“To Each According To His Needs”

Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan Get Bibles in Their Own Languages

An Interview with Dr. I-Jin Loh

Q: Dr. Loh, you are on the Board of Directors of the Amity Printing Company in Nanjing. In what capacity?

A: The Printing Company is run as a joint venture between the Amity Foundation as the Chinese and the United Bible Societies as the foreign partner. I am one of those representing the Bible Societies.

Q: Last year, Bibles represented approximately 90% of the company’s output. Is that still so?

A: Yes, if the demand for Bibles keeps increasing, we may soon start running a third shift, that is a night shift.

Q: All Bibles printed by Amity are for use in China, yet not all of them are in Chinese.

A: That’s right. About 7% of China’s population do not belong to the Chinese-speaking Han people, but make up 55 officially classified national minorities. Some of them are quite large groups, like the Uyghurs in the northwest with 6 million people or the Tibetans with 4 million; others are tiny groups of a few thousand. Most of them live in remote border areas in poor economic conditions. Through their provincial Christian Council four ethnic groups from Yunnan in southwestern China have ordered Bibles in their mother tongue from the Amity Printing Company. Of the 1.45 million Bibles and Testaments we have printed since the press started operation in December 1987, we have produced 30,000 copies of the Lisu Bible, 10,000 of the Jingpo Bible, 30,000 copies of the Miao New Testament and 20,000 copies of the Yi New Testament. Apart from that, we have printed 20,000 Korean Bibles, but the Koreans, of course, live in the northeast.

Q: How much does a Lisu Bible cost, for example?

A: Production costs for one copy of the complete Bible amount to about 12.5 Yuan. But the Chinese Christian Council sells them much cheaper. Sometimes they are even given away free, if some of the Christians cannot afford them. Those ethnic groups are located in remote, mountainous areas and live a nearly self-sufficient life. Their annual cash income per person is as low as US$20. One Yi Christian sold everything he had in order to study theology. Since his local church could not afford to support him fully, he sold his water buffalo and his pigs for cash. If we followed the principles of a market economy, we would never print Bibles in these minority languages. The people just have no spending power. Instead, we follow the principle “to each according to his needs”. All Christians should have a personal Bible in their mother tongue. I believe this philosophy is shared by the China Christian Council. I might add that we, the United Bible Societies, would not do anything before full consultation with our friends from the church in China.

Q: What percentage of those nationalities are Christians?

A: This is hard to say. The churches in those areas have not come up with statistics yet. But take the Jingpo people, for example. According to a Chinese census of 1982, they number 93,000. We received an order for 10,000 Jingpo Bibles. If they, for a start, use them to provide each family with one Bible, then roughly a third of all Jingpo families must be Christian, even if their population has meanwhile grown far beyond 100,000. But this is not more than a guess.

Q: Are those minority languages officially acknowledged by the Chinese government?

A: Oh yes, China not only allows them to use their languages, but also tries to preserve them and encourages them to develop their own literature. Part of their primary school education is held in their native language. And Christians, of course, worship in their mother tongue.

神爱世人

神爱世人，甚至将他的独生子赐给他们，叫一切信他的，不至灭亡，反得永生。因为 神爱世人的儿子，不是爱世人，只爱那爱世人的，爱到如此地步的。神爱世人，甚至将他的独生子赐给他们，叫一切信他的，不至灭亡，反得永生。因

“For God so loved the world…” (John 3, 16-18) - above in Miao (Pollard script), below in Chinese
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Q: Have they had Bibles in their own languages before?
A: The groups I just mentioned, yes. The Amity Press produces reprints from existing copies. But as a matter of fact, it was not always easy to secure suitable copies. Many Bibles were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. You may imagine how a Bible looks after decades of use. Most of them were completely blackened. People often live in one-room buildings with an open fire inside, and everything gets smoky. Therefore, we had to rely on copies which we found in Bible Society libraries abroad.

Q: How old are those Bible translations?
A: They are more or less from the beginning of the century and were prepared by foreign missionaries. Since most of these minorities did not formerly have a written language, their present writing systems were developed by the missionaries. In 1906, Samuel Pollard of the Bible Christian Mission published the New Testament in Miao. The Miao and Yi peoples still use Pollard script which he invented for that translation. The Lisu use Fraser script. Fraser, sent by the China Inland Mission, translated the New Testament for the Lisu in 1938. Both Fraser and Pollard developed syllabic scripts which have a vague similarity to Latin script, with all kinds of additional symbols to represent the syllables. Those scripts are now reprinted by the Amity press, using photographic procedures.

Q: Which language is used for theological training in Yunnan?
A: Chinese. Yunnan Theological Seminary was officially opened in September, 1989. This seminary is specially designed for students from the minority areas. But they come from 12 different ethnic groups. There is just no other way than to rely on Chinese as a medium of instruction. I have just returned from this seminary where I held a workshop on Bible translation with some of the students there.

Q: Then there are still groups waiting for the Bible to be translated into their own language?
A: Yes, indeed. But as a matter of fact, Christians from all groups are demanding new Bible translations, because they find the already existing translations rather difficult to understand. The missionaries' command of the local languages was probably not that good. That's what led the seminary president, Rev. Gu Huakong, to start a translation project for all interested minority groups. The twelve people who attended my workshop came from the Jingpo, Miao, Lahu, Lisu, Wa, Yi and Hani nationalities.

Q: What was the purpose of this workshop? I presume that you are not going to translate the Bible into all these languages?
A: Of course not. I don't even know their languages properly. It is our principle that the translation work must be done by the local people themselves. My task is to teach them translation methods. None of the prospective translators knows Hebrew or Greek. Hence, they cannot translate the Bible directly from the original. They have no other way than to take Chinese translations as their model. Basically, they will use two different types of translation. One is the Union Version, published in 1919, the other one is Today's Chinese Version, published by us here in Hongkong in 1979.

Q: In what way do the two translations differ from each other?
A: The Union Version is closer to the original as far as the formal language structure is concerned, that is, wording, grammar and style. That's why we use it to check for formal correspondence. But precisely because of this formal fidelity this version is difficult for the modern Chinese speaker to understand. Our translation of 1979, in contrast, aims at functional equivalence. Using modern language, it renders the original in a more natural way, without being bound by the grammatical structures of the original, and is therefore easier to understand.

Q: Do you want the translators in Yunnan to try to find a compromise between those two types?
A: No. I encourage them to follow the translation theory which lies behind the latter type. It is the common opinion among today's linguists that a text, any text, is a means for communication. In communicating you try to get a message across to an intended receptor. The form of the language has to serve this purpose. So when we speak about a translation's fidelity to the original, we must focus on the meaning of the original rather than on its form. It is the message which has to be transported faithfully; we cannot compromise on this. The primary question must always be: what is said in the original, and not how it is said. Therefore it is better for them to base their translation primarily on the modern Chinese version through which they at least grasp the right message.

But on the other hand, this method has its risks as well. The more a translation is free in terms of its formal correspondence to the original, the more easily the message might at some points be distorted. The danger of this is even greater, if you cannot refer directly to the original, but have to rely on another translation. Therefore they will learn how to use the Union Version of 1919 as a second step to check the accuracy of their draft translation.

Q: If I understand you correctly, a translator must sometimes abandon the form in order to keep the content. Can you give an example of such a case?
A: During our workshop we translated Psalm 23 as a case study. In some of their languages the sentence “the Lord is my shepherd” makes no sense. People might get the idea that God is a human being, a shepherd by profession, and that they have to be reborn as sheep in order to become Christians. They understand the phrase literally; since they don't have a long literary history, they are not accustomed to using metaphors. That's why one of the Yi participants translated this phrase in the following way: "I am not afraid of anything, because you, Jehovah, look after me and are always with me."

Q: When will the new translations be available from the Amity Press?
A: That's impossible to predict. We are still at an exploratory stage. It will certainly take years before everything is completed. All those translations are concerted efforts, worked out in consultation with the provincial seminary and the local churches. They will work them out by themselves, since they are the ones who need them for their big task of spreading the gospel in their own ethnic groups. But it is a great privilege for the Amity Foundation and the United Bible Societies to be involved in a serving capacity.

This interview was conducted by Gotthard Oblau on February 28, 1990, at the Asia-Pacific Regional Centre of the United Bible Societies (UBS) in Hongkong. Dr. I-Jin Lob works as the Centre's translation consultant. As Asia Opportunity Coordinator, he is also responsible for UBS activities in those countries of the region which have no national Bible Societies, such as China, Mongolia, Vietnam and Cambodia.
Keeping Amity Going

Here they are at a glance: all the Amity staff members from the five divisions in our Nanjing headquarters and from the Overseas Office in Hong Kong. These are the faces behind Amity: those who answer your phone calls, make the field trips, translate reports, drive visitors around, negotiate project plans, keep the books, type letters, seek financial support, edit this Newsletter... and whom you might bump into when you come to visit Amity in Nanjing or Hong Kong.
Keeping Amity Going

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Overseas Coordination Office
Eva Lai Woon-Ching
"Having Received, We Also Serve"
Amity Supports Private Women's College

Since 1986, the Amity Foundation has consistently sent foreign teachers to Hwa Nan Professional Women's College in Fuzhou. This year Amity is supporting the college with five English teachers: its largest sponsorship in any institution. Lois Cole, formerly an Amity teacher at Hwa Nan herself, introduces this unique school.

Located on a hilltop overlooking the Ming River as it winds through the city of Fuzhou in Fujian province, Hwa Nan Professional Women's College is a rarity in contemporary China. The first accredited private women's college to be established in People's China, it owes its inception to a group of women in their retirement years. All former alumnae of Hwa Nan College of Letters and Sciences (1908-1951, founded by the Women's Foreign Missionary Society), they garnered enough funds to resurrect their alma mater in 1984.

According to Dr. Yu Baosheng, the college's eighty-six year old president and founder, after China emerged from the Cultural Revolution, she and her colleagues were motivated by a sense of responsibility to raise the level of education and contribution of Chinese women to society, and felt compelled to abide by the old Hwa Nan motto: "Having received, we also serve."

Unlike its predecessor, which was a liberal arts college, the new Hwa Nan offers a three-year professional training program in four areas: Applied English, Childhood Education and Counseling, Food and Nutrition, and Clothing and Design. Emphasis is placed on an active student-directed approach to learning, and students are encouraged to apply themselves through practical experience. Presenting fashion shows and exhibitions for the general public, running a student canteen, engaging in a one-month internship for a foreign trade company, and using standard intelligence tests to evaluate local children's aptitudes and to provide current information regarding childhood development for parents are all a part of the Hwa Nan learning experience.

The unique all-female environment of the college also gives the students an opportunity to learn to take initiative and to be assertive, skills which might otherwise be inhibited in a classroom with male students.

"In co-educational schools, girls are easily defeated by male students. Girls have been brought up to be gentle and shy, and to be narrow minded. Normally, boys answer first in the classroom. But here at Hwa Nan, the emphasis is on girls, and we have many chances to discover our abilities," said a third year student in the Applied English Language Department.

While the school has gained recognition and financial support from both local authorities and organizations abroad because of its unique characteristics and effective contribution to the community, it still has its daily struggles.

"Money is always a great concern for us, since we are a private college and do not receive a definite amount from the government. Fortunately, we have the support and aid of three institutions: the Amity Foundation, the United Nations Development Program, and the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. But until our financial needs are taken care of, it is difficult for us to concentrate on improving the quality of education at Hwa Nan," said Zheng Yuanxuan, head of the Administrative Office.

Already in her fifties and considered the "little sister" among fellow administrators and full-time teachers, Zheng pointed out that younger teachers and administrators are needed. This year, in an effort to work towards faculty development, the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia is sponsoring a former graduate of the Applied English Language Department, Li Xiao Wu, to study in the United States. Upon the completion of her studies, she will return to teach secretarial skills at Hwa Nan.

Still very capable, the present Hwa Nan staff take on a work load which would be equal to that of "two or three teachers in other institutions," according to one staff member. "We work very hard. Some of the teachers come to work very early in the morning and go home late in the evening. Sometimes we even stay at the school. We do not care for fame or pay. When we receive money for the school, we always use it to buy something for the school. All the local full-time alumnae love their alma mater as much as their home."

This unfailing devotion has had an impact on students, some of whom pledge to repay Hwa Nan when they go out in society by doing whatever they can to aid in its development. Others appreciate the role model the teachers have presented for their own lives.

"I have learned a person should be honest, warm-hearted and always ready to help, and forgiving. Don't return bad things back to enemies," said a third year student of the Applied English Language Department. "Hwa Nan has something to do with this."

Lois Cole, who taught in China from 1987 to 1989, works in Hong Kong with the China Liaison Office of the United Methodist Church USA.

Project Proposals Published

At the end of March, the Amity Foundation published proposals for sixteen new projects for which overseas assistance will be sought. While some of them are duplications or extensions of successful projects already in existence, others are completely at the beginning stage.

The list includes projects in the areas of rural development (3), rehabilitation and special education (3), medical work (4) and education and personnel training (4). They range from well-digging to primary health care models and from the translation of textbooks for special education to a training program for rural English teachers.

As Han Wenzao, Amity's General Secretary, points out in his introduction: "We are committed to work at the grassroots and gear our projects towards those groups that are in greatest needs." Though only a small organization, Amity hopes to play a part in making life better for the marginalized in China.

Copies of the Project Proposals For 1990-1991 are available from Amity's Overseas Coordination Office.
Qinghai Doctors Trained in Nanjing

Anatomy lesson

Room 123 of the Teaching Building of Nanjing Medical University looks like any other classroom. But the women concentrating intently on their anatomy lesson aren’t your usual students. Aged between 23 and 43, with ruddy, weather-beaten faces, they are doctors with an average ten years of working experience. Graduates of Medical Middle Schools in Qinghai Province, they have been working in hospitals all over the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau.

Qinghai Province, with an average altitude of over 3000 metres, is one of China’s poorest provinces. Its climate is harsh and dry, making agriculture almost impossible. Sparsely populated, its grassland areas are inhabited by nomads of many national minorities, Tibetans, Uighurs, Hui and others. There are few big cities and even fewer roads.

As one of the doctors tells it: “From my hospital, I had to ride three days on a horseback to get to the nearest bus stop. The bus took another three days to reach Xining, the provincial capital. After this, the two and a half days on the train to Nanjing were almost a luxury.”

Not all of the doctors come from such remote areas, but all of them have been working in county and grassland hospitals that serve people in large areas. Badly equipped and with poorly trained doctors, these hospitals often cannot provide the help that is needed. Says one doctor: “Many of the Tibetan nomad women just give birth in their tents. Only when something goes wrong do they come to the hospital. But often we are days away, and by the time they reach us, we cannot save their lives, because we don’t know how to do surgery.”

In this situation, the Medical and Health Department of Qinghai Province approached the Amity Foundation for help. In cooperation with Nanjing Medical University, a one-year program was set up in the fall of 1989 to train younger doctors in two special classes. Participants were chosen by the Health Department. Among the 45 doctors now in Nanjing for training, 23 belong to national minorities. After completing their course, they will go back to their respective hospitals where they are eagerly awaited. “When my director told me I was going to Nanjing to attend this class”, says one doctor, “he said that he expected me to be able to do hysterectomies and other surgery when I come back. Now I hope I can learn enough here to be of real help when I go back.” Adds another: “It was very difficult for my hospital to let me go, because we have so few staff. I feel that I have the responsibility to learn as much as possible, because people then want to study from me what I have learned.”

The urgent need for this training program becomes clear in the statement of yet another doctor: “Because there was very little formal medical training during the Cultural Revolution, we have either old or very young doctors in our hospitals. None has had very much training, but the older doctors have a lot of experience, so we can rely on them. But now they are retiring one after the other, and there are no middle-aged doctors to take over their role. If it weren’t for this course, our hospital would be less and less able to help people.”

As a pilot project, content and shape of the course have been developed in close cooperation between Nanjing Medical University and the Amity Foundation. Now that the program has started, the doctors’ input will be equally important. With a high sense of responsibility and a great eagerness for learning, they are a challenge to their teachers. As the pilot project heads toward a successful conclusion, Amity hopes to set up similar classes for doctors from other areas over the next few years.

A Tibetan and a Hān Chinese studying together

The Amity Newsletter is distributed free of charge four times a year. If you would like to receive the Newsletter, or desire further information on any of our projects, please feel free to write.

Funding for the work of the Amity Foundation is from sources, both Chinese and foreign, religious and nonreligious, individual and organizational. Inquiries and suggestions concerning the possibilities of new project initiatives are welcomed, as are contributions for the direct support of the Amity Foundation. Checks or bank drafts made payable to the Amity Foundation may be sent to the Nanjing Officer.

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