"Unregistered Family"

Amity Co-produced TV Documentary About Abandoned Children

The old man, his baskets dangling from a shoulder pole, is shuffling through a small street. Here he picks up a piece of discarded paper, there a rusty tin can or an old bottle. At one heap of garbage he stops short - there is the weak wailing of a very small baby, abandoned in the midst of the refuse. The old man carefully picks her up, comforts her and carries her home in his basket.

Thus begins "Heihu" ("Unregistered Family"), a TV documentary jointly produced by Shanghai Television 2 and the Amity Foundation. It tells the story of Zhang Hongbin and his wife Liu Xiaoying. Without a job or a unit to care for them, they eke out a living by collecting garbage and selling what can still be used. Over the years, they have found more than twenty babies, abandoned in back alleys and road ditches, on garbage heaps and in public toilets. They have taken all of them to their home, a rickety little hut with a leaky roof, and raised them as well as they could.

"What else should I have done?" says Zhang Hongbin. "I pick up every piece of paper, how can I leave the babies?"

Life has not been easy. Not being members of a work unit or any collective, they were unregistered, a "black household". For them, there was no government help whatsoever. No rice rations, no medical care, no place at school for the children. Nevertheless, the family struggled on, with the children helping as soon as they were old enough to walk around. Food was scarce, and clothing tattered. But that did not put the determined couple off. "If we can't raise them to be fat, we can at least raise them to be thin" was their motto. They never turned a child away.

As time went on, the older teen-age children could take over some responsibility for the younger ones. Despite their grim economic situation, the family was closely knit.

Things started to change after a young man came across their hut on a Sunday outing. Shocked by what he saw, he wrote an article for a magazine. When the story rolled off the press, it was taken up by scores of other newspapers and magazines. Suddenly the family was famous. Letters came in by the hundreds; many people sent parcels with gifts of clothes and food. Party groups started to collect money for them.

But the fame wasn't all sweet. Within a few weeks, two more children were abandoned by their doorstep. "We know that you will take her and raise her well", read a note attached to the clothes of one of them. All kinds of shady characters began showing up at their hut, trying to cheat the family and profit from their fame.

But on the whole, the outpour of concern and compassion was overwhelming. Moreover, the government has now acknowledged the family as a registered household. And some of the older children have found paid jobs. "Now we can afford to send our younger sisters to school", says proud Zhang Meixian, the eldest daughter who works at a brick kiln. She herself has never been able to go to school, but is now being tutored in her free time by a retired teacher.

The TV documentary about the family was produced last year. So far, it has been shown on several local and provincial stations in China, and there is hope that it may soon be shown on national TV.

The publication of "Heihu" has touched a raw nerve in China. Ignored for a while, the abandoning of newborn babies has, in the last few years, become a well publicized problem. Children are abandoned because they are girls - their parents want their only child to be a boy. They are also abandoned because they are handicapped, or because the mother is unmarried. If they are found before they die, they will be raised in an orphanage. But few of them will ever find adoptive parents.

The Amity Foundation has been made aware of this problem through its cooperation with the Nanjing Children's Welfare Center, where many abandoned children live. Simply to give some funding to this institution did not seem sufficient. The production of the "Heihu" documentary is a first attempt at raising public awareness of this difficult issue. The film takes a strong educational stance: It appeals to parents to take responsibility for their own child.
Gu Renfa, one of Amity's Associate General Secretaries, has been very much involved in the production. He praises the good cooperation with the camera crew from Shanghai TV and hopes that "Heihu" will only be the first of a succession of documentaries.

With all of this, Amity is breaking new ground. While adventure has been an accepted literary genre for many years, TV documentaries of this style have been almost non-existent in China. One newspaper article about "Heihu" remarks: "Using the medium of a TV film to broadcast a true story is something new." And another commends "Heihu" for being a "successful attempt at TV reportage".

Concludes Gu Renfa: "If only all people were like Zhang Hongbin and Liu Xiaoying, extending just a little bit of love, this world could be like heaven on earth. That's why we've made this film - so that many more people may share in the spirit of love embodied in this extraordinary family."

Monitoring and Evaluating Amity Projects

As the Amity Foundation's work in social service, health and rural development increases, so has the need for visiting, monitoring and evaluating projects. This is not always easy, for most of these projects are in fairly remote areas. For example, when traveling by train, bus, car and jeep from Nanjing, it takes at least two days to reach Jingning County in southern Zhejiang Province. Once there, in order to see Amity's project in bamboo development, it is necessary to trek into the mountains. This initiative was designed to help the local people, many of them from the small She minority, become economically self-sufficient. Most of this work is done by Amity staff of the Social Service, Health and Rural Development divisions. Working and traveling with colleagues like Gu Renfa, Associate General Secretary in charge of Rural Development, affords a unique opportunity to understand the prospects and problems involved in China's efforts for modernization and development, and the Amity Foundation's contribution to this process.

Equipment for a hospital

In November of last year, I visited Huai'an county in northern Jiangsu with Gu Renfa. One project there involves support for the Cheqiao Central Clinic, an important facility for the rural health system in the area. A central clinic takes referrals from several county township clinics, which are in turn serving rural clinics and substations at lower levels. In recent years, the decentralization of health services has meant that medical care has been encouraged to become self-supporting, with many services offered only on a pay-as-you-go basis. This has put a great strain on the resources and facilities at the local level. Still, in the areas we visited, decent health care continues to be available to all who need it, with generous subsidies for patients with limited financial resources.

The Amity Foundation has provided a wide range of medical equipment to the Cheqiao Central Clinic, from X-Ray machines to anaesthetizers to E.K.G. equipment to microscopes. Cheqiao was chosen for this project because of the number of people it serves, and because the local health-care leadership is outstanding.

In the evaluation sessions, we were given a complete report on how Amity-donated equipment had been used, down to the number of patients who had been X-Rayed for different maladies. If anything, the report was too complete, and we had to persuade the hospital administrators that we had not come to check-up on their performance.

Mr. Gu and Rev. Deng out in Zhejiang's rain

One change I have noticed among requests from Amity partners in China is their interest in using Chinese rather than imported products. At Cheqiao, with the exception of one E.K.G. machine and a specialized microscope imported from Japan, all of the products purchased with Amity funds were made in China.

"We realize they may not be up to the same standard as foreign equipment," commented one doctor, "but they are much better for our use, especially in the countryside."

Chinese medical equipment is much cheaper and easier to use. Perhaps even more important, it is easier to have serviced and obtain spare parts for. The superiority of appropriate Chinese-made equipment is a valuable lesson, gained through practice over the last several years. Many reports have been written in China about the wastage involved when sophisticated equipment sits unused, either because its technology is inappropriate, or because spare parts from Japan or the West are unavailable.

Rebuilding of middle schools

Very different concerns are involved in project support for the rebuilding of schools, hospitals and churches in areas hit by typhoons, earthquakes and other natural disasters. Sometimes rural localities want to rebuild a school in a grand style far beyond local needs and requirements. They may think that funds available through Amity are unlimited! Or, if administrators are unfamiliar with budgeting and planning, they may submit project requests which are too vague and too generalized for Amity requirements. This means that Amity representatives must spend a great deal of time reviewing proposals and meeting with partners, in an effort to match local needs with Amity's capacity to assist.

One visit to a rural middle school which was partially destroyed by a typhoon, involved a detailed discussion over the size of classrooms and the availability of building materials. The result was a greatly scaled-down project proposal, which turned out to be just what the rural township needed. Amity representatives never dictate to partners, but through a process of consultation and discussion, try to arrive at projects which genuinely benefit the society.
In March of this year, I visited another rural middle school, where the work of rebuilding had already taken place. Gu Renfa and I were accompanied by Rev. Deng Fucun, Vice-President of the Zhejiang Christian Council, who also functions as a co-ordinator for Amity projects in this province. We visited the Shaliu Middle School, near the coast of Zhejiang, which had been almost totally destroyed by a typhoon in July, 1988. Amity provided RMB 130,000 for the rebuilding effort.

Shaliu is a 10km drive through stark countryside and along dirt roads from the county seat in Sannen. A lower middle school serving the local farming community, it is exactly the type of project which Amity seeks to support. The school is small, with 402 students and 25 faculty and staff in 8 classes. It was rebuilt with the entire community providing the labor, and with the local government doing all it could to help.

All materials (except for the window frames which are unavailable locally) were purchased at "regulated prices", which are far less than the "market prices" used in many building projects. The latter have been introduced in the context of market reforms over the last several years. "Regulated prices" are usually required by Amity. This not only means that limited funds go much further, but also that the project is genuinely supported by the local government, and therefore sustainable by the community.

**Support for a foodstuffs factory**

Amity supported projects sometimes run into difficulties. An example is the Jinjing Shanbao Foodstuffs Factory which has been partially supported by Amity as a rural development project. In the same area as the bamboo growing project mentioned earlier, it is designed to produce dried mushrooms and canned bamboo shoots in alternate seasons, and assist a community of almost 2,000 people. Clearly it serves an important need, and the manager is committed to development work in the local area. He is rare among university graduates, because he voluntarily chose an assignment in a remote mountain area.

When we visited the factory in March, we discovered that it was beset by bureaucratic problems and unable to run efficiently. In order to secure approval for producing two different types of foodstuffs, for example, the manager has had to go to thirty-five different government agencies, thus far, unsuccessfully. And although the local government seemed to welcome the project, there has been a certain amount of foot-dragging on the part of some officials who lack a long-term vision for the future of the area.

Chinese enterprises face a variety of bureaucratic problems. Some of these problems are the result of inadequate planning in the enterprises themselves. Others are the result of poor co-ordination between different government departments. Still others are due to individual government officials who do not know what modernization and economic reform really mean.

**Amity Helps China to Export Ophthalmological Instruments**

Amity's co-operation with the Christian Blind Mission International (CBM) in serving the needs of China's blind has grown considerably over the last several years. Among the areas of project interest is the training of doctors in new techniques of ophthalmological surgery in township clinics and rural hospitals.

For this purpose, appropriate forms of simple medical technology are required, especially designed for the needs of grassroots doctors. Such kits have been used by CBM all over the Third World, and have been made to the desired specifications in Europe. The problem has been that they are expensive, costing the equivalent of more than US$ 1,000 each.

Using specifications provided by CBM consultant Dr. Norval Christie, Amity has now commissioned the manufacture of these ophthalmological sets in Suzhou. They cost less than $150 each, and are now being used all over China. What is more, the ophthalmological kit has been so well received that CBM has ordered more than 100 sets for use in other parts of Asia and in Africa.

"Donated by friends of CBM - Amity Foundation"
Teachers Program Enters Year 6

With the new academic year starting in September, the Amity Teachers Program has now entered its sixth year. For the current period, Amity has recruited 70 teachers of English, German and Japanese, who come from eight different countries. They are assigned to 45 institutions of higher learning, spread over six provinces in eastern China. For the first time, Amity has sent teachers to Hefei, capital of Anhui Province.

Despite the difficulties some foreign teachers experience, the Teachers Program is carrying on without restriction. Now as before it is hailed by students and school leaders, and also welcomed by the political authorities.

Among those 30 teachers who went home after finishing their assignments in the summer, was Peter Ashmore from New York City. For the Amity Newsletter, he summed up his China experience under the title "The Rewards of a Bowl of Jiaozi".

"This is a difficult job. Many times I have used this statement when asked about my current job as an Amity English teacher at the Nanjing Food Economics College. After three years of applying my shoulder to the great wagon of China's modernization more than all the crowded buses and irritating 'back doors.' The excitement and joy of students in the course of a Christmas party brings wonderful relief to a blizzard of compositions waiting on a desk to be corrected. And above all, I saw that my students had gained a marked increase in their English language ability and a more realistic view of life beyond their limited experience, a view they could share with their families and neighbors. This was not a job I had, it was a responsibility -- one I and all Amity teachers have gladly shoulder in China."

Earthquake Rocked Qinghai - Amity Helps

The Amity Foundation is helping rebuild a primary school, two kindergartens, a township health center, two village clinics and a county hospital, which were all destroyed by an earthquake in northwest China's Qinghai Province the evening of 26 April, 1990. Measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale, the quake, whose epicenter was located between Goouhe and Xinghuai counties west of the provincial capital, claimed 126 lives and left more than 2,000 families homeless.

As with former natural disasters, Amity concentrates its help on rehabilitation work in the field of health and education, by selecting schools and hospitals in the most devastated areas. Amity appealed to donor agencies overseas for a fund of half a million Chinese yuan (equivalent to US$100,000). Except for the kindergartens, Amity's support covers only part of what is necessary to rebuild and equip the demolished buildings, leaving the balance to be provided from local sources.

The Amity Foundation has been created on the initiative of Chinese Christians for the purpose of promoting health, education and welfare in the People's Republic of China. It is an independent Chinese voluntary organization in which people from all walks of life may participate. Amity represents a new form of Chinese Christian involvement in society, through which Chinese Christians are joining hands with friends from around the world to serve the needs of China's modernization.

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 Office.

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