

Title: Peace Through the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance

Location: Mekou Village, Longzang Township, Xinghai County, Qinghai Province, China

School: Lewis & Clark College

Students: David Willis (USA, Japan), Jesse Schouboe (USA), Sara Eichelberger (USA, China)

Blog: <http://lcpeaceproject2010.blogspot.com>

#### Section I (a)

We worked with a local non-profit organization to build a motorcycle repair shop in a rural Tibetan nomadic village. The shop will create social and economic opportunities by providing extra income to villagers, making transportation easier and more reliable, connecting the village with surrounding communities, and giving children access to schooling.

#### Section I (b-c)

The project took place in several stages. First, we met with Mekou villagers and arranged for two local men to apprentice in a motorcycle repair shop. Then we bought construction materials and built the shop. Finally, we worked with villagers to ensure that the shop could be sustainable after we left. The two men now own and operate the repair shop, and their work has already begun to improve transportation capabilities in the village. Besides the \$10,000 grant from Davis Projects for Peace, we received funding in the amount of \$2,500 from Lewis & Clark College.

*Planning:* We worked with villagers, the village monk, a former village leader and Pentok representatives to find a shop location, skilled construction laborers, two willing and capable trainees, and a master mechanic to teach them. We also discussed who would manage the completed venture.

*Mechanic Training:* In the county town of Xinghai we found an experienced mechanic eager to pass on his skills. We discussed how the trainees would spend their time, and what skills they would need to run an effective shop. With the help of the monk and a former village leader we selected two Mekou volunteers to train with the mechanic. The two trainees were approved based on several criteria: 1) young (under age 30); 2) from a large family (thus fewer obligations towards herding or other forms of income generation); 3) no history of drinking, fighting, gambling, or smoking; 4) literate; and 5) enthusiastic and interesting in running the shop. Both trainees worked hard during their apprenticeship and were excited to start work.

*Building Construction:* We found a location for the shop in the village center, on a plot of land owned by a former village leader who offered to donate the property free of charge. We measured the space with an old rope, and Tsomo, operations manager of Pentok, ordered all the needed construction materials and tools. We transported these to Mekou via truck, along with a solar panel to power indoor lighting. We then hired two skilled laborers from another village, and they led a team of volunteers in tearing down the old adobe structure and building a new red and cement brick building to house the shop. The construction took seven days to complete, thanks to the expertise of the hired laborers and the hard work of the 30-50 villagers who volunteered their time each day.

*Making the shop sustainable:* Our team took a variety of measures to make sure that the shop would be profitable and able to address the needs of the local community. We stocked the repair shop with a supply of extra parts and tools, so the shop mechanics can perform repairs promptly. During their training the two mechanics also established a supply chain from Xining through Xinghai, so they can order more parts as needed at fair prices. The shop's ongoing relationship with Pentok will allow the organization to monitor and oversee the future of the project, and to give management advice if necessary. In addition, Pentok representatives and the two mechanics determined a pricing scheme based on other shops in the area, to ensure the shop is both reasonably priced and profitable. We left funding with Pentok for the mechanics to undergo

another one-month training session this winter, so they can become more familiar with engine repair and electrical wiring. We believe that more skilled mechanics will boost the shop's chance of success and increase its usefulness for villagers. The mechanics are young and enthusiastic with few other commitments, so they are unlikely to leave due to other obligations.

*Beneficiaries:* The main beneficiaries of this project are the 750 Mekou villagers and the surrounding population of Tibetan nomads. In the village, one in every three people owns a motorcycle.

*Partnership with the Pentok Institute:* Working with a local organization, the Pentok Institute, was instrumental to the project's success. Run by two young Tibetan women, Pentok helped to break down language barriers, lower costs, and made planning much easier because they already have a standing relationship with Mekou Village. Furthermore, they have a network of contacts that includes village leaders, laborers, and construction suppliers. Stan (the first and only university student from Mekou) and village leaders were vital in recruiting volunteers and ensuring there was communication via cell phone between all parties involved in the project.

*Difficulties:* The main difficulty we encountered during our project was unpredictable weather. As a nomadic Tibetan village remotely located in Western China, Mekou is not easily accessible due to poor road quality and limited transportation routes to the village. This summer Qinghai witnessed the highest levels of rainfall in years, leading to severe flooding and making travel to Mekou impossible for several weeks.

We also found that because of Mekou's remote location, it was difficult to communicate with village leaders, skilled laborers, and other people vital to the success of the project. Thus, we encountered numerous delays because we did not always have access to phones or phone reception.

Finally, our project took place throughout the busy summer season. During this time, villagers herd livestock or dig caterpillar fungus, which can earn a family most of their annual income. Summer is also the height of the building season, since construction in villages such as Mekou can take place only during the warmer months. Thus, it took us longer than expected to find skilled laborers for construction and villagers who could take time off to train as mechanics.

## Section II

We define promoting peace as creating equal social and economic opportunities for individuals of diverse backgrounds. In the short-term, the motorcycle repair shop provides jobs and income for several people. In the long-term, the shop gives villagers in a remote minority area improved access to schools, healthcare, markets, and income, allowing for integration into the greater Chinese society.

This summer has taught us that any sort of development work must be done in close cooperation with local experts and with the people whose lives you will impact. This is the most efficient way for a project to achieve its intended goals, and the only way to understand the ripple effects that a project may have within a community. Thus, listening to others with an open mind and communicating clearly can have a huge effect on the enthusiasm of team members and the effectiveness of the project.

### Personal Statement:

"This project taught me that the only way to create targeted and meaningful change within a community is to work closely with local people and experts, keep an open mind, and have fun while doing it. Through teamwork and perseverance, we created new opportunities for 750 villagers."



*David, Jesse, Sara and Tsomo meet with villagers to talk about the project.*



*Men arrive on motorcycles to discuss village affairs and make offerings to the mountain gods. Jesse and David wait on the side for the village leaders to arrive.*



*One of the trainees dismantles the old adobe structure. In its place, we built a brick and cement building to house the motorcycle repair shop.*