All in the Family
A Visit to an Ophthalmological Project

When we entered the courtyard of the rural clinic in Shizhuang Township, a huge crowd of spectators gathered, while half a dozen policemen gave snappy salutes. In this little village in Funing County, seven hours’ drive from Nanjing, foreigners are a rarity, let alone a minibus full. Officials turned out in full force to receive our 12 member group which was touring Amity projects as part of the Amity Consultation on Social Development. Shaking hands and escorting us along the clinic’s one-story brick buildings, medical doctors and party secretaries, representatives of village committees and the county administration ushered us into the reception room. Its walls appeared freshly white-washed, and the rough brick floor was shining as much as any brick floor can.

We took our seats around the U-shaped tables, behind the ever present cups of green tea. Sitting at the head table, our hosts introduced themselves and invited us to enjoy the fresh tangerines and bananas generously spread before us. Remarkable our hosts: “Your trip to Shizhuang has been quite strenuous; you deserve some rest.” However, our time was precious. We were quite grateful for the newly learned skill of balancing notebooks and tea cups, pencils and fruit peels, all at the same time.

The Self-made Doctor

The clinic, we learned, specialized in eye diseases and served the entire county. Upon asking what kind of training the eye doctors received, we were told: “Most things they learned from their father.” Feeling puzzled, we thought our question was misunderstood. “No, no,” somebody went on, “this is really so. All our doctors here are from one family, three brothers and two sisters. All of them are called Dr. Liu. Their father, a co-founder of the clinic 35 years ago, is a gifted eye surgeon who is held in high esteem. He is already 70 and retired, but his children are following in his footsteps.”

Old Dr. Liu lived nearby, and because of our interest somebody was sent to call for him. Five minutes later he showed up, a tall man sporting a healthy tan, though rather deaf. While we raised our questions in English, Tan Liying of Amity translated them into Standard Chinese, followed by the clinic director shouting the same once more in the local dialect into Dr. Liu’s left ear. At times, a representative of the county health bureau assisted from the right. A lively talk ensued.

Dr. Liu told us he had wished to become a doctor since childhood. Because he had no money to study, he joined Chiang Kai-shek’s army at the age of 20. There he received ten months’ training as a first-aid attendant. At night, he read any medical book available. His medical education consisted of eight years of practical experience during army service. Upon his demobilization in 1948, he settled down as a practitioner. Some years later, he became head of the Shizhuang Township Clinic. Once his sons and daughters graduated from secondary school, one
after another they served their “apprenticeship” with him. They learned everything from the treatment of a common cold to basic eye surgery.

While certainly few of China’s hospitals are run as a family enterprise, this story does say quite a bit about the education and training of China’s rural doctors. This in no way implies that ophthalmology in China is critically underdeveloped. The problem is that eye specialists with Western style training and high technology are only to be found in provincial capitals and district cities, while three quarters of the population live in the countryside. Specialized treatment is simply not a reality.

In this context, the Amity Foundation supports raising the qualification of ophthalmologists and improving medical eye care at the grassroots level in selected areas. For this work, Amity has found a competent partner: the Christian Blind Mission (CBM), an international aid organization based in Germany. In projects carefully tailored to village and township levels, Amity and CBM cooperate in assisting hospitals or health stations which show self-initiative and good promise. Furthermore, they encourage cooperation between eye clinics in urban centers and institutions in the surrounding countryside, so that existing skills and knowledge can be transferred to more remote areas.

**Connection with the District City**

Amity established links with Dr. Liu’s rural eye clinic through the district hospital in Yancheng. Amity and CBM found competent leadership in Dr. Zhou, head of the eye department in Yancheng’s No. One Municipal Hospital, for an integrated project which includes training courses for rural doctors. Dr. Zhou and colleagues were trained for this task by CBM. CBM-consultant Dr. Christy, a retired American mission doctor (who for decades had served in Pakistan where he restored the eye-sight of more than 100,000 blind cataract patients), demonstrated to Dr. Zhou and his team on several visits how cataract operations and even more complicated surgery can be performed without costly equipment, yet with excellent results. Instead of making himself dependent on a complicated microscope, which would be unaffordable for China’s rural clinics, Dr. Christy operates with a pair of simple magnifying glasses fixed to his forehead.

In 1989, Dr. Zhou held a six month course for 17 district-based general practitioners. The course taught them the basic skills of cataract surgery. Cataracts appear as a white film on the outer side of the lens, making it impervious to light. They usually affect older people, and can ultimately cause blindness. Western countries usually remove cataracts by laser, yet China still practices the traditional and far cheaper method of extracting the damaged lens and replacing it with special, tight-fitting glasses. This Amity sponsored course was attended by the young doctors of the Liu family, some of whom learned the technique for the first time. Others sharpened their previously acquired operation skills.

We visited Dr. Zhou’s eye department in Yancheng, and found a similar course being conducted for 40 participants. In 1991, Amity plans to establish a workshop for the production of special glasses which serve as lens replacements. So far they are available only from Shanghai, where they are in short supply. In order to aid in transport between Yancheng and rural hospitals, a landrover was purchased. A sign on its right door reads “Donated by the Amity Foundation,” and on the left “Donated by CBM (Christian Blind Mission).”

Dr. Zhou: competence and compassion.

Cooperation between Amity and CBM has been extremely successful. Amity simply could not do what it has been doing without the financial support and expertise of an organization like CBM. Yet competent local leadership is also essential, providing experience in dealing with China’s bureaucracy and knowledge of the local people and existing institutions on all levels.

**Professionalism in the Operation Theatre**

Toward the end of our visit to Dr. Liu’s clinic, we were invited to observe a cataract operation. An old man, his damaged eye already anesthetized, climbed onto a narrow operation table. One of Dr. Liu’s daughters operated smoothly and with a steady hand, not in the least irritated by us foreign visitors. Dr. Zhou, who accompanied us, explained several steps of the operation. He also pointed out equipment donated by Amity: the bottle with a substance to freeze the eye — a safe method of local anesthesia; and the handy set of surgical instruments, produced in Suzhou. Substantially designed by Dr. Christy and marketed by CBM, this surgical equipment is also being exported to other Third World countries.

Leaving the small operation theatre through an
adjacent waiting room, we came across Ms. Wang, who, accompanied by her daughter-in-law, had come a long way for treatment. The lenses of her eyes were covered with a white, milky film. She could hardly see. Yes, she told me, she had been having eye trouble for quite some years. Today, the doctor would decide whether surgery would soon be needed. I asked her if she was afraid. “Well,” she replied, “a little bit, of course.” But Ms. Wang was lucky. Since Dr. Zhou's training course, the success rate of cataract operations performed in this clinic has risen from 80% to 99% — thanks to improved techniques through which operation time could be reduced in half, thereby minimizing the risk of infection.

According to estimates, China has eight million blind people, half of whom could have sight restored, if only medical care were more available. Amity and CBM have taken up this challenge. Yet this would not be possible without people like Dr. Zhou, an authority in his field who doesn’t consider himself too good to be devoted to the medical education of village doctors. Nor would it be possible without people like Dr. Christy and his wife, who, rather than enjoying their well-deserved retirement, travel twice a year to China to do voluntary service. Last but not least, it would not be possible without doctors like those of the Liu family, who defy difficulties and scarcities and, with wit and dedication, know how to make the best of it.

Gotthard Oblau

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Irrigating Farmland in Handong Village

The first time Gu Renfa, Amity’s rural development director, visited Handong Village in northern Jiangsu, the people didn’t even ask him to sit down. More than one hundred official investigation teams had been there over the past thirty years, but they had done little to improve the situation of the villagers. The people thought that Amity would probably give them a small grant, and then leave, so there was no need to bother with formalities. Handong Village was poor, and presumably, it would always be dependent on government supplies of grain relief.

The problem was that most village farmland was high and dry, and therefore could not be cultivated. There were underground and low lying streams, but these had not been tapped for irrigation. It would mean pumping the water uphill. Following extensive discussions with the villagers, and careful investigations conducted by the local hydraulic bureau, Amity and local experts decided that the situation could be improved by building two electrical irrigation pumping stations outside the village where the land was parched and dry. Amity could partially fund this project, providing the villagers contribute some of their own resour-

"Sponsored by The Amity Foundation, September 1989": permanent appreciation by Handong villagers.

"Sponsored by The Amity Foundation, September 1989": permanent appreciation by Handong villagers.

ces, do the construction work and maintain the pumps once they had been built. The villagers were of course enthusiastic. So were the local authorities, who agreed to provide some government funds for the project, as well as supervise the construction process.

When I first visited Hanzhuang Township in 1989, practically the entire population crowded into the courtyard where we met, simply to see what was going on. When we approached the jeep which would take us to the site of the proposed Handong Village Pumping Station, we had to move through this friendly and inquisitive mass of people. Construction had begun, and the pumps were being installed, but the real test would come the following spring with the first rice crop. In the meantime, a great deal of work had to be done to clear the land and get ready for the spring planting.

We returned to this village last November (1990) together with a group of Amity partners who were participating in the Nanjing Consultation on Social Development. The villagers had leveled more than 200 mu of land (approximately 15 hectare), and they had dug ditches and trenches for irrigation. That
summer, they had grown their first crop of rice on land which had previously been thought useless.

It was reported to us that the total rice output for this village of 1,750 persons was 100,000 kilograms in 1990, almost 25% more than in previous years. The yield would have been even higher had it not been for serious flooding of low lying village lands that summer. An additional 400 mu (27 hectare) of land will be reclaimed this spring, and the projected grain output for 1991 is 300,000 kilograms. If this figure is attained, Handong Village, which for more than three decades had been sustained on relief grain, would now be more than self-sufficient. Already local people are making plans to rebuild their mud houses, plant additional vegetables for sale in the city and improve local facilities.

The Amity Foundation provided RMB60,000 of the RMB210,000 budgeted for this project (approximately US$16,200 of US$56,700, based on last year's exchange rate), with the remainder coming from the government and the people themselves. The Handong Village Irrigation Pumping Station is self-sustaining, and it makes use of appropriate forms of technology, all of which are available in the province. From the start, the project has been carefully monitored by Gu Renfa and other Amity staff, and today, it stands as a good example of the type of small-scale rural development project which Amity seeks to promote in other parts of China.

Philip Wickeri.

Amity Learns from the Filipinos

In February, a group of Amity staff spent two weeks on an exposure trip to the Philippines, where they visited development projects and discussed development strategies with representatives of non-governmental organizations. For the “Newsletter,” Ting Yenren, member of the Amity delegation, wrote this report.

I should say at the beginning that this trip to the Philippines is the best overseas visit I have had over the years.

The eight of us in the delegation, from the Amity Foundation's education, medical and health, social welfare and rural development divisions and one of Amity’s partners, the Jiangsu Overseas Chinese Friendship Association, arrived in Manila almost at midnight of February 9th, 1991.

We were invited by the Philippine-China Development Resource Center (PDRC), a non-governmental organization (NGO) related to the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. PDRC is devoted to promoting friendship and mutual understanding between the Chinese and Filipino peoples. As it turned out, the actual hosts included so many organizations that, after a while, I did not even make the attempt to remember their acronyms names. We were literally guests of the people of the Philippines, and I felt overwhelmed.

Our relationship with NGOs in the Philippines started in November 1990 when four Filipinos, including Theresa Carino, Director of PDRC, attended the Amity Consultation on Social Development in Nanjing. We regard the meeting as “the starting point of our drawing benefit from the experiences of our Third World partner organizations.”

Members pause for a view in the Cordilleras.

Very early in the morning after our arrival, we were divided into two groups and began the week of what came to be known to us as “exposure programs.” One group of “exposureists,” led by June Rodriguez, a PDRC board member, visited many grassroots community organizations in the Visayan islands, including Cebu, Bacolod and Iloilo. I was on the north-bound group, together with Theresa Carino and Pepz Cunan, director of the development division of the National Council of Churches. June and Pepz had also been with us in Nanjing at the November consultation. When in the following account the imperial “we” is used, I am really only reflecting on the experiences of the group to which I belonged.

During the week, my group visited Baguio, Sagada, Bontoc, Banaue, Angeles and Olongapo and met with many community workers of various NGOs and people's organizations (POs). After our return to Metro-Manila, the “exposure” continued and all of us were given an orientation to the overall situation in the Philippines and the work of NGOs and
POs. The orientation lectures, which were extremely helpful, had been scheduled prior to the field trips but had to be moved to the end of our visit because we had not been able to leave Nanjing at the scheduled departure time two days earlier.

With the limited space given here, it is impossible to do justice to our hosts who offered us so much: their thorough analysis of the Philippine economy; the ways they recruit new workers or how they handle interpersonal problems within an organization; as well as their dreams of tomorrow’s Philippines and the personal stories of the PO/NGO representatives who received us.

“The trip turned out to be more educational than I had expected,” said my colleague Tan Liying, of Amity’s Social Welfare Division. “I was always overwhelmed by warmth and fraternity. I felt young and happy. Often, I almost forgot that I was in a foreign land. On these trips, we were widely exposed to the suffering of the poor, to the squandering of the rich, and most important of all, to the commitment and dedication of the educated young people to the well-being and betterment of the Filipino people.”

Yes, both of our Amity groups learned a great deal and we cherished the opportunity to be the “exposurists.” Now we are back to the routine of Amity’s daily work. But we will not forget the expressionless faces of the old women in the squatters’ village literally built upon garbage heaps in Metro-Manila. We will not forget the forced smiles of young women on the midnight streets outside Clark and Subic U.S. military bases. We will not forget the dark eyes of malnourished peasant children that lack the curiosity and briskness of our own children back at home. “The Philippines resembles the pre-revolutionary China which we only read about in books and see in movies,” said everyone in the delegation. “It is now easy to see why a revolution took place in China.”

Young Filipino boys working in open-pit mining. Photo by Jimmy Domingo

I was also impressed by the fact that the church in the Philippines is standing at the forefront of the people’s struggle for a better future. The church in China, half a century ago, looked at the people’s struggle as irrelevant to its work. As a result, its own relevance to the Chinese people was brought under question and it has had to struggle hard to live down its foreign image. Even today, the aloofness of the church from the Chinese people may still pose a problem. What we saw in the Philippines is that the church voices the people’s pain, their anxiety and indignation; it suffers with its people, and it sacrifices its best members in their struggle. The message here could not be clearer: the church is the

First Steps in a Long Journey

The Rev. Pepz Cunanan, one of the hosts of the Amity delegation in the Philippines, works with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, where he heads its Commission on Development and Social Concerns. When he attended the Amity Consultation on Social Development in November of 1991 in Nanjing, he made the following remarks in an interview with the “Newsletter”:

“Among the participants of this consultation the delegation from the Philippines is the only one which does not represent a funding agency. I don’t find that strange. We appreciate the initiative of Amity to involve the Philippines, because in terms of the sharing of resources there is more than just the funding of particular projects.

“Instead of giving money, we would like to get involved in a dialogue about development perspectives and broader social issues. We can enrich each other in our efforts to understand the dynamics of the community, the culture and the attitudes of the people, and how they can be challenged. I think we in the Philippines have some experience in community organizing, involving peasants, fisher folks and workers. In this field, we have learnt a lot of lessons which we can bring home.

“With this consultation, we have taken a first step in this kind of sharing. I hope it is a first step in a long journey. Geographically, China and the Philippines are neighbors. We have a lot of Filipinos who are of Chinese origin. What the standard of living and the level of development is concerned, China and the Philippines have much in common. And although we are different in so far as China is a post-revolutionary country while we are still pre-revolutionary, the people in both our countries are hoping for significant improvements of their lives, they both need empowerment, justice and liberation from poverty. We don’t have much to offer, but what we can offer is the struggle of the people trying to get a fair share in life.”
people. To me, this is a church that is truly salt and light. Much can be learned by Chinese Christians.

What impressed us most, as Tan Liying pointed out, is the community workers' whole-hearted commitment and dedication to the well-being and betterment of the Filipino people. Everywhere we went, we met many people, mostly youths and women, who had given up opportunities for better-paying jobs in big cities or overseas in order to work with the poor in villages or urban slums. If their work is hard and dangerous, they did not seem to care. We as outsiders may not be able to imagine the hardship and danger of being detained or even "salvaged" (kidnapped and murdered), which they face constantly. But we were deeply touched by their thorough grasp of even minute details of the work in which they were engaged and their capability of organizing grassroots-level masses of the people into the effort for the improvement of local health or economic conditions.

It is difficult not to include stories of our personal encounters here.

Li Enlin, of the Medical and Health Division, once asked the head of an NGO in Sagada about the biggest organizational problem they faced. She was told, "To convince colleagues to stay behind doing office work, as we all want to go into villages and work directly with the peasants." She was taken aback as she contrasted it with the difficulty of many offices in China in convincing people to go down to the grassroots. She was even more fascinated by the fact that a worker of this NGO would usually have very simple meals in a peasant house, with a small bag of rice he or she brought along. Perhaps we in China have become too used to banquets.

We were amazed by a Christian doctor who is familiar with every little trail and knows every villager in the mountainous villages where she works. These trails are to her what my bedroom is to me, where I can walk in the dark without tripping over anything.

We were almost moved to tears upon learning that one of our guides, a young college graduate, had decided to work full-time for no pay with a peasant organization after being released from a three-month-long detention. His paralyzed mother lives on money sent by his sister who works as a domestic helper in Hong Kong.

"It is amazing that so many women and young people are holding very responsible positions in these POs and NGOs and they are all so capable," remarked Zhuang Ailing, one of the youngest in our delegation. What she said is obviously the case. Not until we visited a peasant organization at the very end of our field trip, were we briefed by a men-only team of peasant leaders, who, despite their uncompromising stand in the face of various threats, were even a bit too shy to shake hands with the women in our delegation. In China, we are painfully aware of the need for greater involvement of women and young people in development work.

Throughout the visit and afterwards, a contrast was often drawn between the youth and women we met and many of those at home in China, between people's participatory involvement in the two countries, and between the commitment of those we met and our own commitment. It was certainly difficult to explain to our Filipino friends the bureaucracy and corruption that have crept into a post-revolutionary society and have thus alienated large masses of the people. The Philippines allowed us to see our own problems in a different light.

A peasant leader in his late sixties, who was hosting us at one point, asked me, with the sincerity typical of those having labored all their lives, "Please tell us how you organize the peasants in your country, so that we can win our struggle sooner." My thinking came to a sudden halt upon hearing this. I had only one feeling: guilt.

It was we who needed this visit and we benefited from it much more than those who hosted us. It was we who should relearn the spirit of dedication and service to the people. It was we who, through numerous person-to-person encounters on the trip, renewed our faith in humanity at a time when socialism is living through its Good Friday, a process that is both painful and, I believe, purifying.

We appreciate this learning experience and believe it will encourage us to look at the problems we encounter more forthrightly.

During the two-week visit, ideas came up of closer cooperation of Amity with NGOs in the Philippines. One idea is a possible Sino-Philippine "joint venture," to upgrade the professional standing of grassroots level health workers in the Philippines.
through an intensive acupuncture training program in Nanjing. We would feel very privileged to be able to contribute a “widow’s mite” to a people who, through the sacrifice and dedication of their sons and daughters, will eventually stand up.

Our visit was very short and we had to come back to Nanjing on February 23rd. But quite a few of us feel fortunate to have been “exposureists” in the Philippines and would like to go back some time not too distant in the future. There is much more we can learn from a people in the midst of struggle. We may not remember the names of all the people we met. We may not be able to see some of them again. Given the present situation, not all of them will be able to live to see tomorrow’s Philippines. But we will remember their faces and voices. We will always love the archipelago they have loved dearly enough to give up their youth and even their lives for its tomorrow. Their dreams are our dreams.

Rehabilitation for Hearing Impaired Improves
Amity Consultants Visit Hong Kong

Discovering the world of sound.

The number of pre-school children in China who are hearing impaired is rising at an alarming rate, stated Xu Tinggui, a medical specialist at the ear, nose and throat department of Nanjing’s Hospital No. 414 during a ten day visit to Hong Kong in December of 1990. According to Xu, a major cause of this development is the careless prescription of strong antibiotics to infants by poorly educated doctors, especially in rural areas.

The Amity Foundation is addressing this problem through its Rehabilitation Center For Hearing Impaired Children where Xu serves on the center’s executive committee and oversees hearing tests and medical consultations. At the center, children between three and six with hearing impairments receive rehabilitation which leads to fairly normal hearing and speaking abilities. After one year of intensive training in small groups, many enroll in public kindergartens to continue their schooling.

On his visit to Hong Kong, arranged by Kari Harbakk of the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre, Mr. Xu was accompanied by Li Shaozhu, a special education researcher at Nanjing University, and Zhu Juling, Deputy Principal of the Nanjing School for Deaf-Mutes, both of whom are assigned to the Amity Center as consultants and board members. Together with Amity staff member Zhang Zuoqian, the group visited schools and other centers for the deaf, special education departments of Hong Kong’s universities, a variety of social welfare institutions, as well as hearing specialists at several hospitals.

The group explained that the Amity Center, founded in October 1988, is now training its third class of hearing impaired children, seven of whom were newly enrolled last summer, while another five continue with a second year. Altogether nine children have graduated. The center’s two teachers, together with Amity staff, and a number of experts from the broader community, closely cooperate in evaluating and improving teaching and testing methods, as well as in raising the technical quality of hearing aids.

Exposing children to a natural language environment, teachers regularly take them to nearby public kindergartens, thus giving them a chance to communicate with their non-handicapped peers. More and better visual materials are now in use for language training. To learn more about the children’s backgrounds, the center seeks close cooperation with parents, who receive recommendations on how to deal with their children’s difficulties at home.

The center also developed a syllabus for elementary, intermediate and advanced training groups and compiled corresponding textbooks. Experimental and innovative in its work style, the center has received visits from many related experts throughout China. Its work has also been reported in a number of newspapers and professional journals.

As consultants take no honorarium and the Nanjing School for Deaf-Mutes provides teachers and room space free of charge, the center’s operational costs are low. Income through modest tuition fees is supplemented by donations received from a group of overseas families who pledged fixed sums for a period of five years.
Amity Teacher Honored

Under the glare of TV lights and the flashes of cameras, more than 200 teachers from Nanjing were recently awarded the title “Outstanding Teacher.” Conspicuous among them was one foreign face: Christine Boucique, an Amity teacher since 1986, specially honored with the Tao Xingzhi Education Medal. The award is named after a well-known educational reformer who was active in the 1920s and 30s.

Boucique, a Belgian Catholic sister, came to Nanjing from Hong Kong where she lived and worked for more than 20 years. Teaching at the Nanjing Foreign Languages Middle School, she has become known among her colleagues and students for her dedication to her work. “I love to teach at this middle school,” explains Boucique. “The students are so willing to learn, and I have such a good relationship with my Chinese colleagues.”

Boucique, who speaks Chinese fluently, seems well liked by everyone. Teachers and students alike are welcomed into her small room at the “Foreigners’ Compound” on the school campus. They come to ask questions, practice language skills or browse through books in a little lending library she set up together with other foreign colleagues.

Boucique has been highly praised for her untiring work. Newspaper articles and broadcasts have mentioned her heavy teaching load, the personal care she gives to her students, and her willingness to help with teachers’ training.

But she is uncomfortable with this kind of publicity. With modesty she comments, “I have simply done what I should do as a teacher.”

Amity is proud to have teachers like Christine Boucique working under its Teachers’ Program. Of the 72 teachers in China this year, many have been honored with the title “Outstanding Teacher.” With their professionalism, dedication, and love for China they are ambassadors of people-to-people friendship. Their presence is highly valued by students and colleagues alike.

The Amity Foundation was 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.

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