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Ghana
Summer 2010

It was a windless and sweltering night. On that night, I had the first conversation with my host brothers and sisters. It is the most special conversation I have ever had: we sat in the dark living room, talking randomly about Chinese Kung Fu and Ghanaian funerals. Sometimes, we sank into the silence, listening to the cicadas singing at the end of this summer. From my host brother David, I learned that the electric power in the village had been turned off for more than one month. It was said that the village committee was working on it, but until then no progress has been made. I suddenly found that for the first time in my life, I had to learn to live without electricity and other modern facilities, which had been long rooted in my life style. At the beginning, I thought it would be a hard transition: after all, it is much easier to step forward than to step backward. After I experienced this unforgettable summer, I realized that this internship means much more than "getting used to living without electricity" to me.

Every day in Putubiw, I started my day by walking to the primary school in the nearby village, Apewska. For the first several days, I walked with Margret and spent the time on the way to school talking about how muddy and creepy the road was. We also discussed how Ghana was unbelievably different from both China and the States, ranging from the education conditions to the transportation system. Before arriving, I thought I had prepared myself well for the cultural shock, but I still had a hard time accepting the fact that most people in the village sadly neglected education. Teachers only teach when they feel they have had enough rest and exchanged enough gossip. Parents regard school only as a day care center where their children are safe. Students do not care about studying at all. They bring small packages of peanuts to the school and sell them to their classmates, in the hope of making some pocket money instead of

learning something in the school. I began teaching my math class with the expectation that my passion for truth and knowledge can eventually have some influence on my students. However, I always ended the class with the awareness that what I could do for this community was too small and too slight to leave any trace.

I began to ask myself, "What does it mean to really understand a totally different culture?" I could not answer, but only saw more and more cultural differences. People take the broken family unit for granted. Ghanaian mothers, without a murmur, accept their husbands' running away from family responsibility. Women have no idea of family planning, and many mothers of older age suffer high risks of difficult labor. Teenagers hold illusive hopes of moving to the States, believing that "developed country," means that wealth will come without hard work. The sugar cane factories in the village produce large amount of black smoke every day. Villagers know it is cheap to use firewood but nobody thinks about the cost of "development".

The turning point of my internship came on one particular night. On that night, my host family and I sat on the concrete steps in the yard. We talked about trivial things, the electricity, the World Cup and the Fufu we had before. Most of the time, my host mother could not join the conversation, since she could only speak the simplest words in English, but when I suddenly met her eyes, I could see care, love and worry clearly shining from her heart. Under the beautiful deep blue sky, we felt the light from same star. I smiled to her, and she smiled back. In that moment, communication was possible without any language. I realized how lonely human beings were in this dark and boundless universe. In such a cold world, the warmth from the smile is all we need. What we have done enough is to point out the many ways each individual, each nationality, each state and each race are different and unique. What we have not realized is how many ways we are the same.

It was then that I eventually gave myself a satisfying answer after all the exploration I had made and all the disappointment I had experienced. For too long I had been putting too much importance on the "differences"; for too long I only saw the difference and the gap between two cultures, which undeniably exists but was also exaggerated; for too long I only tried to understand how we are different from each other but forgot to understand how much, as human beings, we share with each other. The foundation of understanding a foreign culture is to admit the things we share, and the foundation of accepting the things we differ in is to realize how much we are in common.

Things changed a lot after that night. This new perspective allowed me to see much more positive aspects of my host community. I kept teaching math. I kept facing a lot of frustrating moments, when my students showed little interest in math calculations. However, I managed to see the small progress they made every day. I felt truly accomplished when the whole class got into a state where they all paid attention to my chalk and all got involved in the pure joy of learning. I was moved by their shy smiles when they stood up, answered my questions, and received rhythmical applause. I encouraged everyone in my class to speak their points of view, instead of just going with the current. Sometimes, I was willing to spend one hour listening to what everyone in my class thought of one question. Step by step, they knew they had to make decisions and solve problems on their own. They began to understand studying means more than memorizing several formulas. I finally could feel some passion for knowledge flowing in the classroom. I ended my class with the relief that the isolated country life had not shut the door of their curiosity.

I also found my enthusiasm outside of the classroom. I felt it was my responsibility to inform the villagers in the sugar cane factory how harmful the black smoke is for their health. What's more, I realized I should not wait for somebody else to start this project. The ultimate

goal of this project is to help the sugar cane factory change the energy source to gas or other greener energy. With the support of Akos, my country coordinator, and Kelvin, a member of PUSU, I managed to conduct research in the field of energy. I spent my time after class talking with the workers in the factory and the chief in the village and collected basic data about the input and output of sugar cane factory. To my surprise, most of the villagers have long held the hope of changing energy source. Restricted by the little information they could get, people had always regarded this hope as empty. Next we tried to contact some banks in Cape Coast to apply for loans. We visited the Bank of Ghana, the UT, the ADB, and the Procredit Bank. I enjoyed the whole process, even though eventually the prospect of gaining loans turned out to be impossible. Compared to sitting down and complaining about the cultural difference, it is much better to step forward bravely and to start the development process.

Considering that we are still lacking accurate figures for the productivity of gas, we decided the best thing to do now is to start an experiment: encourage at least one sugar cane factory to try the gas for one month, collect the data, and then calculate the exact amount that could be saved by replacing fire wood with gas. Although I could not see these following steps come true, I wrote down the process we had come up with and the future proposal. The country coordinator of United Planet promised that he would keep this project going by introducing this project to future interns in Putubiw and encouraging them to make contributions to it.

When looking back at my experience in Ghana, I have to admit sometimes I did feel disappointed at the limited responsibility and the narrow field I could work in. However, I am glad that I faced the disappointment with courage, initiative and an open mind. I eventually realized that the process of exploring my capabilities, making plans based on research and working with other people to solve problems is much more fun and gives me a much greater sense of achievement than just finishing assigned work. Also, I highly value the time I spent in

getting over the cultural shock. It is through this period of time that I really learned to appreciate and understand a different culture.