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# A Changing in Rural Education in China - Guizhou Forerunner College

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Senior Thesis Project

Final paper

Scripps College

Xiameng (Rene) Xiao

Project Title:

*A Changing in Rural Education in China---Guizhou Forerunner College*

## **I. Conceptual Premise**

The subject of the project will be a short video on my summer volunteer experience at the first non-profit charity college called Guizhou Forerunner College (GFC) in a rural village in China. GFC is located in the rural village called Huishui in Guizhou Province in southern part of China.

It is the first non-profit funded college in China, Guizhou Forerunner College aims to support the underserved low income, blind, and minority communities in the Guizhou Province of China by providing education through innovative teaching. The school started its launching process in 2007 and had its first class of 360 students in the fall of 2009. Professors are all volunteers coming from all over the world. There are 38 in total right now and most of them are from US. As a participant involved with GFC's life for two months, the project would be made through my perspectives on showing not only GFC, in a larger content, to show the characteristics of GFC with comparison to education in poverty areas in Southern China. Besides the techniques learnt from editing courses, the theories and histories of cinema verite and documentary genre will be applied and being the inspiration for the project.

The French term Cinema Verite which means truth cinema, came from the French film movement in 1960s. Cinema verite which is direct cinema

displays the objective truth in documentary. Cinema verite documentary portrays events as they unfold events are portrayed as they unfold, without having the presence of a camera influence those events or any staging or playing for the camera to shape those events. "The less-obtrusive, light weight 16-mm camera, zoom lens, fast film stocks, and superior recording equipment in the 1960s led to the rise of cinema verite documentary during that time"(Giannetti). Successful leading participants of this genre were Ricky Leacock, Donn Pennebaker, and the Maysles brothers and Frederick Wiseman who made numbers of documentaries that captures people's lives in various sites such as school, government, hospitals, etc, such as *Titicut Follies* in 1967, *High School* in 1968, and *Law and Order* in 1969. He shows the interactions among people with minimum editing and no voice over. The cinema verite continued the movement toward the realism in films and demonstrated a different approach to documentary filmmaking. The project will lean toward cinema verite documentary genre. The project will try to use diegetic sound rather than using voice-over or background music. It leaves audience to understand and feel the most direct ordinary life situation of the characters at the college.

The College's motto "Integrity, Love, Nobility" reflects its goal of cultivating well-rounded individuals who are passionate, physically and mentally strong, socially responsible, as well as possess integrity, a strong work ethic, and gratitude. I choose to focus on "Love" in this project. Guizhou is ranked as the poorest province in China while it actually owns most abundant natural and cultural resources in the country. Students selected from these extreme poverty families all live with lowest incomes and suffers different kinds of living difficulties. GFC's idea is to use education to alleviate poverty situation. GFC's

funding creates opportunities for these students to change their destiny of their lives and have a brighter future. The project will share the most unforgettable and meaningful memory from my experience from observing the changes in students under the help and love from volunteers.

The definition of boundary here refers to nationality, language and cultural background. Volunteers and students all come from diverse living background. While the students only speak Chinese and volunteers only speak English, this language barrier were never a problem for the volunteers. They keep trying to communicate and let the students feel their love and care through actions without language limitation. Students are all recruited from extremely poor families that could not afford further education. Each single person at GFC, from the president to the chef in the kitchen, is a volunteer. They rotated in the students' home recruiting process and are assigned to take care of certain number of students' study and lives. All the students have never taken English classes before which was thought to be the biggest problem and challenge at the beginning. While none of the 38 volunteers speak Chinese, they nevertheless put in all their efforts to teach the students English, tirelessly correcting their mistakes one by one. After 8 months in June 2012, students have all become more confident and are no longer scared of foreign languages anymore. There is one scene I remember from an interview with two blind students. They said volunteers are not only teachers. They are more like family members and friends for lifetime. Volunteers come to this rural village, and quietly leave their love on the land without asking for any payback. Their name might fade from memories after some year, but their love will forever stay in our heart.

The format of the project would be video around five minutes. The contents in it will include two major interviews with two volunteers. The camera also documents the students' regular class period, interactions among students and volunteers, new school department launching process, student recruiting and student home visits. The two interviews will include about 40 questions in total such as: Is there anything happened on you since you have come here you think is really unforgettable? What was your motivation at the beginning to be a volunteer and come to Guizhou Forerunner College? How do you see your relationship with students have changed?

The beginning of the video will be an introduction about one minute to the poverty part of china and how the education system looks like in the poor area. It will make a great comparison with GFC and make it stand out with its special characteristics on volunteers and students. The rest four minutes will be shown with footage on class period, interactions between volunteers and students and home visits. There will be no voice over in the four minutes. The selected interview footage of two volunteers will be the main narratives that linkage among different parts. The story of how volunteer's love has influenced students' life will be heard and seen in volunteer and students' own words. Audience will be able to understand and feel life at Guizhou Forerunner College personally by watching this video. The first minute of the video will make a comparison with the later parts of GFC which will make audiences to see the improvements of rural education in China today.

## **II. Process**

The production schedule of the project will be divided into two main sections: shooting and editing. By the end of October all the footage will be collected, including the prior existing footage collected during the summer and the main GFC volunteer interview that took place in San Jose, California. The second part of the schedule starts the last week in October and goes to the end of November. All of November will be dedicated to editing and revising the footage, which will begin with the rough cuts and end with the final project.

The editing outline allows the editing process to be more organized. The outline includes clips in each part of the project and how the 5 minutes are divided under each section. Before any image shows on screen, subtitles will appear on screen with providing the audience with the information that the Guizhou Province with displaying the location of GFC: "For decades, Guizhou Province has been reported as the poorest province in China, based on the The "Human Development Report" shows that the GDP in Guizhou Province in 2005 was only 0.491 the average GDP per capital was only 3600 RMB (568 dollars)." This will give clear background information on the environment in which the project is located. The first 30 to 40 seconds in the project will be a short clip found online to introduce the educational reality in rural part of China. A voice-over will accompany the images, which will make a smooth transition from the overall education in rural China to the story of Guizhou Forerunner College. As GFC appears on screen there will be a short introduction, accompanied with a voice-over. The next image will be the school for about 20 seconds, where there will be short clips of volunteers introducing themselves and it will show their interactions with the students. Next, the interview with the volunteer will take over as the voice over for the next two to three minutes, to talk about the class,

students, home visits and their reflections and feelings toward their lives in rural China. As the volunteer speaks, there will be clips of the class period, home visits, short student interviews and interactions with the students. The end of the video will conclude with images of the school's landscape, such as academic buildings and the surrounding natural environments. The ending scene will show a picture of the school from a mountain top point of view and then end with the school logo. There will also be a voiceover at the end. The selected background music will be used as montage to reflect certain feelings that audience ought to get by seeing the scenes of rural education in China.

The driving force for this project comes from the volunteer experience this past summer. The school's method of alleviate the poverty gap with education makes me think of the rural educational reality in rural China. Most youth age from 13 to 18 suffers from the difficulty of unable to attend school due to poverty. Volunteering at GFC really makes me see the first attempt to change this educational poverty situation. Other than introducing the education methods of GFC, this project will provide audience a chance to see the reality and improvements of the rural education in China.

The project will try to achieve the goals of familiarizing the audience with the reality of rural China's education and to show the comparison between Guizhou Forerunner College and rural education. It makes GFC stand out, since this school gives provides a chance for people to get to know China's new ideas to alleviate poverty within education, which is important for the future. The editing outline gives a clear method of how and where the comparison will occur in the project and how the audience will be able to see the advantages of GFC, which make GFC stand out in a common rural village in

Guizhou, China. The voice over at the beginning and the end will provide a smoother transition between the images, as well as provide a better understanding for the audience on GFC.

### **III. Reflection**

The title of this project changed from “Love without boundary” to “A changing in Rural Education in China---Guizhou Forerunner College”. The focus of the video changes with the title as well from introducing the college to using Guizhou Forerunner College as a medium to introduce the rural education in China and its improvements.

The project faced two major challenges during its launching process, which are approaching the appropriate genre and organizing its content.

The first challenge would be its genre. Peers and professors defined the project as promo-video for the school from the several critiques during the process. My initial idea of this project has been modified several times in these past few months. The content also has been reorganized in order to apply to the goal that the project is trying to achieve. Instead of simply introducing the school through my perspective and experience, the project is now providing a quick insight into the rural education in rural and poverty areas in southern China. It uses Guizhou Forerunner College as an example to let audience see the changes and improvements have been made in education in southern China.

Due to the limited length of the project of no more than five minutes, I decided not to include any diegetic sound with the image or extra interview with volunteers in the video. However, during the final revision process, I did add in a short sequence of volunteers introducing themselves for

about twenty seconds. Audiences are supposed to understand any messages the project tries to pose in their own perspectives. Their directions on understanding the project message should not be interfered. The narration does not give any direction either with only telling the general information and facts of students and college itself. The more images shown on school in general and other scenes such as class period, home visits, the more concrete the content would be overall.

The primary content included only clips of the school, students and interviews of volunteers. As it was stated in my pitch at the beginning that the project will share my personal experience with everyone else and audience will see the special characteristics of the school. After the project theme modified, the content changed its concentration from only showing GFC to the overall education situation in rural southern China and comparing it to GFC. The first half of the video comes with narration to introduce the rural education difficulties with giving certain data on population, environment and education development in rural areas. The video then transit into showing characteristics of Guizhou Forerunner College in order to compare to the scenes at the beginning with clips of school environment and student and volunteer's personal impressions and experiences at the school. The project will stay away from the promo-video style without mainly focusing on the school's developments. Furthermore, GFC strives to revolutionize higher education in China, it will be the medium to direct audience to see the improvements and positive developments of education in rural and poverty areas.

The narration plays the most significant role in the video in order to deliver the correct message and guiding audience to understand the project

appropriately. The narration is divided into three major parts through out the video. Narration introduces the past and current significances of rural and poverty situation and how education has been influenced by these factors. Accompanying with the images, the beginning voice over lead audience to see the poverty situation and think about the consequences of poverty such as the lack of education. The second part of narration connects the introduction with the school scenes and interviews in the middle. After the interviews and scenes of the school, the narration will end the video with a short future forecast for the education in rural areas with showing the environment of the school and the natural environment of rural Guizhou areas in general.

The music sequences play an important role in this project. The music becomes the montage to denote the messages the images deliver and it directs audience to have the sense of sadness that the music assembles. There is two-background music used in the entire video, which split the video into two sections with the substitution of music. The process of music selection was also challenging with balance the level of music and the voice over. Music assists to create certain overall feelings such as hopeful or sadness. However, audience needs to hear the voice over in order to actually understand the information the project delivers. It was a challenge for me to keep the balance between the music montage and the voice over. Music needs to be heard at the same time with narration while it should not attract more attention than narration.

The project comes out as I expected as a piece of work that can show my knowledge in understanding media and my capability in production as a media studies major at Claremont Colleges. Although it started with confusions and misinterpretations on its direction and content, with all the help from

professors and peers, the video gradually develops into a meaningful project as the completion for my media studies major after four years. *A Rural Education in China---Guizhou Forerunner College* as the final video project not only reflects my experience and understanding on China's rural education and media studies career at Claremont, it also provides an opportunity for people to see the new ideas and improvements in rural education in China through my thesis project.

Citation for paper#1 (Conceptual premise)

<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rbeach/teachingmedia/module11/2b.htm>

Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies* January 21 2010 Edition 12