

Example 7

Understanding our country: From reading books to first-hand experience

Ever since the return to China, Tuen Mun Catholic Secondary School (TMCSS) has desired that students fully and thoroughly understand their own country. Regarding the school curriculum, TMCSS emphasises on providing students with a complete Chinese history education. Mr Tang Hon-sun, the panel chairperson of Chinese History, has made adjustments to the curriculum for many years, rearranging certain topics of modern Chinese history to be taught earlier in Secondary 2 and supplementing them with self-learning topics focused on historical figures. This not only helps develop students' interest in Chinese history but also covers the Chinese History curriculum from ancient to modern times during the junior secondary years.

TMCSS also encourages students to join study tours on the Mainland, especially their self-designed Mainland study tours. Mr Ng Ka-lap, the teacher in charge of coordinating the activities, seeks to avoid making these activities mere travel tours with superficial observation. He spends a great deal of effort designing the tours with a variety of themes. For instance, the Pearl River Delta Study Tour allows students to learn about the changes brought about by the reform and opening-up policy, while the Shandong Historical and Cultural Exchange Programme and the Xi'an Historical and Cultural Study Tour allow students to appreciate the characteristics of Chinese history and culture.



Activities with teachers and students
in a Xi'an school.

“Students’ knowledge about the country should not be confined to the textbooks,” said Mr Ng. “They would not really understand the situation if we simply teach them based on the content of textbooks how the reform and opening-up brought about changes to China. They can verify what is written in the books by visiting the Pearl River Delta and seeing for themselves the changes in Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Guangzhou. This is especially the case in

learning history and culture. Students in Hong Kong cannot truly understand the essence of Chinese culture unless they spend time in the ancient city of this culture.”

Student’s Reflection: Xi’an Historical and Cultural Delegation

Chinese history was lifeless text in the textbooks, vague and cold no matter how teachers tried to explain it. However, with visits and understanding on-site, I have started to realise the greatness of ancient China in culture, science and technology, literature and politics, which are things every Chinese can be proud of.

Another feature of TMCSS’s Mainland study tours is that it arranges for students to make contact with local students and people and to work and eat with them. They also visit homes for children with disabilities and the elderly and engage in farming. These activities allow students to obtain the fullest understanding of grassroot Chinese society. Students are deeply impressed after taking part in these activities, which help them learn more specifically about Chinese society and promote reflection on their personal growth.

Over the years, the school has spent a great deal of human and other resources on planning various kinds of study tours, and these have been deeply appreciated by the students and highly remarked upon in the education sector. Despite tight schedules in school affairs in recent years, which have prevented teachers from planning their tours extensively and students have turned to participating in activities organised by the Education Bureau or external bodies, the students of TMCSS continue to care about the country and its affairs.



The chief of a village in Longguizhen, Qujiang County, explaining to students how to farm.

Student's Reflection: Experience Tour in Northern Guangdong

On this journey, we realised the inadequacies of Hong Kong students and the merits of students on the Mainland. For example, our students were reluctant to perform on stage and did not perform well, but the students in Shaoguan were well prepared and performed on stage with confidence and great effort. Growing soybeans at the Shaoguan farms was meaningful, but we experienced only little in that short time. We would have gained more had we been given more time to experience farmers' lives there.



Cooking dinner with local students in groups at Shaoguan Maba education base.

Visiting a primary school and building strong bonds with the students in Zengcheng.



Student's Reflection: Joint Secondary School Exchange Programme in Zengcheng

We should learn from the students on the Mainland. They conscientiously hand in homework and clean the campus. They develop strong civic awareness and aspire to serve the people and contribute to society when they are young. They have strong team spirit – they believe they are part of the group and seek consensus when faced with problems. I am deeply moved by their firm and united mindset. In contrast, the students in Hong Kong do not value the sophisticated facilities on campus. They emphasise individuals too much and yet are easily influenced by others, and many lack clear direction.

Student's Reflection: Exchange Tour in Jiangmen

After visiting Kaiping Diaolou (Watchtowers), we learned about a glorious period of Chinese history when a group of overseas Chinese sacrificed themselves for their families and relatives without complaint for the sole purpose of their families' happiness. They worked hard in foreign countries and made money to support their families. Eventually, they achieved their goals and returned home to buy land and build houses. However, they had to build protective facilities to shield themselves from bandits. They still had a hard time living in peace, and I thought they were miserable.

Student's Reflection: Visit to Guangxi and Dinner with Local Family

They received me with hospitality and politeness. I could feel the warmth being with them which is definitely genuine from their heart. During our chat after dinner, the hosts revealed their wish for their son to study in Hong Kong, and their son, a student, was very eager to answer my questions. They also taught me to write simplified Chinese and speak the Zhuang language. We had a wonderful evening, and I missed them a great deal when I departed.

Engaging in service learning in Nanning and caring for children with disabilities.



Organising activities for the elderly in social welfare homes.

Student's Reflection: Service Learning

Our target of service included children with intellectual and physical disabilities who had been abandoned. A child under my care was not able to speak much but managed to respond when I spoke and to make a victory gesture and smile for the camera. He engaged in games and was willing to share with others, giving his Christmas gift to those who asked for it. He was also willing to share candies with the volunteers. These children are disabled, but if we can see beyond our preconceptions, they are the same as ordinary children.

Student's Reflection: Understanding Chinese Society

Some people may ask whether the people and things we saw on the tour were carefully arranged, and whether we saw the true picture of Chinese society. Certainly, many activities would not have been possible without the assistance of the relevant departments, but many of the programmes were conceived and designed by our teachers, and it would have been impossible for all of the local teachers, students, elderly, disabled children, and farmers we saw to be professional actors. Playing games, having meals and chatting with them, you heard their thoughts and feelings, and you could better understand Chinese society and people's lives.

Teacher's Reflection: Passing on the Torch (Ng Ka-lap, Civic Education Coordinator)

I have taught and organised Mainland study tours at Tuen Mun Catholic Secondary School for many years, and the most touching aspect to me was the student who joined me frequently in the study tours in those years. She has become a teacher and is now active in her school, planning tours to the Mainland so that students can explore and know our country on their own, as she did.

If you are interested in the promotion of national and global understanding, read also Examples 11, 15, 22 and 23.