watching for these athletes and cheering them on. The Chinese Winter Olympic teams, like many other Winter Olympic teams from around the world, often train here in Utah. Having so many top athletes from around the world come to Utah can lead to some great people-to-people connections between nations and hopefully leaves them with a good impression of our beautiful State.

With Warm Regards,



Adam Foster, Chairman  
Helen Foster Snow Foundation  
[www.helenfostersnow.org](http://www.helenfostersnow.org)