

Mexico Cultural & Service Trip Learning Report
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This cultural & service trip has no doubt been a fruitful and rewarding journey. Throughout the 2-week voyage, our team conducted various community visits, carried out thoroughly-prepared activities for children at camp Camomhila, and performed earthquake relief work in Morelos, Mexico. We have successfully stimulated an in-depth exchange with locals and passionate volunteers, bridging the cultural gap and develop life-long friendships. I am very fortunate to become the leader of this cultural & service trip, and this experience has certainly sharpened my soft skills. I am also very grateful that our team is the first Asian batch of college students travelling all the way to YMCA Mexico for a cultural exchange and serve the local communities. This memorable journey has enabled me to reflect on my personal lifestyle as a privileged college student, develop compassion towards people, as well as learning to respect people from various backgrounds, contributing to world peace and harmony.

We started our work after spending a weekend deeply immersing into the Mexican culture, including celebrating the "Three King's Festival". We conducted earthquake relief work in the morning and organized activities for children at Camp Camomhila in the evening. It was exhausting yet rewarding. Amid the morning sessions, we were able to gain a thorough understanding of the devastating effects of the earthquake which hit Morelos in September 2017. Despite the fact that more than 1 year has passed since the natural disaster, the government has not been providing adequate support in rebuilding facilities and homes for the families. Luckily, many external organizations such as YMCA provided timely in-kind donations to the homeless and underprivileged who suffer a lot due to the earthquake. Throughout the 3-day visit of the town in Morelos, we assisted the community in planting trees, distributing presents to the elementary and primary school kids as well as visiting their homes. I then realized how lucky people in Hong Kong are, as we reside in a place where natural disasters rarely happen, where there is a relatively efficient government with a sound legal system. Seeing children's happy faces as they received the small gifts we gave them or taught them to design (i.e. a shuttlecock made by newspaper, plastic bag, tape and fabric) made me reflect on the materialistic lifestyle of the millennials nowadays, who spend most of their time on electronic gadgets and crazily consume branded clothing without considering whether they really have the need for them. Yet, are they really happy even though they obviously enjoy a higher quality of life? Maybe not. Sometimes true joy may come from small acts that shed mutual positive impacts to both parties. Perhaps contentment is realizing that true happiness doesn't come from material wealth.

Night sessions include our detailed-planned activities with various themes for the children at the campsite. Among all the activities, the Cultural Night bestowed me the greatest sense of achievement and satisfaction, as I was one of the person in charge for the night. With introducing the Hong Kong and Chinese culture as our major objective, we set up four stations, including Chinese calligraphy on red couplets, Chinese paper cutting art workshop, Hong Kong nostalgic games (i.e. airplane chess), as well as a food tasting session with maltose candies and various sauces. We even distributed red envelopes with traditional Hong Kong candies at the end of all the activities. I was very contented as they were excited to learn about a new culture and took the initiative to ask follow-up questions regarding it

despite slight language barriers. I was even more ecstatic when I came back to Hong Kong and received their messages, as some of them decorated their home with the red couplets and paper-cutting we taught them to write and cut amid our Chinese new year. This implies that our effort did pay off and the Chinese culture has been rooted in their minds, assisting them in resolving cultural misunderstandings as they grow up.

Farewells are always hard. Last night with the children in the camp is probably one of the most heart-touching and inspiring moments in my life. After several exciting games, we conducted a campfire dance in the outdoor area. We led them to sing and dance around the fireplace, which brought the atmosphere to the climax. We then started our talent show performance by singing some Cantonese songs bidding farewell. Despite the language barrier, one children started crying whom then influence other kids shedding tears as well. They started hugging us and expressed their sadness as we were leaving the other day. "I will miss you", "Te amo y mucho gracias" (I love you and thank you very much). I burst into tears at that night and as I looked up to the sky with numerous bright stars, I prayed to God that I hope these children, though being temporarily underprivileged, shall grow and develop their potential through education and become one of the brightest stars in the world. We shall never forget them and be faithful of them.

We wrapped up our journey by conducting community visits to different local YMCA branches and perform service to the needy in Mexico City. My most memorable service in the last few days was to serve people with mental illness. Despite being psychically challenged and that the activities were conducted under the scorching sun, they actively participated and persisted. I vividly remembered playing three-legged race with one of the teenagers from that center. We were paired up as a team and after the game, I discovered my shoe laces were loosened. Without hesitation, she knelt down and assisted me in tying them. I was very touched at that moment as although they might encounter a lot of struggles intellectually, physically and mentally, they have a compassionate heart that deserves people to pay full respect and support as ordinary people.

To conclude, I am absolutely proud to be one of the Asians in driving the first cultural exchange between YMCA Mexico and China. During the 13-day journey, I met amazing and pristine peers that will surely serve as a motivation for me to continue give back to the community. I have also developed myself as an individual with a compassionate heart and have learnt to respect people from various cultures. My first leadership experience in 2019 has been amazing and I hope we have created a positive and tangible impact on the target group of service, as they have inspired us in so many ways. Grateful beyond words. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chui's Student Excellence Scheme for the tremendous support. It is certainly a once-in-lifetime-experience.





