

A Culture Room for Wabaiguo

December 2006

The clouds are hanging in-between the green mountains like giant soft cotton balls. But unlike cotton balls they are creeping up the mountain slowly and soon we are enveloped by them. We, the DI's (Development Instructor)- Roy and Ada from China, Jason from Korea, (all from the May team) and Hika and me (from the September team, who are DI's in training). We are walking to Wabaiguo, a village in Xinhua with 37 families, one of the three project areas where our school, YID (Yunnan Institute of Development) works.

The condition of the road is terrible. Everywhere there are giant potholes in the muddy road and a mixture of rocks, bricks and branches block the way. The road is hardly used, as in Wabaiguo the people are too poor to afford a car and most other people don't have a reason to go to Xinhua.

But the scenery from the road is breathtaking. Rolling hills and forests are visible as far as the eye can see. The landscape is peppered with the greens and yellows of terraced rice, tobacco, peas, sunflowers and corn fields.

At noon we arrive in Wabaiguo, which is located next to a beautiful water reservoir that supplies water for the entire area of Xinhua. The village consists of 37 households. The houses are mostly made out of mud bricks and often you can see freshly cut bricks drying in the sun. In Wabaiguo there is a vast array of chickens, ducks, dogs, cows and sometimes even pigs running around.

The paths between the houses are all of mud and because of the animals they are extremely dirty. I think that when it rains it must be a disaster

as you cannot walk anywhere without being knee-deep in mud.

The Yi minority live in Wabaiguo, one of the 56 ethnic minorities in China. They speak their own Yi language and have their traditions and customs that are very different from the Han Chinese which make up more than 90% of the Chinese population. But luckily for me, most can speak Mandarin Chinese, so with my basic Chinese I can have a small conversation.

Our first task in Wabaiguo is to give a lesson in the preschool. The new preschool building was opened only a few days ago. It was built by money fundraised by YID and it cost 10,000 RMB (1,000 Euro). It is very beautiful with wonderful white walls and is the best building in the entire village! One of the many tasks in YID is to set up preschools in the villages, as there are no Kindergartens. Therefore without the preschools the children would just be running around the whole day! In the preschool the children have a chance to learn drawing, singing, Chinese, dancing, math



The clouds inbetween the Hills

and everything else between heaven and earth. Also they have toys and children's books, things they don't have in their home.

15 children storm out to greet us, ranging from age 2-9 and all full of energy! Most come from Wabaiguo, but 5 children come from the neighboring village Moladai, which is 1 hour walk away. So everyday these children walk two hours, alone, at the age of 4! Three children have long reached primary school age, but the primary school is three hours walk away and they could only go home on the weekend. So they ran back home and don't want to go to school. But at least they are able to learn something in the preschool.

Wabaiguo and the water reservoir



A typical village pig!



A girl in the preschool

The children are all jumping up and down, wanting to be picked up, wanting to play ball or pull your clothes to get your attention. They all have incredibly dirty faces, hands and clothes. In the villages hygiene standards are very low and the parents don't realize the importance of cleaning and washing yourself. But even worse are the brown teeth, from not brushing them. But YID has provided bowls, towels and toothbrushes for the children. And so in the Pre-School they learn how to wash and take care of themselves.

We take the children out for a drawing contest. Everyone gets a piece of paper and oil crayons. We walk out to the edge of the lake and the task is to draw it. Of course nobody did, they are too young and they drew houses and people but they enjoyed themselves! I talk a little bit to Li Li Fan the preschool teacher. She is only 16 years old and recently graduated from Middle School. But in the rural villages hardly anyone goes to High School as it is too expensive. I admire her for her job, I don't think that at 16 I would have been able to teach 15 children every day from 8 am to 4 pm!

When we go back I take a closer look at the damaged building next to the preschool. Roy explains to me that it used to be the old primary school building before it was closed. The condition is terrible, it is made of mud bricks and the roof is collapsing. He



Two preschool children drawing

also tells me that there is the plan to make a culture room out of it so the villagers have a place to meet together or have a celebration.... But the cost is 20,000 RMB (2,000 Euro) and YID does not have enough money for building it.

In the evening the men and women return from the fields and some of the men suggest that we have a culture evening. I am very excited by this as I would love to see the Yi dancing and singing! First we go to Li Li Fan's house to take a rest. Then from the roof I hear a "Hello" and "I love you" accompanied by some laughing. "Great" I think. "Some stupid premature Middle School boys who are unbelievably



The old primary school building



proud of their 2 English words and are excited to see a foreigner. Really, I've had enough of this!". And I look up through the whole in the roof (every building has a whole in the roof for the fire smoke to go out) and I see 5 boys standing around. They come down into the living room, and after meeting me now in one room they seem very embarrassed about what they did. They look much older than I thought, and it turns out they are all 19, like me, and really nice too.

Together we go back to the preschool as outside the building is the only place with a cemented surface. At the side is a high metal pole, maybe 3 meters high and with amazement I watch the boys climbing up the pole, using only their hands. At the top they turn around and slide head down, stopping centimeters before the ground. When I try I fail miserably, not being able to pull my feet off the ground! Of course, these boys work in the fields everyday, they must be strong!

Then they put up an electric light while some women make a small fire and stand around it to warm themselves. After all it is quite cold, at an altitude of 2,100 m! We get to learn the Yi people dance, which is amazing. The dance goes around in a circle, with many different steps. At the same time you clap your hands in a rhythm and sing and the singing is really beautiful.

After that Jason has the idea we could teach them some Western dancing. So we decide to teach them an absolute classic, the "Macarena"! After 5 minutes they



Climbing up a pole

was not able to do it. I can really see we come from completely different backgrounds!

After the Macarena I have a most interesting conversation with some boys and Hika. I find out that they have only completed grade 2 in Middle School (equivalent to grade 8 in MIS) because their parents could not afford school anymore and needed their help on the fields. Most of the girls in the village leave for the large cities to find better work and the boys mostly stay behind in the villages and so it is really hard for them to find a wife, which for the future will be a big problem. What completely different problems they have compared to teenagers in Europe!

Lastly, there is a request for me to sing a German song! But honestly, I don't know any proper German songs so I sang "All of me" by Louis Armstrong. Then the boys sang a traditional Yi song and Jason

a Korean love song and with that a remarkable evening came to an end.

The next morning I take another look at the broken primary school building, and I think it would be so wonderful to have a room for the villagers, where they can meet, celebrate and remember their culture.

When I came to China and the rural area I was not prepared for an incredible kindness everywhere. The people in the village have hardly anything and still they constantly invite you to dinner or to their house for tea and offer you everything they have. In Wabaiguo the people are so happy that we built the preschool and work to try improve their condition.

So I want to give something to them, I want to collect the 2,000 Euros so these 37 families can have a culture room. And so I am asking you for a small donation for the building. Even if you only donate 5 Euros it will mean a great amount of money here! Please help me in giving the Yi people of Wabaiguo a culture room.

Nayla Abou-Khalil

Yunnan Institute of Development

49-51 Nie Er Road

653100 Yuxi

Yunnan

YID:

Phone: +86 (877) 20 59 695

Fax: +86 (877) 20 59 359

Nayla:

E-mail: nayla_kick@hotmail.com

Phone: +8613708779497

If you want to make a donation, please contact me under my e-mail address and I will send all the necessary information. Donations are possible to make via Pay-Pal or to a bank account.

Thank you!



The opening of the new preschool

begin complaining that it is too difficult and we are teaching it too fast. That makes me really laugh as for me it is easy. And I think over how clumsily I danced the Yi dancing and after 15 minutes still



Yunnan Institute of Development

Yunnan Institute of Development was set up in 2001 in cooperation with Humana People to people and the International DRH movement..



Two DI's teaching a dance in the preschool



Learning to brush teeth in the preschool

The school's aim is to train people from all over the world to serve as International Development Instructors to work in NGO's (Non Governmental Organizations) and with development work in poor areas of China, and overseas (Africa, India) and whilst doing this, improving oneself.

The institute runs a project in the poor mountainous regions of Yunnan Province where it engages in Child Aid project, which includes Community Development and the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

The training course is 11 months. The school's teaching methods combines theory and practice. You will carry out practical development tasks in the project area, located in nearby mountain regions. The teaching language is English, but if you are non Chinese speaking you will also have to study Chinese. Following the 11 months education, you can apply to work in Africa or India in a six months practical program as an International Development Instructor.



DI's practicing a play for international AIDS day



Walking to the project area

For more information about YID and the International Humana People to People movement:

www.volunteerchina.org

www.humana.org

www.drh-movement.org

Email: info@volunteerchina.org