

One week in China

Among the many distinctive features of Li Po Chun UWC, the College's annual 'China Week' shines out. For all first year students, the first week of November is dedicated to exploring the world's most populous country – China.

Gathering themselves into small groups they travel 'off the beaten track' in order to experience life in various parts of the country.

Different groups emphasise different aspects of service, culture and outdoor pursuits during the expeditions.

This year, two projects in particular caught the eye of United World, a new initiative in a leper colony on the edge of the Himalayas (below), and a long running scholarship programme with the Yao Tribe (right).

Supporting leprosy sufferers

Fifteen LPCUWC students from seven countries – Botswana, Canada, Denmark, Fiji, Finland, Hong Kong, and Sweden – travelled to Yunnan province in south-west China with the College's Principal, Dr Stephen Codrington, to establish a new service programme serving leprosy sufferers living in Ma Chan, an isolated mountain village.

Ma Chan (literally 'Place of the Horses') is a remote village off the road between Qiaotou and Zhongdian, situated at 3,200 metres above sea level at the eastern end of the Himalayas. The residents comprise a group of leprosy sufferers, of many nationalities, who have been forcibly relocated under a Chinese government policy that requires lepers to be separated from mainstream society. Of the residents, only the head man may ever leave the village. This means children can grow up without access to schooling, as few teachers are willing to work in the village. The leprosy sufferers are, in effect, almost totally and permanently isolated.

The LPCUWC students went to the village to build a new self-cleaning toilet block for the lepers. This required buying the materials for the toilet in the local markets – as the villagers have no source of money themselves – laying the foundations of the walls in preparation for professional laying of bricks, and digging a 250m long trench from a hillside spring for a water supply to flush the toilet.



"It was wonderful to see the local villagers come to join the students in their work, digging or hoeing to the limits of their capabilities," explains Dr Codrington. "In spite of the deoxygenated atmosphere of the high altitude, the students worked extremely hard to achieve their goals, and also left a sum of money collected through fundraising to pay local tradesmen to finish the tasks that their unskilled labour could not perform. They also donated large quantities of bandages, antiseptics and pain relief medicines, as the village

receives no government assistance."

After two days of hard physical work – digging, hoeing, trenching, shovelling, carrying – the group returned to Qiaotou and, following an overnight rest, began a two-day 24 kilometre trek through Tiger Leaping Gorge before returning to Hong Kong. "They were exhausted but confident that they had made a real difference to the quality of life of some of China's lepers, perhaps the most forgotten and ostracised group in the country," says Dr Codrington.

