

# Project Xing Fu

December 8

# 2010

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An expedition to Yang Zhai, Yunnan, China which involved a group of 22 students from NUS and SMU.

Youth  
Expedition  
Project

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## **Introduction**

During the pre-expedition period, Project Xingfu had managed to raise a total of \$114,000 (including the \$80,000 generously sponsored by Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin Foundation) to fund for the changes that we had planned for the villagers of Yang Zhai and Hei Si Wah. Our major projects include the building of a study centre and a dormitory for the villagers of Yang Zhai, and a toilet for the Muslim dormitory in Hei Si Wah. On top of that, we had brainstormed other goals that we hoped to achieve during the expedition. These changes were planned to give the people of these villagers a better living condition and lifestyle.

As we were not experts in the construction area, we had engaged some construction workers to assist us in the building of the study centre and the toilet at the villagers. That said, over the course of our 2-week stay, we had assisted the villagers in the construction in whatever way possible.

At the end of the trip, we had managed to complete the 50% of the study centre. Another team from NTU – Project Yuknights – will be continuing with the construction work of the dormitory for Yang Zhai village.

## Local Projects

Project	Name of beneficiary	Activities conducted with beneficiary	Date of activity
Pre-Expedition Project	Darul Ma'wa Orphanage	Constructed Chicken Coop for the orphanage's livestock	2 <sup>nd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> October 2010
	Darul Ihsan Orphanage (Boys)	<p>Cross the River – a game which revolves around teamwork, communication and motivation</p> <p>Goal Setting – setting of their goals for the future including their desired occupation and how they plan to achieve those goals successfully</p> <p>Project Xing Fu – introduced the objectives of Project Xing Fu to the students of the orphanage and get them inspired</p>	9 <sup>th</sup> October 2010
Post-Expedition Project	Darul Ihsan Orphanage (Boys)	<p>Project Xing Fu – shared the successes of Project Xing Fu and the goals that have been achieved. Shared the difficulties that were faced by the community that we had visited</p> <p>Reflection session – conducted a reflection session with the students based on what they saw from the pictures and the stories that we told them regarding the difficulties of the people in other countries. Students jotted down their thoughts on a mahjong paper, and shared with the rest of the group.</p> <p>The Game of Communication – conducted a game revolving around communication barriers, and strategy. Students are given a pack of straws, tape, and a pair of scissors. They are then asked to make a hook from these materials such that the hook can be used to get 3 items (attached to a loop), situated 2 metres away. Only the leader is allowed to give instructions to his teammates, while the rest are to follow his instructions in silence.</p>	6 <sup>th</sup> March 2010

## Goals of Project Xing Fu and how we achieved them

### Share our knowledge on cleanliness and the spread of diseases

While we were in the village of Hei Si Wah village, we had shared an alternative to cleanliness by demonstrating to the students a way to clean their toilets (in the dormitories) efficiently, by using scrubs and detergent. As the students are at an impressionable age and are relatively influential, we targeted them in the hope of spreading the message to the rest of the villages.

On top of that, we also had a play session with the children of the villages (Hei Si Wah & Yang Zhai), where we shared with them the basic method of hand washing. We could observe that the hands of the children in the village were rarely washed and this could be vulnerable to their health – especially at that age. Hence, with this awareness, we hope that they will be more conscious of their cleanliness of their hands, at the very least.

We also demonstrated a ‘home make-over’ of the village head’s house, in Yang Zhai village. The village head had agreed to have his house made-over to set an exemplary standard of cleanliness to the rest of the village.

On top of that, we also had a make-over for the mosque of Yang Zhai village. Being Muslims, it is important to keep the compound of the mosque clean and well-kempt. As Yang Zhai village is situated near sandy hills, the carpets in the mosque were very dusty. We then shared a way of dusting the carpets efficiently and recommended that the carpets should be dusted every year or so.



### Refurbishment of study facilities and the provision of resources for learning

At Hei Si Wah village, we did up murals for the classrooms to make the rooms more conducive to study. This was especially impactful for the

children of the village who barely had any interest in classroom activities. The colourful murals painted had the purpose of having an educative side to it which may benefit the children of the village.

On top of that, we had also refurbished some of the classrooms and repainted the walls to show a much vibrant colour, which hopefully enhances learning. We also transformed a classroom to a library for the children of the village. The room was originally locked throughout the day, denying the children access to resources to study. Besides, the room was also very messy and the books were not organized properly to encourage the children to study. Therefore, we had arranged them to ensure that the children would have interest in going down to the library and read books voluntarily.



In Yang Zhai village, we had assisted the villagers in the construction of the new study centre which caters to the children of the village. On top of that, we also painted the mosque, giving it a vibrant look and re-plastered the wall of the teacher's dormitory. At that moment, there was no teacher available to teach the children of Yang Zhai.

### **Share healthy lifestyle tips**

During our visit to the villages, we were in the company of a doctor and a nurse from Singapore. They had kindly brought along with them gadgets that were able to tell blood-pressure and sugar levels. We then assisted them in a health check-up of the villagers. Even though we understand that this exercise is not sustainable for the long-run, it enabled us to advise the villagers on their eating habits and which ingredients they should cut down on. Generally, the villagers have hyper-tension which we guessed was due to the high salt intake in their food. Hence, we advised them to take less salt. Hopefully, with this awareness,

they could spread the message to other villagers, sustaining the effect of the exercise.

### Develop the team's character

We had had several cultural exchanges at the villages. At Hei Si Wah village, we interacted with the teenage students of the dormitory and learnt about the hardships in their lives. Some even had to travel for almost a week to get to the school from the house in another province. This had made an impact in the team's character development as it made us appreciate the easy-life that we have in Singapore.



On top of that, one of the days was spent farming with the villagers. Learning that farming was not at all an easy job made us have more appreciation for the food that is being served to us so easily back in Singapore, whereas for these villagers, they really have it hard.

The days spent refurbishing the buildings had also made us reflect on the hard work that is being put in by the construction workers which are often being ostracized in the Singapore community.

Besides, being in a country with a totally different climate had forced us to adapt and do with whatever resources that we have. We also saw the importance of preparing for shortcomings, and having back-up plans just in-case anything goes

wrong with the initial plans. These had allowed us to develop our character both as a leader and a follower.

## Issues Faced by Overseas Host Communities

### Run down education facilities

Both Yang Zhai village and Hei Si Wah village had poor education facilities with aged walls and poor lighting. Our primary objective was to raise funds in order to create a new study facility for Yang Zhai village where kindergarten classes and religious classes for the



adults could be taught. The communities had also requested that we help refurbish the village's community area as they were run down as well.

### Poor hygiene and sanitization

Both villages were farming communities focused mainly on agriculture plantation. Though most members of the community worked in surrounding plantations, they were not mindful about the importance of sanitization after working on the farms. This was even more prevalent among the children in the village.

Furthermore, the lack of importance on hygiene is also reflected in the state of the average villager's household where livestock and produce often share the same area as the occupants of the house. This could lead to the spread of diseases.





## Impacts

### To Local Host Organization

We had two different pre-expedition experiences – one with Darul Ma'wa orphanage and the other with Darul Ihsan.

For Darul Ma'wa, we had planned to build a chicken coop (as a dry-run for our expedition) for them to store their livestock which are often spotted running around the roadside – which could deem it a potential danger to oncoming vehicles. As a result, we had built a chicken coop for them to deal with this problem.

The project at Darul Ihsan revolved around the interaction with children – again, as a dry-run for our expedition. Our main theme was motivation and inspiration. We had gotten the children to think of their future and set life goals. This was executed through games which encouraged the children to work with one another and motivate their team members to achieve their shared vision. At the end of the day, we had them to reflect on their goals in life.

### To Overseas Host Organization

#### Refurbishment of study facilities

We had successfully refurbished the facilities to the requirements of the host organization and community by painting murals and updating the walls to make the buildings look newer. We could see that the children were extremely happy with the refurbishment of their classrooms and library and thanked us profusely for our efforts.

We had also raised almost \$100,000 in order to build a new facility for Yang Zhai village.



### Improve hygiene and sanitization

After observing the kindergarten classes for several days, we learnt that the students learnt best from poems and songs and with the help of our guide, some of our students came up with a creative poem to teach the kindergarten students how to wash their hands and to educate them on the importance of doing so.



We were accompanied by Dr Radiah and her friend, Meskiah, a nurse, and they had conducted a health workshop with the help of our students in order to educate the adults about the importance of hygiene. After the workshop, they conducted a basic health screening and it was observed that though many of the villagers were healthy, they were concerned about staying that way and had asked how to improve their hygiene standards.

## Challenges Faced during the Expedition

### A Member Short

Due to unforeseen circumstances, one of our participants could not go on with the expedition at the last minute. As her grandfather was very ill, she was advised not to go for the expedition and fly to Manila instead to visit her grandfather. A few of our team mates were affected by this as they were close friends. Apart from that, she was also in-charge of the documentation of the video and hence, we had to come up with a last minute plan.

### Communication Barrier

Though we were a 22-strong team, we were made up of mostly non-Mandarin speaking individuals with only 3 Mandarin-speaking participants. Furthermore, our appointed 'translators' had problems communicating with the locals at times due to the strong traditional dialects of the locals.

Fortunately, our host organization had kindly provided us with 2 guides to assist us in translating and liaising with the locals. In order to minimize communication problems with the locals, we split the team up into smaller groups to work on tasks and ensured that there would be at least 1 Mandarin-speaking participant in the group.

### Inability to Carry Out Activities as Planned

Upon our arrival at the village of Yang Zhai, we had a brief visit of the homes of the villagers and selected the house that we wished to have a home-makeover. Upon selection, the owner of the house was happy to have us makeover his home. However, he became rather demanding of the changes that will be made to his house – which includes bringing down a whole wall and technically requiring us to build a new house for him. As it was not within our expertise, and did not fall under our objectives of the home-makeover – to share an exemplary way of maintaining a house, we scrapped the plan. Also, we learnt that to offer

our services in private might not be recommended as it will be a lot more beneficial if we offered our services to the community at large.

On top of that, we were also advised against constructing chicken coops for the villages of Yang Zhai as their livestock was far too big for the chicken coop that we had built during our local project for Darul Ma'wa Orphanage. Our expertise of chicken coops was for average-sized livestock. To construct a chicken coop fit for large chickens would require additional planning which would take up more time. Hence, we had to change the plans and do more refurbishment of building instead.

### **Weather**

Being accustomed to the warm tropical weather in Singapore, many of our participants were not used to the cold winter in Yunnan. The weather led to many of our participants falling ill and at one point, our team only had 15 healthy participants. It came to a point where the weather nearly dampened the morale of the team. However, luckily for us, we were able to lift the mood a little by joking around and motivate one another; boosting the morale up a little. With the shortage of manpower, we had to downscale the project a little while the remaining participants actively completing as much tasks as possible.

The members of the communities that we were assisting also constantly provided us with support by bringing us hot tea to keep us warm and always helped us whenever possible. We were very grateful to their kindness, warmth and generosity.

## **Lessons of Pre-Expedition Applied to the Expedition**

From the pre-expedition, we had learnt how to manage large groups of children at once and the proper way of treating them, without diminishing their interest or making them feel slighted. We were also exposed to facilitation skills and ways to engage with students to capture their interest in the subject.

Apart from that, we also learnt about teamwork. This was especially so during the chicken coop project which was time consuming and had asked for several individuals to step up as leaders to lead the team in the process.

The pre-expedition was also a guideline for us to plan programmes for the expedition itself. We had tried and tested the games that were being planned for the expedition with the children of the orphanage. This was done, keeping in mind that there will be an inherent language barrier in China for most of our participants.

Our team members were also tasked to interact with the children however much they can, and try not to idle around while the programme is on. During one of the games, a boy had gotten hurt and had one of his toes bleeding. We saw the importance of first-aid training during that incident – making us realize that far dangerous things can be inflicted to any of our team members or the children in the villagers, during any one of our activities.

## **Lessons of Expedition Applied to the Post-Expedition**

We used our post-expedition as a chance to share our experience in China to the children at Darul Ihsan orphanage. We did so by sharing videos and photographs of our trip and provide them with an understanding of what we did there. We followed this by having a brief Question-and-Answer programme

We learnt a lot about resilience and the importance of teamwork through this project and we wanted to teach the residents of Darul Ihsan the same by organizing activities to highlight resilience and teamwork. We played a variety of games to impart this to the residents.

## Significant Events

On the first day of our visit to Yang Zhai village, the villagers were notified by our coordinator of our arrival 2 hours prior to our arrival at the village. Upon notification, the villagers had lined up on both sides of the dirt road leading to the village and waited for 2 hours for our arrival. As we arrived, little children sang at the top of their lungs and the elderly were shaking our hands eagerly. None of the villagers had a sign of annoyance on their faces - for having waited for 2 whole hours in the cold winter. We were really touched by their welcoming gesture and felt a little guilty for being the cause of them having to wait in the cold, just so that they could greet us. It really made us reflect on the level of service that they have in rural villages like Yang Zhai, while in Singapore, a 1<sup>st</sup> world country, often lack this characteristic amongst its people.

We also had a cultural exchange with the teenagers in Hei Si Wah village. Even though we live hundreds of miles apart, we somehow were able to have a common topic to talk about – the opposite gender. The girls in the village were blushing their cheeks out, showing us the boys that they had an eye for. Even though it may sound superficial, it really helped break the ice between the team and the villagers.

In Hei Si Wah village, we met with an 8-year old girl – whom we eventually named Mulan as she was a warrior in her own ways. When we reach the village, Mulan had appeared before us and started begging for money. Most of the time, she would force her calloused nails into our pockets and try to fish out some ‘valuables’. Lucky for us, we got the team to not carry anything valuable in the pockets of their winter wear. Soon after that, we treated her just as how the villagers do – with cruelty. We shooed her away and threatened to hurt her just so that she would run away from us. Then we came to know of her story: When she was little, she was very sick and instead of feeding her medicine, her parents had accidentally fed her rat poison instead. She survived that episode, but had

suffered a mental illness instead. To make things worse, her parents had abandoned her and left her roaming the village to fend for herself. Her story made us reflect on our treatment towards her. After befriending her, we found that she was a pretty pleasant girl who merely seeks the attention of others. Seeing how we treated her, the villagers were less cruel to her (beating her up less often). We learnt that everyone has their own story and we should not judge by appearance only. Understanding a person's plight is important in the way we treat others.



## Reflections

This was my first overseas community service project. It was a truly holistic, life-changing and eye-opening experience; I'm more aware of how much I am blessed, and it has made me cherish and treasure what I have in life more.

-Liyana Sinwan

The villagers were in high spirits about our presence. The village children and youth were especially welcoming and were excited that we were refurbishing their school and mosques. Nonetheless, I feel that the host community touched our lives more than we impacted theirs.

-Muhammad Toy-yib

YEP has opened my eyes to a totally different socio-economic group of society, allowing me to better understand the needs, demands and cultures of others, engaging in positive exchanges to foster personal and character growth.

-Tay Xian Jie

I have learnt not to take my family for granted, especially after they have done their best to provide me with a good life. I have also learnt to be receptive towards others' ideas. I should do my utmost best to interact more with the children of the lower-income group and share the importance of education especially to those who are straying towards delinquency.

- Nurul Asyikin Mohd Nasir