We believe that by connecting people from different parts of the world, we are drawing a greater picture of understanding and love.

Connecting stories of Myanmar: Ours & Yours
Every summer since 2008, some 30 HKU students have participated in the Migrant Outreach Education Initiative (MOEI) programme, organised by the Faculty of Social Sciences, to provide English-language education for Myanmar refugees and migrant children along the Moei River which forms the border between Myanmar and Thailand.

Participants in the MOEI programme are also instrumental in promoting awareness of the Myanmar culture on campus. Among them, a group of volunteers set up a non-profit initiative, Connecting Myanmar, in 2011. It aims to provide medical, educational and other services to the Myanmar refugees and to support them in reconstructing their communities.

In 2012, Connecting Myanmar organised five summer programmes in Mae Sot, a border town in North-western Thailand and Myanmar: the construction of a school and a playground, English teaching, a non-governmental organisation internship programme and a journalism project.

Volunteers were able to interact with local communities and understand what life was like living for long periods under military rule and for those refugees who were unable to return to their homeland.

Connections were made, and when the volunteers returned to HKU they connected with Myanmar students studying at HKU and organised public seminars, forums, and cultural events to raise the awareness among University members and the general public of the people of Myanmar.

This year, the book Connecting – Stories of Myanmar: Ours and Yours was published. It captures the volunteers’ encounters with the Myanmar refugee communities, their memories of the Myanmar people’s faces, songs, laughter and tears, and the moments when their hearts were touched by the joy and sorrow, love and lives in the country.
The book

**Myanmar In My Eyes**
- Myanmar at a Glance
- The Best Thing in Mae Sot
- In the Eye of the Beholder: My Karen Students

**Sweet Memories**
- Share Your Experience
- M:1 O:/ E : / I:D
- Let’s have FUN! Conversation with Ray Chan on the Ray Doll Project
- Wonderful Country, Wonderful People
- It’s all about Love
- Love Burma, Love Life
- A Little Birthday Wish
- If there is only one place I want to go back to…
- Road to Umpiem

**Lessons Learnt**
- Lessons Learnt
- The Truth behind Happiness
- My days as Sayama in Mae Sot
- Memories Beyond Words
- Teacher, Teacher to Connecting Myanmar

**Commentary**
- What we talk about when we talk about Volunteerism
- Removing the Rose-Coloured Glasses
- On Power Relations in Myanmar
- A Foreigner’s Commentary on Yangon Rainy Season 2012
- Burma at a Turning Point

**Words from Beneficiaries**
- Volunteers Make a Difference
- Schools & Parents Have Their Say
- Feedback from Myanmar’s Heart Development Organisation

**Tips for Volunteers**

Tips from students to those people who would like to volunteer in Myanmar

You are connecting people to Myanmar by sharing the book with others
The Truth behind Happiness

Joanne Yan (BBA(Law) 2010, LLB 2012)

In June 2012, Joanne Yan and other eight HKU students devoted themselves to playground construction and health education at four Burmese schools for refugee children at Mae Sot, a border town in North-western Thailand that shares a border with Myanmar to the west. It is also a town with a large population of Burmese migrants and refugees.

“We will never forget the innocent laughter of the young Burmese refugee children who saw the new, yet primitive, playgrounds, almost as happy as if they were paying a visit to Disneyland,” says Yan. “We will remember the faces of our eager-to-learn Burmese colleagues who enthusiastically talked to us to brush up their English oral skills, and the Burmese refugees’ hopeful faces because their concerns were no longer about meeting the daily needs of food and water, but an opportunity to receive an education, even if they were tied to isolated refugee camps and had no nationality or identity of their own.”

“We had one of our most blissful times at Mae Sot because we appreciated the tiny bits of life that we had taken for granted, be they as simple as having access to running water. Reflecting on the Burmese refugees’ hopeful and grateful attitudes towards life, we found that we had missed out the most fundamental building block of life – happiness – while we were being swamped by our hectic lives in one of the busiest cities in the world.”
Wonderful Country, Wonderful People

Airi Yamamoto, a Japanese exchange student of the Faculty of Social Sciences

Last summer, Airi and her team assisted the local NGOs in building a school for the refugee children.

“I thought that we would be able to start building the school right away and complete our job in about a month, but the reality proved to be quite different. We were faced with a sudden disagreement from the Thai community, who objected to us building a school not for Thai children, but for Burmese migrant children. We continued to negotiate with the Thai community, while finding schools that needed the most help.”

“My fondest memories are things like the pineapple full of bees attracted by the sweet smell; Aiya, the restaurant where we gathered to hear the local bands and to learn about the local culture; the time I was sick from food poisoning; the D.K. Hotel and the staff who waited for us every night; the night market where we met the child beggars; the children who jumped on my back... I will keep contact with them and see these wonderful people again in the future.”
The Best Thing in Mae Sot

Yu Pei-hua 余佩樺 (BA, Year 2)

“Even though I’m free I am not.” Since the beginning of President Thein Sein’s presidency, thousands of political prisoners have been freed. However, they are still under surveillance, suffering trauma and stigma.

Pei-hua travelled to Mae Sot as a journalist for five weeks in the summer of 2012. She visited 20 NGOs committed to supporting refugees from Myanmar.

“Most of the NGO workers have to deal with their own problems, be they financial difficulties or mental trauma, but they remain as passionate as ever about their work, despite great difficulties. ‘It is my mission to work for my people. This is why I left my country,’ said a Burmese media worker about being exiled in Thailand.”

“Interviewees were pleased to share their stories with us, despite the fact that recalling their past was painful. When I returned to my country, a colleague asked me whether such generosity was attributed to the interviewees’ desire to make their situation known. This might be true. However, I believe that their kind hearts had greater merit. Some interviewees just started telling their stories without enquiring about our intentions. One interviewee let us film his reunion with his family and a gathering with family members and close friends who had not met for 18 years.”

HKU has been lending support to the people of Myanmar for years, inside and outside the country...
In sharing these stories, we hope you will be inspired to join our mission and form your own connection with Myanmar.

We invite you to start your journey: read our stories and write your own.”

Connecting Myanmar
www.connectingmyanmar.org
connectingmyanmar@gmail.com
Determined to be a university student

On My Way to HKU

2011

2012

2013
HKU holds that no student should be deprived of the right to enter HKU because of financial resources and background.

To celebrate the HKU Foundation Day in March, hundreds of primary school students from grass-root families, ethnic minority groups and diverse backgrounds were invited by HKU students to experience one day of university life, including lectures and tutorials, a mini High Table at Loke Yew Hall, sport games, and a campus tour. Since 2011, over 1,500 primary students have joined “On My Way to HKU” (向港大出發).

Service across borders : 30 destinations

In this summer of 2013, hundreds of students set off to over 30 destinations, including Ghana, Kenya and Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast) in Africa, Greece, the Czech Republic, Romania and Germany in Europe, as well as Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Korea and different provinces in China.

They continue the University’s mission to serve by organising over 33 service projects in Asia, Europe and Africa. They aim to advocate for universal primary education, promote gender equality, combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, eradicate poverty and hunger, improve maternal health and reduce children mortality.

More service stories: www.wp.cedars.hku.hk/web/sd/category/service-learning/