

# Amity Outlook

A Quarterly Bulletin

No. 7

January-March 2014



Education and International  
Exchange

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Published by the Amity Foundation  
Printed by the Amity Printing Co., Ltd.

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Dear friends,

As the first and the “oldest” programmes of the Amity Foundation, the Education and International Exchange programmes will have walked a journey of 30 years in 2015 since the inception of the organization in 1985. From long term teachers of English to the young adult programme, Amity has been constantly adjusting to meet the changing needs of society.

In this issue, volunteers from service learning and young adults programmes have stories to tell about their lives in China. From meeting the needs of Chinese people, Amity programmes have also been serving to provide opportunities to overseas young people to immerse themselves in the rich Chinese culture, to enrich their lives and to trigger reflections on their future and their role in global understanding.

We also have articles covering Amity’s involvement on relief work in the Philippines. From the first international relief action flood relief in the Philippines in 2009, Amity has taken active part in a number of relief programmes internationally. With the development of China, the question of “What China can do for the rest of the World” becomes louder. The two articles will probably answer that question to a certain extent.



She Hongyu  
Chief Editor

#### ON THE COVER:

Danish volunteers playing games with students of a local school for migrant workers' children during their service-learning trip to Nanjing



## Amity Service Learning Program

Service-Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates relevant community services with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, encourage lifelong civic engagement, and strengthen communities for the common good. It is frequently implemented as youth service which offers students immediate opportunities to apply classroom learning to support or enhance the work of non-profit organizations that often exist to effect positive change in society.

Hundreds of volunteers have come from America, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Japan and some international schools in China to participate in various Service- Learning Projects hosted by the Amity Foundation, including teaching English to migrant children

and offering service for differently-abled people. Through a variety of service activities and cultural exploration tours, the participants not only developed a better understanding of Chinese culture and current society, but also enriched their knowledge and applied their classroom learning through service to others.



Amity provides youth from home and abroad with various International Youth Exchange Programs that combine community service, language study, cultural immersion, home-stays and independent learning and practice.

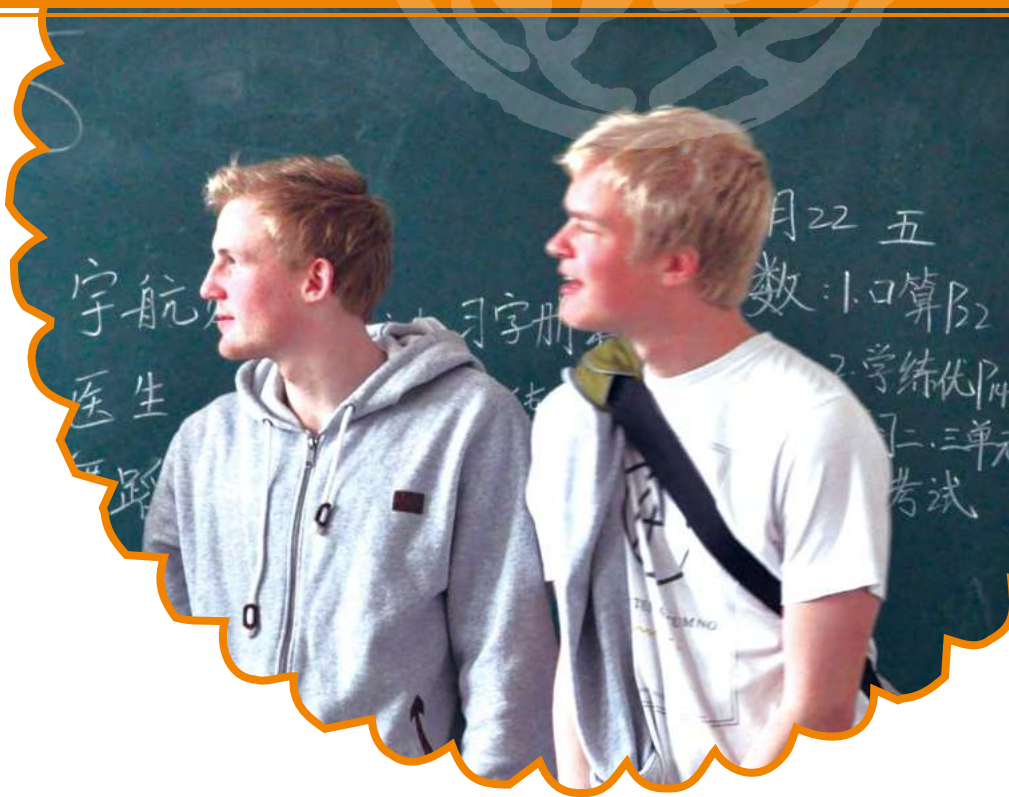
The Service Learning Program has been carried out since 2005. The Education and International Exchange Division, in cooperation with international institutions, recruits young volunteers from overseas to serve as English teachers for secondary schools in China, while offering them tutoring for learning Chinese and providing them exposure tours in China. The project aims at helping Chinese middle school English teachers to raise their teaching skills and promoting communication between the young people of China and those of other countries. Moreover, we hope that the young people overseas will grow an interest in China and have a better understanding of it.

A series of activities have been organized including summer camps for migrant workers' children and training for the young mentally challenged at the Amity Home of Blessings. Meanwhile seminars or lectures on Chinese society and history were held for participants

to learn about Chinese culture and to speak Chinese. The itinerary for visiting students also includes visits to scenic spots and sites of historic importance as well as to some Amity projects. As a result, the project has not only benefited the migrant workers' children or the clients of the Amity Home of Blessings, but also helped promote communication and exchange between young people in China with those of other countries. Now we have a number of the universities in Japan and the United States as long-term partners for the program. They send students on a regular basis to participate in various activities. The students were well received either when they were serving the Amity Home of Blessings

or teaching English to the children of migrant workers.

For those participants who were interested in learning Chinese, we arranged for Chinese volunteers to pair with them so that they might be benefited mutually in English and Chinese, while helping them understand more of Chinese culture and receive timely assistance in their daily life. We also make the program flexible in terms of duration. It can be only one week or as long as two months. Moreover, the expertise of the participants is well taken into consideration. We try to find the most suitable placement for each participant to make the most of his/her trip.



## Remembering the Danish Service-Learning Trip to Nanjing

The city of Nanjing was filled with the colors of spring this march, when the Education and International Exchange Division of the Amity Foundation welcomed the visiting group from Denmark. The twenty four students in the politics class of Silkeborg Højskole, including two students in wheelchairs, were accompanied by two of the home institution's teachers.

Højskole refers to a particular type of folk high education in Denmark. It is a special boarding school providing an adult education independent from academic granting institutions. The history of this type of education can be traced back to the mid-19th century. In 1844 the highly regarded scholar N.F.S Grundtvig established the first boarding school in Rødding, Denmark, which aimed at providing students with a more general education. This type of folk high schools and their educational traditions have since been well preserved within the educational system of Northern Europe. In the beginning years of development

they began by teaching farmers to read which contributed to the elimination of widespread illiteracy among adults. After 160 years of development, the schools have evolved to include more modern forms of education. Activities now include music, outdoor sports, politics, arts, third



Volunteering in a local school for off-farm migrant workers' children in Nanjing

world research and other course related activities, leading to the development of student's independent thinking and open-minded attitudes.

Every spring semester, students of Silkeborg Højskole look forward to their ten-day trip to China. The students spend their trip in three of China's most popular cities: Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai. As the host in Nanjing, the Amity Foundation not only provides an opportunity for them to get in direct contact with Chinese NGOs, but also conducts a series of Service-Learning activities aimed at helping the students develop a deeper understanding of Chinese history, culture and modern society.



At Hongshan School for Migrant Workers' Children, the students have the opportunity to teach children not only how to count in Danish, but basic Danish greetings as well. Disproving the common misconception many young children have that every foreigner with blue eyes and blonde hair speaks English. Even though the school children were only

in the second grade, they bristled with curiosity, wonder and a thirst for learning and by the end of class many students were able to count to three in Danish. However, many of the children seemed more interested in gestures than language.

I grabbed the attention of a boy who was running about playing, and pointed to the girls, "Why don't you go over there and play with the girls?" The boy replied quite frankly, "Who would wanna play girly games with them?" However, the girls' organized and patient way of playing games eventually caught the attention of the boys, and everyone spent a very happy afternoon together formed in a big circle, singing and dancing. When it came time to part, the children rushed forward to shake hands warm-heartedly with their new-found older Danish friends, shouting, "See you tomorrow!" Who can tell what the future might hold, perhaps they will have a chance to meet again some day.

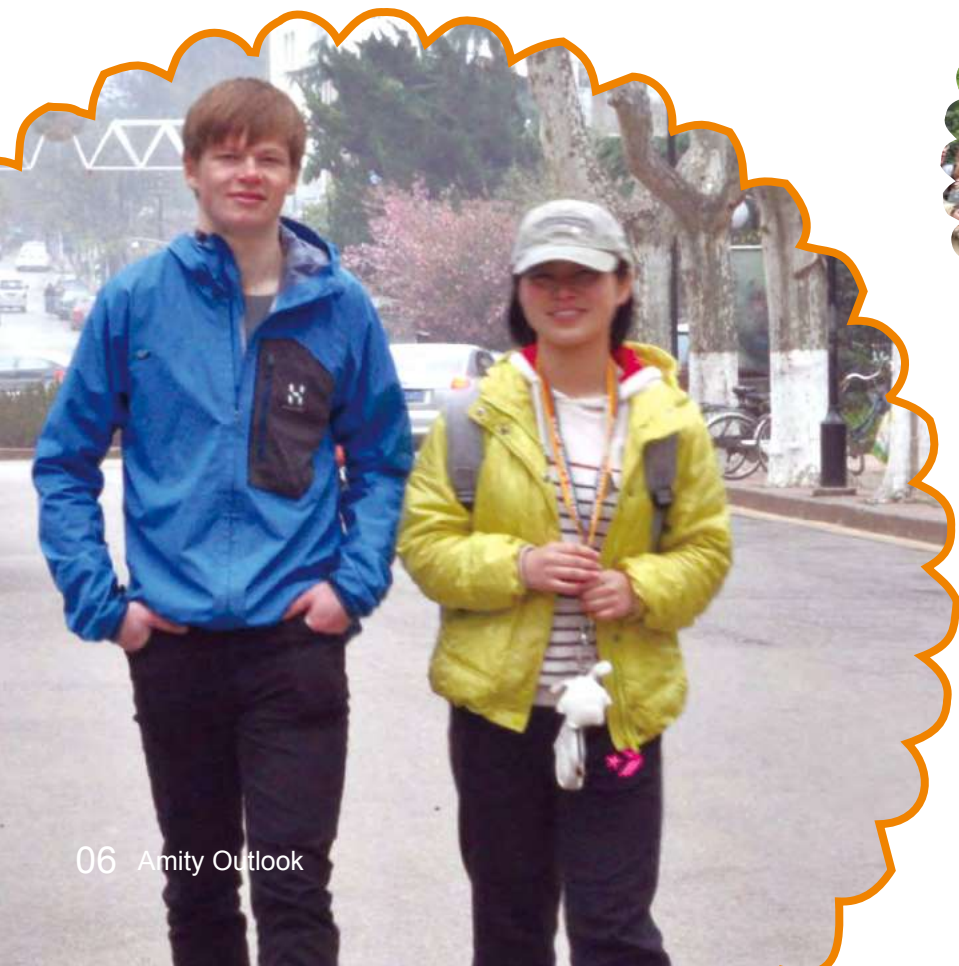


While the time spent playing games with the children was filled with happiness and childish innocence, conversations with students from Hohai University were of a more serious and enlightening nature. At Hohai University, the students from College of Harbor, Costal and Offshore Engineering, guided their far-away friends through their campus full of violet orchids.

Conversations erupted, about the students' interests and life experiences. Despite different cultural backgrounds they never seemed to run out of things to talk about. Their youthful vitality seemed to accentuate the greenery and energy that spring had brought to the school gardens.

The two wheelchair-bound students were not held back because of their disabilities and also shared the other students travel experiences. After a spring snowfall in Beijing the students had the opportunity to climb the Great Wall of China. Wearing gloves, one of the disabled students used his both hands to support his own body weight as he slowly, one step at a time, climbed up the Great Wall. When he removed his gloves, I could see for myself, the band-aids and light bruising on his hands. However, because the girl's body was frailer, teachers and classmates alike took turns carrying her, together completing their travels in Beijing.

Peter, one of the teachers, tells me that Denmark provides various handicap access solutions to help disabled people lead a more independent life. Restaurants, hotels, railway stations and other public places are all designed to be easily accessed by disabled and wheelchair bound people. Denmark also has cars specially designed for people with different disabilities. In order to make sure the two disabled students could go through with this trip to China, the Danish government provided travel expenses of two extra, strong and physically fit, students, "employing" these





Very caring students at Hohai University taking the initiative to assist two wheelchair bound peers from Denmark

travel companions helped the wheelchair-bound students throughout their journey. During the time that we spent together, it was also clear that their disabilities did not make them feel inferior. They discussed future prospects and dreams with hope

and passion. Their fellow students did not look after the two students excessively, only giving them a hand when they needed it, letting them do everything they can by themselves. This kind of equal treatment and attitude is truly commendable.

For Jonas, the other teacher, this was his fifth trip to China since the beginning of Silkeborg Højskole and Amity's cooperation. He has joined the English worship with his fellow Chinese believers at St. Paul's Church, enjoyed the beautiful night scenery at the Confucius Temple Area and even tasted authentic Mexican food in Behind The Wall Bar on Shanghai Road. He is already quite familiar with many of Nanjing's nooks and crannies. When it came time to say farewell, he led everyone in dedicating an originally composed song to their new-found friends in Nanjing, expressing deep-felt friendship.



Danish volunteers and their Chinese peers from Hohai University

## Amity Young Adults Program

For young people looking for an incredible life experience, ideas for their future, and maybe even just a touch of adventure, Amity offers an unparalleled opportunity through its Young Adults Program in China. Participants in this program get to immerse themselves in a language, country and culture completely different from their own, make contact with their Chinese peers, and acquire valuable skills through service to and empowerment of others.

Participants need to be 18- 28 years old, have at least a high school education, and possess energy, enthusiasm, and the ability to work as a team. Successful applicants come to China for an extended period of six months or a year, living and working alongside Chinese people in a small Chinese city as a teacher of Oral English in a middle school. In return for teaching language skills 14 hours per week, the young person receives a living allowance and free housing, free Chinese language lessons with their own personal tutor, and organized exposure visits to places

of cultural and social interest in their immediate environment.

Above all else, it is the connections forged between young people from overseas and China that last and bear the most fruit in this program, helping to break down barriers of misunderstanding and miscommunication and build bridges of tolerance and peace for the future. Young people emerge from this program with new ideas and new perspectives on life, hands-on teaching and cross-cultural experience and, more often than not, a much better understanding of themselves and their own strengths and weaknesses.

Amity prepares program participants for their stay in China through a compulsory Summer Training Program (pre-post training) in August prior to their placement in China. This course includes advice on living and working in China, dealing with cross-cultural surprises and, most practically for those who have never taught before, how to teach a lesson in

a Chinese English-language classroom. Once at their placements, program participants are assigned a local co-teacher and an Amity program supervisor to whom they can turn at any time for help and advice as needed. They also participate in regional meetings of local Amity teachers as a further means of encouragement and support.

If all this sounds exciting to you or a young person you know, get in touch with us, we'll gladly discuss more details and help you plan your stay in China with us. You should be available to participate in this program between the months of August and January for a six-month placement or August to July for a 12-month term of service. You will also need to secure support for your round-trip travel costs to China from your home country, medical insurance, and a one-off payment to cover your training program and program support while in China. Amity and your host school in China will take care of the rest.

## Extracted Reports from young volunteers in China

### Fall semester, 2013

When I wrote my application to come to China, I never thought I would change sides so fast. Six months ago, I sat on the other side of the desk. I had to take notes, listen to the teacher and had to do my homework every day. After doing this for 12 years of my life, I had summer holidays like everybody else, but with a different future. Holidays were over and I left the country. My plan was to go to China to become a teacher. After learning about China, about teaching in China and a little of the language, I went to Jiuquan, Gansu. Suddenly I stood in front of the class. Normally I looked at the blackboard, now I was standing in front of it, looking at the class. I had changed sides.

—— Christoph Deller

Life outside of teaching is an ongoing adventure. During the week I am mostly on the school campus, exercising at the school playground and gym, or spending my time with my own hobbies, which include making music, reading, and practicing Erhu, the traditional Chinese stringed instrument, for which I take lessons. I also try to go out and explore the city, eating at different restaurants, meeting new people, trying to grasp and comprehend Chinese culture, which, though often very similar to my own, can at the same time be very different. I have made many friends in my time here, most notably, the performers in a circus troupe



Teaching English in Gansu Province

that practice at a nearby gym. I also meet many interesting people around the city, in stores and restaurants; many of whom are the parents of students that attend my school. I have also tried to read some Chinese literature, though I realize some things are still too difficult!

I am having an extremely pleasant and eye-opening time teaching in Lishui, and in China. I thank both the Amity staff for their continuous support with whatever issue I have, and Global Ministries, for funding this amazing experience. I hope I can give back to these students as much as I'm gaining from living here.

— Theodore Rycroft

To get in contact with students is very easy. They ask me whether we can do something together and because I have QQ (a Chinese instant messaging program) now I can communicate more with the students that are better at writing than in speaking English. Because I often have the lesson before the lunch break I often go home together with Li Ruobing (Senior 2). She is a good friend of Sara's and mine. We met several times, and went eating together; I went shopping with her and she helped us to buy some clothes on the internet. Two weeks ago we made dumplings at the house of the grandpa of my student Angel. We often meet the students in the afternoon when they have

some free time and Sara and I play ping-pong or badminton with them.

We also have contact with the English teachers of our grade. Two weeks ago we ate hot-pot altogether and after that we went to KTV. This was a very funny evening and a good chance to get to know the teachers better.

All in all I am very happy in China and I love teaching. I like my students very much and I like spending time with them (teaching or meeting them in my free time). With the teachers, especially our tutors, I get along very well and our headmasters care for me. I feel very safe and I get along very well in Jiuquan.

I get along very well with my roommate, Sara, too. We do nearly everything together and we have a lot of things in common and have so much fun together!

—Miriam Graap

All in all I really enjoy the life here in Jiuquan and being a teacher is a new experience, which I am lucky to be able to have. Although from time to time, when the class am I teaching is not that interested and is rather noisy, it is a bit annoying, on the whole I think that this will become a year which I don't want to miss.

—Franziska Söll



There is a saying in German: “To jump over one’s own shadow”, which means to overcome your own fears and do things outside your own comfort zone. I jump over my shadow while biking in Jiuquan, standing in front of 60 Chinese students or bargaining at the local market. Every single jump in my daily life lets me grow a little bit. However, it is sometimes hard to make the first step.

I will never forget that first day: I am standing in front of this white door of the 9.6 class checking for the fifth time whether I am at the right classroom. I am sweating, my heart is beating way too fast and I am realising the moment I have waited for over one year had finally come: I, little Clara, will now be teacher Clara. The good advice of other teachers is crossing my mind: “Speak slowly and loudly”. Finally, I enter the classroom. The whole class is suddenly silent and whispers fill the room. Being afraid that they won’t understand me, I am heading to the teacher’s desk while all eyes are on me.

Now, as I reflect, my past three months have been filled with many wonderful and many little moments which has made my time unbelievably awesome.



Teambuilding by the volunteers

A life in China would not be true without some less wonderful moments: Being woken up by my stomach because it doesn’t like the overdose of Chinese food, my poor Chinese, which leads to a miscommunication frustrates me, a noisy class that doesn’t understand me, doesn’t respect me and just decides to stop working, manipulates my mood.

——Clara Kruse

Two weeks before the National Holiday our school asked us, if we would like to do an English Corner once a week. We were happy, because we once asked if it would be possible to do an English Corner.

The first lesson we were wondering how many people would come. Our tutor told us that all English teachers told their class that there would be an English Corner. At our first lesson, 80 students came. We were surprised, because we expected about 20. But it was a lot of fun. After a few weeks we can tell which students come regularly and which just come sometimes. I personally like the English Corner, because there are not so many students: Maybe between five and twenty and you can have closer contact to them. Our aim is that our students learn how to express their opinion. So we do a lot of discussions.

——Sara Huber

If we are not spending time cleaning the apartment, cooking, etc., of course we are doing our job as oral English teachers. This consists of the teaching of seventh- and eighth-graders (12-15 years old), which lays its focus on playful teaching of communication skills and not the dry study of grammar or reading the English book.

We are currently working frequently with PowerPoint presentations and lots of pictures and use these to teach the children useful phrases and vocabulary, which later they might really need sometime, such as: going to the supermarket, asking and giving directions, buildings in my hometown, countries around the world, etc.

During class, we find that the performance level of students is sometimes drastically different. Some of the students started studying English in primary school and in addition to that visit a private English tutor and for this reason are able to understand most of the things we are telling them and even are able to speak fluent English in certain situations.

On the other hand, there are those students, which in seventh grade are just now starting to learn English with us and therefore, have a very little ability to understand the things we are trying to tell them. This is probably the biggest issue we have to deal with as teachers.

——Caspar Ziegler



Orientation and demonstrative teaching workshops at Nanjing Normal University



## An interview with a young volunteer

By Martin Lachmann

Nadya, one of the young Amity teachers volunteering in the academic year 2013-2014, shared her experiences in an interview:

*Why did you decide to take a gap year after graduating?*

I grew up in Botswana, Africa and when I was fifteen years old, my parents told me that we'd be moving to Germany at the end of the year. Until then, Botswana had been home to me and I was forced to leave a part of myself there. Jokingly, I said that I would return as a volunteer after completing high school. Here, the idea of spending a year doing developmental work abroad started forming in my head.

Arriving in Germany, I felt misunderstood. Simply displaced. The school system was different, the language difficult and the culture foreign. But, slowly, I settled in and after three and a half years, I did feel happy there. However, having grown up

somewhere completely different, a part of me always wanted to see more of this magnificent world!

This world is a fast-paced one and due to globalization, it is impossible to thrive on one's own. I believe it is

necessary to open oneself to the world. So, I wished to take a gap year in order to take a break from intellectual learning, in order to question my view on the world and myself and in order to immerse myself in something new.



Teaching English in a Chinese classroom is a challenging but rewarding job

***Why China? What gives you the idea to teach English in a small city in Gansu in China?***

Actually, I didn't take China into account at first. In the beginning, I thought about returning to Africa. Then, pursuing the thought of seeing something new, I applied for several positions in Latin America. This seemed to make sense: I have relatives in Brazil, many friends of mine have spent gap years in Chile or Peru, and I have studied Spanish for three years. I wasn't granted a single placement.

Finally, I stumbled upon the homepage of Mission OneWorld and saw that they had one place left: China. China? China? I hadn't even known that volunteers are sent to Asia. Should I really apply? Am I completely out of my mind? I don't speak a word of Mandarin and I don't consider myself able of teaching students.

But don't I want to spend a gap year abroad? Isn't the whole point of a gap year doing something you wouldn't normally do, to go places you wouldn't normally go? To cut a long story short, I finally applied for the position and haven't regretted it since. China is an awesome country for me to live in, at least for the time being.

***What did your parents, friends, relatives say about your decision?***

To be honest, I didn't really ask my parents about their opinion. I simply informed them of my plan. In the beginning, my mother would have preferred me flying to Latin America, simply because we have been there as a family before and she can connect more with the continent than with Asia, "the great unknown". But, she also accepted my decision of going to China. Most of my friends supported me, although some did worry and asked me if I wasn't afraid of being so far away from home for such a long period of time. I was jubilant and sometimes

frustrated (because there was so much to organise), but, until then, it hadn't crossed my mind to be scared.

One elderly lady told me that I must be completely out of my mind. Another was very happy for me because she loved China herself as a young adult. I had to promise to cook Chinese food for her when I return.

***What were your expectations before and how are they matching with your present daily life? What was most surprising for you?***

It's not erroneous to say that I had no expectations concerning my year here. I knew I would spend most of the year in



Nadya's school in Gansu where she teaches for one year

Jiuquan, Gansu, together with 11 other volunteers. I knew that I would be at a school together with another female German volunteer and I guessed that we'd be living together somehow. I also knew that a Chinese school class has almost double the amount of students a German class has. I knew that Gansu is dry and very cold in winter, but other than that, I had no idea.

If you don't imagine much, you can't be surprised or disappointed. What did, however, surprise me, is that I sometimes feel as if I am back in Botswana: Both China and Botswana are high context cultures, meaning that people enjoy beating around the bush as opposed to saying exactly what's on their mind, as most Germans would. Their mindset is a lot more spontaneous and buildings as well as other items aren't built to last for a long time. To a certain extent I could also connect with the omnipresent hierarchy and the way of teaching because I grew up in a similar setting in Botswana.

***How are you perceived and treated in your school and in your daily life by the local people?***

From the very beginning, the seventh graders treated me like a regular

teacher, bowing and saying " 老师好 " (Hello, teacher) whenever I walked past. The elder students seldom greet me. The fact that I am a teacher, but aren't accustomed to Chinese teaching methods, and cannot grade my students, complicates the matter. Many eighth graders hardly respect me because they know that I don't have a lot of power. For example, because I teach a whole grade, I am not capable of learning all 500 students' names. Names are power and, consequently, missing names are missing power.

Nadya, one of Amity's volunteering teachers in Gansu

Many teachers are very open-minded and friendly, especially in my new teacher's office, others more reserved. Of course, I understand that it is difficult to reach out to me. My Chinese is more than basic and I believe many simply think I am one more of many foreigners who pass through their school, only here for a year, only a child ( 孩子 ). I am thankful for those who make the effort anyway.



## Armed with fortitude and resilience, villagers survive Yolanda's fury

By Theresa C. Carino

Recalling typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan)'s fury still brings tears to the eyes of 42-year old Rhylene Toquero. The housewife, barangay councilor and hardy mother of 6 children aged 25 to 2 years old, shuddered as she momentarily relived the terror she and her family members felt as the storm raged for two seemingly unending hours, tearing apart their home as they huddled together, immobilized by fear and praying for their lives. They were enveloped in darkness as the stormy waters swirled around them and totally washed out their house located not far from the beach on the small island of Puntaburi, one of many islands in Ajuy, Northern Iloilo. After the typhoon had spent its rage, the family rushed to the hills where they sought shelter, unsure when the typhoon might return. It was only the following day that they dared to venture back to where their home used to be, with only bananas for food, offered by kindly neighbors. Collecting the usable debris from damaged homes, they constructed a makeshift shelter.

According to Rodolfo Burroba, a civil engineer who had opted for early retirement after stints in Japan and Saipan, all roofs were blown off, including that of the school gym. As in many other affected islands, in Puntaburi, almost all of its 155 boats were severely damaged, undermining the livelihoods of fisher folks that make up the majority of the population. Electricity has been partially restored, but only in the area around the village hall, using restored generators and some solar powered lights.

There are quite a few families in Puntaburi that still live in makeshift shelters, using tarpaulins as roofs. On even smaller islands, damaged homes tilted in the wind, with broken roofs and gaping walls still visible from the sea, as we approached them on small, motorized boats fitted with bamboo outriggers. At low tide, we had to wade ashore in knee high waters.



Dr. Theresa C. Carino from Amity interviewing a typhoon-affected villager



While villagers appear to be in high spirits, grateful for the delivery of relief packages from Amity Foundation working in tandem with KAISA, a non-profit voluntary organization made up of Chinese Filipinos, things are “not yet normal.” Over the last three months, various NGOs and UN agencies have delivered relief goods a few times, but often giving only two to three kilos of rice per family per distribution. More than 5,000 families in Ajuy, Batad and San Dioniso were delighted to receive 25-kilo

bags of rice per family during Amity-KAISA’s distribution of relief goods that was supported by the Hong Kong SAR Government’s Disaster Relief Fund. Apart from rice, the 40-kilo packages included much needed mosquito nets, blankets, slippers, candles and pails.

During our week-long trip to distribute relief goods, we personally experienced the communication and transport difficulties of the many island and mountain barangays affected by the

typhoon. Bringing relief goods to these areas required shipping or airfreighting materials from Manila to Iloilo city, followed by a process of repacking and transporting them overland in dump trucks to points where bangkas (small boats) would repeatedly ferry the relief goods to the islands. The time taken was painstakingly long and we were grateful to have the help and support of enthusiastic volunteers from KAISA, the Iloilo Red Cross and the ICAG (Iloilo Citizens Action Group). It was a complex, delicate



and challenging operation. The provincial office of Iloilo helped the process by providing dump trucks and motorized boats for ferrying relief goods but we realized the province had very limited infrastructure, equipment and staff. The number of dump trucks available was quite inadequate as they were also being used in the restoration of damaged infrastructure.

Our trip exposed us to the dangers and difficulties confronted by students and teachers as they bravely continued holding classes in badly damaged rooms. More than half the classrooms in many schools have lost their roofs. Some continue to be used even as twisted galvanized iron dangle dangerously from broken beams

and children suffer from intense heat as sunlight streams into partially roofed classrooms. Some schools have received galvanized iron sheets and nails from NGOs and local governments but still lack funds to hire carpenters who have the necessary skills.

After surviving for almost 3 months with very little, people are hungry for livelihood projects that will enable them to work for a living again. According to the mayor of San Dionisio, the 3 month hiatus in fishing has brought back the crabs and fish to the pristine waters of Northern Iloilo. Missing, however, are usable, seaworthy boats. Unfortunately, trees such as the locally grown Bakan and Tipulo were completely destroyed during the typhoon.





Tree trunks that provided strong material for hulls were ripped off by the storm, broken and strewn over the highways, destroying the local boat-making industry in the area. In response, government, NGOs and churches are just beginning to donate boats for livelihood projects. It will certainly take time before “life can be normal” again but we know that hope for a better future remains strong in the hearts of the people of Northern Iloilo. And that is what truly matters.



Amity working with KAISA to relieve the victims of the super typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan)



Typhoon-affected villagers receiving relief supplies from Amity

## Solidarity and cooperation among Asia —— in the aftermath of super typhoon Haiyan

By Martin Lachmann

*"This is the 16th disaster relief project I am part of, but this is the first time when I think no matter how much support we have brought to the victims of typhoon Haiyan it is not enough yet." said the vice president of KAISA on the way to the airport of Manila, from where we headed to Iloilo. In this province, heavily hit by typhoon Haiyan, we were to help distribute emergency relief goods during the following days and witness the truth of this statement. Recorded as the most disastrous typhoon in the Philippines, Haiyan hit the country on November 8, 2013 and caused more than 6,000 deaths.*

I decamped from Hong Kong to the Philippines with another Amity staff member to distribute emergency relief goods with our local Philippine partner KAISA. These emergency provisions worth of HKD 2,057,000 were provided by the Hong Kong government as relief aid to 5,000 families. For each family the supplies included 25 kilograms of rice and various non-food items such as mosquito nets, candles, water-proof food containers, blankets, cutlery, slippers and sanitary items.

As a new staff member of Amity Hong Kong, I was participating in such relief operation the first time. I arrived in Manila with mixed feelings. On one hand, I was concerned about recent reports of looting and chaos. Would there be problems distributing the emergency supplies? On the other hand, I was deeply impressed by the willingness of organizations from all over the world to help, especially by Hong Kong citizens. All over the city sympathy was empathized and numerous charity events took place throughout Hong Kong, in order to help the victims of Typhoon Haiyan. As a European Hong Kong resident who reads about tensions between the governments of Hong Kong and the Philippines in the mainstream

media, I was delightfully surprised to see cross-border cooperation and solidarity among the people in the face of such tragedies. By the time when even the Hong Kong government granted support for the humanitarian crisis to the people of the Philippines, I was eager and proud of being part of Amity's relief operation.

Current tensions between the Hong Kong and the Philippine governments center around the 2010 'Manila hostage crisis' in which Hong Kong tourists were killed after their tour bus was hijacked. Filipinos are the largest group of migrant workers in Hong Kong and the direct neighbor of Hong

Kong and China in the South China Sea. Furthermore, unsettled territorial disputes arise from time to time between the Philippines, China and most neighboring countries of the South East China Sea. But through Amity and other NGOs, Hong Kong contributed a lot to the relief efforts, as did people from mainland China. I hope for peace and development in this Asian region.

In Manila we were first invited to KAISA's headquarters, our Philippine partner NGO that already cooperated with Amity in a 2009 disaster relief operation. They explained about their ongoing disaster relief work since the beginning of the typhoon to the present.



A meeting at KAISA's office in Manila

Besides being grateful for their trust, transparency and sincerity, I was pleased to hear about their general mission before our departure to Iloilo, where we planned to distribute the relief goods. KAISA is a Filipino-Chinese NGO that advocates friendship and mutual understanding between Chinese and Filipino citizens as well good governance and charity actions. Especially I was amazed about the fact that volunteers managed such a well-organized and professional NGO and that there is a personnel turnover for the president at the age of 49, in order to have a flow of new ideas and innovation.

After our arrival in Iloilo we teamed up with the KAISA volunteers and visited the relief goods warehouse. Other local volunteering partner organizations, namely the Iloilo Citizen Action Group and the local chapter of the Philippine Red Cross already did a marvelous job by packing all the relief goods, ready for transportation and distribution to the coastal municipalities. Additionally we met with government officials, who expressed their gratitude to the government and the people of Hong Kong and supported our relief operation with trucks and security. "People in Iloilo are poor and it



Checking up warehousing of supplies

will take probably years for them to reach a state of normality again." Dr. Baniyas the provincial administrator, who is coordinating the disaster emergency efforts in the province, gave me these words after I asked him about his assessment of the state of rehabilitation. On the way to Ajuy,



the first municipality of our operation, we could already witness the impact of the natural disaster. All the way we saw roadside houses that were heavily damaged; they had received makeshift repairs with tarpaulin. Power lines had only recently been rebuilt in many places.

In Ajuy the team of nearly 30 volunteers split into two groups. While the first group delivered supplies to mountainous barangays, I joined the second group that went to four remote islands accessible only on small, motorized boats fitted with wooden outriggers. Entering the islands by wading ashore through shallow water showed us the logistical difficulties of delivering supplies to these remote barangays of Ajuy. After our arrival, on the way through the barangay to the village center, we were eyed skeptically by the people. However, after news



Well organized for distribution

spread that we came to distribute relief goods, more and more people flocked to the village center. Soon the place was crowded with people and a bunch of excited children who ogled me with prying eyes soon surrounded me.

Our team hung up banners that provided information about the donor government, Hong Kong. The banners also noted the people and organizations that helped the operation with logistics, organization and manpower. While the team set up roles, volunteer villagers set up chairs, loudspeakers and helped carry relief goods to the village center stage. Afterwards the mayor of Ajuy,

who accompanied our group this day, gave a speech of gratitude and informed the people about the process of goods distribution. Short speeches by Amity and KAISA staff followed. Also, a local villager reported on the typhoon's strike and daily struggles after Haiyan hit their island.

I was surprised and impressed about the management, and how orderly the distribution was. Prior to our visit, beneficiaries received red cards that certified their identity and needs. Those who benefited most from the relief supplies were families with the elderly. The local Red Cross volunteers



Well prepared for distribution

were young criminology students of Ajuy University, and some of them grew up in the villages themselves. They helped with identifying, checking and verifying the village residents' lists that were provided by the local authorities. They also passionately took part in the distribution of the goods, with other volunteers. All relief project participants were eager, altruistic, professional and fair.

In the next hours the beneficiaries lined up orderly in front of the stage where red identity cards were collected before supplies were distributed. The Mayor instructed the village chiefs to provide volunteer assistance for woman and the elderly in order to help them carry relief supplies home. We could see the Philippine people's happiness and gratitude increase as we handed over relief goods. This increased the whole team's enthusiasm. Although the physical challenges wore on us, we continued to work without much rest. And, we were all rewarded by the people's memorable smiles and thankful expressions. As time went on, the villagers also shared fresh coconut juice and hand-made snacks. In the end, they all seemed quite happy with the fair distribution of the supplies and I recognized a substantial change in



Teaming up with volunteering partners

the atmosphere when we left. Feelings of friendship and happiness replaced initial skepticism and people thanked us with handshakes, cheers, and waved goodbye.

The full engagement of every single participant of the goods distribution

gave me time to look around the village, meet the people, witness the devastation first-hand, and take pictures. The typhoon exacerbated the already impoverished situation of the people. I learned that many villagers cannot start rebuilding their former lives and are still living in tents and emergency



shelters. Most people are fisherman and their fishing boats were destroyed by the disaster. They are in a hopeless struggle of restoring their livelihood. The village chief, a middle-aged woman who was elected a short time before Haiyan hit the island, told me, "It was very hard for me to maintain order

here." Her eyes reflected the stress she experienced in prior weeks.

I also learned that, although people had been warned of the typhoon, they did not expect the devastating impact that it brought. The municipalities' communication and infrastructure supported by Amity is very limited. On the islands, it took up to five days before supplies were delivered. During that time villagers had to deplete their inventories of coconuts and crabs in order to survive. It was thus quite gratifying to know that the Hong Kong Yacht Club has already donated some money to help villagers to rebuilt some outrigger fishing boats that some families could soon resume their regular livelihood.

Over the next days, Amity conducted similar relief operations for mountainous and coastal barangays. A total of 41 barangays in the municipalities of Ayuj, Batad and San Dioniso were supplied. Wherever we went people showed their gratitude in one way or another. Sometimes small difficulties occurred, such as local authorities not providing sufficient information that resulted in beneficiaries not being able to arrange appropriate transportation. But our

local partner KAISA always found a satisfactory solution through its reliability, experience and contacts.

In the end, it was an overwhelming experience for me. I learned a lot about disaster relief work. If I get a chance to participate in such a project in the future – perish the thought of future natural disasters- I hope I can make more contributions in terms of organization and preparation, based on my experience in the Philippines. Personally, I was moved deeply by the hospitality, friendliness, and the happiness of the people. When I told them I had not expected to see such serenity after such devastation, they told me, "There is nothing else we can do, we only can look forward" This bold attitude enthralled me and I am happy that Amity contributed to this spark of hope for a better future, and to strengthen the friendship and harmony among Asian peoples.



Martin Lachmann and Tong Su, Amity's relief staffers in the Philippines

