



From left: Dr HUANG Yuping 黃玉平博士, Dr SU Kai Leung 蘇啟亮博士, Professor Albert KWAN Kwok Hung 關國雄教授, Mr Peter LEE Kai Kwong 李啟光先生, Dr GUO Dajiang 郭大江博士 and Professor Leslie George THAM 譚國煥教授

Today's highly developed societies impose great demands on civil engineering education. Would-be engineers must possess state-of-the-art professional knowledge and technical skills, political sensitivity, a firm grasp of economics, competence in budget management and understanding of many branches of legal knowledge. Likewise, they must be prepared to work in diversified environments whenever real needs call. Other sectors of our society often doubt whether our young graduates, born into an age of material affluence, can adjust their lifestyles and use their professional expertise to deliver material relief and goodwill to economically backward regions.

Experiential learning is a key component of the civil engineering curriculum to fulfill our education aims in preparing our students for the engineering profession. In the last ten years, we saw the evolution of experiential learning courses within our curriculum. The *Mingde Projects* is a step of advancement in providing a platform for experiential learning. Students will be exposed to new technical and social challenges as they are required to design and build structures in an entirely new environment. More importantly, the project to be constructed is a real project generated from real needs. Through the Projects, the educational goal of bringing the real project into the classroom and, vice versa, bringing the classroom into the project, is realized. Students, who are working as a team, think of themselves as the projects' planners and developers. Delivering the project on schedule and within budget gives them a sense of satisfaction. Playing major and even decision-making roles in planning and management gives them a sense of ownership. The experience acquired by students launched on this unique learning platform has proved to be stimulating, inspiring and gratifying.

I joined the *Mingde Projects* in year 2004 as my industrial training. The project gave me a unique opportunity to apply theories learnt in the classroom in practice, and also broadened my engineering knowledge by learning engineering practices in the Mainland. For example, we had to consider snow loading on the building. 'Feng Shui' was also a factor in determining the building location and orientation. Energy conservation was another important factor to be considered as energy was not easily available.

There were field trips to the construction site of the primary school. During the trips, we were able to experience village life in the Mainland, and understand their culture, which is very different from ours.

Throughout the project there were a lot of people helping and teaching us voluntarily. I understand that they are all busy people and I greatly appreciate their willingness in helping the villagers and the enthusiasm they have in serving society. From them, I have learnt how to become a better person.

Adrian LAI, BEng(CivE) 2005, PhD 2010

I joined the Projects in the 2004 summer and I can still remember those happy and enjoyable moments where we (a team of 18 students) worked for the project. We worked together in understanding the building standards in Mainland (they were not taught in our curriculum) and preparing the design; travelled together to Guangxi for topographic survey and presentation of our design; and carried out fundraising for purchasing necessary furniture and stationery for the new school. More importantly, I was very delighted to have the support from the Department of Civil Engineering, in particular our advisors Dr D. Guo, Dr Y. Huang, Professor L.G. Tham and Dr R.K.L. Su, who had supported us throughout the summer.

Jerry TONG, BEng(Civ-EnvE) 2006

One year's work to benefit an entire generation!

Through building schools in remote parts on the Mainland, not only is the *Mingde Projects* nurturing the young people there; it is also nurturing batch after batch of Civil Engineering students who are given the opportunity to practice what they have learnt in the classroom and gain exposure to the real world.

During the design and construction of the school buildings, we were able to apply knowledge previously confined to the classroom on real life situations, from basic surveying and construction design principles to dynamics analysis and contract management. We learnt at the same time as we put them to practice, honing our skills in the process.

Besides, there was a lot of exchange between us and the students there and many friendships were forged. We got to see first-hand the hardships they had to face, and realized that nothing should be taken for granted. We feel grateful and inspired to give back to society.

William WONG, BEng(CivE)

In my first site visit, we had drama show, basketball competition and school visit. When the students took us to their temporary dormitories, I was shocked by the crowded living conditions and saw the urgent need of a new dormitory.

After the completion of Gewu Luo, I re-visited the site and stayed in the new dormitory. The experience was really exciting. Gewu is not a modern nor a gorgeous building (it has no air conditioning, hot water system or other luxuries), but it has a comfortable and warm living environment. I was amazed by what we had achieved in such a short period of time! It is the best building that I have ever lived in: it embodies the love and care of the Mingde members.

Sharon WONG, BEng(CivE) 2009, MPhil