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The Amity Foundation is an independent Chinese voluntary organisation. It was created in 1985 on the initiative of Chinese Christians. It has worked to promote education, social services, health, and rural development in the underdeveloped areas of China.

Amity’s work is grounded in the belief that all human beings share the same dignity. Abiding by the principle of mutual respect in faith, Amity builds friendship with both Christians and non-Christians in China and abroad. In this way, Amity contributes to China’s social development and openness to the outside world. It makes Christian involvement and participation in meeting the needs of society more widely known to the Chinese people and serves as a channel for people-to-people contact and the ecumenical sharing of resources. Helping to develop civil society in China is one of the key aims of its work.

The Amity Foundation has about 60 full-time staff at its Nanjing headquarters. Hundreds of volunteers work with Amity all over China. The foundation receives funds from partners abroad as well as in Hong Kong and mainland China.

Editorial:

Anders Granberg

This edition of the Amity Newsletter is of personal relevance for me because of its focus on international exchange and connections. This has been of particular interest to me, because of my role here at the Hong Kong Office. Additionally, my past experience in teaching always emphasized the importance of experiential learning for students throughout their learning careers. I have particularly wished to emphasize the importance of Amity’s projects historically as well as potential models for future exchange. Amity projects remain at the forefront of this type of activity; promoting learning and skills exchange at different levels of international NGO involvement.

This edition therefore contains a number of articles that reflect on a wide variety of international exchange. Theresa Carino, the Amity consultant now based in Nanjing, gives an expansive overview of Amity’s historical involvement in exchange with illustrations from churches and a focus on the role of the Hong Kong Office. The latter articles highlight the different types of international exchange projects; ranging from long-term teachers hoping to have a local impact to international conference involvement to service learning projects. Service learning has become increasingly important internationally as a means of encouraging personal and institutional self-reflection. The example demonstrated in this edition highlights the impact exchange has on both the participants and beneficiaries, who can both benefit from another point of view or opinion about changes and future plans.

International exchange continues to shape the course of modernisation and globalisation. We at the Amity Foundation hope we can contribute to the future success of international exchange; to promote understanding and learning crossing cultural, national, economic, religious and other boundaries.
Growing Ties that Bind: International Exchange and Partnership

Theresa Carino

Partnership in China – a new beginning

Amity’s uniqueness is not just in being one of the first NGOs in China, but also having overseas partners from the very start. When China reopened its doors in 1978, there was a call for ‘A New Beginning’ centered on cooperation between the Chinese church and organizations related to the ecumenical movement in Europe and the USA.

For overseas church organizations, working with Amity in the Chinese context was an experiment in practicing a new understanding of Christian mission. There was a very conscious attempt to get rid of the old colonial model of mission that had alienated many Chinese in the past. The new mission hoped to introduce a new way of doing things that was mutually respectful and empowering. The “ecumenical sharing of resources” was underpinned by an understanding that while funding and personnel will be contributed by overseas organizations, there must be respect for the Three Self Principles of the Chinese church as well as for Amity as a Chinese-run organization with Chinese leaders. Reminiscing about the Chinese-European dialogue that accompanied the founding of Amity, Gerhard Kobelin has noted that it was to develop “a relationship of partners, a reciprocity of giving and receiving, involving equality, mutuality and trust.”* These principles have been part of Amity’s strengths ever since.

Peace Building

Mutual respect and trust grows out of mutual understanding. It has been the Amity Teachers Program, more than any other, which has probably contributed most to this process in the last 26 years. For many Christians wishing to serve in China, teaching English afforded an opportunity for intensive exposure to life in China, especially in some of the more remote areas of the country. The Teachers Program has been a great vehicle for inter-cultural exchange and learning and what I see as sowing the building blocks for peace. It has been a catalyst of “ecumenism in practice”, where Christians from different parts of the world put aside cultural and denominational differences to live and work together in China.

Of the more than 1,000 Amity teachers who have served in China over the last 26 years, most have experienced the rapid and extraordinary changes that have swept the country in the last 15 years. Like their Chinese students, they have seen both the positive and negative aspects of this experience and developed a much deeper understanding of the country and its people. Even short-term volunteer programs, such as Summer English Teaching, have created opportunities for bonding and mutual learning between overseas volunteers and local Chinese teachers and students.

Global dimensions and strategic partnership

With China’s economic rise and Amity’s growth, North-South exchange will evolve into relationships between equals. Funding and expertise from overseas contributed immensely to the quality and growth of Amity’s work, but there was also an imbalance in the relationship. In the coming years, however, it can be expected that foreign funding and development aid for China will shrink. While the amount of foreign funds for Amity may decline, the partnership with churches and NGOs overseas will continue to be vital in view of the global implications of development work in China.

Given its size, population and economic power, how China addresses issues of sustainable development will be vital for the rest of the world. Amity’s work in rural development and its response to the growing rich-poor gap, environmental issues and social needs will have global dimensions. Having overseas partners, provides Amity opportunities to engage more deeply in dialogue and cooperation on common concerns. Future North-South relationships will hopefully focus less on funding and more on developing partnerships based on common concerns and shared vision. As suggested by Katrin Fiedler in an earlier issue of the Amity Newsletter, “Amity and its overseas partner organizations need to forge a strategic development partnership that can serve as a model for cooperation between China and the West.”

Apart from North-South exchanges, there are now plans for Amity to expand its ties with other developing countries. In the 1990s, the PDRC (Philippine-China Development Resource Center) initiated South-South exchange between Amity and NGOs in the Philippines concerning themes such as sustainable rural development, women’s equality, health, education and church-run social service. For the Chinese, these exchanges provided not only exposure to another developing Asian country, where Christians are a majority, but also showed the significant social and political role NGOs can play. Chinese participants in the exchange were amazed at the leadership and participation of women and youth in these NGOs.

At the same time, Amity has a lot to share with other NGOs around the world. In the exchanges with the Philippines, biogas and acupuncture were major contributions on the Chinese side. Filipino doctors and nurses learnt acupuncture from the Nanjing
University of Traditional Chinese Medicine and practiced this to the benefit of poor rural communities in remote areas in the Philippines. In Cebu, Filipino engineers sent to the Chengdu-based International Center on Biogas, learnt to adapt Chinese models to suit Philippine conditions and have, since then, been promoting the use of biogas among NGOs in the southern parts of the Philippines. Amity hopes to expand this kind of sharing with NGOs in Africa and the Pacific for the benefit of the poor across these areas.

**Hong Kong-mainland exchanges**

Hong Kong (HK) is part of China and therefore exchanges between Chinese from the mainland and HK may not be classified under international exchange. Nevertheless, Hong Kong has historically functioned as a bridge between mainland China and the rest of the world. The HK Amity Office (earlier known as the Overseas Liaison Office) has facilitated international exchanges with Amity through its publicity work, support for the Amity Teachers Programs and the annual Amity tours for international participants. International staff based in HK helped Amity reach out to Europe, the USA and parts of Asia.

Over the last 10 years, Amity has intensified its outreach to HK youth, providing more opportunities for them to become involved in social development programs in China through exposure trips and service learning. These have provided channels for better people-to-people relations and a stronger sense of Hong Kong being part of China, changing earlier attitudes of mutual distrust and misunderstanding.

**True exchange - China in the world**

Travel to China has become quite commonplace and there is no longer reference to the “Bamboo curtain” that purportedly separated China from the rest of the world. Nevertheless, the persistence of stereotypes, fears of rising Chinese power and negative media coverage have all contributed to misapprehensions and mistrust of China and the Chinese. Additionally, Chinese investments in other countries have not always been welcome or well received by local populations. Developing mutual trust and understanding, changing attitudes, promoting cooperation based on mutual respect, sharing of best practices and working together for a better world – these have been some of the less visible, less tangible, but perhaps more vital aspects of Amity’s work in the past, now and into the future.

[^See Gerhard Kobelin, “The Amity Foundation begins with practice, Northerners begin with Definition” in Amity’s Founding: Recollections from Abroad. Edited by Ewing Carroll, Jr., Oliver Engelen and Beate Engelen, Hong Kong, 2010.]
SH: You were one of her closest grand-daughters and I believe that your grandmother has made a lot of impact on you. What is some of the impact you can recall today?

AC: I think she was a very strong person but she suffered a lot through life. A lot of her childhood was unhappy, but she was able to rise above it and get through it. I believe that the suffering she went through made her a stronger person, and I admire her for that. One of the things that defined her was her keenness to sort out problems. For example, if there was a problem with the litter bins in her local area, she would write to the council to point this out. She wasn’t passive – she would do something about problems she saw. She would always stand up and say what needed to be done, not sit back and rely on other people to take action. I think that that has impacted on me, because I, too, feel a sense of responsibility to society and feel driven to point out, and act on, problems and injustices that I observe.

SH: Did your grandmother share with you her stories or memories from her life in China that have made an impact on your own life?

AC: Yes, although she was quite young when she left China – she left in 1910, when she was only six. But her life in China was always very special and she could recall some very clear memories. For example she told me that as a very small child she would run around the veranda of the house looking out over the Yangtze river. She also remembered her Amah, her nurse, and I think she once broke a vase and asked a servant to sweep it up and pretend that nothing had happened! I don’t remember any more stories, but from photographs I can see that she owned a Japanese doll, and in fact two Japanese dolls have been inherited by the family today. I believe she was happy in China, which was nice, but it’s also bitter-sweet to realize that, because it was after she left China that her life took a different turn and her childhood became very unhappy. China was a good start to her life and I hope that she carried the happy memories with her throughout the difficult years ahead.

SH: And this attracted you to reconnect with China?

AC: Yes, because my family have always felt quite proud of the connection with China, but I never thought I would have the opportunity to come here. I just used to mention it, it was nice, people would be interested. At her funeral, when the priest spoke, his first words were: ‘Joyce Kerfoot was born in Shanghai.’ Instantly, everyone was thinking, ‘Ooh, that’s interesting!’ It was such a captivating way to start the story of her life, which he told in his sermon. So I’m very proud of the connection I have with China.

SH: We know you have a Chinese name, kē lì yuán. When you asked your Chinese colleague to give you a Chinese name you requested a word, a Chinese character, with the meaning ‘opportunity’. What sort of opportunity are you seeking in being able to come to China?

AC: I think it is really an opportunity to serve God. Over the last few years I have realized that in my natural speech, I probably use the word ‘opportunity’ at least once a day! I keep noticing and pointing out that so many things, every day, present a wonderful opportunity – to get involved, to serve, to try something new. And of course it is such a great opportunity to serve through Amity in China. I could have said, ‘it’s too difficult, I am not going to China. I would have to leave my family, my friends, my cat, my job ….’ Instead, I am taking the opportunity to come to China. I am saying, ‘Well, there is an opportunity here, why not take it?’ I feel that I am called to serve God through teaching English in China, dedicating myself to Christian service. I feel that God is blessing my decision, and I feel that every step of the way everything is working out.

SH: You have just started your career in TEFL in China. What sort of expectations do you have for your future career? I gather you will be teaching in Inner Mongolia?

AC: I think it may certainly be a bit of a culture shock – getting used to the different culture and the different systems. And of course, for me, it will be a completely different job, as I have not been a teacher before. I’m just going to start off with the attitude: ‘I’m here to learn’. I have to start somewhere, so I am just going to start off and see what works, what doesn’t work, how things are done. It is important to be flexible and open-minded.

SH: Regular teaching in the classroom

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work, try and change if I need to, and ask for help if I need it. I will make sure that I am doing what the school wants me to do and check that I know what the expectations are. I really want to make my new colleagues aware that I will be available for any English queries, as part of my role is to give support to the staff. There is also another really interesting opportunity – again, the word ‘opportunity’! – because we are also going to be liaising with Middle School teachers, and if we can help them with their work, then they in turn can enable the next generation of young people to have even better English skills. So it’s really quite a big responsibility for us in our teaching. And I feel it will be a real learning curve for me because I don’t feel I have many inner resources as regards teaching material. I have some ideas, but I think I’ll be relying to a certain extent on other more experienced teachers to help steer me in the right direction, particularly in the first few weeks.

Current update: This past year – international exchange

This past year has been very positive in terms of international exchange. Our colleagues are very interested in everything to do with the UK, and have appreciated the Faculty Development sessions that we have organized in which we talk about things such as Education, Taxes, Festivals and many other issues to do with culture. We have also discussed the differences between our cultures. My students are really nice people, very polite, enthusiastic and appreciative. Through them I have learnt about what is important to them – concepts like strong family ties, the desire for a harmonious society, and love of one’s country. Many of them have never had a foreign teacher before, so they view us as rather exotic! This is sometimes problematic in the sense that they believe their problems will all be solved if only they have a foreign teacher to teach them – not realizing that progress also requires some effort on their part.

“Spaghetti” Wires, Paper Boat and Other Things:

A reflection on WCC/EWN Consultation on “Communities’ Rights to Water and Sanitation in Asia”

Tong Su

When we arrived at the entrance of the urban poor community called K-1, our guide Ms. Maulinda Broma pointed at a wild mess of black electricity wires tangled together and said; “This is what we call “spaghetti”. She explained that because real estate developers wanted the land, the government tries to drive the poor away by providing few services. They therefore have no choice but to install their own electricity wires and water pipes. Those who cannot afford the expense have a hard time. Maulinda, our guide, is one of those, she does not have the money to install a water pipe and has to buy water from downhill and carry it to her house on the top of a small hill every day. It is truly a shocking reality, right in the middle of Metro Manila. In a protected area for the filtration plant of a major water concession and amongst many rich people’s houses, people are fighting for their basic right to land, electricity and water.

The trip to the K-1 community was part of a WCC regional consultation organized by Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) towards the end of 2010 in the Philippines. More than 40 participants from 12 Asian countries took part. The consultation focused on communities’ rights to water and sanitation in Asia, with the aim of identifying key challenges, increasing Asian churches’ commitment and to scale up action on these issues.

Water, Creation and Rights for All

In 2002, The General Comment No. 15 on the Right to Water was issued by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. For the first time, a UN document identified the right to water from a human rights perspective. Water rights were reiterated in similar documents and many advocacy groups, including the recently established EWN, adopt and try to promote the inherent right of all peoples to a safe supply of clean water.
The consultation, including Christian and non-Christians, acknowledged access to water and sanitation as the basic human right but simultaneously also voiced a refusal to view water through a purely anthropocentric 'human-centered' approach. The theological reflections and panel discussions emphasized that water is part of God's wonderful creation for existence, non-exclusive to all forms of living beings on earth and without proprietary rights to water as restricted natural beneficiaries.

Communities’ Struggle for Water

When we go home every day, cook, eat and wash, 1.1 billion people worldwide do not have access to sufficient and safe water. 2 out of 3 of them live in Asia. The consultation enabled partners to share and exchange projects and stories to encourage the continuing focus on water issues and to learn from local and regional successes.

China, like other Asian countries, is facing a water crisis in one way or another, this has become markedly clear during the recent drought on the lower Yangtze in spring 2011. The situation is often exacerbated by climate change, exploitation and discrimination and it is usually the most vulnerable groups who suffer the consequences. According to Mr. Mahbub Hasan, the participant from Bangladesh, 1/3 of the country's land, especially the coastal districts will be submerged by water in a couple of decades because of increasing sea levels. 30 million of his countrymen will become “climate forced” migrants. In the mountainous country of Nepal, where the big rivers in Asia have their origins, water supply has decreased markedly. With climate change and economic growth, the flow of natural springs are decreasing and the water table in cities like Kathmandu is dropping. Those who do not have the resources and knowledge to access other sources suffer from malnutrition and diseases. Water is a resource where access is also denied to some. In some areas of Pakistan, women are denied the use of water for bathing because others link bathing with sexual behavior. Also in India, the Dalits, the ‘untouchables’, are still being discriminated against and denied of access to water and sanitation.

The tropical country of the Philippines ranks the second lowest in Southeast Asia in terms of per capita water availability. The increasing scarcity of water is intensified by privatization and mismanagement. Dr. Giovanni Tabang, one of the two local

academics invited to the consultation, helped to unveil the ugly face of profit-oriented development. In Metro Manila, 35% of the people still do not have access to domestic water. The current government's “Public-Private-Partnership” water project initiatives do not help. Under this proposed privatization scheme, national and international investors are handed full control of water. Water becomes a commodity and profit the only priority, reflected in the sharp increase in water tariffs since privatization. The ecological climate is also threatened by similar attitudes. For instance, when a super typhoon hit Metro Manila in 2009, a private company refused to close a dam built outside of the city to maintain power output, causing the flooding of Marikana River within the city center. These factors pose real risks for people's livelihoods and the eco–balance of whole regions.

Together We Can Make Differences

We have to continue to push for universal access to water in Asia as a basic human right. Many Asian countries are in favor of the UN’s resolution recognizing access to water and sanitation as basic human right. China is taking the lead by including safe drinking water supply in its poverty alleviation strategies and actions. Indonesian lawyers and experts are lobbying their government for improved water policies. Also in the Philippines, water activists are raising awareness of the negative effects of water privatization, for example teaching primary students about the importance of protecting their watershed areas.

Water issue is an issue that crosses borders. Solutions need to involve efforts by likeminded people and groups from across the world. The EWN consultation participants additionally recognized the urgent need for global ecumenical cooperation during the strategic planning sessions. EWN was suggested to become a platform where practices, good and bad, could be shared. Individual efforts, such as Amity’s work involving local church and youth in drinking water projects in rural China, are no longer isolated but contribute to creating solutions on a global scale. The Amity is going beyond a simplistic understanding

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of poverty alleviation and development work, building on international exchange and learning from a globalised network of best practice. A paradigm shift is in motion.

A communication system was set up at the end of the consultation to keep participants updated on developments in the region. Symbolically, participants mixed samples of water brought from different countries, which were re-bottled and exchanged to underline the need for continued exchange, commitment and determination together. The consultation concluded with the words of hope from Rev. Rex B. Reyes; “I used to play with paper boats on clean and beautiful rivers when I was young. Now huge dams have been built and people have been forced to leave … but it is my hope that through our joint efforts, our children would be able float their paper boats on clean and beautiful rivers in the future.” The Amity Foundation has an integral part to play both in China and overseas, enhancing exchange opportunities and acting as model for positive social change.

More Information:

Ecumenical Water Network: www.oikoumene.org

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**Service or Learning through the Amity Foundation?**

Anders Granberg

Service Learning as a concept has become more important during recent years, how is the Amity Foundation responding and contextualizing this concept? The Amity Foundation has a rich and varied history of working through education to help the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of society in China. Education programmes, with a Christian foundation, have been integral to a greater approach in tackling poverty and social disparity since 1985. The newer concept of ‘service learning’, has incorporated many of the ideals of these tried-and-tested programmes, with an added emphasis on the participant in the programme implementation. The current ‘service learning’ projects have been developed with experience, time and within the confines of project constraints. The Hong Kong student group that recently travelled to Guizhou had many of the ideals, hopes and visions for societal impact and personal growth that characterize the modern social construct that ‘service learning’ has become.

**Definition and Implementation**

‘Service Learning’ (SL) is a term that has been bandied around in development work, but which is often left undefined except as a positive goal for projects and initiatives. As early as 1979, Robert Sigmon defined service-learning as an experiential education approach that is premised on “reciprocal learning” (Sigmon, 1979). He suggested that because learning flows from service activities, both those who provide service and those who receive it “learn” and benefit from the experience and activities. The key debate has been whether it is possible to balance the often disparate service and learning elements of this type of activity. A key element of the learning component is a wider contextualization of the experience within the participants education experiences. The barriers include inadequate preparation and tools for engaging in a reflective learning experience that draws participants out of their regular educational framework. This should ideally be balanced with a service component addressing a clear and identified need in the community of wider society. According to Furco, SL in its ideal form promotes “active participation, thoughtfully organized experiences, focused on community needs and school/community coordination, academic curriculum integration, structured time for reflection, opportunities for application of skills and knowledge, extended learning opportunities, and development of a sense of caring for others”. These ideals are in no way easy to match and required extensive planning, reflective attitudes and a key awareness of community needs.

**The Amity Foundation’s Guizhou Service Learning Experience**

This SL experience, during the Easter week in April 2011, attempted to meet many of the local needs of students and villagers in the project areas in Guizhou. Participating were two different groups of students; one a group of trainee teachers from Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), the other from Lee Kau Yan Memorial School (LKY) comprised of a disparate group of students at the end of Secondary School from a more disadvantaged area of Hong Kong. The trip involved a few different service opportunities that included; conducting a survey in a proposed project village to gauge the necessity and usefulness of an Amity water project; 2 different practical opportunities to dig a trench for a water pipeline and plant rice; a day teaching English, hygiene and cross-cultural awareness at a local primary school; as well as a meeting with local officials and project partners. Built into this framework was an initial briefing, continuous reflection sessions on the trip as well as a plenary reflection paralleled by an initial and final survey and individual discussions. These components provided the basic framework for a SL trip to engage the students with a society and situation outside their normal purview, in addition to an opportunity to serve others and contribute to society.
Service Learning Component

In light of the large volumes of data written on SL, in this article I have chosen to limit the analysis to four criteria amongst those outlined by Honnet and Poulsen in their guidelines for effective and engaging SL opportunities. These criteria are by no means exhaustive but provide a framework for analysis of a trip that had some surprising observations and issues to ponder.

1. Experience aims to engage people in responsible and challenging actions benefiting others

The Guizhou trip aimed at both benefiting the participants as well as the local villagers through the different acts of service. Theoretically, the service component was very evident and the local villagers in Sansui would have benefited from additional help in farming and potential additional projects identified by the survey project. Whilst actually completing these service elements, it became clear that the actual service provided was not as clear, especially with the village work. Most of the Secondary students simply watched the work being done and the rice-planting was haphazard and for a very short period. The service opportunity was possibly too challenging for such a different group of students with different levels of maturity and this may need to be taken into account for the next trip. On the other hand, the students themselves were able to gain a lot from these experiences, putting themselves ‘in others’ shoes’. For their own learning experiences, the outcome was an increased awareness of the difficulties of rural life and the practical limitations of living in remote poor villages in Guizhou. Many of the students had prior to the trip, expressed that they were prepared to be shocked by the living conditions, but were later still awed by the difficulties conditions. The teaching element was much more a combination of standard SL practices both in theory and in practice, allowing the participants to give of their own skills to the children at a local Primary school. The participants benefited from learning about a different culture, especially the teacher trainees became more appreciative of a different teaching and learning style. This could potentially generate ideas for teaching as well as providing useful information on how to integrate new students from mainland China. On the whole, the Guizhou trip was planned to encourage an attitude of service, with different levels of results in practice, though the intensity of personal reflection was particularly encouraging.

2. Experience has identifiable service and learning goals and vision

The Amity SL trip to Guizhou in April 2011 did have two primary aims focused on the standard components of SL. The components of service and learning were planned to occur in conjunction through activities and time for reflection. The learning component was aimed at raising awareness of both the work of the Amity Foundation as well as the local living conditions of rural villagers in Sansui County of Guizhou through personal experience. The learning was especially evident in the first day.
Learning something simple: to cherish

Ling Hanjie, 5C, Lee Kau Yan Memorial School
(Translation assistance from Maria Vittoria Bortolussi)

I have participated in the six-day “Sansui, Guizhou investigation” organized by the Amity Foundation. Upon my return from Sansui, I hope to share some of what I experienced in Guizhou.

The week I spent in Guizhou was fun, but very challenging. As part of the exchange tour, it was the first time flying too! During the tour, I actually found that life is not easy for people who live in this part of China; particularly accessing clean water and that the local kids are always socially isolated because their parents away working in other provinces to earn a better paid wage. I also learnt that people’s needs there are very simple, especially compared to Hong Kong. We can say that the two are completely different worlds. Although the standards of living in Guizhou are lower than in Hong Kong, I had the feeling that our visit was appreciated. They tried their best through a heartfelt programme of visits and food to show us a real insight into their lives.

During the exchange tour, I learnt many things. First of all, I realised that I am extremely happy to live in Hong Kong. Some people are born to be destined to grow up in poor areas; some are born to be doomed to face deformity and diseases throughout their lives. Even though I do not live in a wealthy family, at least I have been able to grow up in a family that provided me with three meals per day and enough to live comfortably. Secondly, I learnt how to cherish. The people in Guizhou have to face food and water issues, which are the most basic human needs. On the other hand, we HongKongers look at these things as if they are necessarily unquestionable. After this tour, I will work hard to learn how to treasure and cherish my own water, food, friends and family. Third, I found myself very fond of Hong Kong. It is a very comfortable place, where it is very easy to get whatever you want. Therefore I hope we in society will work together to support the activities of the Amity Foundation; to serve our country and strengthen the sense of the local, whilst improving people’s standards of living. It is my hope.

Ps: I miss things in Guizhou; I don’t know whether I will have the opportunity to visit there again.
3. Provides structured opportunities for people to critically reflect on their service

The SL trip to Guizhou had built in opportunities for personal and group reflection of the impact of each day and the trip as a whole. The initial and final survey were particularly useful in garnering personal reflections of the time that the students had participated, including what they enjoyed and were able to gain most from. Their observations ranged from the practical to more philosophical. Many of the students expressed that the local situation had been beyond their initial expectations, especially the level of poverty, the different lifestyles and the constant life on the edge of survival. For some of the Secondary students, this was their first time flying and opportunity to visit outside Hong Kong, so a completely new experience that opened up their eyes to new possibilities and differences. The trip itself had positives consequences for inter-personal relationships; encouraging cooperation and teamwork, skills that they can re-apply later in life. The practical service teaching also gave the students a real boost as it was very well received; one teaching trainee mentioned that he had “never had such a great reaction in lessons! They [local Primary school students] showed that they really enjoyed the lesson and love us!” Practically, the SL chances allowed the participants to think outside the box, reflect on their own lives in comparison and within a designed reflective framework analyze the outcomes constructively. At a more theoretical level, the students critically engaged with their experiences, with observations including flawed water quality measuring techniques without access to regular scientific testing. They also mentioned that though the villagers were poor, they did not seem unhappy and even content. This gave rise to a much more serious reflective discussion on Hong Kong and our waste-culture without regard to consequences. Some suggested that essentials such as water were taken for granted because they were so cheap and the local culture at home could gain from a perspective that was not as achievements obsessed around exams and grades. The SL participants, especially on the last day of reflection, assessed many of the differences between Hong Kong and Sansui County and critically engaged in a discussion on problems and possible alternatives. Hopefully this will have a particular impact on teaching and future careers of all the students who were able to attend this SL in Guizhou, encouraging post-trip reflection and observations for the individuals involved and the ‘common good’ that may raise awareness of these issues also amongst others.

4. Insures that the needs and expectations of all involved are fairly met.

The preliminary briefing outlined many of the needs and expectations on the organizational side of the visit though a more comprehensive discussion of expectations may have avoided later unnecessary confusion. The initial SL project aim focused on water problems and understanding the importance of water in the target County and at home. This aim was discussed in detail and the emphasis was appreciated and understood by the participants also in the feedback as they had gained a more thorough understanding of differences and problems. But on the other hand, the importance and preliminary legwork for the service teaching side of the project were not as thoroughly discussed, to many it seemed to be an add-on that they appreciated but did not know how it fitted in to the larger aims of the trip. Many afterwards expressed that this was the most enjoyable part of the experience and suggested that the next SL opportunity focus more exclusively on teaching. They felt they could make a greater contribution in this field, especially as some were training as teachers. The second difficulty was more related to the two groups involved in the SL. These groups did not have sufficient time to get to know each other and had very different expectations of SL. These groups did not have sufficient time to get to know each other and had very different expectations of SL. The university students had had a programme over the year of multiple meetings leading up to the trip, assessing expectations and clearly identifying aims and goals. The Secondary students on the other hand, were chosen to come not long before departure and felt that they were insufficiently prepared and had goals more related to their age-group and situations. This SL opportunity could have benefited from more planning in this area, in order to integrate expectations and the team to a greater extent. Overall, most of the students did feel that the trip was rewarding and worthwhile at an individual level, at a group level they felt that more could be done to encourage appropriate SL to benefit both the participants and recipients.
A comparison between Guizhou and Hong Kong Schools

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On the 25th April 2011, on our fifth day of travelling in Guizhou, we arrived in a primary school in Sansui County, to visit them and to make a simple comparison between Hong Kong and the local school life.

The local students first imagined what school life is like in Hong Kong. Some said that in Hong Kong, schools are huge with basketball courts and soccer fields, classes have many high-level teachers and that teacher-student relationships are positive and teachers are more like friends. I explained to them that actually, our schools are not all very large; some do not even have playgrounds. In fact, Hong Kong teachers are not necessarily more advanced; it’s just that they generally undertake more training. Lastly, in Hong Kong the teacher-student relationships are very good and the atmosphere in the classroom is possibly more harmonious.

The differences between Guizhou and Hong Kong are largely practical. The consensus was that in Guizhou most students get to school by bike, by bus or parents bringing them. They also had to be in school by 8am, otherwise they would be considered late. They then mentioned that classes were each 45 minutes for 7 periods a day compared to 8 periods of 40 minutes in our school. Their extracurricular activities were limited; often they played basketball, football, etc. In comparison, schools in Hong Kong offer a greater array of activities including exchange groups such as tours to Beijing, Sabah and the UK to increase their international exposure. One of the bigger differences was that in Guizhou, every student had assigned cleaning duties or other chores, whereas in Hong Kong the school employs specialised staff to maintain the school.

Guizhou and Hong Kong schools are definitely different, each have their own strengths. The students in Guizhou are diligent and hardworking regardless of the school’s facilities, and the teaching materials are all based on external requirements regardless. The key to learning is to rely on oneself, because having the chance to access education is already a blessing. I invite everybody to cherish this opportunity!

The enthusiasm and unity of Guizhou students is truly amazing and fascinating.

Conclusions

This SL trip to Sansui County in Guizhou had some very clear outcomes for both the individuals involved and the Amity Foundation's organizational planning. The practical difficulties of integrating the two disparate groups of individuals poses some questions about this practice's viability in the future and emphasizing the need for more preparatory planning and activities to encourage cohesion. The practical benefits of SL do still show the importance of this type of experiential learning for students, which encouraged deep personal and societal reflection for the key minds of the future. The role of the Amity Foundation and the Hong Kong Office to promote this type of exchange is indisputable. From this trip, SL has an important part to play as a key element in the educational system of Hong Kong and China. The Amity Foundation continued to act as a bridge between cultures, encouraging understanding and exchange to bring the inhabitants of this world closer to one another.

References

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