After Floods In East China: Amity Active In Reconstruction

International response to Amity's relief appeals has been overwhelming. In mid-October, total donations already topped 1.5 million US dollars, ten times as much as Amity's original appeal, exceeding even its boldest target by fifty per cent.

No single event has ever affected the work of the Amity Foundation more extensively than last summer's floods in east China. Torrential rains, lasting from May through July, caused the worst flooding of the Huai and Yangtze rivers in this century. Hardest hit were Anhui and Jiangsu provinces, exactly the regions in which the Amity Foundation, whose base is in Jiangsu's capital Nanjing, has concentrated most of its welfare and development projects, and where Amity is best known for its concern for the betterment of people's lives.

According to official statistics, the floods took 3,074 lives, made 10 million people homeless and damaged 40 million hectares of cropland nationwide. In such a situation, it would have been unthinkable for Amity to restrict itself to its ongoing development projects and long term plans as if nothing had happened. Millions of people and countless organizations inside China involved themselves in volunteer work and provided resources to fight the floods and to alleviate the impact of their destruction on the victims. Likewise, the Amity Foundation, though primarily committed to development rather than relief, wanted to play its part in offering help to those affected in Jiangsu and Anhui provinces.

In the last Newsletter, Amity appealed to overseas friends for US$150,000. However, when the actual extent of flood damage became clearer, Amity raised the figure to one million US dollars. More detailed reports were circulated to major donor agencies, and by mid-October, the target had been exceeded by more than 50%. By October 15th, the Amity Foundation had received US$596,000 in cash plus US$606,000 in kind, and had been pledged an additional US$300,000 in cash. The Amity Foundation is grateful to all partner organizations and individual donors for their quick, generous and unbureaucratic support.

The international and ecumenical character of Amity's support network is most evident in the fact that roughly one-third of all donations (pledges included) and more than half of the total amount in cash have been given by the World Council of Churches. The money from Geneva includes many contribu-
tions from all over the world specifically earmarked for flood relief in China, as well as general relief funds provided by the Christian community worldwide. Most of the remainder, however, originates from agencies in just two parts of the world: Hong Kong and the United States, with the United States accounting for more than one-third and Hong Kong for almost one-quarter of all donations received.

The great bulk of the North American funds have been given by the National Council of Christian Churches, USA (flanked by significant contributions from the Southern Baptists and the United Methodists, USA), whereas donations from Hong Kong are from a number of major sources, including Caritas, the Hong Kong Christian Council, the Anglican Diocese, the Salvation Army, the Yang Memorial Social Service Centre, and the Chinese Rhenish Church.

By mid-October, Amity had completed projects worth US$323,000 (US$217,000 in Jiangsu and US$106,000 in Anhui). Funds for projects still under way and pledges for planned projects amounted to US$304,000 (US$171,000 in Jiangsu and US$133,000 in Anhui). To date, the total sum spent or pledged by Amity (US$627,000) was therefore a little higher than what Amity had actually received in cash. More donations will immediately be used for further projects. Pressing needs in the flood-stricken areas far exceed whatever amount of donation Amity can possibly obtain from overseas or what can be handled by its limited staff.

Nationwide total economic losses were estimated by the government at more than 15 billion US dollars. In terms of such great a disaster, Amity's contribution is little more than a token of solidarity. However, for the Amity Foundation itself, the handling of this volume of relief money has been an unprecedented challenge. One-and-a-half million US dollars is nearly twice as much as Amity's annual budget for all of its social and development projects together, excluding the teachers project. All of the Amity staff in Nanjing shouldered an extra and unforeseen work load, which was especially heavy for those who travelled to the flood-stricken areas, led negotiations with flood victims and local governments, identified projects and hammered out their budgets.

With the assistance of the Overseas Chinese Friendship Associations in both Anhui and Jiangsu provinces, Amity identified those counties in which help was most urgently needed. In this way, relief projects were limited to 12 counties in Jiangsu and four in Anhui. In most areas, Amity concentrated its relief efforts on housing, schooling, and support for the elderly.

Besides the lack of food and the threat of diseases due to poor sanitation, the most pressing problem flood victims faced was housing. Peasants whose houses were flooded and subsequently collapsed, usually fled to dams and built-up roads where they stayed in make-shift huts. At the end of September, there were still more than two million homeless people living on dams in Anhui province alone. With the approach of winter, when temperatures can drop down below freezing, the situation is urgent. With no time to rebuild houses for all of the homeless before winter, relief efforts concentrate on the erection of temporary winter shelters, generally 18-square-meter rooms with raw brick walls and thin asphalt sheet roofs, designed to accommodate one family each at a cost of between 650 and 800 yuan (US$120 to US$150). In most places, Amity has granted 500 yuan (US$93) per shelter, with the remainder being raised by the beneficiaries.

In Anhui Province, Amity has spent US$177,000 to construct
more than 2,200 of these one-room shelters. But in some places construction of provisional shelters was not appropriate. An additional US$30,000 was designated for the construction of 30 one-room, 50 two-room and 40 three-room houses in Anhui Province. In both the temporary and the permanent housing projects, beneficiaries were elderly people without children to support them. Special support was given to the "three-no-families," so called because after the flood, they had no house, no money and no food.

Hardest hit among the homeless were elderly peasants who had no children to rely on and who were too old to rebuild their houses and to restore their farms. A concerted effort was made to shelter these people in homes for the elderly. With a total of US$118,000, Amity helped to repair, extend or newly erect eleven such homes in Jiangsu and one in Anhui.

Another immediate need was the maintenance of basic school-

ing. According to statistics, the floods affected more than 89,000 schools all over the country. To help ensure the re-opening of classes after the summer break, the Amity Foundation channelled US$30,000 to seven primary schools in Anhui and another US$118,000 to 12 primary and two middle schools in Jiangsu for the repair or reconstruction of classroom buildings.

Other institutions receiving major support from the Amity Foundation were two township clinics in north Jiangsu, the Social Welfare Center in Wuxi (south Jiangsu), and a welfare factory in rural Anhui.

While Amity did not engage in the reconstruction of church buildings, it supported the renovation of a residence for Buddhist nuns in Shouxi County (Anhui), and assisted a Muslim township in the same province with the construction of a primary school and the erection of 400 one-room winter shelters, and sponsored 300 one-room winter shelters in another Muslim township.

For all projects negotiated by Amity, contributions from local governments and beneficiaries were sought. However, this principle could not always be followed, as governments and people in the worst hit areas were too impoverished.

Besides the funding of reconstruction projects, the Amity Foundation handled several donations in kind, including 15,000 cotton quilts and 25,000 overcoats. The Jiangsu Christian Council mobilized all its young staff to help with the distribution of 500,000 sterilizing tablets.

News In Brief

For the second year Amity cooperated with the Jiangxi Provincial Education Commission and four Cooperative Services International sponsored teachers to provide a Summer English Training Program for teachers in rural areas of inland China.

The Amity Teachers Program has entered its seventh year. In the 1991-92 school year there are 72 German, English and Japanese language teachers from nine different countries who teach at 44 different institutions in six provinces. Five of these teachers are now serving their fourth year or more with Amity.

To broaden Amity's understanding of social work and its practice Liu Ruhong and Cao Jingxin took part in a one-month internship program at the Yang Memorial Social Service Centre in Hong Kong.

Gu Renfa, Associate General Secretary and coordinator of Amity's rural development projects, is presently enrolled in a six-month international development study program at Selby Oaks College in Birmingham, U.K.

The annual meeting of the European Network of Amity Partners (ENAP) was held from November 10 to 12 in Berlin, Germany. Two Amity staff members, education director Ting Yen-Ren and Rev. Claudia Währisch-Oblau of the Overseas Coordination Office attended along with board members Rev. Chen Zemin and Bishop Shen Yifan.
Depressing Scenes, Determined Spirit
A Visit to Flooded Xuyi County

The fate of millions: flood victims find shelter on river dams

On August 10th and 11th, two of us from Amity travelled to Xuyi County, about 140 km north of Nanjing, to carry out relief work in this flood-affected region.

Xuyi is the area where I lived and worked as a commune member for four years during the Cultural Revolution. Thousands of high school graduates, or "educated youths" as we were then called, were settled there, leading a life as simple and hard-working as that of the some 600,000 farmers in this county. Old memories came back as the bus entered the county.

We were immediately taken, first by car and then by boat, to see the flooded areas. As time was limited, I could not visit any of those I had known from 20 years ago, those who had helped shape my life. I did go to places where some of them used to live, only to find entire villages submerged in water. It would have been difficult to find who was where since all farmers and their families were now staying in small huts built with straw and reeds, lined up on top of dikes above the water level.

Large areas of land were still under water. Our boat easily sailed over the road on which I had walked many times in the early 70s. Only when the boat passed under the power line along the road was I forced to bend down.

A few brick buildings stood orphaned in the water, one here, two or three there. We passed by a primary school which I could remember from the 70s. This time I could see only its portion above the middle of its windows. Most houses in this area had mud walls which had all collapsed. Here and there, we could see drifts of old straw, formerly the roofs, now washed up against the sloping dikes by the waves.

The local officials accompanying us bombarded us with figures. The rainfall over the worst ten days was 620.5 mm, seven times the normal figure. The Huai River, which cuts through the county, rose 3.09 m higher than its 12.50 m normal level, rushing down at 10,000 cubic meters per second. During those days, officials even moored their boats at the steps of the county government building.

Total direct losses in the county are estimated at 400 million yuan. One-third of the summer crops were washed away, another one-third molded or sprouted due to the lack of sunning. Sixty-seven thousand hectares of fall crops, more than two-thirds of the total, were flooded; 19,800 hectares were completely destroyed.

Thirty-one thousand rooms collapsed in the floods and 82,000 became uninhabitable. About 110,000 people had to leave their homes for some time, and 45,000 were still unable to return to them at the time of my visit.

Altogether, 135 primary and secondary schools, 25% of the total, were flooded. The schooling of 15,000 children this fall was in question because their schools had collapsed, were no longer safe or were still under water, or because the children's families had been relocated too far away from the new schools.

Admittedly, the local officials did a very good job of moving people to higher ground when it was pouring. In Xuyi County, not a single case of death was reported despite the collapse of so many houses and dikes. At least one woman safely gave birth to a baby during the 110,000-person exodus from the floods.

However, we found the situation rather grim on the dikes, where hundreds of thousands were living temporarily. Some were to move into UN-assisted winter shelters, others would stay through the winter, and many, perhaps, would stay for one or two years.

The water on either side of the dike was used for cooking, washing, and doing laundry. Garbage and refuse was thrown into the
same water. Efforts had been made by the local Red-Cross and village health workers who had distributed water purification tablets. But I do not know what will happen as the situation drags on.

Most farmers were living on a ration of one jin (half a kilo) of grain per person per day, sold or distributed by local governments for emergency relief.

The most difficult part will come this winter and next spring and summer when people run out of food. Much of the summer crop was damaged and the fall crop was not planted because it would have cost too much (even for the government, let alone the disaster-trodden farmers) to drain the water in order to sow wheat in October. Therefore, many farmers will not have a harvest next summer. If government relief grain does not arrive on time, the situation will become critical.

Already, I saw some farmers drying the sprouted wheat in the sun and was told that they were going to eat "mixed flour," made from 70% normal wheat and 30% sprouted wheat which is poisonous if eaten in large quantities. I instantly remembered once having buns made from such flour: they upset my stomach for several days.

Amity has helped expand a home for the aged to house old farmers who have no children to depend on. Too old to work, many of these people were left with dilapidated mud houses and with little or no furniture or personal effects. The rain-storms had damaged these houses so severely that they could no longer be repaired. But many old people had no other place to go.

We visited a 71-year-old woman in her house; the beams had fallen from one side, exposing the room to the sky; the part of the thatched roof above her bed had been mended with old plastic bags. Whenever it rained, she had to rush to a distant relative's house and stay there until the rain stopped.

The people in that township decided to expand an existing home for the aged, also badly damaged by the rainstorms, because it was uneconomical to rebuild individual houses for the old people and it would be difficult to provide services for them if they continued to live far from one another. The expansion, now under construction, will have 20 rooms on 400 square meters. The project will hopefully be completed by mid-November, before winter sets in.

In another township, where most of the land was still under water when I visited, we met the head of the township committee, a "government-in-exile," as it was called since its daily work was being done from a large junk. Here, Amity helped build a temporary school for children of temporarily relocated families.

The school has 15 classrooms and enrolls about 1,000 pupils. (The township used to have three primary schools and one junior high, with a total enrolment of 1,830.) The project was completed before September 1st and school began on September 15.

We also decided to make contributions toward the building of a primary school in another township. But however much we have done and continue to do, it is only a drop in the bucket, or, using a term Amity likes to use, the widow's mite.

The scenes were depressing; however, I did not feel depressed. In front of a 10-square-meter straw hut on the dike, a woman in her fifties was cleaning her "stove" - a hole dug in the ground. Her husband, together with many others, was away building the UN-assisted winter shelters. Seeing a sack of wheat in the corner, we asked what she would do when the food ran out. "Well, there will be a way," she said with a calm smile. That smile was indeed the most comforting thing we saw.

There were numerous stories of young people who had spent over a month reinforcing dikes, without even going home when their own houses were in danger; stories of fishermen sinking their family junks to fill the breach in the dike; stories of village leaders working three days non-stop, with little sleep and only one meal a day; and stories of women organizing the evacuation of entire villages, carrying the elderly and sick, and sharing a few buns among several families.

Floods can destroy crops and houses. But they can also unite people and bring out the best in humanity.

Ting Yen-Ren
(Ting Yen-Ren is the director of Amity's Education Division.)
Amity Pumps Save Part Of Rice Harvest
Jiangsu Rural Development Projects In The Aftermath Of The Floods

Since July, Amity staff have made a number of visits to flood-hit areas in Jiangsu and Anhui provinces. In addition to studying the overall situation and identifying priorities for relief efforts, we have also been concerned to assess the impact of the floods on ongoing Amity projects.

In late August, I visited development projects in northern Jiangsu together with Gu Renfa, director of Amity's Rural Development Division. As we drove north from Nanjing, we could see that the level of rivers and lakes was much higher than normal. Flood waters had by this time subsided, but they had left clearly visible marks on many buildings and walls.

Gu Renfa reports that Amity's rural projects, especially those in Jiangsu, have suffered only minimal flood damage. Rural projects are located in poorer parts of the province, mostly in the north, whereas the floods hit hardest in the more developed areas along the Yangtze River, especially in and around the city of Wuxi.

Only one of Amity's 19 well-digging projects in Anhui and Jiangsu has been affected. That was in Caomiao Township, Jiangsu, an area visited by one group of overseas Amity partners during the Consultation on Social Development in November, 1990. The building which housed the well collapsed during the floods, and the pump was ruined. Still, the damage was slight. Amity has provided 7,000 yuan (US$1,300) for rebuilding purposes, which should be sufficient. Most other wells are on high ground, beyond the reach of the flood waters.

Gu Renfa and I made in-depth visits to two rural development projects, both of which were also on the itinerary for the 1990 Consultation on Social Development.

United in suffering: the floods spare no one

Sanbao Township Drainage Stations

In the township of Sanbao (Huai'yan Prefecture) two drainage stations have been built over the past 12 months. Two additional pumping stations are projected, but due to the rains and flooding of the last few months, they have been postponed.

Amity will provide a grant of 154,300 yuan (US$29,000) toward this entire project, which has a total budget of 994,000 yuan (US$185,000). The project is basically concerned with flood control. The purpose of the drainage station is to drain water from low-lying land to make it useful for agriculture. Twenty-four km of dikes were raised by two meters last fall. It was surprising to learn that 12,000 inhabitants of the township performed the work in 20 days. Once this had been done, the pumping stations were built.

The summer floods have affected this low-lying area. After the July rains, the two pumps had to work continuously for two days to drain all the water. Thanks to the pumps the rice harvest was not completely lost in Sanbao, as it was in other low-lying areas.

The situation is complicated by broader infrastructural problems. When we visited Sanbao, the water level in the drainage canal was about 5.2 m above sea level. In early July, the water reached 7.25 m, while the dikes are only 7.5 m high. When water was almost level with the top of the drainage canals, the North Jiangsu Irrigation Bureau decided to turn off the pumps. If they had continued to pump water out of the farm land into the drainage canals, it would have overflown back into the farmland, thereby damaging the dikes.

In addition to the loss of the harvest, many people in the township lost the fish they were raising in their own ponds as a side industry. One village put her family's loss at 5,000 yuan (US$930). Other villagers were more fortunate. We saw that several had established enclosed ponds for raising fresh water crabs, an autumn delicacy in Jiangsu, and these had not been lost. Still, in early July, most of the villagers in the areas we visited stored their belongings as best they could, and went off to live with friends and relatives.
In comparison with other projects (for example, the irrigation work we saw the next day in Yuwei Township, Lianshui County), the reporting back of local officials from Sanbao to Amity has not been entirely adequate. Gu Renfa also observed that the changes made possible by drainage projects are not as significant as those made possible by irrigation. My own feeling in this particular case is that a great deal depends on infrastructural conditions above and beyond the project, over which Amity has no control. All of these observations have implications for the future, in terms of how Amity’s limited funding can be put to the best use.

Yuwei Township Irrigation Station

This project is situated in one of the poorest areas of Jiangsu. The poverty here is partly a result of the township’s lack of an irrigation system. Farmland is on high ground, and although we saw that the water was high in many of the canals and ditches, this area was by and large unaffected by the summer floods.

As we observed in November, 1990, land here was not suitable for rice cultivation in the past. Now it is. Although some cotton, beans and other products are still grown, rice is now the major crop and the local people will be self-sufficient in rice production after the fall harvest.

A local official told me that the 1990 per capita income of Yanghe village in Yuwei township was 313 yuan (US$58). Estimates are that the per capita income may increase to 463 yuan (US$86) this year. Although I have no way of verifying such figures, informal conversations with villagers and my own observations confirmed that their standard of living is a great deal better than it was in the past.

The irrigation pump is maintained by a yearly fee of two to four yuan per local family. This is designed to defray costs for the repair and replacement of the pump, as this becomes necessary.

Gu Renfa observed that the villagers were obviously not used to growing rice, as could be seen by the unevenness of the rows in the fields. "They will do better next year," he commented. Amity’s contribution of 104,000 yuan (US$19,000) of a total 397,000 yuan (US$74,000) budget appears to have been well spent in Yuwei Township.

Philip Wickeri

(Philip Wickeri, based in Hong Kong, is overseas coordinator of the Amity Foundation.)

Floods Strike Those Who Are Lowest

Home For Disabled Children To Be Rebuilt In Wuxi

Beneath the heavy black cloud cover there was little daylight left in the city of Wuxi (southern Jiangsu Province) and the relentless rain continued to beat down. As the dim light of the day turned into the darkness of evening the flood wave came. The waters of Lake Tai and the Grand Canal had long exceeded danger levels and were still rising. For several days and nights hundreds of soldiers and civilians had been frantically reinforcing dikes to stem the pressing waters.

When in the afternoon of July 2 the Social Welfare Institute received a warning that dikes of the nearby Grand Canal might not withstand the water’s force much longer, their compound was already more than ankle deep in water. Only the newest buildings were more than one storey high, so at this warning the leaders and staff took immediate action. With great speed and care most of the 260 residents - abandoned babies, disabled children and frail elderly people - were carried over the water, through the rain and then up the stairs to the upper floors of the few new buildings. Though the evacuation took hours and the staff’s housing was also on the ground level, the nurses focused their energies on those committed to their care, not on their personal belongings and color TVs.

The staff had only just rescued all of the residents from their endangered wards, crowding them together in quarters quickly improvised with bamboo mats, pillows and chairs when two soldiers, wet to the skin and covered in mud, came running up, gasping for breath. A 200 meter long stretch of dike had breached. And then, almost at the same time as their warning, the water came pouring in behind the soldiers, flooding the city.

The Social Welfare Institute is the home of those at the lowest levels of society. Likewise, it is located at literally the lowest spot in the Wuxi area. It also stands
closest to the Grand Canal. It was here that the water hit first, and it hit worst. Within twenty minutes from the time the soldiers came, bringing the flood with them, the entire compound was under 3.1 meters of water. Of the one-storey buildings, only the roofs jutted above the water.

There had been no time to save equipment. Expensive devices that had been of great use in the training of the disabled had been submerged along with the washing machines and refrigerators, essential to baby's diapers and milk formula. The kitchen, with all of its food provisions, was lost. Electricity was suspended. Night had come; rain was still pouring down; nobody knew how much further the floods would rise or how long the houses could withstand the rushing waters.

Without delay, city authorities started to evacuate people to higher ground in other parts of the city. The government arranged for small boats that people boarded from balconies and second floor ledges. On the built-up road nearby, buses waited in knee-deep water to take people from the boats to another social institute, to a guest house or to a school. By working late into the night and starting again at dawn, they finished the entire evacuation process by late afternoon of the following day.

When I visited the Wuxi Social Welfare Institute seven weeks later, the water, which had turned into a brown-black reeking muck during the 17 days it had taken to recede, had since been pumped out. The water's stench had been replaced by the smell of chlorine hovering over the grounds of the Welfare Center. "We have disinfected the whole area three times," said Director Lu. "So far we have been able to prevent the outbreak of diseases. Cleaning up was terrible. Our skin smelt for days. We couldn't wash it off."

Walls felt wet to the touch. Black and brown horizontal lines left by the water reached almost to the ceiling. "There is nothing we can do," Director Lu said. "The walls need to dry out for about three months before we can start renovating."

The ground floor of the orphanage was a sorry sight. Flood waters had not reached the gaily colored flags and the Chinese lanterns dangling from the ceiling. But walls were black and green from mold. The floor boards had already been torn out, and now lay in a wet stinking heap in the front of the building.

The day I visited, the handicapped children had just moved back into the institute, though they were housed in temporary quarters. The building they had lived in was in ruins. Their temporary accommodations were disheartening: bare rooms with discolored walls and peeling paint. Beds were cramped together with almost no room between them. On the beds, children and teenagers with all kinds of physical and mental handicaps lay idle and bored. Two deaf boys huddled together on one bed and looked at me with big, unsmiling eyes.

These 57 handicapped young people are the poorest of the poor. Abandoned as newborn babies, they do not even have distant relatives to rely on, and with their severe handicaps they will never have a chance to be adopted. Their fate is the saddest of all those at the Welfare Center. As Amity's resources are too limited to cover the Welfare Center's entire loss of three million yuan, the Foundation has decided to concentrate on helping the disabled with 250,000 yuan, to cover the cost of a new building for them, including the replacement of lost equipment. It is hoped that they will move into their new homes by Christmas of this year.

Gotthard Oblau