Braving The Winter Chill

The Second Amity Consultation On Social Development

Poverty is harmful; poverty in the snow and cold of North China's winters is horrid. This was the most impressive - though in its physical directness unplanned - learning experience of the participants in the Consultation on Social Development hosted by the Amity Foundation from November 20 to 26.

On the very day our meeting was to start in Huaiyin, a prefectural city in North Jiangsu, an unusually early cold front from Siberia pushed its way across Central and East China, bringing snow storms and freezing temperatures as far south as Nanjing. Had it not been for the extraordinary skillfulness of the pilot of Dragon Air flight 322 from Hong Kong to Nanjing, carrying about half of the 47 participants from 18 different countries and regions, the Amity meeting would have been hopelessly thrown into disarray. Shaken by heavy gusts of wind and hampered by low visibility in thick clouds and pouring rain, the pilot approached Nanjing's runway twice, but had to abort both times. While normally the plane would then have been diverted to Shanghai or all the way back to Hong Kong, on this day the pilot gave it another try and bravely touched down at Nanjing's airport, which despite the fairly high mountains nearby is not equipped with an automatic landing system.

That same evening, the buses taking the participants up to Huaiyin had to make their way through thickening snow, passing an increasing number of abandoned trucks on the roadside. What normally would be a three-hour drive took six hours, but all eventually made it safely to the Huaiyin Hotel, the venue for the first day's meeting.

Rubber boots, brand new from the factory, were provided courtesy of the local government. They helped quite a few people keep their feet dry on the muddy paths from the road into a village in Hanzhuang Township, where local Christians received their foreign brothers and sisters for a Sunday service at their newly constructed meeting point.

The opening presentations and discussion groups were interrupted by a break during which many of the participants were taken to a nearby department store to purchase additional warm clothing, an opportunity gratefully seized by friends from India, Hong Kong and the Philippines; even Swedes and Norwegians were seen browsing through gloves and trying on woolen caps. Thus people prepared themselves for three days of field trips that took two of the four visitation groups even further north into central Shandong, where they inspected clinics and wells, and took
photos of pumping stations and village children, thereby exposing themselves to cutting winds in open fields and the penetrating chill of unheated buildings.

The participants in this consultation represented exchange partners and funding agencies in Asia, Europe, North America and Australia. We met for almost a week, sharing views on social development, exchanging experiences, visiting and evaluating our projects in Jiangsu and Shandong provinces, and discussing Amity's future work and coordinated support.

This meeting was the second of its kind, preceded by a similar event three years ago. Since the first consultation, the Amity Foundation has grown in size and experience, and significantly expanded the number of projects as well as the geographical area of its involvement. Our different program divisions have developed a clearer profile, as we were able to deepen old partnerships and establish new ones both in the "First World" and in developing countries in Asia.

At this point in our history, our second consultation was a very significant gathering, providing insight and fresh ideas from a broad range of knowledgeable people, including development professionals as well as church and mission related representatives. At the same time, we hope that through this meeting our international friends and partners got to know us a little better and gained a picture of our evolving spirit and work, and of China's society, the context we are working in.

Once again we have been deeply impressed by the commitment and dedication of our overseas friends, which on this occasion expressed itself most significantly in the composure and good humor they kept despite all the hardships. After returning from the field trips, while we were holding our closing meetings - for a change - in a comfortably heated four-star hotel in Nanjing, one North-American participant remarked: "It is important for us to always remember that the vast majority of the people of China suffer much more every day than we do as a result of inconveniences we go through as overseas visitors. It is one thing for me to complain about the food; it's another for people to have no food to eat. It is important for us to be sensitive about the genuine needs of people who do not have adequate clothing, adequate food or adequate shelter. We should expend our efforts in helping to improve their lives rather than complaining about our accommodation."

The greater part of the plenary sessions in Nanjing were spent on receiving reports from the visitation groups and exchanging ideas and suggestions as to how to improve our efficiency in contributing to China's social development, how to relate to local governments, Chinese churches and other NGOs in Asia, how to define our developmental goals and strategies, and how to face the challenges of China's current sweeping economic changes. Naturally, the variety of views and opinions reflected the great range of people and organizations present.

As Philip Wickeri, Amity's Overseas Coordinator, said in his concluding comments on the last day of meetings, "Part of Amity's wealth is the diversity of our friends and partners from around the world. People here include development experts from specialized agencies, as well as theologians from mission agencies. They don't often talk to one another. We have representatives of organizations ranging from very small, one- or two-person-run groups to very big institutions with tremendous resources. We have friends from Europe and North America, as well as from developing countries in Asia. The number of different church denominations represented here is rather great, with an even greater range of different perspectives from within those denominations. Some of our partners are used to working in ecumenical networks, while others prefer to stay away from them. Of course, this diversity has brought about a great range of perspectives in our discussion. I find it amazing and uplifting that the Amity Foundation can bring people from so many different backgrounds together not only to talk and exchange views but to actually get involved and get things done for the betterment of the people in China."

Gotthard Oblau
Culture Shock In Fei County
How China's New Affluence Affects Its Hinterland

Amidst rapid economic and social changes, the Amity Foundation tries to strengthen those sectors of society that tend to be pushed to the periphery. An example of uneven development could be observed by participants in the Amity consultation who travelled to Fei County, where Amity runs a variety of health and rural development related projects. Though located in the coastal province of Shandong, Fei County is classified by the government as one of the poorest and least developed counties in China. Here, over a hundred villages are still without electricity or without an adequate water supply. Dozens of places lack primary schools, and many more have no health station.

After visiting a comprehensive project in Yulinshan Village, one of the international visitors, a seasoned development expert, commented, "I don't think that I have ever seen a place so completely covered by stones in my life. Wherever the eye fell, there was stone, stone, stone." In this area, many young peasants stay unmarried, as they are too poor to find brides, while others join China's increasing migrant population in search of jobs in factories or on construction sites elsewhere.

Knowing that Amity tries to reach out to areas in the greatest need, we had prepared ourselves to be confronted with poverty still untouched by China's latest economic boom. What came as a surprise, however, was the accommodation prepared for us in the county town. We stayed in a newly constructed guest house which had opened just in time for our arrival. Though it was built with local resources, and many of the facilities were still not working properly due to a lack of experience in installing and maintaining them, this hotel must be heaven for the young girls hired as staff from the surrounding villages. Never before had they stayed or worked in a place which had carpeted floors and heavy curtains, color TV, central heating, and private bathrooms with hot water.

I stayed in an equally luxurious place a month earlier, when I visited a very backward county in neighboring Jiangsu Province. In the faint hope that foreign investment will lead to economic prosperity, even the poorest regions are now competing for foreign visitors. To attract them, county officials feel the need to create the necessary infrastructure, usually consisting of guest houses and Japanese cars. Such investments, which can only pay off if dreams come true, amount to more than a poor county's entire annual budget for health and social services.

On the first day of our Amity visitation tour to Fei County, we were sitting together after dinner to discuss the projects we had seen during the day when an official came in to invite us upstairs to meet with the county magistrate in the Karaoke bar of the hotel. Having just visited peasants in their mud houses - their weather-beaten faces, their more than spartan homes still fresh in our minds - we entered a dance hall filled with the flashing lights of a color organ and the sounds of the latest Chinese pop music. Two big color screens displayed laser disc controlled video clips showing bikini clad Chinese girls in front of the skyline of Hong Kong. The bar served a fine variety of domestic and foreign beverages.

We learned that the entrance fee to this symbolic wonderland of modern consumerism is 10 yuan; drinks, of course, are extra. In this place, I figured, it shouldn't be too difficult for a party of officials or newly rich entrepreneurs to spend 385 yuan in one night. Though only a modest amount by foreign standards, this sum equals the county's average per capita income per year.

Gotthard Oblau
The following is a summary of the Amity work report presented by Project Secretary Gu Renfa at the International Consultation on Social Development.

Over the last three years, the Amity Foundation has applied a lot of the suggestions and recommendations offered at its first international consultation in November 1990. We have also benefitted from the experience of other development related NGOs in Asia. The Amity board meeting in 1993 affirmed our progress and approved the direction our work has been taking on the basis of those suggestions.

Achievements Made Since the 1990 Consultation

In reference to the recommendations made at the previous consultation, we may list the following achievements:

1. Amity has reached out to still poorer areas, especially further west, and has concentrated its work in selected target regions. Medical training programs are run in the six provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi. Our rural development work has expanded from Jiangsu and Zhejiang to the Dabie mountain area in Anhui, the Yimeng Mountain area in Shandong and to ethnic minority regions in Yunnan Province.

2. In the field of medical and health programs, we have shifted our focus from equipment provision to personnel training. When we give medical equipment to poor township hospitals, we arrange training necessary for the proper use of the equipment at higher level hospitals.

3. Through regular technical analysis and consultation with experts we have been seeking the most effective utilization of natural resources. Before making decisions on agricultural projects, we regularly seek advice from senior engineers in provincial level technical departments. In several drinking water projects, we have been able to persuade local partners to change their plans and choose more appropriate ways of getting clean, potable water.

4. We have engaged a growing number of Chinese and overseas experts to inspect our projects, introduced standardized evaluation forms to be filled in by local project partners and undertaken regular surveys after completion of some of our projects. In addition, our evaluation no longer focuses on economic benefits alone; greater attention is paid to the empowerment of local people. With all of this, we hope we have improved our project supervision and evaluation.

5. We have strengthened our relationships with NGOs in other developing countries in Asia through mutual visits, exchange programs and project cooperation, especially with groups in the Philippines, India and Bangladesh.

6. Amity is beginning to pay greater attention to the gender issue and to the study of this issue within the Chinese context.

Amity’s Role in China’s Social Development

China’s reform policy has brought about rapid changes which have led to prosperity but also to some severe social problems. As Amity grows, it plays a more active role in taking up old and new challenges.

1. Serving humanity - Chinese society is currently undergoing a period of transition during which the government no longer takes care of every social problem, while non-governmental welfare and social security systems are still evolving. In times like these, voluntary aid and support from society to groups of people in special need is especially crucial. It is in this context that the Amity Foundation defines its mission in China.

2. Blazing new trails and bringing forth new ideas - As an independent NGO, the Amity Foundation freely determines its involvements and distribution of resources. Amity has established and utilized wide social connections without government restriction. As we are free of any vested interests, it is sometimes easier for us to understand the needs of the people at the grass-roots level. In some fields, therefore, we can play a pioneering role and motivate the government to develop urgently needed social programs. For example, we have promoted the concept of rehabilitative medicine. We have tried to import advanced ideas and rehabilitation techniques from overseas; we have also helped establish a long-term rehabilitation training center at the Nanjing Medical College as well as various community-based rehabilitation projects in urban and rural areas.

3. Mobilizing various sectors of society and influencing the distribution of resources in local commu-
Your Last Chance To Respond!

DON'T MISS OUR FUTURE ISSUES!

You have been receiving the AMITY NEWSLETTER regularly and free of charge. We will be happy to keep you on our mailing list for future issues. But we need your cooperation.

You can help us update our mailing list and save money. If you have not yet done so, please fill in the form included on the back of this page and send it to our Nanjing office before May 1st, 1994. (Readers in Hong Kong should send it to our Hong Kong office.)

To remain on the list, you must return the form. Mail it today! We value our readers. Ensure that you or your institution continue to receive the AMITY NEWSLETTER -complimentary as always!
To
The Amity Foundation
17 Da Jian Yin Xiang
Nanjing, 210029
P.R. China

Yes, I wish to continue receiving the AMITY NEWSLETTER.

Number of copies per issue: __________

Name (Individual/Institution):
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________________________

In addition, please mail _____ copy/copies per issue to the following person/institution:

Name: ____________________________________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________________________

Date: ___________ Signature: ___________
development - As a Christian-inspired development organization, we aim at spreading the Christian spirit of selfless dedication, thereby improving the perception of Christianity in Chinese society and making a positive contribution to the upbuilding of China's spiritual civilization. We support a variety of Christian initiatives which benefit the society, including a number of clinics run by local churches. We also play a coordinating role in the exchange of experiences between different Chinese Christian organizations involved in social development, including provincial Christian councils, the YMCA, YWCA and church-related NGOs.

8. Exploring our own approach to development work in the Chinese context - In an effort to develop our own profile, we have sent staff members overseas to study the theories and practices of other development organizations, invited overseas specialists to China and shared ideas with NGOs in other Asian countries. While we cannot simply copy anyone's development concept, we try to learn from everybody and apply whatever seems beneficial in our Chinese context.

At present, the development strategy of the Chinese government is to take economic construction as the key link. This strategy meets the demands of the current situation better than the old concept of development centered around political ideology. However, economic growth does not necessarily lead to social development, and prosperity does not equal quality of life. On the one hand, therefore, we support the economic objectives of our government, because they are progressive. On the other hand, we attach great importance to other aspects of development such as people's cultural life, education, the elimination of poverty and community stability. In general, we aim at a people-centered development path which emphasizes holistic social development.

Gu Renfa
Outlining Future Policies
Excerpts From The General Secretary's Address

Han Wenzao

On Staff development:

Our program emphasis has seen a considerable shift to remote rural areas. However, most of our staff members have little or no experience in living with rural people, which makes it difficult for us to understand the peasants’ feelings and problems. Our staff should not go to the villages with the idea - even sub-conscious - that they are “saviors” or “money-givers,” rather they should go as “servants” and compassionate friends. Overcoming our shortcomings on this point will remain a problem to be tackled for years to come.

In reaffirming our "three-C" goals for staff development (compassion, commitment, competence), our staff should resist any temptation of material gains and avoid creating the misunderstanding among our partners that we are "money trees."

On China's new social challenges:

As to the transition from a planned economy to a socialist market economy, we should be alert and thoroughly study the rapid social changes around us and their effects on our work.

We should seek not only quantitative results but also qualitative change. This requires careful research, in-depth social investigation and long-term evaluation. For example, we need to find out how the township and village health workers perform after having received Amity-sponsored training, or how the young patients who underwent polio surgery are progressing in rehabilitation.

Our projects need to realize genuine people's participation. They are not mere receivers of benefits. Rather, they should take an active part in project planning, implementation, supervision and evaluation. Procedures of this kind may help raise the level of democratic participation in our society.

On Christian participation:

Local church leaders could sit on committees overseeing integrated development projects in given areas. This form of church representation would be very valuable even if the persons involved are very old and not very knowledgeable in development issues, as long as they sit together with trained specialists. On another level, we would like to invite young, capable and competent lay Christians to be involved in the actual implementation of projects. Though more plentiful in big cities, Christian engineers and medical doctors can also be found in remote areas.

On a third level, we intend to offer short-term training to local project leaders. Though we hope to expand our staff, we will always have to rely on well-trained local leadership which ideally should include lay Christians.

On regional exchanges:

We intend to further strengthen our South-South exchange programs. Since 1990, quite a number of joint activities of the Amity Foundation and the Philippine-China Development Resource Center (PDRC) have taken place. Both sides have found the exchanges worthwhile and beneficial. In addition, we would like to have more exchanges with India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and other Asian countries to engage in a process of mutual sharing and learning.

A word of thanks:

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to convey the appreciation our board has expressed for all the support we have been receiving from friends and partners overseas. Without the concern, support and prayers of our overseas friends, the Amity Foundation could hardly accomplish anything.

Han Wenzao

With deep sorrow the Amity Foundation announces the deaths of two of its board members. Rev. Tsai Wenhuo (Peter Tsai), President of the Zhejiang Christian Council, passed away on November 24, 1993, at the age of 80. Ninety-year old Rev. Wu Gaozi (George Wu), a former vice president of the China Christian Council, died in Shanghai on November 26.

Please don't forget to fill in the order form on the insert and mail it to the Nanjing office!
Lynn Walters
1966 - 1993

With deep sorrow the Amity Foundation announces the untimely death of Lynn Walters (27), an English teacher assigned to Ganzhou, Jiangxi Province, who joined the Amity Teachers Program in the summer of 1991. Her tragic and unexpected death on Christmas day left all who have known her with a sense of shock and great sadness.

Lynn Walters, born in New Hamden, Connecticut (USA), on May 29, 1966, graduated in 1988 from Smith University with a BA in Literature. She served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Marshall Islands before she came to China, sponsored by the United Church of Christ (USA).

Lynn Walters loved the Chinese people and dedicated her life to China's educational development. When she first applied to teach in China, she clearly expressed her wish to work in one of the poorest areas that needed teachers. During her years in Ganzhou, she never complained about nor even mentioned the hardships which inevitably are part of daily life and travel in a remote assignment like hers. In a letter to her parents, she expressed that her living conditions were much better than those of her Chinese colleagues and students, and that she did not want to ask for what they did not have. In her last months, she indicated several times that she would like to extend her stay in Ganzhou for a fourth year, as she saw how much the school and the students needed her.

Memorial services, which were held in her hometown, NewHamden, in Ganzhou and at the Amity teachers conference in Guangzhou, showed the multitude of friends she had and how she was loved by her fellow-Christians back home and in China, by her former classmates, her students in China, and by her Chinese and international colleagues.

Those who have known her can only agree with what Rev. Franklin Woo, the former director of the NCCCUSA China Program, said of her in his eulogy: "Lynn Walters was so alive, so present - she was all there in giving herself and her talents freely in self-abandonment with enthusiasm, exuberance, commitment and integrity... Surely such a loving and caring person had found life so rich and rewarding that her cup 'runneth over' with goodness and mercy."

We are grateful for Lynn Walters, for who she was and what she lived.

Remembering Lynn
A Portrait By An Amity Colleague

Our college with its buildings in need of repair and color is not a beautiful one. There is little to delight the eye. But just after Lynn's arrival I noticed that some things began to take on a little more of a cheerful atmosphere. For example, the shabby stairwell of our apartment building became a kind of philosopher's walk where appeared little wall cards of quotations from Emmerson, Thoreau and Blake. In that same place a home-made poster appearing on Lynn's door would invite all to tea in celebration of the opening of the third rose bud on Lynn's balcony.

Lynn and I shared one particularly grotty classroom which no one ever seemed to clean and where each week there appeared yet one more broken chair. I whined on about such conditions until one day, shuffling into the classroom, I discovered all the broken chairs somehow piled together in a wild and crazy pattern. A sign near the chairs read, 'Struggle - a free form sculpture, artist: anon, price: not for sale.' - I recognized the handwriting.

Lynn was like that in many ways - the giving of herself - always gentle - that warmth of person with often a touch of that which is whimsical. Always the smile.

Gary MacDonald
WCC Offers Assistance In Fund Raising Coordination

Speaking to the participants, Dr. Park Kyung Seo, Asia Secretary of the World Council of Churches, emphasized the need to put Amity's funding policy on a reliable and secure longer-term basis. He outlined suggestions to increase the number and volume of undesignated funds and to enhance the administrative efficiency of all sides involved. Specifically, Dr. Park offered the World Council's assistance in improving coordination and flexibility in the handling of worldwide support for Amity projects.

The consultation reached a consensus that a core budget should be created to cover the administrative costs of Amity's Nanjing and Hong Kong offices for a period of three years. Since not all overseas partners would be in a position to give exclusive donations for administration, it was resolved that roughly one half of Amity's administrative budget should be covered through direct contributions, while the other half should be secured through the scheme which has been generally followed in the past. According to the old practice, individual project budgets are topped with a five-percent administration fee. In the future, Amity partners will have the choice between giving direct contributions to the core-budget or paying five percent on top of their donations to specific programs.

In another round of business-related discussions, the Amity Foundation presented its plan to build an Amity Center on the campus of the Nanjing Theological Seminary. The center will provide enlarged office space, conference rooms and guest rooms. The consultation proposed ways to put the building plan on a workable basis and discussed fund raising procedures.

From December 26 to 31, a short-term training course on community-based rehabilitation was held in Pi County (North Jiangsu), jointly sponsored by the Amity Foundation, the Jiangsu Academy of Rehabilitation and the Red Cross Society of Pi County. The 66 trainees, who were from 36 township hospitals in the county, learned about post-surgery rehabilitative therapy methods for polio victims. Four years ago Pi County was hit by a polio epidemic which caused physical handicaps in over 500 children.

Effective January 1, 1994, the Chinese government undertook a major currency reform by abolishing the "Foreign Exchange Certificate" currency (FEC), making the Rennminbi freely convertible and adjusting its exchange rate closer to its real market value. While in the past US$1 bought 5.6 yuan FEC, it is now equivalent to 8.7 yuan RMB. This means that the nominal domestic value of donations in foreign currencies received by the Amity Foundation has increased by almost 50%. This gain, however, is largely neutralized by China's current inflation rate, which in 1993 reached an officially acknowledged 25% in urban areas and is expected to soar much higher as a result of leapfrogging import prices. The Amity Foundation has therefore decided to keep the old USS calculations for all project requests sent out in 1993, but will send out specified accounts on individual projects to involved overseas donors and consult them on the use of any left-over funds.

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.

The Amity Newsletter is prepared by the staff of the Amity Foundation and printed by the Amity Printing Company, Ltd.

Editor: Gotthard Oblau

Headquarters:
The Amity Foundation
17 Da Jian Yin Xiang
Nanjing, China 210029
Phone: (86-25) 7741354
Fax: (86-25) 7741053
Cable: 4377 Nanjing
Telex: 342222 AFN CN
Account No.: 958 148 247 256
Bank of China, Jinling Branch

Overseas Coordination Office:
The Amity Foundation
4 Jordan Road
Kowloon, Hong Kong
Phone: (852) 723-5011
Fax: (852) 366-2709