



Reaching out through cultural exchange

In June of 2007, nine brothers and sisters from Markham Chinese Baptist Church embarked on a trip to the Youth Center in Zhaojue. They are from all ages and walks of life, some speak Mandarin while others not at all, but they have a singular objective: to show God's love to the youths of Yi minority group through a 10-day cultural exchange program. Here are their stories:

Low expectations were built before our trip. Even some brothers and sisters from church questioned how much love we could really show in a mere ten days, and what kind of meaningful message we could leave behind given limits on the words we could use. How could we "live the Good News" and have any kind of an impact in such a short time? We all had the same doubts, but in the back of our minds there

was also hope, because we were constantly reminded that we did not go alone. So we prayed for God to show us and went forward in faith and surrender. And God showed us so much, but only a few things can be shared here. – Lou Leung

After 2 days of grueling travel from Toronto to Hong Kong, Hong Kong to Chengdu, Chengdu to Xichang, we were set to take a three-hour bus ride up the mountains in Liangshan. I had not anticipated that this would have been the highlight of our travel. The mountainous landscape was utterly picturesque: lush green pastures; animals—dogs, cows, oxen,

chickens, goats, herds of sheep; mud huts and mini-villages throughout; families emerging from their homes, carrying babies on their backs, hauling wood; men and women lounging on hill-tops; children running in groups or solitarily across fields; bridges, miniature waterfalls, rows and rows of trees. The higher up we went, the more stunning the horizon became. – Priscilla Chan



Yi women with their children resting in the street.

Beauty and Poverty

Zhaojue, in all, was a town that surprised me. I was even surprised at its very existence—how did a city just pop up in the middle of the mountains? Walking to the edges of the city, I was not greeted by miles of suburbia, but by field upon field of farms. Then, beyond the fields were mountains taller and more beautiful than I have ever seen.

I saw that Zhaojue was a city nestled within a grand display of God's glorious handiwork. Being there to enjoy His creation alone was a blessing. – Samantha Tam

I found myself so heartbroken for the Yi minority group in China. Zhaojue in the province of Sichuan is a very impoverished land. There was a great dichotomy between the beautiful, lush rolling mountains and amazing scenery and the reality of the impover-

ished and desolate state of the majority of the population. Seeing this daily made my heart heavy for these people. We got to labor for Christ in many different ways, from teaching the youths Canadian culture to doing farm work! Needless to say, we got to see God do far more abundantly beyond all that we could have asked or thought! – Amanda Wong

There is just something about the youths: the way they talk, the way they sing, the way they took to our activities that were just amazing. In everything they did, they did with exuberance, with joyful anticipa-

tion, with passion, and purity of heart. In teaching them paper airplanes, they were still flying them around well after the lesson ended. When we were eating pancakes and maple syrup with them, they were so excited. They put some of their maple syrup into their tea and drank it with delight. In teaching them the value of persistence in solving the human knot game, they took it to the next level and saw that "problems are for solving" and that the most rewarding problems, like the brick-crossing problem, are those you try at 99 times and finally get it on the 100th try. – Samuel Wong

Patience and Persistence

As each new day came, God taught us about patience and persistence. Gradually picking up bits and pieces of the language, the non-Mandarin speakers on the team were determined to use the language no matter how silly we appeared. The youths were helpful and encouraging. Many meals became lesson times for us—the youths were eager to teach us not only Mandarin, but also the Yi language and songs.

One day after some of the girls performed an impressive and entertaining Yi dance in their colorful costumes, we went to the open field to take pictures with them. They enthusiastically invited us to try on their costumes. Not only did three girls promptly volunteer to take off their costumes, but they also assisted us in putting on the clothing, even coaching us on how to pose for



Enjoying the richness of Zhaojue

the camera. – Priscilla Chan

I am appreciative of the work we were allowed to do at the Sunshine Farm. I am sure that, on the first day, we were somewhat more of a hindrance than a help. On the second day, we did “real work” in a division of labor that was effective and enjoyable – there is a certain feeling of accomplishment in seeing our fences strong, taut, and freshly painted. – Samuel Wong

During one of our break times, our team asked some of the youths to join us for mountain hiking. As the trek up the mountain grew more difficult, however (the steepness, wet mud, and lack of an actual trail did not appear to obstruct the girls at all), the girls immediately came to my rescue. Two or three of them jumped ahead of me during the climb, calling out to me “Chan lao shi” (teacher), reaching out their hands to pull me up, pointing to the exact spots of where I needed to place my feet—easing my city-girl fears of the long way down the mountain. Upon arriving at the top, I was amazed by the breathtaking view. Beholding the entire village from the mountaintop, along with the girls who got us there—God’s glory and power were manifested: love was not restricted by mere words. – Priscilla Chan

More love...

In the mountains of Zhaojue, I have found my heart has grown bigger, stronger, like an athlete that has been training in high altitudes. I find myself capable of more love, more than what I show on a daily basis back home, that it actually feels good to exercise your heart, like you were somehow designed to live a life of lavish, outward care, a love that throws caution to the wind and risks it all. – Samuel Wong

...the Body of Christ is not limited by distance, language, culture, or lack of familiarity...

In addition to working with the youths, we participated in numerous other activities in Zhaojue. Of particular importance was the special walk we did around the city. Here, I was able to learn from the long-term workers about the real, harsh life led by many of the Yi population. I saw that they felt hopelessness in their lives and about their futures. I realized how much captivity these people were in. By praying for their freedom with the long-termers,

we were able to stand with them, though not for long physically, but spiritually. – Samantha Tam

We experienced the fact that the Body of Christ is not limited by distance, language, culture, or lack of familiarity. We were inspired by the long-term workers and the sharing between us. Though meeting together only recently, the whole team felt like we’ve been brothers and sisters all our lives as we shared laughter and even tears together! We simply felt like a family. – Lou Leung

Farewell

The night before our departure, the Youth Center had planned on having a campfire. Early in the evening, it began to pour. But God was good: right before the time when the program was scheduled to start, the sky cleared up. Our team taught the youths line dancing, including the “Chicken Dance” and “Cowgirl Twist.” Then

came the not-so-easy Yi dancing—all of us held hands, surrounding the fire, stepping to the Yi music that blasted through the stereo system. Warmth and celebration filled the air. Hours passed



Beautiful Yi children

by, all of us not ready to leave, longing to savor every lingering minute with the youths. While shaking my hips in the darkness, I relished in the pleasure on the youths’ faces, marveling and delighting in their sincere gladness in a simple night of dancing among friends. – Priscilla Chan

What have we accomplished?

But a short-term trip like this is just that—all too short. Before I knew it, the day of our departure was fast approaching. I was reluctant to leave the youths, all of whom I had come to love so dearly. I was reluctant to leave the people in the city, whom I barely knew yet my heart broke for. I was reluctant to leave the long-term workers and other brothers and sisters in Zhaojue, with whom we had built such great bonds. However, God has shown me so much in such little time. China is no longer just a country on a map, anonymous and foreign. Instead, it is a home to people that I love, and a people-group that I care for. My preconceptions of our limitations and bounda-

ries had been shattered by the Lord. Though our stay was a mere ten days long, I am confident that the Lord's work has made a lasting print, not only on the hearts of those we spent time with, but also on our very own. — Samantha Tam



A Yi man caring for his grandson

Something I learned on this trip is that love is a choice and obedience is a choice too: consciously deciding to love people works. Like the people there. I had never seen them nor did I know them. At first, I asked myself, how could I love them? The answer is that—you can—as long as you interact with them, because you can **choose** to love your neighbor. This trip has reinforced in me the principle that you can always expect the best in people, that people do change for the good, and even though they might disappoint you sometimes, you still believe that they can overcome their particular weakness sooner or later, because this is part of love: always hope, always believe. —Jacob Lau

The Lord meets our needs

We clearly saw the work of our Lord in this trip, from the LOI process, the trip to Zhaojue, to the weather. The weather had been so “co-operative” that none of the planned outdoor programs needed to be changed. I could also see the work of our Lord in the hearts of our team members. The attitude of humility and willingness to serve was evident—every one of the team members was willing to help and support even if it was last-minute requests. — Simon Tam.

Together we ran, we played, we shared, we laughed, we ate, we drank, we climbed mountains, we repaired fences, we sang songs, we danced, we shared our life stories, we thanked our newfound friends, and we cried when we finally had to leave them.

Yes, we shared the Love that compels us to love.

Yes, we worked well with His schedule.

Yes, we all expressed ourselves, not by name but by deed.

Yes, we had more than we needed, with 12 baskets leftover.

Yes, we had the greatest youth group, which grew both in skill and spirit.

Yes, we had the best resource: Creativity.

Yes, the most trusted pair of Hands was carrying us.

Yes, we had enough time to fulfill the Great plan.

Yes, our loving words were being heard.

This was our trip—people who were driving Love, serving with Joy, and finishing in Peace—and it does not stop here. — Simon Yuen

I am confident that the Lord's work has made a lasting print, not only on the hearts of those we spent time with, but also on our very own.



Showing off the beauty of Yi costume with MCBC team

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Reasons Not to Stay but to Go!

Hieu Ho

Hieu, a Math teacher in Edmonton went to southwestern part of China for a year of service in teaching English. Here is his story:

“Why China?” A former student recently asked me when I told her about my upcoming year of professional service. Of course, I could only give her a thirty-second response. But here are the four reasons that the Spirit has impressed upon my heart to share with my family and friends regarding my decision to pursue God’s calling to overseas service.

First, through reading Scripture and biographies, I have gained a deeper understanding of the biblical truth that God aims to glorify Himself by bringing some people from every tongue, tribe, and nation into His presence to worship Him. John Piper says it best, “Mission exists because worship doesn’t... Worship, therefore, is the fuel and the goal of missions.”

On my second short-term service with MSI in 2005, I became more aware of the spiritual poverty among the “B” people. I learned that, of the 250 000 living in one particular county, only about 60 are Christians. And across the province, no more than two percent of the two million are believers, making them an unreached peoples group.

Second, I am learning from Jesus that nothing is as nourishing, life-sustaining, and fulfilling as doing the will of God.

Recently, I heard a conference speaker comment that the emphasis in Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 is not on the word “go” but on the phrase “make disciples.” So a better reading of the verse would be “in going, *make disciples*”. I think his point is that we do not need to go overseas *in order to make disciples*. Nevertheless, unless we are willing to “go...to the nations”, much of the disciple-making process will not happen.

Third, I am reminded that the cost of being Jesus’ disciple is, and should be, costly. “There is a mindset in the prosperous West that we deserve pain-free, trouble-free existence... This mindset gives a trajectory to life that is almost universal—namely, away from stress and toward comfort and safety and relief...(by John Piper).

Foremost among the men and women whose life stories God has used to inspire me to go is Hudson Taylor. He once challenged his audience, “Do you believe that each unit of these millions [even billions of Chinese] has an immortal soul? And that there is none other name under heaven [except Jesus Christ] whereby they must be saved...? It will not do to say that you have no special call to go to China. With these facts before you and the command of the

Lord Jesus to go, you need rather to ascertain whether you have a special call to stay at home.”

Please join me in praying for the “B” people, that God



Hieu, second on the left teaching a group of students in China

would open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18). Pray that God would help me daily count the cost of being His disciple. And that, in the end, I can say with Paul, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing [and making known] Christ Jesus my Lord.” (Philippians 3:8)

Answer to China Trivia: The Chinese writing means “Pay 20 cents to use the washroom!”