

Reflection on Building a library for a local secondary school in Vietnam

(12th June – 29th July 2016)

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This summer, Project Mingde cooperate with World Vision in organizing a cross-disciplinary project to improve a rural school facility for teaching and learning in Vietnam. This project is very useful for me to apply my knowledge and skills learnt from lessons, such as how to read the construction drawings and check the dimension of the building. This project provides me an excellent opportunity to learn more about each part of construction work. I have chance to participate on brick laying, steel fixing, back filling, concreting, floor paving, and painting work. The construction skills attained can certainly help my future career and broaden my horizon.

There many unexpected challenges facing me, the most unforgettable challenge is lack of powerful muscle. The first week construction required lots of manpower and strength, which is harsh for most of the girls. When I watched the workers transporting soils, I thought it was easy. However, the soil and clay were much heavier than expected. Despite of the difficulties, I persisted in helping with the hard work. After a few days of muscle pain, I found that my muscle had more strength, and the construction work became easier for me.

Apart from the construction work, engineering students had to involve in research and projects. The structure of report was very different from laboratory report that civil engineering students do. For example, the needs analysis report for Plan of Action consisted of a session called literature review, which I have no idea what information I have to gather for that part. Fortunately, every group had at least one student from social science faculty, and I can ask for his help. The co-operation between groupmates can certainly strengthen our bonding and boost efficiency. During the inter-disciplinary interaction, we can learn from each other and broaden our horizon.

The Vietnamese habit and culture also opened my eyes. The traffic was messy yet amazing. During our very first travel on roads in Vietnam, we observed motorbike drivers did not wear helmet, drove in opposite lane, drove on pedestrian road, etc. We have to be very careful when crossing the road.

Although I learnt some useful Vietnamese phrase on Youtube beforehand and we have interpreters for each group, it was still difficult to communicate with local Vietnamese. Whenever we went out for dinner without interpreters, we spent about half an hour to translate the menu by google translate. During construction, the local workers tried to teach us in Vietnamese, that we could only find help from interpreter immediately. After a several days, we were much familiar with the menu and recognise some of the Vietnamese name of food.