Economic reform. Double-digit growth rates. Modern cities where industry booms and five-star hotels, Toyota sedans, air-conditioned restaurants and richly supplied department stores abound. This is the China international visitors get to see, and this is how some in China like to portray the country.

But China has another side as well: incredible poverty, denuded mountains and advancing deserts, soil erosion, drought, and loss of water. Under Mao, “The East is Red” was once the most popular song. “The East is Rich,” would be more apt today. While China’s eastern regions, especially its coastal provinces and major cities, fully benefit from market reforms and the influx of foreign capital, the West is likely to be left behind.

The world’s greatest problem, the alarming and growing gap between rich and poor regions, is in some way mirrored in China. The global North-South conflict, the scandalous disparity between economically thriving, industrialized, wealthy nations and the so-called developing countries, frequently plagued by malnutrition, a declining environment, a lack of education and health care, finds its equivalent within China’s borders. Here, it manifests itself as an East-West conflict.

The depth of poverty in western China has been portrayed in a variety of contemporary novels and films. The famous sociologist Fei Xiaotong gave an account of a visit he paid in 1984 to a poor peasant’s hovel in Dingxi in central Gansu: “In a mud hut containing nothing but a kang [a large stove made of dried mud or brick] and an empty cooking pot, a middle-aged peasant told me tearfully that his wife was sick and he had no food or firewood. Apparently, at that time about a third of the peasant families were also unable to secure the basic necessities of life.” There are villages in China’s remote West where the bare essentials of grain, firewood, and water constitute the sum total of the people’s livelihood.

In their own language, statistics describe the same reality. It is eye-opening to compare the 11 provinces of Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Xinjiang, Shaanxi, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Xizang (Tibet), and Guangxi that make up the western region, with the rest of the country, which may be taken as the East. While the West covers 64% of China’s total land area, it has only 31.6% of the total arable land and 25.4% of the total national grain output. The average yield per acre in the Northwest is only 63% that of the East. In the Southwest, low yields are aggravated by the fact that per capita cultivated land lies significantly below the national average. Tens of millions of people in the
West still live below the poverty line, defined as an annual per capita income of 200 yuan (US$36). In 1987, the annual average per capita income in Guizhou, China’s poorest province, accounted for a mere 12% of that in Shanghai. The figure for the poorest county in Guizhou was as low as 80 yuan (US$15).

Amity Struggles For The Grassroots

The Amity Foundation strives to reach out to the grassroots and to improve the livelihood of those in greatest need. With its lack of resources and an almost non-existent administrative network outside its base in Nanjing, capital of the eastern province of Jiangsu, Amity has first concentrated on pockets of poverty still existing in the East, which, as individual counties or townships, hardly exceed the average level of wide areas in the West.

With its medical work, however, Amity has already reached out on a large scale to the West. The most significant program so far is a scheme of one-year intensive training courses for rural health workers whose educational and medical background is usually woefully inadequate. In the fall of 1992, Amity started 12 courses for 50 trainees each in the six western provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi. All of these courses are held at local medical schools, whose regular purpose is to provide basic medical training for young students after they have completed their ninth grade of schooling.

Of all Amity staff members, Li Enlin is the one most familiar with the West. As deputy director of the Medical and Health Division, she traveled extensively, visiting all those medical schools cooperating with Amity in the training program.

Where Each Rice Grain Is A Treasure

When she first visited the West, she was shocked by the extent of the poverty she faced. "During the Cultural Revolution," she recounts, "I was sent down to the countryside in Anhui Province. As a young city girl, it took me quite a while to adjust to the simple village life which seemed so wretched to me. But now I have realized that the peasants in Anhui and Jiangsu even twenty years ago were much better off than their counterparts in the West today."

To her as an urban administrator, Western China is just a different world. "People in the West treasure every grain of rice and keep mending their clothes until they literally fall apart. If I was not there to help, I would feel ashamed to meet the people. In Nanjing, we are so wealthy, and we waste such a lot."

The Amity training courses in Gansu have been set up at two district health schools. One of them is located in the above mentioned town of Dingxi. When Li Enlin visited the school, she observed a large number of students crowding around one single water tap in the courtyard. They were cleaning dishes, washing their laundry, filling buckets. When she expressed her surprise about so many people gathering around a single tap, she was told that this was the only source of water for the entire school of over one thousand people. The area was so arid that rainfall was the only source of drinking water. With insufficient rainfall, even this tap would run dry.

At supper in the school canteen, she observed the students having no more than a bowl of rice gruel and a piece of steamed bread. Wondering why they had no vegetables, she learned that they could afford vegetables only once a day, and even then two students had to share one little dish.

No Bowls To Eat From

At the Gansu Health Bureau, Li received a briefing on the 28 counties classified as poor. In those areas, many families are so destitute that all their household belongings combined are no worth 10 yuan (US$2). Though Li found it hard to believe, she was told that some peasants don't even have bowls to eat from. Their tables, made from mud, have carved-out depressions to hold the food.

In the remoter areas of Sichuan Province, the situation is hardly better. Li discovered this when she negotiated a training course in Wujiang in the province's southeastern border region. Upon offering the usual 600 yuan (US$110) per student to cover tuition fee and living expenses, she was asked to add some more so that the trainees could buy extra bedding. In China, boarding students have to bring their own quilts to school. But this posed a problem in Wujiang: "If the trainees take their quilts from home," the school authorities explained, "their wives and children will have to sleep under their coats. In the villages here, most families must share a single quilt." Li also learnt that the trainees would have to bring their own bag of rice with them, as the school was unable to purchase enough food.
Nothing But A Stethoscope

Under conditions like this, basic health care can hardly be expected to prosper. Take Gansu Province, for example: Though all of its village stations are staffed with at least one medical worker, 90% of them have no training at all. The government’s annual spending on medical care is limited to a modest two million yuan (US$366,000), from which hospitals and health stations need to be built, maintained and equipped. What is left for medical training for the entire province is normally less than 100,000 yuan (US$18,000) per year - for 17,000 untrained medical workers.

In Guizhou Province, as Li realized, many township hospitals exist only nominally. Often, their medical equipment consists of nothing more than a single stethoscope. In some cases, staff salaries have to be covered by patient fees, with the result that doctors are impoverished if local people are too healthy. Public money hardly trickles down to the township level, as provincial health expenses are very meager in any case. With a state rule that urges the provinces to spend 3.4% of their fiscal revenue on health, China is miles away from the 8% target proclaimed by the World Health Organization for the year 2000. In absolute terms, for the poorer provinces this 3.4% works out much less. In this way, the backward areas lose out even more.

Half-Illiterate Doctors

The worst conditions are to be found in areas with national minorities, ethnic groups whose culture and language differs from the Han Chinese majority. They usually inhabit the fringes of China, inhospitable and mountainous border areas. One such region is southern Yunnan Province, close to Vietnam, Laos, and Burma. When she went there, Li learnt that public education is so scarce and poor that young medical health workers who have nothing but a few months of on-the-job training regularly fail the entrance exam to the one-year training courses offered by provincial health schools. Many of these “doctors” must rely on somebody’s help when they pre-}

scribe a medication, because they are half-illiterate. Or they laboriously copy Chinese characters from a sample list of the names of the most common diseases and medicines - not a promising method of medical treatment.

It is experiences like this that led to Amity’s policy of giving priority to the training of health workers from ethnic minorities.

Honghezhou, one of the counties in southern Yunnan, has an interesting peculiarity: most of its villages are situated on mountain tops. Though people from neighboring villages can see each other and communicate by shouting, it takes them hours of climbing to reach each other. Bicycles are rare, and almost entirely useless. When Li passed through the region by bus, she thought how difficult it must be to see a doctor under those conditions, especially as the few existing dirt roads are frequently blocked by landslides.

Where There Is No Doctor

It is precisely for these people and others like them that the Amity Foundation is arranging the publication of a medical handbook for lay people which in a simple language and through clear illustrations explains how common illnesses can be treated with traditional methods and well-tried household remedies. Widely known under its English title Where There Is No Doctor, it has been translated into more than 20 languages and is well received in Third-World countries throughout the world.

Amity has appointed a team of doctors at the Drum Tower Hospital in Nanjing to work out an adapted Chinese version for use in China’s countryside. However, the project has been delayed by the Nanjing doctors’ tendency to raise the standard of the book to a level too high for barely-educated peasants. “Urban doctors,” Li comments, “can hardly imagine the real situation in those poor and remote regions. Since medical standards in our provincial capitals are only one or two decades behind those in North America and Western Europe, they find this book too superficial and, in its simplicity, of no use for China. Yes,” Li sighs, “unless they have seen it with their own eyes, people in the East just have no idea how it is in the West.”

Indeed, Where There Is No Doctor would be perfectly suitable for the hill tribes in southern Yunnan. Among the 30 or so families in every village, there may be a single person with complete primary school education, who, in case of an illness, would be able to consult the book and find out what can be done even without a doctor or chemical medication.

Protection Behind Barricaded Doors

In 1991 alone, Li Enlin travelled more than 8,000 km overland. It does not take a great deal of imagination to realize that her trips are rough. As the Amity
Foundation is chronically short of qualified staff members, Li tries to save time by taking buses and trains over night, when possible. And she travels alone. This regularly startles her local hosts. Time and again she hears their warnings, all along the same lines: "You know, our place is not so bad, but the province you are heading to is quite a wild place. As a woman all by yourself, you should really be on your guard!"

And that she is. More than once, Li has spent the night in dimly lit roadside inns, where female guests are a rarity. In situations like that, she has learnt to barricade her door with all the movable furniture her guest room has to offer.

When Li goes travelling, she leaves her husband and a five-year old daughter behind. And from many places she can't even call home to put her worried family at ease.

Li Enlin spares no trouble nor hardship to serve those in greatest need. Her courage and commitment are firmly rooted in her Christian faith. In striving for the improvement of China's grass-roots medical care, she helps the sick and brings hope to the poor. She does this as a practical witness for Christ, following her personal call from God. With this, she undoubtedly walks in the footsteps of her parents. Her father was a Protestant minister, and her mother a medical doctor, who ran a little clinic for local people, both Christians and non-Christians.

Injections For Pigs, Instruction To Seminarians

Even as a teenager, Li had learnt many medical skills from her mother. Li made full use of her knowledge during the Cultural Revolution, when she was sent to the countryside where she worked as a "barefoot doctor" for several years. "The villagers approached me with the strangest requests," Li remembers. "Not only did they expect me to heal their dying parents, I even had to give injections to their pigs." Since then she has preserved a deep love for country folk and a special interest in basic health care - a commitment from which the Amity Foundation benefits today.

After the Cultural Revolution, Li Enlin first studied English and later attended the Nanjing Theological Seminary. After her graduation in 1985, she taught theology at the newly-opened seminary in Wuhan before joining the Amity Foundation in the spring of 1987. "My work for Amity is just another way of working for the church," she confesses. "At Amity, I participate in God's great mission through which He lets people feel his faithfulness to the poor and his salvation of all creation."

It seems, however, that her church does not exactly share this perspective. Li Enlin feels a bit disappointed by the fact that nobody has ever considered ordaining her as a minister. And since she started working for Amity, she has never again been asked to preach. Is Amity's service regarded by the church as too worldly an affair? Apparently, large sectors of China's Protestant Church, especially at the local level, have still to learn that the gospel has a public dimension and that personal piety needs to be linked with social responsibility.

Li Enlin, as courageous barefoot doctor, English teacher, theological instructor and medical administrator, is a forward-looking example which will hopefully be more broadly recognized and emulated in the future.

Gotthard Oblau
Amity Training For Over 1,000 Rural Medics
Amity Increases Its Input to Meet Immense Need

Doctors who had attended Amity-sponsored training courses in Nanjing gave up-beat and confident responses to Li Enlin’s enquiries when she met them during a visit to Qinghai Province. “Before my training with Amity,” one gynecologist confessed, “I had no idea how many possible diseases there are. When I now see my patients, I can interpret their symptoms much better. Often I think: Oh yes, I have seen this condition in Nanjing already.”

A young doctor who had been assigned to the ophthalmological department of a township hospital in Qinghai when he was just 18 years old, explained: “They called me an eye-doctor, but I knew practically nothing about eyes. I tried to glean some knowledge from experienced colleagues, but that wasn’t much. Only my internship in Xining (the capital of Qinghai) provided the breakthrough I needed. Within six months I not only gained a solid theoretical background but also learnt to perform cataract operations. A well-structured course gives you much more in far less time than any on-the-job training could.”

His hospital director could confirm that: “We have sent three of our eye-doctors to different Amity courses. After their return, our department suddenly flourished. We had to put up a lot more beds for all the patients who come for operations. Before, we basically did only out-patient treatment. Now we are extremely busy, and our doctors do an excellent job.”

The Amity Foundation has been engaged in the training of doctors from Qinghai Province since 1989. Female gynecologists have attended one-year training courses at the Nanjing Medical College, surgeons have upgraded their skills through internship programs at the Jiangsu People’s Hospital, and general practitioners from township clinics learnt simple eye surgery in regional short-term courses.

The ophthalmological programs have expanded so rapidly that Amity has established a separate division to handle them. Training courses in Nanjing have been opened up to gynecologists from Gansu Province as well. Internship programs, on the other hand, have been shifted away from Nanjing to the western provinces where equipment and medical techniques are closer to what the trainees face in their day-to-day work at home. During the current academic year (September, 1992 - July, 1993) 20 surgeons from Gansu and Sichuan provinces will do internships in the capitals of their home provinces.

In the three provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, Amity initiated half-year programs of specialist training for doctors who have already undergone at least three or four years of general training at medical secondary schools. The kind of specialization they are acquiring depends on local needs. In Guizhou, China’s poorest province, leper villages are still a common sight. Here, Amity supports rural doctors to research a cure for leprosy. Other medical fields offered are internal medicine, general surgery and gynecology, as well as maternity and child care.

At present, 300 trainees are enrolled in six courses taught by doctors from provincial hospitals. The Amity Foundation is supporting each participant with a grant of 950 yuan (US$174), which includes the cost of accommodation in simple guest houses, because host hospitals cannot provide accommodation in their compound. The main overseas donor for this program is the Swedish Alliance Mission, with further contributions coming from the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the California-based China Connection.

To date, Amity’s biggest medical training scheme, which started in September 1992, is the training of 600 rural medical workers in the provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi. The 12 courses, two in each province, are held locally, at medical schools in district cities. With these courses, doctors will be enabled to treat common diseases and diagnose severe cases which make referral to township or county hospitals necessary. The curriculum also contains lectures on Community Based Rehabilitation, following a WHO manual on a broad variety of disabilities.
A patient ward in a township clinic

While schools are providing teaching staff and dormitory accommodation, Amity is contributing 1,200 yuan (US$220) per student, covering tuition fees and living subsidies, as well as textbooks and other learning aids. The main overseas donor for this training scheme is EZE, a church-run development agency in Germany.

Upgrading the medical standards of China's rural health workers is an enormous yet urgent task. As national statistics show, these so-called village doctors are responsible for nearly 50-60% of the medical treatment and 80-90% of prevention and health care work in the country. However, in comparison to the responsibility they carry, their skills are usually far too inadequate, for most of them have received only short-term or on-the-job training. Of all rural medical workers presently working in the field, 56% have had less than one year of intensive training, 30% less than half a year, and some are even illiterate. When a nationwide standard exam, equivalent to the secondary medical school level, was given to a large group of rural medical workers in 1990, 68% of them failed. On top of this, their number is too small, and their distribution uneven. Many villages have no medics at all.

In choosing locations for its training programs, Amity has given priority to minority inhabited areas (regions with a mainly non-Han Chinese population), where the medical situation is again far worse than the national average.

Health care for everyone is a human right. In this respect, though resources are limited, the Amity Foundation is doing its best to make a visible and significant contribution toward the realization of human rights in China.

Gotthard Oblau

Qinghai doctors try to apply their new-found knowledge to the questions on the standardized exam
More Cooperation with The Philippines

Three Amity staff members attended the "National Consultation on China," which met in Manila from September 10 - 12. Organized by Ms. Theresa Carino of the Philippine-China Development Resource Center (PDCR), the purpose of the consultation was to provide an update on China-related issues for Filipino non-government organizations (NGOs) and churches. More than 75 participants were involved in the three-day meeting, which included presentations by William Hinton, author of "Fanshen" and an authority on Chinese agriculture; Ms. Wu Qing, Associate professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University, who spoke on women's issues in China's reform; and Time magazine's Beijing Bureau chief, Jaime Florczuk, who spoke on China's urban youth.

In addition, Amity Associate General Secretary Mr. Ting Yen-Ren presented a paper on educational reform in China; Ms. Li Enlin spoke on China's health care system; and Philip Wickeri, Amity's Hong Kong-based Overseas Coordinator, spoke on Chinese Christianity and religious policy. A book of conference papers is now in preparation and may be ordered from the Philippine-China Development Resource Center, 23 Madison St., Quezon City, Metro Manila.

Amity representatives also spoke with PDCR about future co-operation and exchanges. These will include a visit to the Philippines by an Amity-sponsored Chinese Women's delegation in November and December. The PDCR-Amity relationship has developed considerably over the last few years, and represents an important expression of South-South sharing for both organizations.

A Remarkable Visitor

In early September the Amity office in Nanjing had a remarkable visitor who was commended by the Hong Kong Rehabilitation Association. A native of California, Mr. Dave Barr has spent the last two years traveling four continents, covering over 80,000 kilometers. While this may not seem unusual at first glance, it is, when you consider that Dave Barr is a double amputee who lost both legs in an unfortunate accident some years ago.

While adventure may be part of the motivation, Mr. Barr's main reason for these travels has a great deal more to do with helping other disabled people who may feel that they have lost the possibility for a meaningful life. This goal is one of encouraging and enabling the differently-abled, and also one of educating and informing the general public of the potential contributions of these special members of society.

While he was in Nanjing, the Amity office arranged for Mr. Barr to meet people with disabilities, and to visit factories and staff of the federations which serve or employ these workers. The highlight of Barr's stay in Nanjing was an outing to the Mausoleum of Dr. Sun Yat-sen with a group of 13 young people, all with mobility difficulties, some amputees. Together they climbed the 392 steps to the top, a joyous achievement.

Tri-cooperative Project

The Amity Foundation, the Nanjing Children's Social Welfare Institute, and the Hong Kong Yang Memorial Social Service Centre have almost completed the preparatory work for an Experimental Caring Program in Nanjing. The aims of this cooperative effort are to upgrade services and rehabilitation opportunities for orphaned children with disabilities, and the strengthening of staff in the institute. Ms. Minny Tang (Deng Meimiao) has moved from Hong Kong to Nanjing and has begun in-service training for eight staff members who have been recruited to work on this project.

Another Visit Of Officials

In early September a six-member delegation from the Religious Affairs Bureau and the United Front Work Department of Jiangsu Province visited Hong Kong, accompanied by Mr. Yan Jiabao of Amity. The group met with leaders of church organizations and visited several church-sponsored social service projects. The delegation was led by Mr. Zhang Bingduo, Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau.

Amity Continues Helping Flood Relief Efforts

The summer of 1992 was again a time of devastating flood waters in mainland China. This year major damage occurred in Zhejiang, Fujian, and Jiangxi provinces, the worst in five decades. Though not as catastrophic as last year's disaster in East China, the floods have claimed over 1,000 lives and have resulted in property losses exceeding 2.4 billion yuan (US$425 million).

In addition to destroying some 7,000 buildings while damaging 100,000 more, and laying waste tens of thousands of hectares of farmland and crops, the raging waters have caused incalculable damage to the infrastructures of these provinces.

Railway lines were cut, roads were washed away thus isolating many villages and counties, and telecommunication lines were downed for days.

The Amity Foundation has responded to the urgent need for relief assistance by allocating initial grants of 200,000 to 230,000 yuan (US$37,000 to 42,000) per province from its emergency reserve funds, the monies to be spent particularly to help repair and reconstruct schools, old people's homes, and small water conservancy facilities. An appeal has been sent to the World Council of Churches asking for US$120,000 to alleviate the costs of these projects.
The Amity Foundation welcomes two young English graduates on the staff. Ms. Pan Le (22), a graduate from Nanjing University, joined the Amity staff working for the Christoffel-Blind-Mission (CBM) and rural development projects. In the Rural Development Division, she is succeeding Ms. Zhuang Ailing, who has been appointed liaison for CBM, which is a major German partner in Amity's work for the prevention of blindness and the rehabilitation of the blind.

Ms. Yu Qun (22), who received her tertiary education in Wuhan, has started her work as a hostess for Amity's countless overseas visitors. She is a replacement for Ms. Zhang Xinxing, who, after three years with Amity, went to the United States for further studies. Earlier this year, Ms. Yu Xiaomin left Amity after two years in the Medical and Health Division to join her husband in Japan.

Mr. Ting Yen-Ren, director of the Education Division, has gone to England on a one-year sabbatical for research work in connection with his teaching position at Nanjing University. He will resume his work with Amity in the fall of 1993.

The Amity Foundation was created at 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. Institutions receiving the Newsletter are welcome to reprint any article from it. Credit should be given to the Amity Newsletter, Quarterly Bulletin of the Amity Foundation.

Funding for the work of the Amity Foundation comes from sources, both Chinese and foreign, religious and nonreligious, individual and organizational. Inquiries and suggestions concerning possibilities for 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.