

Lin Mu '12 (China), Mark K. Magnus '12 (USA), and Eric M. Stachura '12 (USA)

Draft video documentary available at: <http://vimeo.com/14680550>

Our Mission:

The goal of our project for peace was to develop a superior water sanitization system and to foster an educational program on water hygiene and community health in the rural town of Gaojiagou located in the Shanxi Province of Western China. More specifically, we provided the equipment for water purification, gave lectures on water hygiene, donated books for long-term education, filmed and will be distributing a public service announcement in an effort to raise both awareness and funds for those lacking safe drinking water.

During our stay in Gaojiagou Town, we worked together with two volunteers from the U.S. and a group of 47 middle school students from Lin Mu's alma mater in China. In order to better understand the constraints each villager faced on a regular basis, our team (Lin, Mark, Eric, and our two volunteers) chose to live with a local family residing in a mountainous region of Gaojiagou Town; it was also with this host family that we were able to gain a better insight of the existing water storage system. We learned that it is common for families to dig a "drainage hole" in a low spot of their courtyard to lead rain water from the surface into a water cellar underground. These families are then able to draw the water up from the underground cellar through a system of pumps or windlasses. However, with a high pH, the collected rainwater in the cellars is considered very basic. When villagers boil such basic water in attempts to remove impurities, precipitates usually form at the bottom of their boiling equipment which can ultimately destroy it due to uneven heating. In response to this predicament, our group donated 30 automatic electric thermal water boilers specifically designed to boil collected rainwater in cellars and remove harmful precipitates. In Gaojiagou Town, with a population of approximately 10,000 people, 12 villages and 10 schools benefited from our equipment donation.

In an effort to promote safe water consumption, we prepared lectures and books for the public on water hygiene and sanitization. Our team donated to the local schools in the town a library of approximately 200 books on healthy drinking water habits and water sanitation. Following this donation, we gave a series of lectures to an audience of approximately 80 secondary students and their teachers, together with the 47 middle school students giving their talks on health to the elementary school students in the town. During these talks, we stressed the importance of drinking only sanitized water in an effort to encourage improved lifestyles and positive ways of thinking. We also worked with the secondary school teachers in the town to use the new library of books as a foundation to continue the education of drinking water and health for the community. It is our hope that with continual emphasis placed on proper water hygiene, the youth will be able to gain a better comprehension of healthier life choices, which will in turn be passed on to future generations.

As a part of our project, we have also filmed a public service announcement focusing on the issues surrounding communities facing clean drinking water shortages, using our work in Gaojiagou Town as a model for those interested in making a difference. This video documentary will be distributed through the network of Global China Connection and will also be available on the Internet. We hope this public service announcement will help raise awareness and collect donations in the long run to further our cause in improving drinking water conditions.

During our stay in Gaojiagou Town, a series of five reports were printed in a local newspaper about our visit and project. With the help of these reports, we have already begun to spread the word of our cause. In addition to these newspaper articles, we were also able to reach out to a broader audience with the support of the middle school students from Lin Mu's alma mater, Affiliated Middle School to Jilin University. We appreciate the diligent preparations and clear deliveries of these students' informative presentations in Gaojiagou Town. Lastly, we are indebted to Brendan S. Sullivan (Denison University) who volunteered to help us in China with many logistics, Cody J. Vandenberg (Ohio University) who

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helped us with filming and editing of our video documentary, and Ruiya Huang (Denison University) who made great contributions to the selection of the books for donation.

Looking back on our journey in Gaojiagou Town, we are so thankful for our preplanning on those long summer days. As we had expected, although Mark and Eric read books on the Chinese culture and even arranged Chinese lessons before this trip, language and cultural differences still challenged their communication with the local people. Unexpectedly, however, Lin too faced a language barrier, because most of the villagers spoke a very different dialect of Chinese. These hardships were intensified when Lin, our main communicator, was hospitalized after an eight-hour medical transport from Gaojiagou Town. Nonetheless, with our coordination and arrangement with the local students who speak Mandarin and Lin's middle school students who speak some English, we still managed to develop new friendships and succeeded in carrying out all of our endeavors. As one of the newspaper reports said, the detailed preparation and open-mindedness helped us in honorably overcoming the language barriers to accomplish our mission for clean drinking water, health education, and the betterment of the community.

The day before we left Gaojiagou Town, the educational officer presented us with a plaque in appreciation for our project. It reads, "Peace beyond borders, love across boundaries; purer water we produce, healthier life we introduce (original text in Chinese)." During our short stay in the town, we were amazed by how although we came from different parts in the world, we were able to connect on such a deep, human level. We are so glad that we were able to help but we wish that we could still do more for the villagers. This is why when facing budgetary constraints, we did not hesitate to spend most of the available fund on the purchase of equipment and books, while we ourselves covered our own costs in China. We truly hope that our efforts will leave a sustaining, positive impact on Gaojiagou Town.

Our Insight:

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, water is a physiological necessity that occupies the base of the human needs pyramid. Simply put, a human being is unable to survive without water. It is vital that every individual maintains proper hydration in order to pursue upper-level self and social activities such as education, medical care, and agricultural production. Once our own needs are satisfied we can begin to look beyond ourselves, and only then can we start to look towards the benefit of others. It is our belief that peace is not merely the civil coexistence with one another but a harmonious unity fostered by the feeling of universal respect and caring for others. The way that our project contributed towards peace was by fulfilling the basic need for water and bringing the people of this town one step closer towards helping others. Our short term goal was to give the equipment necessary for water purification and to provide education on hygiene and health. Our long term goals rely on the students. Perhaps when they are grown up they will remember how they have been supported and they will pass along the favor to other people.

During our visit in Gaojiagou Town, we felt very impressed by the local villagers' hospitality and the students' desires for learning. We also admired how, even though the people there do not have much, they work hard and live a happy life. In the past, their diligence and optimism helped guide them through various hardships; today, this valuable tradition and spirit is helping them to build a better community. Admittedly, people in the world are different, but we share the common pursuit for a better life. Everyone can do it and make a difference. As Lin said, "Life is given but once. No matter who you are and where you are right now, as long as you take good care of it with a positive attitude and a persistent manner, one day, one day, you will be amazed by yourself, about how much you have done and how much stronger you have become."

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