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## MEET THE BOARD

# Shirley Young



**YEARS OF SERVICE:** Five

**BACKGROUND:** Born in Shanghai; daughter of a diplomat.

When Japan invaded the Philippines in 1941, senior staff at the Chinese embassy in Manila were taken into custody: Her father was never seen again; families left behind turned the compound into a farm to survive. After the war, immigrated to California with her mother. Won a scholarship to Wellesley College. Began working in advertising; later became a vice president of General Motors, overseeing sales in China. Currently owns a business consulting firm, splitting time between New York and Shanghai. Has served on numerous corporate and nonprofit boards, including Bank of America and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

#### Impact of Manila embassy experience:

I became rural. We went backward: no electricity, water from a pump, no car. I had my own chicken and plot of vegetables. To this day I love to look at rich soil. I have an appreciation of nature, how it works.

#### Reasons for joining Conservancy board:

I've always been interested in overseas economic development and sustainable development, including the environment ... because I lived surrounded by poverty, particularly during the war.

#### On returning to China after many years away:

I was Rip van Winkle. The development has been astounding. I've seen it with my own eyes, from extreme poverty to real affluence. It has been enormously gratifying.

#### American misperceptions of China:

The images we have are very narrow. China has 2,000 nature reserves, and 15 percent of China's land is in reserves. The Conservancy has been in China for 10 years now. There's great interest with the Olympic Games coming up. We're trying to let people know about the natural side of China. (See *China "Worldview,"* page 71.)

#### The importance of music in life:

It's really a belief that through the arts and education you can create a bridge between people. I play piano. I have several residences, and I have a piano in every one, including rural Ireland, where I bought a piano over the telephone. I had the piano guy playing while I listened. And it worked out fine!