

2001

Social Studies Ambassadors to People's Republic of China.

Ronald G. Helms Ph.D.

Wright State University - Main Campus, ronald.helms@wright.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/books>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Helms , R. G. (2001). *Social Studies Ambassadors to People's Republic of China..* Spokane, WA: People Ambassador Programs.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by CORE Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Books Authored by Wright State Faculty/Staff by an authorized administrator of CORE Scholar. For more information, please contact library-corescholar@wright.edu.

Helms' Book

Helms, R. (2001). *Social Studies Ambassadors to People's Republic of China*. Spokane, WA: People to People Ambassador Programs. No ISBN

Social Studies Ambassadors to People's Republic of China

Ronald G. Helms, Ph.D., Professor

ronald.helms@wright.edu

Wright State University

2179 Briggs Road

Centerville, OH 45459

H 937-433-2611

ronald.helms@wright.edu



Biographical statement_5.10.19
ronald.helms@wright.edu

Prefer Home Address

Ronald G. Helms
2179 Briggs Road
Centerville Ohio 45459

937.433.2611 Home ronald.helms@wright.edu

EDUCATION

Institution	Concentration	Degree	Date
Ohio State University	Social Studies Education Curriculum & Instruction	• Ph.D.	1972
University of Dayton	Political Science	• M. A.	1968
Fairmont State College	Social Studies Comprehensive	• B. S.	1966

Ronald G. Helms is a Son of the American Revolution and is in **Who's Who in America 2018**.

Ronald G. Helms is a full professor, one of two national auditors for **NCSS_NCATE** Program Reviews, a member of **NCATE Board of Examiners, National Board for Professional Teacher Standards** facilitator, the Principal Investigator at Wright State University for a NBPTS institute; Helms has assisted over 500 NBPTS candidates, and has offered several national presentations on the NBPTS process.

Helms is the recipient of 45+ grants including a \$916,000 **Teaching American History** Grant from the U. S. Department of Education. Helms has been active with OCSS and NCSS for the past 40 years and currently is serving on the NCSS Social Education Committee and the Conference Committee.

Helms is the recipient of the following Wright State University college of education awards: Outstanding Faculty Member Award, 2006; Excellence in Scholarship Award, 2004, Excellence in Scholarship Award, 2001; Excellence in Scholarship Award, 1999; Excellence in Service Award, 1997.

Helms has offered over 36 international presentations, over 100 national presentations, over 100 state presentations, over 80 Invited Speaker presentations, and over 159 consulting presentations. Helms is the author/co-author of 17 books and over 110 educational articles.

Helms national service includes; Kappa Delta Pi, *The Educational Forum*, Educational Review Panel, Phi Delta Kappa Foundation, Author Seminar-Lecture Program, National Education Association, Educational Web Page **Consultant**, **The Population Connection Organization**, Education Foundation National Lecturer Program. 1997 - - Present.

Helms international service includes several leadership roles to Germany, Ontario, and China. Helms foreign travel includes the following: Mexico, Canada, Puerto Vallarta, Costa Rica, British Isles, Puerto Rico, China, Hong Kong, Ireland Germany, Eastern Europe, Iberian Peninsula, Scandinavia, Chile, Argentina, Morocco, and Western, Central, and Eastern Europe.

Social Studies Ambassadors to People's Republic of China

*Ronald G. Helms, Ph.D.
Wright State University*

From childhood to present, I have been fascinated with China and with the Chinese. This book will report some events of my leadership of a PEOPLE TO PEOPLE Ambassador program to China. Winter, spring, and fall had served as a time of preparation for this great Chinese adventure. As a forty-five-year veteran of the International Sister to Sister Program and as a veteran foreign traveler and veteran delegation leader, I was delighted to lead a delegation to China.

I'm extremely pleased with the members of the Social Science Delegation. These professionals also had long anticipated the trip to P.R.C. Our delegation included 7 men and 7 women. These professionals had invested a good deal of money, time, and energy in preparing for this expedition. I was later to learn that several bore the financial expense without institutional support. Several were "docked" days of pay to make this trip. The social science delegation was indeed responsible, civil, alert, knowledgeable, and most important flexible.

Who would have predicted that one of the largest airports in the U.S. would suddenly "shut-down" due to computer and radar problems? Some 90 plus American delegates to China were stranded in air or on the tarmac for two plus hours while the LAX problems were being solved.

PEOPLE TO PEOPLE had insured that all delegates would have “time” for such a contingency. We could board Cathay Pacific without stress.

The trip required 7 hours in the U.S. plus an additional 14 hours to Hong Kong plus 2.5 hours to Shanghai. This would equal 23.5 hours in air and several hours in airport. Cathay Pacific and Dragon Air are excellent airlines with hosts and hostesses meeting all needs of those in transit.

The land/air transit system was seamless. Leonard and Shoe met us. Leonard would be our national guide – Shoe would be our city guide.

Our first Chinese experience was lunch (a banquet) at the Seagull Hotel. If this would be representative of Chinese dining, we knew we were in for a first class treat. Lunch was followed by a walking / photo op. tour of the BUND and waterfront. Local city vendors were in abundance. Next came arrival at the Shanghai Radisson – yes, this is a five star Chinese Hotel (All Chinese hotels visited were five star.)

Human events often have a way to influence something as important as a PEOPLE TO PEOPLE exchange does. Historically, all the delegates knew the concept “Shanghaied” – surely this was an interesting story, but of small concern in such a modern urban city of 13 plus million.

Suddenly, the Education delegates realized that three of our own people were missing! We had begun the day well-rested and eager for adventure into the bowels of the fascinating city. A wonderful “banquet-lunch” was followed by a much-cherished visit to “Old-Town-Shanghai.” While the press of the citizens and tourist was not quite that of a Madri Gras in New Orleans, there were many people and sights in an area not unlike China Town, San Francisco. It was here that our first drama was experienced.

Three delegates were missing! Three people whom we all knew and by now cared about were missing. This event weighted heavily on us. Cell phone calls were made. Leonard and J.J. made a search to no avail. Reluctantly we continued to the Shanghai Museum for our next appointment. Two of the missing delegates greeted us at the museum. We had great hope. As educators, we are concerned humans. We were all well-educated and many well-travelled. We were not chaperones for a group of students. The delegation had expectation that reunion would occur.

Our delegations were four: a philosophy group of 44: three Education groups of about 15 each – Special Education, Child Development, and Social Studies. The four groups had similar but different schedules. Cultural events and meals were common events. The 45 educators toured together and integrated for many social events.

Today, we were delighted to visit the **Jade Buddhist Temple**. Buddhism is an important life force for many citizens of Shanghai. As always, we encountered street vendors and the citizens. We moved freely and without safety concerns.

The visit to **Old Town** and to the serene gardens in Old Town was a special event. The delegates mixed with locals to enjoy the pleasant Sunday afternoon. It is impossible to count the number of photos taken today. Next came a tour of the **Shanghai Museum**. This treasure rivals the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. We might easily have spent an entire day at the museum. The Seagull restaurant provided another feast. The delegates were fortunate enough to share in the events of a Shanghai marriage during the banquet. Then off to the **Shanghai Grand Theatre** for the Acrobatic Show. We enjoyed two hours of super human events.

Following acclamation and cultural events, the entire social science delegation was most pleased to dialogue face to face with our Shanghai counterparts. We were well rested and eager to meet the Shanghai professions.

Our first professional visit to the **Shanghai East Normal University** was most eventful. This university campus might easily have been a Western campus. Seeing the young students was viewing the future of China. The students were in western dress and behaved much as U.S. students. Teaching methodology seems to require an overhaul.

A-V resources were scarce. Helms presented a study based on I.S.T.E. standards. Helms converted a PowerPoint presentation to overhead transparencies and an overhead projector was used. Each American delegate introduced himself/herself. A lively discussion ensued by all Americans, and by most Shanghai professors and graduate students. A Strong focus was the use/abuse of WWW and of the availability of computers to Shanghai students. The youth clearly have taken to computers and the WWW. Professors are unconvinced of the education value of this resource.

Several American delegates provided round table accounts of their own research efforts. Clearly, the American delegates enjoyed an additional twenty minutes with the Shanghai professors and students in an informal “one-on-one” conversation. It would seem we do have much to learn from each other. Several delegates provided gifts to our Shanghai professionals. American spirits truly soared from this experience.

Our second visit to **the Shanghai Social Science Academy** was viewed as very successful. The requested overhead projector was broken, so Helms presented a paper on “An inquiry into the

National Council for the Social Studies Standards.” The research model was explained to the Shanghai Social Scientists. Again, there was spirited discussion on computers and the www.

The American Delegates sought to move the direction of the dialogue to the research of the Shanghai Social Scientist. The term sociology was defined much more broadly than that which Americans accept. We were offered views on the status of Chinese women and current discrimination against women. We were also provided detail concerning city and rural social security and medical treatment.

PEOPLE TO PEOPLE had out done itself with a magnificent banquet the previous evening. It was of special note to social science educators that the banquet site was the famous location of the Shanghai accords signed in 19732 by President Nixon. We could savor the history.

As a young man, I had delighted in riding America’s rails. Now we were to be treated to a real Chinese train ride from Shanghai to Suzhou. This was a marvelous adventure. The Social Science delegates agreed that the PEOPLE TO PEOPLE arranged public train transport was a most interesting. The transfer to one of the world’s largest train station was invigorating. To mix with the Shanghainese in common transport was a very smart move by PEOPLE TO PEOPLE. Delegates could view countryside, flora, gardening, and human residence.

The delegation first visited the Suzhou silk factory (constructed by the Japanese). New guides, Jennifer and Benny assisted in learning about Suzhou. Jennifer’s narration of the silk work process and the actual tour of the factory were a “must see” attraction. Time was provided for silk product shopping – the delegates enjoyed this experience.

Perhaps most interesting was the visit to the **Grand Canal** – constructed 2500 years ago and second only to the Great Wall as a Chinese accomplishment. Suzhou is known as Venice of the East. Canals were everywhere. Guide Benny carefully escorted the delegates on a one-hour tour of the ancient city wall and the Grand Canal. Benny took care to point out several still existing Pagodas.

Street vendors were everywhere. Street shops were in abundance. The delegates freely mingled with hundreds of bicyclists and citizens of Suzhou. While the population is 2 million plus, we had the feeling of being in a small town. The delegates were delighted with the Suzhou visit.

It would rain today and this seemed a certainty. CNN had reports of a typhoon off the China coast – of course it would rain. So how to prepare well dressed for a morning professional meeting followed by outdoor cultural events in what the Irish refer to as a “soft day.” The solution lie in packing rain gear.

The first order of business was to remind our city guide of the need for a projection system, which would permit Helms to display visuals of a study of the International Standards for Technology Education. The CNN news of the previously evening had highlighted Secretary of State Madeline Albright meeting directly with the North Koreans. Today we found ourselves in a comparable conference room meeting with **the Dean of the School of Sociology and Suzhou faculty members.** The delegates too were part of history. As Social Science educators, we carefully reflected on the important events to the North.

Events such as the World Series in New York seemed of minor importance. In preparing for the technology presentation, I quickly noted the LCD projector was very similar to that which I carry to numerous national conferences in the states. Further, the LCD was interfaced with “Elmo” for display purposes. Large screen TV’s were in abundance. The conference room was comparable

to that of a conference room in the U.S. Our colleagues at Suzhou's University had state of the art technology.

The U.S. Social Science delegates were by now secure in their roles. Each delegate is a practicing professional in the U.S. Each delegate brought a wealth of knowledge to China. And better still, our Social Science delegates were long skilled in critical thinking. Could our Chinese interpreter keep up with the pace – Jennifer tried, but lacked the skills of Leonard. It is vital to speak in 2-3 sentences and then permit time for interpretation. This was too much to ask of a young woman. But still both Americans and Chinese could operate on a conceptual basic. Yes, details were lost in the translation. Again, the delegates strongly felt that the face-to-face discussions and presentations were central to our mission.

Following lunch all three-education delegates joined on one bus and visited the Grand Canal.

Then the rain came. Jennifer was superb in guiding us through **the Humble Administrator's Garden**. Oh, to have such beauty and serenity near us at home – what a treasure! The tour required one hour.

The rain continued. It should be noted that PEOPLE TO PEOPLE had also arranged for a group of Philosophy Professors to experience a similar schedule, as did the educators. The two groups experienced different Professional Programs, but often met for cultural/events and for meals. It seemed the Educators were much better prepared for outdoor rain and the elements.

Jennifer next guided the group on a one-hour (rain) tour of **Tiger Hill**. Jennifer again had a wealth of information. The large ancient **Pagoda** on top of the hill was similar to the tower of Pisa. The Pagoda was leaning. The foundation was sinking into a still more ancient Chinese King's tomb. How could a social science educator possibly experience a better tour?

For those delegates, old enough to remember American Rail, the rail ride to Nanjing was purely nostalgic. Special thanks to PEOPLE TO PEOPLE guides. Boarding the correct car would have been next to impossible without their assistance.

The delegates immediately visited the **Nanjing Institute of Education**. We were greeted by Vice President Jia Lu – this was a very special honor. Several Nanjing professors and graduate students were in attendance. The Vice President was especially proud of the new addition to the university and delegates viewed a new special video on Nanjing College of Education.

The discussions focused on several issues; pedagogy, curriculum, technology, preservice and in-service education. All delegates and all Chinese thoroughly enjoyed this conference. The Vice President presented the delegates with two fine China plates. Delegation leader accepted, and Helms had a policy of presenting all gifts to members of the delegation.

Travel concerns: many delegates have been eager to contribute the Chinese economy. Since luggage was also available for sale, delegation luggage was to increase 50%. Due to the central location of the Mandarin Garden Hotel, many delegates choose to walk back to the hotel following dinner. PEOPLE TO PEOPLE provide little shopping time (with good reason). Delegates did enjoy the opportunity to walk the streets and visit the stores of regular Chinese. Sun Yat Sen – The father of modern China. The visit to his tomb in Nanjing is to visit a large natural park on a mountainside overlooking the city. The climb of 362 steps to the top gave pause for historical reflection. To know that this park was built as well as a new road constructed for this Nationalist leader was awe-inspiring. Perhaps a comparison is a to the Hearst Castle in California might be in order.

Americans look to Washington DC for inspiration. The Chinese truly revere Sun's Tomb. In addition, the delegation visited and hiked the hills of various mini tombs. To have the time to study Chinese history again would be a gift. But the greater gift is to come to Nanjing. I was able to spend several hours walking the city streets alone both in daylight and dark. This is a live vibrant city. Perhaps as a male, I drew little if any attention to my wondering.

Nanjing's number one High School – Pure dynamite here. Yes, we have been very impressed with our university conferences. But the delegates truly relished our visit to Nanjing's number one High School, which also houses the Jr. High School. The principal is an exceedingly dynamic educational leader. I suspect many American administrators could learn much from this dedicated man. Following a long historical review, the principal was proud to report that his school had been number one in the province, but now enjoys number one status in the Nation. Many students are housed in campus dorms, as are young teachers. This may have been our most dynamic meeting to date. We began at 1:45 PM and left at 5:15 PM. The local students were dismissed at 5:00 PM. The delegates were eager to see Chinese education. We were offered a brief tour and then a teacher asked if we wanted to visit the gym. Visit the gym? This was one of the very few times I followed my intuition and said yes. We entered the gym. The entire Jr. High School was seated in the gym. On the floor, were two tables. A Jr. High School debate was in session. Proposed: education is very important – yes, but so too are other things. The American delegates were truly awe struck for some 45 minutes. Could this happen in an American school?

As social scientists, our delegation was aware of the fall of Nanjing to the Japanese in December 1937. Following the rise of Sun Yat Sen, the national government continued to be headquartered in Nanjing. Military history is filled with the conquest of the enemy's capital. Upon Sun's death both Chiang and Mao claimed followers and authority. The historical view is that Chiang blundered when he chose to expend resources and military to fight Mao. Even as the Japanese

invaded China, this civil war endured. The Japanese war machine was simply too powerful for divided China.

This a must visit site in Nanjing (PEOPLE TO PEOPLE) is the visit to **the memorial of the Japanese massacre of Nanjing**. Over 300,000 citizens and soldiers of Nanjing were killed. This memorial is much like the New National Holocaust Memorial in Washington D.C. The memorial was designed as a history lesson for Chinese students. Most knowledgeable Americans request a tour of this site. PEOPLE TO PEOPLE – this site is by far more important than the visit to the Pearl Factory!

The delegates next visited the **Nanjing Bridge** spanning the Yangtze River. How could a bridge be of interest? The Chinese are extremely proud of this 1985 structure. Events had turned hostile between the USSR and China. The USSR had withdrawn all aid. Chinese infrastructure was still primitive. The Chinese had to learn to manufacture the quality of steel to span the river, and they did. The bridge houses a small museum and an elevator to the top for spectator views.

Upon arrival, we were advised of a proposed visit to an **elementary school** on Saturday from 2:00-4:00 PM. Our days had been filled from 6:30 AM to 9:30 PM. The delegates declined the visit. Then Rose-Marie gathered additional information. We were to meet with a village elementary 45 minutes outside of Nanjing. The headmaster and teachers were expecting the delegation. How could we pass on this opportunity? We responded instantly – yes, we wanted to conference with this school.

In 45 minutes, the bus stopped on the main highway. We then walked 1/2 mile into the village. We were greeted at the highway by 3 young students – these elementary students were learning English and were eager to practice. Remember today is October 28 – The Chinese were still

tending their gardens. Ducks and chickens were in abundance. This was a farming village. Clothes were hung out to dry.

We were greeted in a most friendly manner by the Head Master, three teachers. Then small groups of students appeared until we had nearly fifty students practicing their English and shaking our hands. Surely, this was a proud experience for everyone. The U.S. delegates truly considered this event to be the highlight of the trip. Yes, we are to visit the Great Wall; but as educators we relished our one-hour with the children. A dorm had been built to house city High School students for spending a week in the country.

The headmaster pointed out that a Chinese student of John Dewey's founded the school. In addition, we were advised that the school was to be greatly expanded next year. The headmaster had just won a highly-coveted Teacher of the Year Award. We were given a book authorized by the headmaster. Helms as delegate leader gave all gifts to members of the delegation. This seems an equalitarian way of sharing the Chinese experience.

To be clear, the PEOPLE TO PEOPLE China exchange is not a vacation. Travel is tiring; the meetings are challenging, but conducting a meeting is mentally exhausting. No two meetings are ever the same. A script is just not possible. All the Social Science delegates are professionals with much experience. It is vital to be aware of group processes to move the meeting forward without offense to either the Chinese hosts or the American delegates. The members of the Social Studies delegation now know and respect each other. In addition, there has been a meshing of all three-education delegations. We look forward to seeing each other.

Both the Nanjing and Beijing airports are state of the art. I've been in almost every major airport in the U.S. – I really prefer both Chinese airports to the U.S. airports. Somebody has got this right. The 2.5-hour flight seemed like 15 minutes.

The American delegates – to a person – exclaims that we are in Beijing. Who would have believed this? Our expectations are high. We've had an excellent expedition thanks to the detailed attention of PEOPLE TO PEOPLE. We are convinced that it would be impossible to professionally experience the Chinese without the careful planning of PEOPLE TO PEOPLE.

Leonard continues to narrate our visit to the **Summer Palace**. As Social Studies delegates, we know the history of the empress dowagers. We know the excesses of the empress. The recent film, The Last Emperor is in mind.

Never the less, we experience a grand tour. Leonard is superb. The Hotel Kunlun overlooks a modern city. Can we wait to visit the forbidden city? Following the separation of the Education delegation for 3 days in Nanjing, the educators are delighted to be reunited. We have 3 delegations; Special Education, Early Childhood, and Social Studies. We speak the same language. We are truly one delegation. The three delegation leaders respect and enjoy each other. The sheer evidence is the co-mingling at cultural and dinner events

Today's schedule provides the delegates an opportunity to visit the **prestigious China Social Studies Academy**. This research institution like several others on our tour was well founded with a significant meeting area and impressive Chinese Scholars. We defined the Social Sciences, Sociology, and the Social Studies as these concepts are used in the U.S. Delegates could ask insightful questions. By now we realized the first answers were often insufficient. Follow-up questions were necessary. Again, the current mixture of capitalization and socialism is explained: "It doesn't matter if the cat is black or white as long as the cat catches the rat."

The PM meeting was held at the **China Children Center** - A mixture of several age groups of children, both residential and non-residential. Our Chinese colleagues spoke flawless English and understood our educational concepts. We were then treated to visits to several classrooms. We were always greeted warmly by teachers and students. (Note – some business cards were not given – but most are in the file at the end of the report).

The evening's entertainment was a visit to **Beijing's Opera**.

Following return to hotel, Delegates met to discuss tipping leaders and future meetings. It has been an extremely long day. We began at 6:30 AM and this report is finished at 11:00PM.

A 6:15 wake-up call alerted the delegates to the business of attending and presenting at **Beijing Normal University**. Following a discussion on Educational Technology. Dr. Mc Bee presented the "Social Studies Multicultural Kit." The kit was carefully selected during the tour. The kit contained various artifacts of silk embroidery, books, visuals and CD's. This presentation was very well received.

Our Chinese hosts had a variety of concerns about the present status of Chinese Education. The one child family is producing an egocentric generation of little "emperors" – very spoiled children. We have consistently discussed this issue throughout our visit to China.

The afternoon was filled with a delightful tour **of Beijing attached number one High School**.

We have now had direct experience with preschool, elementary, middle school, and high school students and teachers. The high school was equipped with state of the art audio, visual and many computers with internet capabilities. We could photograph students with laptops and cell phones in the classrooms. The classrooms of interest were the presence of 60 plus American students who were carefully selected and screened for this experience. One of the American teachers was a graduate of the College of Education at Wright State University.

Our final group dinner – banquet was very special Beijing Duck. Rose-Marie had taken care to advise us of this special treat. In addition, Rose-Marie had planned a special birthday party for one of our delegates. It's past 11:00 and wake up is for 6:00 AM with a 7:15 AM departure for the Forbidden City and the Great Wall.

But this day was the stuff that social science educators dream about. At least 95% of all U.S. social science educators have a dream of visiting China. We had the good fortune of being joined by Rebecca Jones, daughter of Rick Jones, National Board Certified Teacher from Marion Ohio. Rebecca had chosen to live in China for two years. At times dealing directly with the language problem can be challenging. So, when I asked the precocious Rebecca for help in ordering grilled salmon, Rebecca promptly told the waitress in English “grilled salmon.” This brought the whole dinner party to its feet in applause. Space does not permit the accounting of hundreds of similar stories and adventures during this trip.

We arose at 5:45 AM and its now 11:15 PM. Where did the day go? Would there be time for breakfast? We were done with the very serious business of meetings. Now suddenly we were all standing in the center of **Tian 'amen Square** – The events of 1989 were on our minds. We were face to face with the Great Hall and with Mao's Mausoleum. There was a marked absence of military and police – Undoubtedly these people were there and watching us closely. How could we spend four hours in this public place without loss of delegates – because we cared for each other?

Last Emperor” replayed in our brains as we entered **the Forbidden City**. This Forbidden City was truly forbidden for hundreds of years. Yes, the Chinese have much to be proud of; and as

delegates we have grown greatly from these experiences. The social science delegation delighted in recounting Chinese history to our early childhood and special education colleagues.

How can I possibly climb the last 30 steps to the third tower on the **Great Wall**? August hiking in Colorado had prepared me. The delegates had two hours to climb the Great Wall. I had elected to watch a PBS special on the Great Wall rather than view the second presidential debate. I knew of the old ancient walls and the restorative efforts of the Chinese. How could Nixon have spent only ten minutes here in 1972? We all relished this physical exertion, the beauty, and the history of this experience.

We depart for **Hong Kong** today. Many of our delegates will then fly to Los Angeles. Several of us will experience Hong Kong. Five Social Science delegates and several others will journey to Hong Kong for the view of an extremely dynamic city.