Building up A Network of Cooperation

In a recent interview in Hong Kong, Mr. Gu Renfa explained some principles of Amity's development work. Gu is an Associate General Secretary of the Amity Foundation and director of its Rural Development Division.

1. Amity develops projects of a creative and pioneering nature.

We take pride in the uniqueness of Amity projects and hope that they will be "copied" in other places. Just a short time ago, we opened the Amity Rehabilitation Center for Mentally Handicapped Children in Nanjing. In China we find very little education for people with mentally handicapping conditions. In addition, training usually starts only at the age of 14 or 15, after attending primary school. We knew that better results could be obtained if the mentally handicapped were trained from childhood. Hence, we approached the Children's Mental Health Research Center in Nanjing and in cooperation with them, we established this Rehabilitation Center for the training of children, starting at the age of 3.

This class is the first of its type in China. The aim of the Center is not only the education of mentally handicapped children, but also the development of teaching materials for use in the educational process of these children. These types of teaching materials do not yet exist in China. Once developed they can be used in other parts of the country where there is a great demand. We believe that this project is an innovative model.

2. Amity cooperates with specialists.

Amity's primary involvement in social welfare projects is to assist those who are mentally or physically challenged. Yet, our Foundation is young. We do not have specialists of our own and must rely on adjunct specialists. For example, the Amity Center for Hearing Impaired Children utilizes teachers from the school for the mute and deaf in Nanjing, because they have experience in this area. To help us develop the medical aspects of this program, we sought the help of hospital doctors from the ear, nose and throat departments. While Amity supervises the Center's day to day work and general program development, the training of each child is the responsibility of the experienced specialists. This combination proves most effective.

3. Amity strengthens self-reliance.

When undertaking an Amity project, we seek not only to help the people concerned, but also to encourage local involvement as well.

Amity provides short-term assistance. We rely on people of the units we are working with for assistance and improvements. For example, the Renji Clinic in Zong Xian, Sichuan Province, staffed by retired Christian doctors, is run by the local church and uses its buildings. Start-up costs for this medical clinic came from local Christians. But they could only afford the most basic equipment and did not have funds for a laboratory or an X-ray machine. When we saw these conditions, the Amity Foundation provided equipment for a complete laboratory so that testing has become an integral part of the clinic's services.

4. Amity cooperates with local government agencies.

Amity is an independent people's organization which makes its own decisions with regard to its work. However, we also encourage the participation of local government agencies in our projects. We want to secure their support, tap their financial resources and engage them in finding workable solutions when problems occur. In general, Amity has received the welcome and support of local governments.

For example, in a very mountainous region in Yixing, Jiangsu Province, a small hydropower plant was built. This is an economically deprived area and Amity helped this project by contributing four fifths of the necessary funds for construction. We talked to the county government and they, in support of our work, provided the remainder of the money. With their help, the water department of the provincial government recommended a hydraulic engineer who later helped with the construction. The provincial government also granted permission so that the villagers could purchase building materials which are otherwise difficult to obtain.

5. Amity makes Christian presence more widely known.

When we plan or start a project, from the very beginning we let our partners know that the Amity Foundation was initiated by Chinese Christians and is led by Christian Church leaders.

Amity's work represents the kind of work through which Christians traditionally express their human love. Before liberation, Christians administered hospitals, schools and special welfare projects. Today, we are doing the same, actively taking part in China's development and looking at areas of special need. We are working together with those who love the people, love the poor, and who urgently need assistance.

In the Yixing project, we told our partners that major funds came from the Hong Kong Christian Council's "Five Loaves and Two Fish" campaign, a fund that channels Christian donations to various projects. Therefore, people in the village know that the funds for their power plant came from Christians who are concerned with their development.
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Secondly, while Amity's staff is small and concentrated in Nanjing, we develop projects in other provinces and cities and work with representatives of the local churches in these areas. In the summer of 1988, when parts of Zhejiang Province were devastated by a typhoon, Amity wanted to help schools and hospitals in that region to rebuild. We then asked the Zhejiang Christian Council to investigate the situation and to help us decide which schools and hospitals needed urgent help. The Zhejiang Christian Council dispatched a pastor to gather critical information and report it back to the Amity Foundation. The local people in that region knew that this person was a pastor of the Christian church and became aware that the church was involved in rehabilitation work and was willing to help them in their time of great need.

Finally, Amity gives priority to assisting Christian initiated projects. Quite a number of local churches all over China have founded little clinics, for which they set aside parts of their church buildings and recruit retired doctors who often are church members themselves. In Longquan County, Zhejiang Province, local Christians have even started their own middle school. Projects of this kind show the people how much the church is involved in building up society. Through supporting some of these initiatives, Amity helps to make Christian presence in China's society more widely known.

The German journalist Marietta Gesquiere-Peltz toured China earlier this year and visited Amity projects sponsored by the Christian Mission for the Blind (CBM). The following report is an excerpt translated from her forthcoming book "Reise im Schatten des Lichts" (Travel In The Shadow of Light), which describes the work of CBM in Asia.

The Christian Mission for the Blind has, during the last few years, become an important partner of the Amity Foundation, and vice versa: through Amity, CBM can be involved in China in a meaningful way. Xu Xunfeng is the Amity liaison for CBM. He remarks with a smile that he also has to teach. With his fluent English, the welfare organizations which cooperate with Amity are not the only ones who need his service.

He accompanies me to a huge school where special education teachers are trained. It was founded only in 1985, and is still the only one in China. Built to accommodate 700 students, the school now has an enrollment of 924. Twenty-two subjects are taught, focusing on work with the blind, with deaf-mutes and with the educationally handicapped. These future teachers come from all over China for the four-year course. At present, the school is still short of teachers, specialists and qualified educators. CBM is trying to send some teachers, for at least one term. All teaching materials have to be newly developed. Xu shows me a little booklet that CBM brought to China: "How to raise a blind child." It has been translated into Chinese and is now a great help to future teachers of blind children. Here is evidence that it is not always large amounts of money which are needed; inspiration and practical advice can often be of great help.

With a group of Chinese visitors we walk through the classrooms, caught up in eager discussion. The guests are school directors from other provinces on a fact finding tour. China discovers her handicapped!

In one room children are sculpting (oddly, their model is a Greek statue). In another room they are painting. Here some blind children learn to use their sense of touch; there, in a pavilion, they are busily making music with Western and Chinese instruments.

Somebody tells us, apologetically, that the new electrical teaching equipment cannot be used today: On Saturdays, this area of Nanjing has no electricity.

The and other limitations are very visible. The hostel where the future teachers live is hopelessly overcrowded, six to eight people in one room. Late-comers have had to make their homes in a shed, the "UN-Building," they call it, because laundry flies like multi-colored flags from the windows.

Tang Genyan, the program director, a small, busy man who seems hidden in his grey windbreaker, asks us into the reception room. Over a cup of green tea I try to ask questions, to understand the situation — I have only just been thrown into this changing China from a completely different world. Tang Genyan asks somebody to translate my questions.

Yes, this is the first attempt to improve the chances of handicapped children in the education sector. According to government statistics, about 6% of all Chinese schoolchildren are handicapped in one way or another. At present the government tries to provide nine years of schooling, but fifteen years are needed for a handicapped person to learn a profession.

I ask about the one child policy. A couple who have a handicapped child may have a second child, if a doctor certifies that the first child is handicapped. Chinese newspapers these days carry ads seeking marriage partners for handicapped people — a new phenomenon. The handicapped do not hide as much as they used to.

Why do so many people want to become special education teachers?

There are a lot of reasons. First of all, many people who want an academic career are looking for a chance to study. Teachers at special schools are better paid than those at regular schools — that is also a factor. And then — the Chinese people have some breathing space right now: there is economic growth, the small beginnings of prosperity. This leaves some room to care for those on the fringes of society. Now there are, at last, some doors open to outside help in many areas where it could not be sought before. CBM, for example, is now giving substantial assistance in the building-up of this school. Next term, an Australian specialist is scheduled to come.

And finally, there is room for a new social awareness, of which the school may be an example. One hundred students have finished the course and are now working in the provinces. Schools which include children with and without handicapping conditions have been opened: another new beginning in this country.
Amity Teachers Program Continues

For the new academic year starting in September 1989, Amity has recruited 62 teachers of English, German and Japanese language from eight different countries. This is a considerable drop from last year’s total of 85, as about 20 of the newly appointed teachers withdrew after the June events in Beijing.

The teachers’ orientation, held in Nanjing from August 27 to 29, saw a large number of returning teachers as well as newcomers, which made a valuable exchange of experiences possible. An important topic of discussion was how to balance the principle of abiding by government laws and decrees with that of standing for justice and helping the marginalized. It was unanimously agreed upon during the meeting that teachers in a cross-cultural setting are more than technocrats who only pass on language skills; yet they should not be crusaders who may earn a reputation for themselves, but at the same time get colleagues and students into trouble.

The head of the Jiangsu Provincial foreign affairs office was invited to speak on “China’s reform and Chinese students”. He gave a long report on the economic development of Jiangsu Province over the last ten years.

In a message to the sponsoring organizations, Ting Yenren, head of Amity’s Education Department, expressed his gratitude for their continuing support: “At this time in our history, I would like to reaffirm that we will always be with our people through our dedication to their welfare. We appreciate the teachers’ coming at a time when the Chinese people are in difficulty and when help is needed. We will treasure their presence and their contribution.”

Another Center for Mentally Handicapped Opened

Xijun cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony. The center’s board of directors includes health and education officials from Nanjing as well as representatives of overseas sponsoring agencies.

According to official statistics, China has more than ten million children with mentally handicapping conditions. However, training and rehabilitation programs for school age children are so far practically non-existent (see the interview with Gu Renfa in this issue). Encouraged by specialists from overseas, the Amity Foundation started this center, which enrolls children aged three and up. This experimental program is carried out in cooperation with the Nanjing Children’s Mental Health Research Center, where the center is also located. Since its earliest planning stages it has received technical advice from the Yang Memorial Center in Hongkong. A social worker and a head nurse, now working in the Amity Center, attended several training courses in Hongkong.

Before the official opening a pilot class had been set up, training a few children in basic skills in the fields of language, self-reliance in daily life, and relating to their surroundings.

It is hoped that this center may aid in the development of education for mentally and educationally handicapped children in China. Bishop Ting said at the opening ceremony: “The work of this center is a deeply humanitarian undertaking. This is exactly what the Amity Foundation with its name and principles stands for.”
Orientation and Mobility Training Course Held

Amity recently organized China's first “Orientation and Mobility” training program in Beijing for workers with the blind. The two and a half month program brought together 12 teachers from Beijing, Shanghai, Lanzhou and Kunming whose job it is to help blind and partially sighted people get used to living and working in the broader society.

Under the direction of Dr. Tom Blair, a Christian Blind Mission consultant from Australia, the program emphasized the need for greater self-reliance for the blind, and their integration into a “sighted” world. Said Xu Xunfeng, Associate General Secretary now in charge of Amity’s Medical and Health Division, “When people on the streets saw blind people shopping for groceries or boarding a bus, they refused to believe that they could not see. This shows how successful the program was!”

It was the hope of all participants that similar programs can be planned for the future.

Three Middle Schools to be Rebuilt in Sichuan Province

In July this year, some of the worst floods in living memory hit Sichuan Province in Southwestern China. Hundreds of people were killed, and economic losses have been very high. In cooperation with the Sichuan Christian Council, the Amity Foundation has decided to direct help towards the Wanxian area which has been worst hit.

Funds are now being raised to help rebuild three middle schools that were badly damaged. Two buildings at the Hexing Middle School in Liangping County collapsed, and Chenjiu Lower Middle School in Kaizhan County lost its library and all teaching equipment in the floods. Dongzi Middle School in Zhongxian County, a rural middle school located in a mountainous area with multiple ethnic minorities, lost a quarter of its buildings. This school has been selected in line with Amity’s policy of giving priority to assisting minority people, who usually live in poorer, remote areas. Altogether, 270,000 Yuan (about 73,000 US$) will be needed for these three schools.

Bible Production Reaches One Million

On September 28, 1989 the Amity Printing Company produced its one millionth Bible. Since its opening less than two years ago, the Company has printed approximately 600,000 Chinese Bibles (complete or New Testaments) in the old script, 300,000 in the new script (starting in the spring of this year), and 100,000 in five different minority languages.

General Manager Peter MacInnis closed his announcement of the latest production achievements by saying: “We are grateful to all inside and outside China who have worked together toward this end, and we give thanks to God who has made it possible. We pray that the help and grace represented in the first million Bibles will be with us as we continue to work to meet the Scripture needs of Chinese Christians.”

Hearing Impaired Children Complete Course

The first class at Amity’s Center for Hearing Impaired Children (see Amity Newsletter No. 8) has graduated, and the ten children have now entered regular primary schools in the Nanjing area. This pioneering program seeks to maximize the abilities of hearing impaired children so that they may learn and play together with their peers. Although there are 20,000 children with hearing disabilities in Jiangsu Province alone, this is the only center which addresses their particular problems.

Representatives from the Amity Foundation, the Social Welfare Bureau, related institutions and parents attended the closing ceremonies on August 28th. To the delight of all assembled, the children danced and did exercises to show what they had learned. A new class has already been enrolled for the second six month program.

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