

Feedback to His Fellow Africans

Dr. Honda Hsu

By Hsieh Ming-Feng

As he woke from the bed, there were still some chill in the air. The scent of burning wood warmed Dr. Honda Hsu's heart. "What a familiar smell. I am finally home." Hsu immigrated to South Africa from Taiwan at the age of eight, and later returned to Taiwan in his late 20's. And yet Hsu still regards himself as South African.

Honda Hsu was so thrilled to have returned to the African continent that nurtured him. His childhood memories gradually came back to him. Smelling the burning wood common in all African households, on the first day to Beira, Mozambique, Hsu was homesick.

Grew up in South Africa, and later became a plastic surgeon in Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, Hsu never thought he would have the opportunity to return to African to serve his fellow Africans. "This great African continent gave me so much, and I could only return so little," he said.

Mozambique is a long narrow



country that stretches north-south along the eastern edge of Africa. Beira, located in the northern region of the country, speaks a language different than that of South Africa, one that is not familiar to Hsu. Maputo, is closer to South Africa in terms of geography and language, where a majority of the vocabulary is shared between two languages, making it much easier for Hsu when communicating with his patients. Furthermore, there were a few locals who had worked in South Africa who were fluent in the native languages, which made him feel a sense of nostalgic familiarity, sending him back to his adolescences practicing medicine in South Africa.

During the service, Hsu encountered

something interesting. Since there was a long line in front of the obstetrics and gynecology, he decided to help out. A 43 year-old woman came while he was there. “What seems to be the problem,” he asked. “I want to get pregnant. Doctor, can you do something,” she asked.

Hsu could only bring his hands together in a praying gesture. The woman saw and smiled. “She knew she was considered advanced maternal age, and bearing children would be difficult,” he said. His sincerity and humor immediately resolved a potentially awkward situation.

He came to realized something else. A major contrast between practicing medicine in Africa and in Taiwan was that Taiwanese are frank and straightforward,

while Africans tend to be obscure. Patience is therefore required to disentangle the true problem from all the allusiveness. For example, some men came to ask whether they have sexual transmitted diseases or not, but instead of saying “I have unusual discharge”, they would instead say “I pee” or “I have headache”.

With so many folks waiting in line, every doctor needs to treat patients in different fields of health care, combining physician, surgeons, gynecologist and pediatrician into one. Hsu, who was fortunate to have experience practicing medicine in South Africa, was not troubled by the diseases he faced. He was a plastic surgeon. On the first day of the free clinic, he encountered a 5-year-old girl who was scarred by her friend near the eyebrow while playing outside. Hsu and other healthcare workers stitched the wound for her.

When injecting the anesthetics, the girl only made a “huh” sound. “Injecting anesthetics hurts, but she didn’t cry one bit, letting us stitch up her wound without any hassle. She was really brave.” Hsu witnessed in these children both strong resilience and resignation to fate. If it was his daughter, she would be crying non-stop, he said.

Among Hsu’s patients, there were plenty of children with swollen abdomen, to which he could do nothing about.



Their staple diet is mielle meals (ground maize). Over time, the children begin to suffer from malnutrition caused by the lack of protein in their diet, and the subsequent fluid retention develops into swollen abdomen.

These children reminded Hsu of his time as a resident physician in South Africa. One day during community service, a children who had been reduced to skins and bones. During his early morning shift, a nurse came rushing to him, “that child stopped breathing!” Everyone rushed to help.

When the attending physician arrived, he simply said, “There’s no

need.” “Why,” Hsu asked, clearly puzzled. The attending physician replied, “he starved to death.”

The reply overwhelmed Hsu with grief. As much as he love children, he walked away from pediatrics and never looked back. “We have failed them...” Hsu said. Even now, Hsu still gets teary-eyed when thinking about it.

“If there’s something I can do, I am willing to contribute what little strength I have to help the place that nurtured me,” Hsu said. Growing up in Africa, Hsu Hung Ta would never miss the opportunity to overturn the lives of his fellow Africans.

Chinese Medicine Clinic under the Mango Tree

Dr. Cheng I-Che

Translator: Doris Shieh

By Chang Li-Yun

Traditional Chinese Medicine is a strange concept to people in the African regions. How would the patients react when they see long needles sticking into their bodies?

Chinese Medicine doctor Cheng I-Che had some tricks in his sleeves. At the beginning the student translators standing next to the patients turned out to

be the most fearful. They kept asking Dr. Cheng: “Should we explain something to the patient first?” Dr. Cheng had already considered this point. Fear of pain is not only limited to the African people. Even in a civilized country where acupuncture treatment is well-understood, people are still frightened. Therefore, his method is to count “one-two-three” with the patients to