

X-Ray

Examining the China Enigma



trodden stratum of our society.

The Hainan authorities in charge of the project have gone beyond what they were supposed which was to pay the workers properly and without delay.

"I participated in three construction projects in Hainan last year, but only the library did n me a penny," said Chen Tongxue from Sichuan, whose name is listed on the plaque.

At another job in Jiangsu Province, the defaulted payment for him and 279 of his co-work up to more than half a million yuan (US\$61,730). "We are laying the bricks and tiles for urban up, but it is hard to get the pay promised us. And now it is the end of the year again," he said.

The end of year on the lunar calendar is traditionally a time to clear all debt. It is also a time some business operators in China, especially those in the construction industry, will go to e lengths to avoid paying their employees what has been contractually owed for months.

The marble plaque in Hainan Library cost some 100,000 yuan, but its value as a beacon o ness ethics and decency is priceless. The latest reports show there are people visiting the library see the plaque and read the names.

There has always been something fetishistic about carving names in stones. Ever since t tional Monkey King etched "I have been here", generations of Chinese tourists have followed s carved their names in the stones of the Great Wall and other historical buildings in a vain atte acquire immortality at the cost of defacing public properties.

Another fictional character, Willie Stark in *All the King's Men*, had a penchant to inscr name on all kinds of public structures. Based on real-life Louisiana Governor Huey Long, the p nist of the Robert Penn Warren novel named a lot of things built during his reign after himself

This is far from the worst offence for a politician. The man certainly had an oversized ego, projects seemed to serve public interests, at least the ones shown in the 1949 Oscar-winning version. He put up structures like bridges, which are not exactly white elephants, and more impo he did not pilfer public funds. (But then, he engaged in murder, which is a crime for any pers

Officials deserve to have their names on public projects, which bring maximum benefit people and the officials are the single biggest force to make these projects possible. Isn't tha than spending the money on wining and dining? Then, the architect's name could be prom displayed if the structure has the potential to be culturally significant.

To plaster hundreds of names of the people who actually build it, names that normally c building contractor would have a record of, is not only unconventional, but has a touch of ge

Now, it would take another genius to put up another plaque, in a conspicuous place, that i the names of employers who treat migrant workers like dirt. Let's call it the "Wall of Shame", a it would be an even bigger attraction.