

# Our Tuao Internship (August 2010 )

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My sister and I have had a somewhat *'Turn Left, Turn Right'* (Chinese Movie) relationship in our spiritual lives. Her 3 trips to Payap Church of Christ in Chiang Mai, Thailand in 2005 and mine to Chiang Mai and Tuao in November/December 2006 were defining moments for us spiritually. After she left for Japan, we would frequently share about our respective churches and encourage each other to keep serving and walking right with God. It was sometime in 2008 when I realised that we had both been serving, but had never served together! So we prayed for an opportunity and one did arise when we were able to intern in Chiang Mai once again, but together this time. Some people say that the hardest people to love are your family members (Proverbs 17:17), because you don't have a choice! I guess that is true to some extent – serving and living together after 3 years of being apart and 'doing our own thing' certainly was not a piece of cake. But the 4 weeks we spent serving together were a greater blessing than a trouble as we shared our thoughts with each other and led activities together, learning to work together and take care of each other.

Spending 2 weeks in Tuao this time was certainly the providence of our Almighty God. We had gone to Chiang Mai thinking it would be our only opportunity to serve together before my sister starts working, as Singaporean and Japanese students have no overlapping holidays. But who would have thought that the Youth Olympic Games would cause NTU's school schedule to be delayed by 3 weeks, and **only** NIE's schedule in particular, to be delayed by an extra week? I was and still am so thankful for this God-given opportunity. Truly, *'My cup runs over'*! I was eager to share with her the place and people who are close to my heart, and to let her take a look at a possible mission field or place of service, bearing in mind her return to Singapore next year.

*'Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.'* – Jeremiah 33:3

I remember praying this verse to the Almighty God on the 2<sup>nd</sup> morning of the December 2008 trip to Tuao, Philippines. It was exciting to return to the mission field which had taught me so many things, particularly after having nearly completed my National Service. 3 years on, I find the same verse on the 2<sup>nd</sup> morning of this trip as well. And indeed, the Lord was faithful and showed me great and mighty things, which I did not know.

*'So how is everyone there? Have \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ grown up? J'* – Some Tuao 'alumni'



Some things in Taribubu (the village) & Tuao (the municipality) have changed since 2006. A few more buildings have popped up, and hey, there even is a new Congressman! (Our favourite Dr Manny

Mamba whom we met on the 2008 trip has been ousted from power by his cousin, who isn't a Mamba. But for those who are aware of the politics in that area: No fear, the Mamba family still has the Mayor and Asst. to the President positions firmly in grip).

Yes, some things have changed, but many have not. I remember feeling very touched one night at a house visit, just thinking about the many villagers we have come to know over the years. These aren't just Filipinos, or our 'mission objective', or villagers, or farmers. These are **people**, people with **souls** and **lives to live**. And I am so thankful that I can call many of them **my friends**. I am thankful that they are willing to be my friends, even though I am so different from them. It touches my heart to know that even 2600km away from Bukit Purmei, I have another home, in Taribubu, where I can be myself and am accepted for who I am. Much as we have seen this church grow up, this church has seen us grow up too! Much as we have served & attempted to teach this church, I think this church has probably served & taught us more than we know. The preacher Brother Jhun Ma, whom I am proud to call my (very eccentric) friend (haha!), has been playing Adam Sandler's 'Grow Old With You' on the guitar since I taught him the chords last May and I remember that on the last night, he said that he hopes to grow old with the Taribubu and Singapore Christians together. I pray that all of us **will** run the race together, not leaving any behind, but stretching out to catching a brother or sister who is falling, pushing each other towards the goal in Christ Jesus!

One 'surprise blessing' that I want to thank God for was the opportunity to sit at the feet of Brother Ed Poblete, an evangelist in Ada, Oklahoma. He is a middle-aged Filipino who split his schooling years between the Philippines and the US. I guess we could say that he is somewhat of a mentor to Brother Jhun, as he had worked under him in a church planting project outside Manila earlier this decade. For a man of his stature and accomplishments, Brother Ed is such a humble and unassuming man (M.A.R.C.H. for Christ was his brainchild) and puts his lessons across with a powerful type of simplicity. His sermon on the ability of Christians to 'go beyond ourselves' because of God's presence in our lives (*'more than conquerors'*) on Sunday morning moved my sister to tell him 'I think I needed to hear that', while his lesson on worship in the afternoon was exactly what I needed to hear. He encouraged us to view worship on Sunday mornings as a meeting with God (*'For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.'*) and challenged us to be as fearful, reverent (and hence, purposeful) as the prophets of old when coming into the presence of the Almighty God, King of the Universe.



Because Brother Ed was only around for the weekend, my sister and I hardly talked to him, yet he told me on 3 separate occasions how impressed he was that the young people of our church were taking time to come to Taribubu every year. One curious thing happened though: Upon finding out that my sister and I are single ('Single-poreans', as I joked to him), he told us that he'd be glad if we could meet his children! While it might have been a passing comment, I was amazed at how he thought well of us despite not knowing anything about us except the fact that we had come to Tuao to serve God. It reminded me of Sister Babes, who had other richer and more glamorous suitors, but

says she chose Brother Jhun **'because I knew I wanted to serve God all my life'**, and also of Brother Dan, who says he chose Sister Lala over others because he could serve **with** her.

We also had the opportunity to watch the Captain Mendoza hostage taking incident on Live TV after dinner. It was quite a memorable experience, because such happenings (if they ever take place in Singapore) are never aired in such great detail over here and I guess that results in one less perspective. As the drama unfolded before our eyes, we really could feel the tension in the air. I remember that Brother Jhun, Sister Babes and some other villagers were quite worked up about it, because this lapse in national security spelt trouble for the country's economy and for Filipinos working overseas! The next morning, Brother Jhun received an 'S.O.S.' SMS from Sister Ella Agayam who was working in Hong Kong, asking for prayers for safety because some Filipinos in Hong Kong were attacked publicly. It was then that I felt their anxiety too, because Sister Ella was the church member who had hosted me during the home-stay in my 1<sup>st</sup> trip! And we knew her husband and family too! Brother Ariel's fiancé was also working in Hong Kong. This incident was the talk of the town over the next few days, and we even used it as an example in our home Bible studies (to not build your house on your career, but on Jesus *'the Rock'*, the true foundation of our faith).



Perhaps one of the most memorable experiences over the 2 weeks was the mountain climb. Having climbed it 4 times before, I was somewhat expecting a fairly quick walk (there were only 6 of us this time and we set off at 8am). But in an experience that probably summed up my main learning point this trip, I would say that this was my most challenging climb ever. Having to wait for others is not something that comes easily to me – it is one of my weaknesses, a *'thorn in my flesh'*. But through this climb and through this trip, I think God was teaching me to wait for my sister (even if it means having to be weaker: *'to the weak I became as weak'*), just as she has waited for me in my many weaknesses.

Running the Christian race is not an easy task. If you are running fast, running with those slower than you might be even more difficult. But let's not forget that we all run out of gas sometimes, that we all have weaknesses. And it is in these weaknesses that God's strength, not ours, *'is made perfect'*. It is in the *'marred'* nature of our pottery that *'the hand of the potter'* will *'made it again into another vessel'*, for *'as the clay is in the potter's hand'*, so are we in God's hand!

*'Take me, mould me, use me, fill me,  
I give my life to the Potter's hand.  
Call me, guide me, lead me, walk beside me,  
I give my life to the Potter's hand.'*  
– 'The Potter's Hand'

– Irvin Wan

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Hygienic living conditions (good sanitation), a constant supply of electricity, and the availability of clean water: These are not considered privileges but *prerequisites* for normal living in both Singapore and also Japan, where I have been blessed to spend most of my past 4.5 years living and studying.

Prior to deciding to go for the Tuao internship, the daily devotion I did based on Jeremiah revealed that I was in danger of “settling”. Sure, I’ve had my fair share of downs and spiritual challenges during my time in the Land of the Rising Sun - doing your entire degree in a foreign language that you picked up in less than a year while living on your own in a different culture with no one who shares your background located within a 2.5 hour radius of you is no piece of cake. However, I have been blessed, and by God’s grace, I know that I’ve not been in want in the last 4.5 years materially and physically speaking.

And so in the same way that the Israelites ‘settled’ in their sin and disobedience to God, it would have been easy – perhaps too easy – for me to ‘settle’ in my comfort zone and pamper myself with, for example, a well-deserved summer vacation in Singapore or some other exotic location across the globe.

Not to say that taking a break is wrong – after all, God rested on the seventh day, after He finished creating the world. But I am also well aware that once I start work next April there will be fewer opportunities to get out of my comfort zone and stretch myself in a manner that only university students have the time and energy to do. In my Christian fellowship group in Japan, our theme for the year 2010 is “Move up, move out, move forward!” – but the question that has constantly been on my mind is whether or not I’d be able to *move it* when God reveals to me that I should.

And so, I prayed that God would grant me that opportunity to move out of my comfort zone, and a few weeks later, my brother asked me if I’d be interested in doing an internship with him in Tuao. Two words: Prayers answered! ☺

I learnt so much in the short 13 days in Tuao (although the precious time I spent there seemed much longer than that to me!) – about gratitude to God for the abundance we’ve been blessed with in Singapore/Japan, about the innocence in the smiles of the children there, about Godly contentment (which is great gain) in the midst of constant power failures, about submission to God and His control over Nature (even if that creature of Nature in question – a locust – found its way most unceremoniously into my bed in the dead of the night), about how the chubby lizards of Taribubu actually look quite cute while wriggling up and down the walls (as long as they don’t fall off the walls because of their err, weight) and the list goes on ☺ Haha.

But these are the 3 main lessons that I’ve learnt from this internship:

## **1. God created Man to work/labour, and not to be idle**

One thing that really impressed me was the industry of the women in Tuao – be they young or old, farmers or church workers. I experienced a mini culture-shock when I found out that the women working in the church at Tuao (Sister Babes and Sister Jane) wake up daily at 4am to prepare breakfast, do household chores and subsequently continue to hand-wash all the clothes in the morning, before preparing food for lunch and so on. It really felt like there wasn’t a moment in which they were not doing anything, and as I watched and participated in those activities with them, I was reminded of the verse Genesis 2:15 “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and

take care of it." While having adequate rest is important, God certainly didn't create men or women to laze around and while the time away to one's own fancy.



And so my challenge to myself would be to work and not idle in my final semester in Japan. As I've cleared most of my credits (by God's grace) and am left with only a couple of classes and a thesis to write, it would be only too easy to become idle and 'relax' before starting work next year. Please pray for me, that I may work with my hands and take proper care of the 'Eden' that God has placed me in for the next half a year for the glory of God.

## 2. Worship God the Creator, not the created



I have never, in my life, been around Nature so much! In Tuao I experienced what it means to live in the midst of Nature: the rolling hills, the greenery, the incessant crowing of the cockerels every morning at around 5:30am, the yelps of the dogs outside, shouts of children playing, watching the carabaos/ horses/ goats go about their daily business, watching as ducks and their adorable ducklings occasionally waddle in and out of the church building as if they owned it, and even having the opportunity to share the room that I was sleeping in with a bat on one fateful night!

But in my case, I realized halfway through the internship that 'the created' that I was in danger of worshipping was not Nature but... *Electricity!!!* Or rather, the convenience that comes with having electricity in the house. At the start, I couldn't understand *why* there were so many frequent power outages, how the electric companies could possibly keep turning off the power for 'maintenance work' every other day, or how the villagers could deal with this so serenely, and at times, even with smiles and laughter! It was simply mind-boggling. Coming from Singapore and Japan where the constant supply of electricity is a given, I had always taken for granted that I would have access to electricity 24/7, because it was "my right", and more than that, because it was a necessity for "normal living".

However Jeremiah 16:20-21 says, "Do men make their own gods? Yes, but they are not gods! Therefore I will teach them – this time I will teach them my **power** and might. Then they will know that my name is the Lord." Amen to that! During the internship God humbled me by showing me how having electricity is a privilege, not an entitlement or a right. The same is true with our God-given gifts/ abilities/ environments. The Lord has every right to give AND take it away from us if we start thinking that we aren't able to live without this talent or that environment. My prayer, therefore, is to be submissive to the true power and might that comes from God, and to know that in any given situation, God, and not electricity or any other created thing, is Lord and Master of my life.

### 3. True love, as exemplified in Christ, comes with sacrifice



I learnt this lesson twice during the internship – the first was in the story of how Sister Babes went through so much pain and suffering to give birth to her and Brother Jhun Ma's wonderful baby Jed (who, although is only 2 months old, is fondly nicknamed "the master of the house"...haha).

Sister Babes has Antiphospholipid Syndrome, or APS, which is an autoimmune disorder in which the body's immune system reacts against certain normal substances present in blood. A person with APS will have a greater than average tendency to form blood clots, and is associated with greater odds of pregnancy loss (recurrent miscarriages). In order to have a successful pregnancy, she had to inject herself daily with heparin, which is a blood thinner that prevents blood clots.

Sister Babes shared about how she cried everyday because with every injection there would not only be pain but an outflow of blood from the spot where she was injected; and yet she went through all of that just so that her son Jed could be born into this world, and to live life abundantly in Christ Jesus. Sister Babes shared that at times, she wondered why she had this condition when all the other ladies in the village had such an easy time getting pregnant and giving birth to numerous babies (to the point where some of them even tried aborting their pregnancies). But she shared that God is the Great Provider, that He heard their prayers and both she and Brother Jhun Ma are just so full of

gratitude to God for their son. I learnt then that true love manifests itself not in words but in deeds; in the giving up of self for someone else – even if it costs your pain, tears and blood. But the result of that sacrifice is thankfulness and joy that comes from experiencing the providence that only God, and not Man, can grant us.

The second is something I experienced personally during the mountain hike. We were scaling some steep rocks on the way to the halfway point (Brother Ariel's hut) when Brother Oscar (a church worker) offered to take my hand and help me up the rocks. Not being very confident of my physical strength or agility, I readily took his right hand in my left as he climbed up ahead of me and moved to pull me up. However, suddenly, in a split second, he lost his grip completely and slipped off the edge of the rock that he was climbing on. His whole body including his legs were dangling off the edge of the rock in midair. And because he was holding a huge container of water in his left arm, the only thing that he was clinging on to that was keeping him from plunging downwards were the fingers of my left hand. Looking back, it was literally a scene from one of those Hollywood blockbuster films – the only thing missing was a sea of boiling lava or a raging ocean with sharks swimming in it underneath us.

Thankfully Sister Marissa and some of the rest managed to help him up and no further harm or injury befell anybody. But the lesson I learnt was that in the moment that Brother Oscar lost his balance, I realized, with surprisingly clarity, that I couldn't keep him from falling without getting hurt myself. I knew I had 2 choices: Let go of his hand and spare myself the pain of watching the flesh of my fingers get torn from the friction against the jagged rocks, or sacrifice my fingers and hold on to him to break his fall. To be honest I was afraid of the pain and of getting hurt, but I simply couldn't let go, and even now I still believe that it was only God's grace that gave me the courage to hold on.

In this experience, I only got a few scratches on my hands, and yet this whole episode had frankly been quite shocking for me. I realized how shallow my 'love' had been; that even though I hadn't let go, all I could think of afterwards was the pain I felt and how I could possibly continue the hike in this condition. In 1 John 4:10 it reminds us, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." My fingers were hurt in order to help break a brother's fall. Christ was pierced, spat upon, humiliated, made to bleed and crucified for the forgiveness of our sins. What I experienced wasn't even a millionth of what Christ experienced and yet I didn't know if I was prepared to give more. I confessed my selfishness to God and asked for His forgiveness for my inability to love the way Christ loves us.

But I rejoice at having experienced this, I rejoice that God once again revealed the depth of His great love for me through this episode. Through this internship I've learnt about gratitude, industry, submission to God's sovereignty, and over and above everything, Christ's sacrificial love for us.

I am still a "work in progress" and have a long way to go. But I take heart because God, the master Potter, is not done with me yet. In Jeremiah 18:4, it states that "the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him". In the same way, I give thanks and rejoice because God used my experiences in Tuao to reshape the parts of me that were "marred" in order to form me into a pot that is more pleasing to Him. My prayer is that He will continue to do as seems "best to Him" with my life, so that in everything and through everything – even my weaknesses – God may be glorified in my life.

– Candice Wan

