Overseas Partners Reaffirm Commitment
Consultation on Social Development Held

The Amity Foundation's international cooperation and support network made itself visible as never before when Amity held its “Consultation on Social Development” in Nanjing from November 1 to 10, 1990. The first of its kind in Amity's nearly six year history, the consultation was a tightly scheduled working meeting of Amity staff with 30 representatives from overseas and regional partner organizations, including church bodies, mission societies and development organizations from the Philippines, Singapore, Australia, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Finland, France, UK/Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, the United States, and Hong Kong.

Participants reviewed and discussed Amity's work in the areas of health, social welfare, and development. The program consisted of three parts: an opening presentation on Amity's perspective on social development; a five day visitation tour to Amity projects in Jiangsu, Anhui and Zhejiang Provinces, arranged in three separate groups; and a final phase during which participants shared and evaluated what they had encountered on field trips, raised questions and suggested ideas for Amity's future project work and cooperation with overseas agencies.

"This has been the experience of my life." "I have been touched, strengthened and enriched by this conference." Many similar comments were heard in feedback sessions where participants expressed their satisfaction and enthusiasm not only about the meeting itself, but also about their past and future cooperation with the Amity Foundation. The consultation provided participants with first hand exposures to China's countryside and direct contact with the people who implement and benefit from Amity's rural projects. This was a new experience even for "old China hands" among Amity's friends.

The atmosphere of the meeting clearly reflected a spirit of democracy, of mutual sharing and learning, and was enriching to Chinese and foreign partners alike. It was gratefully noted by overseas participants that Amity resisted the temptation to show a glamorous facade. Instead, projects were presented in an open and honest way, "warts and all" according to one observer. Amity's weaknesses and failures were discussed, and this spirit encouraged mutual trust and a sense of shared responsibility among participants.

On field trips, the groups saw pumping stations serving irrigation or flood control, dikes being built and ditches dug. They spoke with villagers who enjoyed uncontaminated drinking water, supplied by recently dug deep wells. Participants visited training...
classes for village paramedics, inspected newly donated hospital equipment and observed eye operations in a rural clinic. They also met with local project leaders, discussed crop yields and water supply, questioned health statistics and decision making procedures, and queried the cost plans and sustainability of some projects.

Amity’s Consultation enabled further North-South sharing. Comparing experiences, Canada’s Rhea Whitehead (l) and the Philippines’ June Rodriguez (r) meet for the first time.

Because overseas participants represented a diversity of political and cultural backgrounds, their perception of what they encountered in China’s townships and villages naturally differed. This resulted in numerous cross cultural discussions. When, for example, one of the groups came across a scene where thousands of peasants were busy with shovels and carts, moving sand and earth to raise the level of a dike, a development expert from Europe felt awkwardly reminded of forced labor. In contrast, his colleague from the Philippines saw this as a sign of people’s power and the determination of the masses to liberate themselves from the bonds of poverty. After learning that this mass labor took place in fulfillment of the peasants’ duty to contribute 22 days of labor per year to communal tasks, many in the group agreed that this arrangement could, quite pragmatically, be regarded as a feasible form of an adjusted tax system.

Coming from a developing country themselves, Philippine participants saw many similarities between the problems of China’s countryside and those of the Philippines. Yet they were amazed by the functioning government structure which provides a minimum of health care and other basic services even down to the most remote village.

“In contrast to our country,” commented one Filipina, “local governments in China are at least willing and concerned to tackle the problem of underdevelopment. And there is always a public structure you can make use of for development initiatives.”

A representative of a Western development agency observed: “While in many developing countries our partners understand their projects as an attempt to bring justice to the people and overcome oppression, you do not get that kind of talk in China. Although you may find a lot of corruption and social inequalities here as well, injustice doesn’t seem to be as much an inbuilt part of the system. There is not the structural injustice evident in China that there is in other countries. China’s equal land distribution seems to make a decisive difference.”

Amity’s project philosophy was most clearly defined in a presentation given by Ting Yearen, head of the Education Division. He pointed out that Amity’s key to success in its efforts for China’s social development lies in enhancing “the confidence and initiative on the part of the people”. Thus, Amity supports people’s emancipation from a feudal past which is still shaping China’s reality and which is characterized by a hierarchical bureaucracy which keeps the masses passive, submissive and fatalistic.

During an intensive discussion process covering the remaining two days of the consultation, Amity’s overseas partners raised a great many questions and suggestions which will help the Amity Foundation evaluate its work and proceed with its plans for the future. One immediate fruit of the South-South sharing at the conference is a proposed visit of an Amity staff delegation to the Philippines to visit projects and study development perspectives there.

Indeed, there is much to learn, areas in which to grow. Amity is ready for the challenge. Said Amity staff at the conference opening, “Amity is not an organization of long establishment. But despite its youth, it has been passing through similar stages of development its fellow NGOs in the world took many years to pass through. So, looking to the future, we see continued transition and development in our approach to work from one of traditional welfare relief to one of effective social, economic development.”

This issue brings more news and views from the consultation.

A spirit of openness and concern characterized Amity’s Consultation on Social Development.
Amity Strives for People’s Selfhood
Excerpts from a Presentation
by Ting Yenren

Amity has been involved with a wide variety of projects over the last five years, in the areas of education, printing, medical and health work, social service, rural development and relief work. We have supported more than 70 projects in the period from April 1985 to August 1990. Many of these have been in the East China provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shandong, but altogether we have conducted projects in 18 of China’s 31 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions.

One of the things we have learned from our five years of experience is that to enhance the confidence and initiative on the part of the people we work with is the key to success in our effort for China’s social development.

In such a vast country as China, where the needs are often immense, a small NGO like Amity can never do everything by itself. No matter how much we do, it will only be a drop in the bucket. The only solution is to cultivate the spirit of independence and self-reliance which leads to a development that is self-supporting and self-sustaining. In other words, we must direct our support to helping establish and strengthen an organization that will sustain the long-term growth of the community by itself.

In order to achieve this goal, it is important for Amity to direct support to the grassroots rather than high level institutions. It is important for Amity to grant its support step by step so as to avoid creating dependency on the part of our partners. It is also important for Amity to be involved with the largest possible number of community members so as to enable them to see local development as a cause of their own, something in which they have rights and obligations to contribute and to implement. In short, people should assume the ownership of their development projects, in which Amity plays the role of a catalyst.

The present social system in China assures a more equitable distribution of wealth than the past. But such a distribution does not eliminate poverty by itself. The idea of associated labor’s mastery of society will erode if the leadership becomes divorced from labor and habitually dependent upon the government’s allotment of wealth. While the idea of public ownership is upheld in theory, a lot of the administrative decisions are left in the hands of the leaders, who act in the name of all people, but with the majority of people kept passive and alienated. Hence the loss of the initiative on the part of the people, who are supposed to be the masters of society. It is worth pointing out that the problem may be aggravated in the Chinese context where peasants traditionally placed all their hopes on the “benevolent emperor.” When this happens, poverty is bound to continue. Many local communities where Amity works receive large amounts of government relief every year. But often, such outside help only eases poverty but does not end it. To counter poverty, it takes a lot more than good will and the ability to give. Much work should be done in helping local residents make effective use of local resources and discover their own strength to organize themselves and sustain their own organizations in a truly democratic sense.

We are opposed to the “give and leave” approach because this approach only perpetuates dependency and corrupts the true organization of the masses of the people. Also, project selection is not just a process of saying “yes” or “no.” It involves a great deal of study, discussion and revision of a proposal. We are in no position to dictate to our partners but, through a process of consultation and discussion, we try to arrive at projects that will be genuinely self-supporting and beneficial to the communities.

This means that most projects are co-designed by Amity and its partner organizations. It is through repeated study and discussion that we at Amity experience our own growth. The process is beneficial not only for our projects and partners but also, and more importantly, for ourselves. The latter is more important because our own growth enables us to carry out better projects and thus better serve those in need in the future. The whole process should be seen as one of self-education in democracy on the part of all involved. This is something we are still learning, and I think we still have a long way to go.
Issues Under Discussion

Back from the field trips, participants of the Amity Consultation spent most of their time in group and panel discussions reviewing Amity's work, sharing findings, raising questions and offering comments and suggestions. The most important points from their discussions are listed below.

People’s Participation

Amity stresses its role in strengthening people’s participation and self-organization. To achieve this, it was proposed that Amity examine more carefully the delegation of decision-making power: how much do the people possess? How much is in the hands of officialdom? Participants saw that rural projects seek active participation of local peasants, and they suggested a similar approach for health projects. Patients should be seen as masters of their own health rather than passive beneficiaries. Projects should therefore not only concentrate on the supply of equipment, but also on awareness-raising and educational components, especially in the field of public health care.

Planning in development work. Overseas agencies offered to supply Amity with their own policy papers on gender awareness.

Amity - Church Relationships

Many participants suggested that Amity should give more attention to involving local churches in the initiating and monitoring of projects. However, Amity staff pointed out that this could complicate matters severely, if adopted as a rule.

As to the question of how to balance the Christian aspect with the development aspect of its work, Amity referred to the words of Bishop K.H. Ting in the recently published report “Amity in Progress”:

“Making Christian presence felt’ is often a natural result of work well done, but to meet human needs is so urgent that we should not make that our overriding aim. In this regard, we need to stress the compassion, commitment and effectiveness which are essential for any voluntary organization involved in social development.”

At the same time, Amity is happy to give preferential consideration to funding requests from Christian communities running social projects by themselves. Amity currently cooperates with three such projects: the Wuhu Clinic (Anhui), the Renji Clinic (Sichuan), and the Longquan Middle School (Zhejiang).

At the consultation, it was widely understood that Amity is not only a way of making a Christian presence felt in society, but also of helping Chinese Christians realize the social dimension of the gospel.

Amity’s Contact With Third World Communities

Amity seeks to strengthen contacts with development organizations in other Asian countries. A proposed visit of Amity staff to the Philippines was an initial result of the consultation. It was suggested that donor agencies provide funding to facilitate such exchange visits.

Technical Analysis

A need for technical analysis was emphasized for the planning, assessment and selection of projects such as drilling deep water wells, improving irrigation systems or developing wasteland for rice cultivation and fish farming.

Additional Ways of Funding

Funding agencies were asked to consider the option of undesignated block grants which would allow Amity more flexibility when granting support. Amity
also intends to build up its revolving loan fund, which is used for granting projects loans which, when refunded, can be used to advance funds to other projects.

Reporting

Donor agencies asked Amity for more regular financial updates on ongoing projects. For purposes of interpretation to constituencies, they also suggested that Amity staff supply human interest stories which give project reports a more personal face.

Self-Evaluation by Donor Agencies

As pointed out by Amity, projects which are very appropriate in the Chinese context do not always find foreign funders, in part due to a lack of understanding of China's situation by foreign partners. Overseas participants expressed a need for self-criticism and self-evaluation by donor agencies as to whether they are exhibiting a certain amount of "cultural imperialism" in their attitudes to China.

1989: Expenditure Exceeds One Million US$

Overhead Stays Below Seven Percent

On the occasion of the consultation, the Amity Foundation published a financial statement covering all income and expenditure since its founding in April, 1985, to December 31, 1989. The following figures on Amity's 1989 expenditure are taken from that account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>in Yuan</th>
<th>in US$ (*)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects in Education</td>
<td>1,212,948</td>
<td>330,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects in Social Welfare</td>
<td>1,351,901</td>
<td>367,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects in Health and Medicine</td>
<td>917,063</td>
<td>249,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects in Rural Development</td>
<td>853,017</td>
<td>232,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Expenses</td>
<td>159,212</td>
<td>43,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional Expenses</td>
<td>82,820</td>
<td>23,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4,576,961</td>
<td>1,244,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the 1989 expenditure of the Overseas Coordination Office in Hong Kong (US$ 22,000) is added to that of the Nanjing Office, total administrative and promotional expenses amount to 6.95%.

(*) approximate equivalent, based on official exchange rate in 1989
Standing Between a Flowing River and a Stagnant Marshland

by Jose M. Cunanan

Rev. Cunanan, head of the Commission on Development and Social Concerns of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, wrote some impressions of China which came to him as a participant of the Amity Consultation. Here is one of his poems.

As we stood on a dike
  Between a wide-flowing river
  And a field of marshland
  Where reeds and wildbirds
  Grow in abundance.

We heard the pleading of people
To prevent the rivers overflowing
And stop the flooding of their fields and home
And convert the waste land
  Into productive fish-pond and riceland.

We raised a lot of questions
  Based on experiences and backgrounds.

Whether the hydrologist experts
And agricultural technicians
Were consulted in the process
And noted the role of pumps and cared
  About ecological balance.

What was it that the people wanted done?

To raise the level of the dike dam
  From its present height of 6.2 meters.
And be higher at 7.5 meters.
And that would involve
  A stretch of 4.2 kilometers
  And a width from 5 to 6 meters.

At the back of my head I thought
  But not a word was said.
This must be a dream
  Which will only be realized
  With money and machine.

We will mobilize five thousand persons
  Who will work for thirty days
  With hoe and spade.
This dike will rise,
  To keep the river’s water
  And make this marshland fit for rice.

We left the place and slept
  At the comfort of a Huai’an hotel.
And our hosts’ generosity treated us
  With the fresh-water crabs delicacy.
I thought a sound sleep
  After a delightful meal
  Would make that look over the marshland
Fade away.

As with our “horse” van we snaked our way out
  Of a street market full of produce
And people buying and selling.

Then suddenly we beheld
  People with their hoes and spade,
With baskets full of dug earth
Or wheelbarrows pushed through the ground.
Dug and dumped, whatever was the task.
  In tens, then hundreds we saw them,
And then along irrigation ditches and river beds.

With colorful flags - of red, yellow, orange -
  A spectrum of the rainbow.
Blown by the wind, underneath the glowing sun
Moving the earth, digging the well
  A mountain is brought to the ground’s level.

A rock at a time, a spadeful is lifted
Till water springs and flows...to irrigate the land,
  To control the water, to direct it over
Parched and thirsty land.
The General Secretary Looks to the Future
Han Wenzao Discloses His Dreams for Amity's Ongoing Work

In his closing speech at the consultation, the General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, Mr. Han Wenzao, thanked the overseas partners for their active participation and valuable contribution to the meeting. After looking back to the early stages of the Amity Foundation, he expressed some general hopes for the future. Excerpts are printed below.

Since Amity is hardly six years old, an international meeting like this inspires me to reflect upon our Foundation's future rather than on its past. I will do that in a very general way, because I have the excuse of being the general secretary - one who knows things only in a very general way. Our dreams will not be too romantic but rather realistic, though maybe with a bit of romanticism.

First, we want to do our best to reach the people at the grassroots level and to draw as much of their participation as possible, so as to enhance self-support and self-reliance. We do not want to give them a gift and then leave; we would rather participate in organizing them to be self-reliant, to be self-confident, to be self-supporting. To achieve this goal, we try to reach out to the poorest areas. As our foundation is located in Jiangsu Province and our resources have been limited, we have so far concentrated our efforts on China's eastern provinces, which on an average belong to the richest of the country. Yet, even in Jiangsu Province, there are still at least 22 townships which are considered to be very poor areas, with an annual per capita income below RMB 200 (around US$40).

We are also trying to extend our work to poor counties in neighboring provinces. In the long run, we may be able to serve the people in the western provinces which are China's vast remote and most backward areas. But transportation is a big problem, and with current staff limitations, we cannot afford to send our colleagues to such areas too often. 

(Continued on next page)

A Comment from a Participant

"As participants in this consultation we are quite a diverse group of people. Coming from fourteen different countries and belonging to all kinds of denominations, we represent very different church bodies, mission societies and aid organizations. The only thing bringing us together is the fact that six years ago a group of Chinese, Christians along with non-Christians, became concerned with social problems in their country. This small group of concerned Chinese, their commitment and their spirit, is apparently strong enough to unite us despite all our diversities, and to commit us to serious and concrete work.

It seems that the Amity Foundation embodies a symbol for us. It incarnates a spirit which lends us wings. It is the spirit of people saying: 'Don't sit back; let's get involved!' As we all sense that this is something that matters, we have come to Amity from all directions, and are now involving ourselves. This is an amazing development, especially considering the short period of five years. It reminds me of what one of Amity's board members, Prof. Kuang Yaming, told me in an interview, when saying that the big task now is China's 'spiritual' construction. I see this taken up by Christians and non-Christians alike. This, as I see it, is a symbol of resurrection."

Gerhard Köberlin, Protestant Association for World Mission, Western Germany
Second, we want to cooperate with as many partners as possible. We seek the support of a great variety of donor agencies, including churches, development organizations and non-governmental foundations. We hope that our partners can help us in many ways, not only financially, but also in sharing their experiences, their concepts and techniques.

Third, we welcome support for specific projects, but for the future we hope to receive more block grants. Seeking funds for individual projects involves us in a lot of red tape. After making several field trips to a prospective project, discussing it with local partners and within our staff, we write a project proposal and send it out to our donors overseas. In turn, they go through a similar decision making process, circulating the proposals to different committees, often contacting us with specific questions for clarification. This way, we may only after a long time eventually receive a green light indicating a financial pledge.

But if we had more funding from block grants, we could use our judgment to say that this or that project should be funded. It would shorten the period of time needed to carry out the program, be more efficient and also avoid overlapping funding. Of course, we will always be grateful for funds we receive for specific projects. My point is that we need to develop the idea of block grants, but we will always keep both tracks open.

Fourth, we seek more opportunities for South-South sharing. It may be true that China is more developed than some developing countries, but there are many similarities in the fields of social and economic development between China and, say, the Philippines or Thailand. They may also have more experience with development programs run by NGOs, so we can easily learn from each other.

Fifth, we hope to build a staff team with three "C"s, that is compassion, commitment and competence. Professional training and development are no doubt very important; however dedication and high idealism are also important. We therefore need an Amity code of conduct for supervision, for continuous learning from the people we serve.

Sixth, and last, but not least, I personally hope that an Amity Center could be put up in the near future with facilities for a resource center, for running training programs, for receiving visitors by providing clean and modestly furnished guest rooms, for daily operation and so forth. Such a center could become a symbol of the Amity Foundation, and of the friendship among people from all over the world. In principle, the Amity Foundation will not support any capital construction. But could we make this one exception? Maybe this is a dream, and we are a bit romantic, but it is my hope.

Let me say a thousand thanks to all friends overseas. I look forward to their continuous prayer, concern, advice and support.