

Exploring the Cross-Cultural Experiences of College Students with Diverse Backgrounds Performing International Service-Learning in Myanmar

Ruo-lan LIU

National Taiwan Normal University

Hsin-hua LEE

Ginling Girls' High School

Abstract

Background: In view of the growing globalization, volunteer service organizations, local universities, colleges, and student groups have begun extending their service programs from Taiwan to other countries. This study employs a self-organized, self-funded group of university students participating in international service-learning as its subject, and explores the service experience and the effectiveness of learning. The services they provided consisted of teaching guidance, community development and raising money for building nursery school and field-work.

Aims: The purpose of this study was to investigate the cross-cultural experiences of participants and compared the differences between the Taiwan students and overseas Chinese students from Myanmar who were returning to their homeland.

Research method: A qualitative method, using in-depth interview was adopted to conduct this research. Six college students were interviewed, including three Taiwan students and three overseas Chinese students from Myanmar.

Conclusion: The most important feature of the Seeing Home Again Service Team is the mutual cooperation between Taiwanese students and overseas Chinese students from Myanmar. The intercultural experience of participating in an international service-learning enabled the Taiwanese university students to experience the following forms of growth: personal experience with a different view of the world, growing understanding and appreciation of a different culture, awareness of one's own strengths, finding life goals for the future, challenging past thinking habits. The overseas Chinese students from Myanmar who had come to Taiwan to study underwent the following changes from their intercultural experience of serving in their homeland: increased possible career choices, reflections induced by the field survey and a new understanding of their homeland, along with an increased interaction with Taiwanese students.

Keywords: College student, cross-cultural experience, international service-learning

不同文化背景大學生參與緬甸國際服務學習跨文化經驗之探討

劉若蘭

台灣師範大學

李欣樺

新北市金陵女中

摘要

背景：基於志願服務國際化的趨勢，台灣各大專院校與學生團體開始將服務範疇從本島擴展到海外，參與國際服務的人數逐年增加。本研究以跨文化背景大學生自組自籌團隊參與國際服務學習歷程為研究主題，探討他們國際服務的學習成效，並瞭解不同文化背景大學生的經驗內涵。該團隊的服務內容包括教學指導、社區發展、田野調查與募款籌設托兒所。

目的：本研究目的為探討跨文化背景大學生自組自籌團隊參與國際服務的學習成效與不同文化背景大學生的經驗內涵，以作為大專院校學生參與國際服務學習之參考，進而有效推動跨文化背景大學生自組自籌團隊參與國際服務學習。

研究方法：本研究採用深度訪談之質性研究方法，參與者包括三位台灣學生與三位緬甸學生，共六位。

結論：本研究服務團隊最主要的特色，是參與成員不同文化背景的互動，彼此相互學習多元的行為模式，促成更好的學習成效與服務品質。到緬甸服務的跨文化經驗，促使台灣大學生獲得的成長包括：世界觀改變、更加了解與欣賞不同的文化、察覺自己的能量、尋找未來生活目標與挑戰過去思考習慣；而緬甸籍學生透過返回自己家鄉服務，產生的改變包括：生涯抉擇的可能性增加、田野調查引發省思與對於家鄉更深的了解，以及與台灣學生有更多的互動。

關鍵詞：大學生、國際服務學習、跨文化經驗

Background

Service-learning is the pedagogy that links academic study with the practical experience of community service. It promotes understanding of local issues as well as recognition of the interrelatedness of communities and societies across the world. (IPSL, 2008). Jacoby (1996: 5) describes service-learning as “a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service-learning.”

Exploring the impact of college students’ participation in international service-learning on their thinking, identity, as well as future career making decisions is an important issue. Although some study results have shown that participation in domestic or international service learning experiences can help students to pay more attention to social justice and to take action in the related problems (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Keily, 2004), many students pursuing diversity and civic responsibility through international service-learning program have received a deeper understanding regarding global competitiveness. However, the learning outcomes of perspective transformation through critical reflection and behavioral changes still have not been explored in depth.

In view of the growing globalization of volunteer service, domestic universities, colleges, and student groups have begun extending service-learning programs from Taiwan to other countries. According to a 2006 survey taken by the National Youth Commission, Executive Yuan, the number of teenage students from Taiwan participating in international service-learning program increased steadily over a five-year period from zero in 2002 to 361 in 2006.

This study employs a self-organized, self-funded group of college students participating in international service-learning program as its subject, and the participants consisted of Taiwan students and overseas Chinese students from Myanmar. The purpose of this study was to investigate the cross-cultural experiences of participants and compared the differences between the Taiwan students and overseas Chinese students from Myanmar who were returning to their homeland. It is hoped that the findings of this study can provide a basis for the implementation of related programs and be of assistance to various organizations to achieve a win-win outcome among service subjects, volunteers, and organizations.

The Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Perspective Transformation

"Cross-cultural adaptation" can be defined as an individual's steady increase in adaptability and tolerance as he or she adapts to a new environment. Black, Mendenhall & Oddou (1991) suggest that cross-cultural adaptation refers to the changes in the role played by an individual and that individual's work unit culture after going to a foreign country, which includes dealing with such aspects of an unfamiliar culture as living habits, climate, food, health care, customs, political system, and language.

Bennett (1986) also described a model for the development of intercultural sensitivity. The model consisted of six stages to describe the individual passing from lack of experience and low tolerance to increased experience and appreciation for diversity. The six stages in this continuum are as follows:

1. Denial: there is physical and/or social isolation that prohibits the individual from contact with significant differences.
2. Defense: include denigration of the new culture's

differences and an assumption of one's own cultural superiority.

3. Minimization: This is an attempt to belittle any differences that exist, stressing the similarities of all culture.

4. Acceptance: this stage marks the shift from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism and is divided into two phases. First, there is recognition and acceptance of differences; second, there is a recognition and acceptance of some cultural values.

5. Adaptation: the individual develops the ability to empathize with a person of a different culture in many given situations.

6. Integration: involves the evaluation of events and situations in a cultural context.

These theories can be applied to international service-learning. When service-learning participants leave their home countries and go overseas to perform service, particularly in Third World countries, they will inevitably face the issue of cultural adaptation. Most of the literature regarding international service-learning has focused only on the short-term and positive transformative effects on undergraduate students (Hartman & Rola, 2000; Kadel, 2002). Kadel claims that the international service-learning experience fosters a commitment to social justice for many students (p. 59). Hartman and Rola state that as a result of their international service-learning experience, students often change their career focus and become more informed, caring, and affirmed students. However, the authors also doubt that whether these changes will continue throughout these student's lifetime (p. 21).

According to Mezirow, who has perhaps the most well known theories regarding transformative learning within the field of adult education, says that learning is "the social process of construing and appropriating new or revised interpretation about the meaning of

one's experience as a guide to action" (Mezirow, 1994, p.223). Central to Mezirow's thinking is the process to make meaning from our experiences through reflection, critical reflection, and critical self-reflection. He named this process "perspective transformation" to reflect change within the core or central meaning structures through which we attempt to make sense of our daily life experiences (Dirks, 1998). Multicultural service-learning allows students to learn through engaging in an experiential and reflection-oriented approach which addresses social issues and community needs, with special reference to their cultural context (Lai, 2009).

Service-learning in the Service-Learning Asian Network (SLAN) is organized as part of the academic structure of member institutions, and includes both international and community (domestic) service-learning. Since 2007, SLAN partners have been encouraged in designing research that would examine their own institutional service-learning programs, and the effects of the SLAN international service-learning student exchange on their campuses (McCarthy, 2009). Most research findings are as follows: Students enjoy having newly discovered autonomy. They enjoy friendship with their team mates and in some cases these experiences have encouraged students to rethink career, and life-style changes. Students also showed improved academic skills. Service-learning was supported students to become independent learners, developing learning strategies, self-awareness, problem solving and critical thinking skills. Other researchers have also documented the increased appreciation among participants for the rich heritage and cultural diversity among Asian countries. Particularly apparent were the benefits students gained from learning to understand and live among people who are different from themselves (McCarthy, 2009).

Establishment of the Seeing Home Again Service Team

International volunteer service is considered to be a very important part of participation in international activities. This inspired the establishment of the "Seeing Home Again Service Team." The Seeing Home Again Service Team enabled overseas Chinese students from Myanmar (most of whom were studying at NTU) to return to serve their own homeland, and, through its linkage with the NTU International Affairs Society's international volunteer service plan, also allowed Taiwanese college students to see their classmates' home country first-hand.

The Union of Myanmar is ruled by a military government. Apart from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labor, and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, most departments and cabinet posts are in the hands of the military. Myanmar's overall 21st century economic standards currently show little improvement from those prevailing before World War II, and may even be lower. In spite of this, Myanmar is blessed with fertile farmland that is very well-suited for agriculture. Compared with ethnic Burmese, the Chinese in Myanmar are extremely hard-working and often successful. Most of the successful business people in Myanmar are either Chinese or Indians. Because of this, it is widely believed that the Chinese live well and belong to the middle and upper segments of society and most ordinary people consist of poor Burmese. As a result, the gap between rich and poor is extremely great.

This is how the idea of contributing to Myanmar first inspired an international service-learning project to that country in 2007. At that time, the Seeing Home Again Service Team became one of a very small number of groups able to enter Myanmar to perform humanitarian work. The team's main mission was to

promote education, while also striving to improve the sanitation and health care of some villages in need. The members sought to rely on friendly interactions to improve the living environment of Myanmar farmers and improve the educational quality of overseas Chinese in Myanmar by providing innovative Chinese-language instruction. This, it was hoped, would help alleviate poverty, reduce illiteracy, and allow the team's members to do their part as citizens of the world.

Research Design and Implementation

This study employed qualitative interviews to collect views and thinking concerning various aspects of the learning experiences during the service-learning in Myanmar.

Research Field and Participants

This study employed the purposeful sampling method, using selected participants in order to meet the goal of the study. The NTU International Affairs Society's "Seeing Home Again Service Team" was founded by a group of NTU students. The team had a total of 17 members, and made a trip to Myanmar during the students' 2007 summer vacation for a period of 28 days of service and interchange sessions. The Seeing Home Again Service Team's 2008 trip to Myanmar included 15 volunteers, of which 11 were female and four were male. Fourteen of the team's members were currently college students (consisting of seven Taiwanese and seven overseas Chinese), and one was working at company. The Seeing Home Again Service Team enabled overseas Chinese students from Myanmar (most of whom were studying at NTU) to return to serve their own homeland.

The preparation and training courses were very thorough. Courses included Introduction to Overseas Volunteer Services, Cultural background of Myanmar,

Methods of Field Study, and Ethic of Service Learning. The members collected 1000 sets of toys, 80 text books for elementary and junior high schools and 12 thousands NT dollars for the fund of building a kindergarten in Myanmar. The projects for this service-learning include Chinese schools (primary and secondary school) of the life education and health education teaching, the nursery school fund-raising, the exchange groups (community activities serving children), as well as carrying out field research in order to obtain more information. They were doing reflections every night during the services by discussing their thoughts and feeling with each others and writing down later and putting on their website.

This study examines student service team that went to Myanmar in 2008, and compares the students'

learning experiences from different cultural backgrounds along with their impressions. The subject inclusion standards included (1) a high degree of willingness to participate in the study, (2) a volunteer performing service learning to Myanmar in 2008, (3) able to provide sufficient information about the learning experiences, (4) overseas Chinese students from Myanmar and Taiwanese each constituted one-half of the participants. As a consequence, the six respondents selected as interview subjects included three overseas Chinese students from Myanmar and three Taiwanese students. Only one of the six respondents was male student.

The following table is a summary of the six research participants:

Table 1

Summary of Participants

ID	Nationality	Sex	Overseas Service Experience	Major/ Grade
A	Taiwan	Female	Twice (Served as a service team leader in 2008)	A senior student in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, NTU
B	Taiwan	Female	Once	A third-year graduate student in the Graduate institute of Electrical Machinery, NTU
C	Taiwan	Female	Once	A second-year graduate student in the Graduate Institute of Anthropology, NTU
D	Myanmar Chinese	Female	Twice	A senior student in the Geology Department, NTU
E	Myanmar Chinese	Male	Once	A senior student in the Medical Administration Department, NTU
F	Myanmar Chinese	Female	Once	A junior student in the Department of Nursing, NTU

Procedure

The interviews were conducted one month after the participants returned from their 2008 trip to Myanmar.

Open-ended questions were used during the interview with questions like: Why did you choose to participate in the Seeing Home Again Service Team's 2008 trip to

Myanmar? What were the experiences and gain of this trip? Were there difficulties about preparing and doing the services? How did you deal with these difficulties? What have been the greatest challenges of your service experience? What have been the greatest triumphs or accomplishments of you? What were you most proud of? How did you think about yourself now and before? All interviews were tape-recorded and were then transcribed into written form word by word and the data analysis was carried out by open coding, axial coding and determining the initial theory.

Data Coding and Trustworthiness

Qualitative data were collected through interviews and analyzed through a constructivist, inductive process in which themes and patterns were discovered rather than predetermined (Manning, 1999). This study employed a three-part data and analysis process consisting of keeping interview journals, making interview transcripts, and compiling documents connected with the study participants (school's online profile, the Seeing Home Again Service Team's results report, and the participants' individual files). The data coding system consisted of using English letters to represent each participant's code and the six numbers to represent the interview date.

Four criteria were applied to evaluate the trustworthiness of this study: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established by using open-ended interviews, verifying participants' responses and asking participants to validate the findings. Transferability was established by use of variation in sampling, and analysis of a large volume of qualitative data. Dependability was ensured by using a peer review coding process and constantly re-coding the transcripts. Confirmability was established through

detailed review and critique of the data.

Research Results

The content of the interviews and relevant documents was employed to extract the insights gained by the international volunteers in Myanmar. It was discovered that in this study the experiences of the Taiwanese students and Myanmar students have some experiences in common, such as increasing personal awareness and growth, challenging past thinking habits and finding life goal, but there are many in differences. In the case of the Taiwanese students, the impact of serving in another country, with a different environment and lifestyle, has promoted their personal growth and the Myanmar students, having been studying away from home in Taiwan for several years, went back to their homeland, as participants with a service organization with different goals and expectations from their Taiwanese classmates. Upon returning to Myanmar, these students became more conscious of social situations than ever before. Their new awareness created new and deeper understandings, along with renewed efforts to make their short-term contributions, significant ones. The following is a discussion of the experiences of the Taiwanese and Myanmar students.

Cross-Culture Experiences for Taiwan University Students

The subjects in this study included three Taiwanese students, of whom A made his second trip to Myanmar and was the team leader during this session. The other two Taiwanese students, B and C, were performing service in Myanmar for their first time, and were both graduate students. Student C was a graduate student in anthropology, and bore responsibility for planning field survey tasks. Although this was the second time that the team leader had been to Myanmar, because the

service methods and recipients were different, he still had many new experiences. This was the first time the two Taiwanese students had participated in overseas service; they experienced relatively intense culture shock, which caused them to change their opinions and perform reflection. The following is a summary of the experiences and insights of the Taiwanese students:

Personal experience of a different view of the world.

The participants experienced a different view of the world when they encountered the different ways of living in Myanmar. According to Bennett (1986), the participants' intercultural sensitivity seemed to be between the Minimization and the acceptance stage. The abundant training courses before service helped them to recognize and accept different culture. For instance:

"I saw a very different part of the world during the service process, and personally experienced a different view of the world." and "My worldview underwent a tremendous change." (B081110)

"Getting out to see the world like this can show you that there are different lifestyles, and you can then take your pick. While in Myanmar, I discovered that I really don't like a technological lifestyle. I long for the simple life than we live in Myanmar. Of course we only lived there for three weeks; I'm not sure if I would say the same thing after living there for three months or three years." (C081121)

During the service process, the Taiwanese volunteers went from being part of the majority in their own country to being an ethnic minority at their place of service. The resulting mental transformation enabled them to learn with humility and respect the cultures of other peoples, as well as appreciate other places'

histories and cultures.

Growing understanding and appreciation of a different culture.

The Taiwanese students gained a greater understanding and appreciation of the overseas Chinese students from Myanmar by working together with them on their service team, and with their interactions with local Chinese students in Myanmar it also gave them much insight and inspiration. Lai (2009: 112) also notes that throughout multicultural service-learning, the participants are influenced to tolerate and accept the differences in people, pressed to go beyond the boundaries they have set for themselves, and pushed to see people and the world from a fresh and enlightened perspective. The following student feedback supports Lai's findings.

"The innocence and enthusiasm of the Myanmar students was refreshing and inspiring." (B081110)

"Although the students from Myanmar are often disadvantaged in Taiwan, they have tremendous group consciousness and cohesiveness. Their presence gave the service team intense solidarity." (A080526)

"The solidarity and enthusiasm of the Myanmar students really helped the team come together and feel a sense of closeness." (A080526)

"Interacting with the students in Myanmar forced me to change some of my thinking." (C081121)

"The Chinese-language school's principal showed great dedication to teaching and was committed to transmitting Chinese culture; his example brought to mind many values that have been neglected in present-day Taiwanese

society." (B081110)

Personal awareness and growth.

The participants' service work gave them better knowledge of themselves and increased their confidence, as can be seen from the following:

"The service work showed me my own abilities, and helped me discover my strengths." (C081121)

"What I gained from continuous reflection on my experience let me put the things I had done into perspective and gave me the energy to continue to participate in service work in the future." (A080526)

"The service work brought about a change in my interpersonal relationships and caused me to reflect on my existing lifestyle." (C081121)

Previous service learning research has provided evidence that self-confidence, social responsibility, civic-mindedness, self-esteem, and personal efficacy are positive outcomes (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001; Lai, 2009). Eyler and Giles found that service learning is strongly correlated with tolerance, personal development (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Finding life goal in the future.

Participation in international volunteer service activities can effectively increase the career options for the Taiwanese students. In Taiwan's very utilitarian cultural environment, students, who mainly attend National Taiwan University, are expected by their families, teachers, and society to engage in highly remunerative work after graduation; therefore, international volunteer service has expanded their horizons and can encourage them to consider a broader range of possibilities for the future.

"I think that one way the volunteer service

changed me is that it made me realize that this world is very large, and everything is possible. The trip also increased my courage. We encountered many unexpected circumstances, and our teaching plan was constantly changing. I never would've thought that I could do these sorts of things. So this is experienced gave me the courage to overcome the unknown. I think I will consider more possibilities when I look for a job. I don't believe that a graduate of an electrical machinery department necessarily has to work as an engineer. The experience expanded my thinking about life, and influences the way I think about my future." (B081110)

"The service is connected with the way I look for a solution when I encounter a problem in life. Many university students are still at a loss when they graduate; very few people are really sure about what they want to do. The trip gave me an opportunity in time and space to think this question over. When you see the world, you learn about people's different lifestyles, and you are better able to make a choice. I think the special thing about volunteer service is that the experience will gradually influence the participants. While participating in one volunteer service session will not necessarily clear up a person's bafflement with life, the experience indeed gave me the wherewithal to think about what I want from the future." (C081121)

After participating in this international volunteer service program and activities, the participants realized that this kind of service can become a long-term commitment. They saw the reality and needs of the world outside of Taiwan. No matter what kind of work

they do in the future, they will be able to apply this experience to their life and work, and passing to others service and love.

Challenging past thinking habits.

Contact with a different country and culture prompted the participants to reflect on their thinking and ideas.

"I try to avoid complacent thinking that things are just a matter of course. I try to think deeply about things, have a responsible attitude, and be respectful and interact properly." (A080526)

"I try to break free from my old habits and smugness." (B081110)

"My encounter with Myanmar gave me a very important insight. We are limited by our tendency to take the things we see as a matter of course. We couldn't have imagined some of the ways of doing things that we saw in Myanmar. Even if we had knowledge of what things are like there, we still would not necessarily know that we should respect others and respond appropriately. The logic and context of international volunteer service goes beyond field ethics and professionalism; it requires continuous effort, and one must be ready to think about things at a deeper level, and to give responsible service." (A08526)

"When we were at a temple day care center near Yangon, we saw that the ground had no asphalt, just stones embedded in clay. But was this really so exotic? No. When I showed photographs of the scene to some members of my family, they said that saw similar things during their childhood. These surfaces were used in Taiwan several decades ago. The

facilities inside the temple were so simple and crude that it was hard to imagine. There was a shack of boards piled together, and there was muddy water and a pile of trash on the ground. Many children were learning in a makeshift shack. Our job was to give out supplies when we saw this scene. But our giving out of supplies disturbed the students a bit, which made me wonder if doing this was the action of a giver giving to a receiver. The second thing was that, because we didn't have sufficient information, we found out after we had visited more temples that there were many other schools that were even poorer. We had given out all of our supplies to the first school we had encountered. So what we did was perhaps to cause resources to be unevenly distributed. I think that this blind spot was the result of our looking at the situation from the angle of a developed country, instead of from that of a poor country." (C081121)

Mulling (1995) proposed that stereotypes commonly arise during the service learning process. One of these stereotypes is due to a sense of superiority and identification of deficient cultures. It can be seen from the research data that the Taiwanese students became part of a minority while they were performing their service. Because of this, they were forced to think and appreciate the feelings of those being served, which also caused them to soften their original inflexible or preconceived thinking.

Service learning facilitates an increased awareness of stereotypes and assumptions while allowing students to begin to understand larger social issues that affect their service sites (Jones & Hill, 2001).

Cross-Culture Experiences for Overseas Chinese Students

Three overseas Chinese students from Myanmar were included in this study. Although they had lived in Myanmar before going to university, the service work took them to areas they had never visited before, it gave them an updated understanding of their homeland, and increased their concern for their country. In addition, the close interaction in this team established friendships with the Taiwanese students. Besides the same experiences of increasing personal awareness and growth, challenging past thinking habits and finding life goal with the Taiwanese students, the different experiences of overseas Chinese students are as follows.

Increased possible career choices.

Participating in international volunteer service encouraged some students from Myanmar to consider a wider range of career options for themselves because of seeing more needs in their homeland. While they bore the expectations of their families when they came to Taiwan to attend university, the Myanmar students were actually even more uncertain about their future career development than the Taiwanese students. They were unsure of whether to return to Myanmar or remain in Taiwan, and were not certain about what work they could do. The Myanmar students felt quite confused about their future.

"This service changed some things in my life. After I became clearer about this thing, I also began thinking about the medical management that I am studying, and I'm now in my fourth year, and don't know whether I should go to graduate school after I graduate. For instance, I have recently been wondering whether I want to attend graduate school in a subject like overseas Chinese education at

National Taiwan Normal University. So this service made me think about taking some different direction." (E081107)

"Because I am a native of Myanmar, this trip home gave me many very deep impressions. The first thing I thought about was what would I do on this trip back, and how I would feel about it. Afterwards, I felt that I should have the spirit of repayment. We grew up attending Chinese-language schools, and the service process reminded me that I had studied for five years in Taiwan and had made a bit of professional growth. So I hope that I can contribute what I have learned to my homeland." (F081122)

Reflections and new understanding of homeland.

Myanmar's military government has long kept the media under tight control, which prevents people from finding out very much about their country. Therefore, the "Seeing Home Again Service Team" trip to Myanmar gave these students from Myanmar an opportunity to rediscover their own homeland. The field survey allowed the participants to have new opportunities to better understand and reflect upon their homeland.

"This service experience caused me to have new insights about many of the things I saw. I formerly felt that Myanmar's Chinese-language education system was nothing wrong, but after going back, I realized that the environment should not be the way it is. Changes should be made. For instance, we asked the managers of the Chinese-language schools what the schools were for, and they told us that they were trying to pass on Chinese culture. In the past, when I was still

living in Myanmar, I would've felt that this was nothing exceptional, but I now feel that schools should give students a chance to enjoy future prospects." (E08117)

"The deepest impression I received from this service trip occurred when we visited a monastery school in the suburbs of Yangon. People's lives were really tied in the area where the school's students lived. I had almost no contact with that kind of poverty when I was living in Myanmar. But after I had seen it with my own eyes, I realized that the environment was so impoverished that the students had to kneel on the ground and write on a board instead of a desk. It had just rained when we went there, and the houses were dripping with water. When I saw those children, I thought: Heavens! Why does the world have such poverty that children don't have enough to eat and no desks to study at. Even the plastic sandals worn by the kids were all battered and broken. The children's growth was also stunted. I asked them how old they were, and they answered that they were nine years old. Nine-year-old kids in Taiwan are usually well-developed, but these kids looked practically emaciated." (F081122)

In the case of the students from Myanmar, the choice to study in Taiwan not only meant that they could have access to better educational resources, but that they could become motivated to make changes in their homeland. Taiwan's educational environment, social resources, teaching materials, and flexibility of thinking are all completely different from the situation in Myanmar. So this was one of the chief motivations of the Myanmar students studying in Taiwan. In the face of Taiwan's politics, economy, culture, and society,

Participant E expressed that she felt like a snake that had shed its skin. Having received the opportunity to serve their homeland, the overseas Chinese students wished to use what they had learned in Taiwan to change their country, even if oppressive political rule made it seem as if change would never come. Therefore this learning experience of the service session enabled the overseas Chinese students to enjoy incalculable growth.

Increased interactions with Taiwanese students.

The biggest reward for student D was the chance to make lifelong friendships with Taiwanese classmates. She felt that, regardless of people's nationality, love is the best international language. Student F mentioned that she had, because of her coursework and jobs, she had had very few chances to interact with classmates not from Myanmar before she participated in the service team. She made many good Taiwanese friends while with the service team; she not only admired them for their willingness to serve in Myanmar, but also learned a lot from them.

"The most rewarding thing for me was to train and toughen myself. I learned a lot of different things, interacted with many people, and made many new friends. Some of them have even turned into good friends. I think this counts as my reward." (D090501)

"In the past, when I wasn't in class, I would spend almost all my time at the dormitory working on reports, and I also had to go to work. I was like a stay-at-home girl (laughs). I seldom participated in any activities apart from when I was with my classmates from Myanmar. I feel that the Taiwanese students who went to serve in Myanmar were very brave. It seems like outsiders believe that

Myanmar and is a dreadful country, and people who go there might not come back. Particularly for those persons who grew up in Taipei, where life is convenient and food and clothing are abundant, it was a very admirable thing for them to go to a place where they couldn't speak the language and transportation was difficult. In our team, I learned the most from Wan-jung. Although she joined our team and a late date, I learned a lot from her ways of doing things and her attitude." (F090513)

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this study show that, in the case of the Taiwanese students who participated in the international service-learning, they were faced with having to travel to another foreign country, shift previous conceptions about that country, culture and people and experience culture shock. The Myanmar students, since they had spent many years studying in Taiwan, and had already undergone an experience of culture shock when they first entered Taiwan, had successfully adapted to Taiwan's education and lifestyle. Upon returning to their homeland, they experienced new awareness that they had not paid any attention to before. Upon reflection of these new insights, they ended up seeing things that they had never noticed before, and gained a deeper understanding of their country, along with a wish to contribute to their homeland. The intercultural experience of participating in international volunteer service enabled the Taiwanese university students to experience the following forms of growth: personal experience of a different view of the world, growing understanding and appreciation of a different culture, awareness of one's own strengths, finding life goal in the future, challenging past thinking habits.

For their part, the overseas Chinese students from Myanmar who had come to Taiwan to study underwent the following changes from the intercultural experience of serving in their homeland: increased possible career choices, reflections induced by the field survey and new understanding of homeland, and increased interaction with Taiwanese students.

One important feature of the Seeing Home Again Service Team was the mutual cooperation between of Taiwanese students and overseas Chinese students from Myanmar. In the process of these interactions, students from different backgrounds, that possessed different behavioral models when encountering each other, which enhancing the learning effect. The overseas Chinese students from Myanmar provided a wealth of cultural information about their homeland, and also learned much about their own country from the service process. In the case of the Taiwanese students, the service-learning experience has expanded their perspectives, and caused them to appreciate different cultures and lifestyle. According to this result, if overseas service teams can recruit participants with different cultural backgrounds, and provide sufficient training in preparation, this should further enhance the quality of service-learning programs.

As to the suggestions to volunteers involved in overseas services, it is very easy for volunteer service workers to fall into the trap of ethnocentrism, project what they know on the recipients of their service, and forget that other countries have different cultural backgrounds and social contexts. Because of this, service workers should try to avoid their previous habits of thought as much as possible. They should clearly understand their own positioning and needs, and take advantage of various channels to learn about the situation in their place of service. They should look at problems from all sides, absorb information, and avoid

being constrained by ethnocentrism. They should try to think deeply about things, have a responsible attitude, and be respectful and interact properly.

The training courses for the Seeing Home Again Service Team were comprehensive and practical; this training helped the students participating in volunteer service to sufficiently understand the service recipients and their culture, and allowed the students to prepare for their stay overseas. If it is possible to involve students in different majors and areas of specialization in the future, allowing them to apply their knowledge to service work, all will benefit and learn even more.

The students' self-organized, self-funded international volunteer team can accumulate even more ability to handle challenges and solve problems. If schools or other relevant organizations can provide timely support and guidance, and assist with training and reflection, this will give the students even more encouragement to participate actively and learn more. Ongoing reflection is the best way to truly learn from service, and will give participants even more energy to continue to serve society, cross geographical dividing lines, and become world citizens.

References

- Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(2), 179-196.
- Black, J. S., & Mendenhall, M., & Oddou, G.. (1991). Toward a comprehensive model of international adjustment: An integration of multiple theoretical perspectives. *Academy of Management Review*, 16, 291-317.
- Dirkx, J. M. (1998). Transformative learning theory in the practice of adult education: an overview. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 7, 1-14.
- Eyler, J., & Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where's the learning in service learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hartman, D., & Rola, G. (2000). Going global with service learning. *Metropolitan Universities*, 11(1), 15-24.
- International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership. (2007). *IPSL Declaration of Principles*. Retrieved November 18, 2010 from <http://www.ipsl.org/advocacy/declaration-of-principles.html>
- Jacoby, B., & Associates. (1996). *Service-Learning in higher education: Concepts and practices*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Jones, S. R., & Hill, K. (2001). Crossing high street: Understanding Diversity through community service-learning. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(3), 204-216.
- Kadel, C. J. (2002). Service learning abroad. In R. M. Romano (Ed.), *Internationalizing the community college* (pp. 59-69). Washington, D.C.: Community College Press, American Association of Community Colleges.
- Kezar, A., & Rhoads, R. A. (2001). The dynamic tensions of service-learning in Higher education. *Journal of Higher Education*, 72(2), 148-171.
- Lai, K. H. (2009). Developing leadership and cultural competency through service exposure attachment program. *New Horizons in Education*, 57(3), 105-118.
- MacCarthy, E. F. (2009). Where we are now: a review of service-learning among SLAN Colleges and universities in Asia. *New Horizons In Education*, 57(3), 8-19.
- Manning, K. (1999). Setting the context. In K. Manning (Ed.), *Giving voice to critical campus issues: Qualitative research in student affairs* (pp. 1-10). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Mezirow, J. (1994). Understanding transformation theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 44(4), 222-235.
- Torbiorn, I. (1982). *Living abroad: Personal adjustment and personal policy in the overseas setting*. New York: Wiley.

Authors

Dr. Ruo-lan LIU, Associate Professor,
Department of Civic Education and Leadership,
National Taiwan Normal University
[rl Liu@ntnu.edu.tw]

Ms. Hsin-hua LEE, Teacher,
Ginling Girls' High School, New Taipei, Taiwan
[c09292001@yahoo.com.tw]

Received: 10.6.10, accepted 10.8.10, revised 8.2.11, further revised 3.8.11.