The Power Of Braces, Crutches And Bubble Gum
Polio Project Restores Mobility To 97 Children

Didi responded willingly when her mother asked her to walk for the visitors. Taking firm strides with the help of crutches and leg braces, she was proudly able to walk on her own. She walked with the help of bubble gum, the seven year old girlDidie one of 500 children who were hit by the outbreak of polio in 1989 in northern Jiangsu Province. Most come from Pi County, which covers an area of 4,047 sq. km., and consists of 36 townships and 669 villages. With a population of around 1.4 million, the region is poor and largely made up of farming communities.

One of 97 children to have completed surgery and been fitted with leg braces, Didi owes the optimistic outlook for her future largely to the efforts of a retired official. If not for the good will and hard work of Zhang Pushi, who is retired from a post as the director of public affairs in Pi County, the project may have taken much longer to get started, noted Wu An'an of the Amity Social Welfare Division.

"Zhang wanted to do something for these children, so he conducted an extensive survey of the victims after the polio out-break was stemmed in 1991, and then went to various governmental departments for funding. All showed sympathy, but many were too limited in resources and experience to be able to help," said Wu. "He learned through a colleague about the Amity Foundation and came to us in 1992. We started the project in January 1993." Zhang now coordinates the project and has a small motor scooter so that he can travel more easily, visiting patients who live in villages far from the hospital.

With funding from the Norwegian Missionary Alliance and professional assistance from China's Infantile Paralysis Research Society, Amity was able to get the project underway on a basic level. Operating out of No. Four People's Hospital in Pizhou City (Pi County), the project only has one surgeon, Dr. Miao Changjie. Miao, who studied for a year in the orthopaedic department of Zhenjiang Hospital 359, an army hospital, has operated on 285 children, conducting almost two surgeries on each child. Several weeks after surgery the children are measured and fitted for braces, which are designed and produced at Hospital 88, another army hospital in Tai'an, under the direction of a retired specialist cooperating with Amity in this project.

Didi shows off, making walking with braces and crutches while blowing bubble gum look like a breeze.
An 18-year-old polio victim recovers from her operation with her attentive mother standing by.

Not the first time Amity has cooperated with the military on a project, the army's assistance is valuable, said Wu An'an. "Polio hasn't been around in Europe or America for over 50 years now. There are very few foreign experts who can assist us. Here in China, Hospital 88 and Hospital 359 are well-known for their work with polio cases. We feel that as long as our goals are the same, we can work well together at the grass roots level."

The reputation of both army hospitals is grounded in the work of two orthopaedic surgeons, Dr. Wu Huabin, chief of the orthopaedic department of Hospital 359 in Zhenjiang, and Dr. Ning Zhijie, chief surgeon of Hospital 88 in Tai'an, who studied under Dr. Wu for several years at Hospital 359. "Dr. Wu and I first became interested in infantile paralysis around 1980, when we were riding down the road on the way to the hospital," said Dr. Nin. "We noticed a young woman of around 16 walking on the side of the road with a pronounced limp. We stopped and talked to her about her condition and then invited her to the hospital for an examination. We decided to operate. Her case was so successful that word got around. Many people began bringing their children to our hospital."

This eventually led the surgeons in 1985 to join other orthopaedic doctors in establishing the Infantile Paralysis Research Society, devoted to the prevention and treatment of polio. With centers in 10 provinces, the society has assisted the government in a polio eradication campaign involving mass immunization programs. In January of 1994, 83 million children under the age of four were vaccinated in two days. A month earlier, 82 million children were vaccinated over the same period. As a result, the number of reported cases had dropped from 5,000 people affected by epidemics in 1989 and 1990, to just 653 reported cases in 1993. China has since been praised by the World Health Organization for the dramatic cut in its contribution to the world's polio cases from 25 per cent to eight per cent.

Pledging a commitment to training the staff of the Pi County polio project, Dr. Ning commented that the project has a number of hurdles to get over. "The hospital is unable to supply blood transfusions and the anaesthesiologist is unqualified. Urgent problems which might arise during surgery cannot be attended to in such conditions. Because the medical staff do not have a good education and need to improve their skills and gain more experience, complex cases must be handled at our hospital." According to Dr. Miao, however, there have been few difficulties so far and the hospital's services have been adequate. "I can actually stand up," Zhang pointed to a small child in the hospital courtyard who was working hard, taking awkward strides with his new braces and pushing a blue walker with wheels. Behind him stood his grandfather, watching attentively.
Didi shows to visiting experts that she can do just about everything herself now, including strapping her braces on and off.

Before and after surgery, and even after the children have been fitted with braces, they will need a good deal of physical therapy to retrain the muscles which were left unused since the disease struck. "Unfortunately," said Wu, "we have little experience in China with rehabilitation and there are very few physical therapists."

The project has relied on the periodic visits of an American doctor of rehabilitation, Alta Kaufman, from Taiwan Pingting Victory Home, which has a history of over 20 years in treating patients with polio. Amity has also supported the training of three health care workers at the rehabilitation center of Nanjing Provincial People's Hospital. Recently, a rehabilitation center was set up in Hongqi Township Clinic in Jiangsu County. Staffed by one of the newly trained rehabilitation therapists, the center sports parallel bars, wall-length mirrors and a comfortable red-carpeted floor. Children can come to the center at any time for physical therapy and to have their braces adjusted.

"The only problem is many children live far away from the rehabilitation center and it is difficult for their parents to bring them there," said Wu Nan. "The hope for the future is that we can have trained township and village level health care workers who can provide physical therapy on a daily or weekly basis for these children." As the system stands now, the parents are largely responsible for helping their children with their exercises at home, after receiving basic training from the staff at the rehabilitation center.

After the tour of the rehabilitation center, our delegation was invited to visit one of the children's homes. As our van jostled over the muddy road with its pits and bumps, we attracted stares from villagers unused to vehicles careening down these roads. Chickens fled, squawking, while large pink pigs ambled out of our way at a faster rate than they seemed comfortable with. As the van drove up to an old brick farmhouse, we could see Didi, the little girl who had shown us how well she could walk and how well she could blow bubbles, waiting indifferently for us at the gate. She did not seem overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of a local TV crew, who directed her to walk in and out of her courtyard and pose with members of the delegation.

After inviting us into the living section of their home -- consisting of the sitting area and the large family bed in one room -- Didi's mother told us that while her daughter's progress was great, she still could not go to school. The mud roads were too rough for her to walk on with crutches, and the school did not have toilet facilities for handicapped children. Fortunately, she said, Didi was eligible to attend a school for the handicapped which would open soon in Pi County.

Also an Amity project, the boarding school will serve those children with double paralysis, according to Zhang Pushi. Their education beginning from primary one and continuing through to vocational training, the ultimate goal would be to ensure that they could find employment, said Zhang. With grounds for the school already provided by the local government, Amity is hopeful that the school will have enough teachers and rehabilitation staff to open its doors in January of next year to a class of 30 children, eventually accepting 100 in its enrolment.

As we left Didi's home, I couldn't help but reflect that she had a good reason to look complacent as she chewed her bubble gum; hers was a happy story with a hopeful future. Unfortunately, not all of the children we saw affected by the polio out-break in 1989 are as lucky. Some not only have "lower involvement paralysis" where the legs are affected, but "upper involvement paralysis" which means the arms -- and there are no braces devised for the latter yet. There were also children who couldn't be operated on because they had been so severely affected, they had no muscles. Many also had a severe case of scoliosis (spinal curvature).

But these children may still have a fighting chance. They already have the tireless devotion of their parents, who seem willing to search out all possibilities for them. They also have the hard work and dedication of people like Zhang Pushi, who is bent on improving the quality and resources of the project.

Lois Cole
"Blow The Wind Of Christian Service To Society"
Amity Workshop Finds More Churches Involved In Social Projects

![Christian posters on the wall disclose the hospital's identity.](Image)

"I know nothing about God; but I must thank the God you believe in, because you have saved me and given me a second life." These were the words of an elderly village woman to the doctors at the Christian Hospital in Linyi County, Shandong Province. It was shortly before Spring Festival. Having learned that she lived in extreme poverty, with a paralysed husband confined to bed, the doctors not only removed her cataract without charging her a penny, but also paid for her transportation home and gave her some cash and used clothes.

The doctors and nurses in this township hospital often end up paying for transportation, registration, medication and treatment when they accompany their patients for further tests and treatment in a county or prefectural hospital. This is only possible because staff members of the Christian hospital do not take much for themselves. All doctors and nurses earn the same salary, which is hardly more than pocket money.

In Chinese, the place is known as Ai-De Hospital, with "Ai" and "De" standing for "love" and "virtue." This name was undoubtedly inspired by the Amity Foundation, which in China is called "Ai-De," Love-and-Virtue-Foundation. Doctor Zhao Yabo, head of the hospital, commented: "Of course we are not part of the Amity Foundation, though we are friends and have received support from them. You may say we have stolen the name; but it is only appropriate because it tells people exactly who we are and what we stand for."

Despite its Christian identity, the hospital is one of the officially recognized "Model Institutions for Spiritual Civilization" in the country. The plaque with the engraving of this title was presented personally by the county magistrate, who travelled all the way to the hospital which is located in the countryside far from the city.

This was one of the many stories shared at the workshop on "Church Involvement in Social Service," held by the Amity Foundation at the initiative of the China Christian Council from March 20 to 23 in Nanjing. Participants represented 23 provincial or city Christian councils from areas in which Amity is involved with major projects or in which local churches have started social service initiatives. The workshop was also attended by a few project holders, including the national YM/WCA and the Christian monthly Tian Feng. Discussions at the workshop centered on why and how Christians and local churches should serve society.

"I used to make 600 to 1,000 yuan a month when I operated my own clothing store; now I earn only 200, but I give love and help to the weak, and this, I feel, is my calling," said a young woman, referring to her work at the Aihua Rehabilitation Center for Mentally Impaired Children. It is a small place run by a group of Christians and their friends in Dalian, Liaoning Province.

According to the center's director Dr. Sun Yuehua, the name Aihua has a double meaning. Besides "love China," it can also be read as a shortened form of "love Jehovah," the name for God in the Chinese Old Testament. In the beginning, the city Christian council did not agree to her proposal to include "Christian" in the name of the center, since some pastors were concerned that the good name of Christianity could be hurt should the project fail. Dr. Sun understood, "Ours is the first program of this nature in Dalian, so it is only natural that people have worries. To be honest, I have my worries, too."

Now, Aihua has 30 regular clients and 10 staff members, mostly Christians from the local church. Some of them are retired women doctors like Dr. Sun. The center is housed in an apartment which was offered free of charge by a retired Communist cadre who is "happy to see whole-hearted dedication to good work for society."

The opening speech at the workshop was given by Dr. Wenzao Han General Secretary of both the China Christian Council and the Amity Foundation. He endorsed a slogan circulating among Christians in Zhejiang Province: "Let the church serve society and society understand
the church." Most Christians in China have a tradition of being very conservative and living their faith in quietistic ways, aloof from "worldly affairs." But according to Dr. Han, church participation in society is essential, and he listed three reasons.

First, Christians, by definition, should do good works and share their love with other members of society. Christian love includes love and care for others, especially those who are disadvantaged and in difficulty.

Second, participation in social service helps Christians develop a better understanding of their own faith. Christian faith should not only center around personal salvation but be concerned with the earthly well-being of one's neighbor, particularly the suffering neighbor.

Third, social involvement can help the church gain the respect of the Chinese people and develop greater harmony with Chinese socialism.

Participants in the workshop all agreed that in today's China Christian involvement in society speaks a clear language. A spirit of service, love for others and concern for collective welfare serve as a sharp contrast to widespread obsession with money and material progress. This "development complex," as it was diagnosed at the workshop by Huang Jiaqian, community work department director of the Shanghai-based YM/WCA, is eroding China's traditional values of care and respect for others.

How significant the impact of even the smallest project can be was illustrated by Rev. Deng Fucun of the Zhejiang Christian Council with a true story from Hangzhou. When a medical doctor was seeking baptism, he told the pastor: "I first became interested in the Christian faith that summer when I noticed the tea at the church gate offered to pedestrians free of charge. I passed by the church every day on my way to and from work, and I always saw the tea. I thought there must be something special about people giving free service in a money-dominated world, and I wanted to find out more about them."

The church should be deeply rooted in society and always be part of the people. This was strongly expressed by Chen Xida, a young colleague at the Nanjing office of the China Christian Council. "That our church has grown so much over the last decades," he said, "has a lot to do with the progressive forces among us who were able to reconcile the common concern for personal salvation with a sense of social responsibility."

As many participants felt that the churches needed to open themselves up to the world, they proposed that the Christian monthly Tian Feng ("Heavenly Wind") "blow the wind of Christian service to society." Mei Kangjun, one of the editors, agreed to establish a special column to cover the social development work done by the Amity Foundation, local churches and individual Christians, as well as theological reflections on such work. Though changing people's faith concepts and entrenched Christian attitudes may be a long and arduous process, things have started moving little by little.

Consider an example in a suburb near Hangzhou's airport. "Our staff and residents always eat together," said Ms. Xu Fazhen sharing her story about the Hangzhou Home for the Elderly. "One resident can no longer think clearly, and she refuses to eat any food unless it has some chicken in it. So, whenever we have chicken, one of us will do with rice and vegetable, saving the chicken portion for her when no chicken is on the menu."

The home for the aged, with 31 residents from different parts of Hangzhou, is run by a congregation consisting almost exclusively of farmers whose village has been swallowed up by the fast-expanding city. This is a conservative church and their pastor would have never promoted the idea of social participation. However, the difficulties of some old congregation members caught the attention of the church committee. After much discussion and prayer, they unanimously decided to found a home for the aged. "How could I die in peace, without knowing these old brothers and sisters have good care?" the pastor commented.

They started the project with no experience, no staff, no money, no
the Amity Foundation help finance its expansion and thus make an exception to its principle of not supporting any capital construction projects.

At the workshop in Nanjing, it was enriching to learn that there are so many social service projects being quietly carried out by so many Christians in China. Amity staff members feel privileged to assist a great number of them financially. It became clear that the Amity Foundation is no longer the only example of Christian involvement in society. As one Amity staffer commented, "Those grassroots groups have put in much more work and love, and have overcome more difficulties than we in our relatively secure position in Nanjing. We should not steal the limelight and get all the credit."

Workshop participants resolved that great efforts should be made to study more effective approaches to social service in a country changing as fast as China. Having separated themselves from society for years, many churches and councils do not know how to best respond to needs brought about by new situations.

A problem pointed out by many was the threat to the unity of China's church. "Suffering glues together, but an easy life drives people apart." This old Chinese saying was frequently quoted at the Nanjing meeting. In many places, good project ideas have failed due to disunity, or at least a lack of willingness to cooperate. Strengthening unity in a country of growing religious tolerance poses a great challenge to the church. Since internal disputes are often related to property ownership, church expenditure and other financial matters, the provincial Christian councils in Fujian and Zhejiang have adopted a policy of redistribution, following the slogan, "Big churches must help small churches, and rich congregations must assist the poor ones." It may not be a coincidence that these two provinces have seen Christian grassroots projects mushrooming. At the workshop, news circulated about Christian clinics and homes for the elderly in Nanjing, Nanping, Wenzhou and Shaoxing, but no Amity or provincial church representative had ever visited these projects.

The democratization of church management and administration was strongly urged by Rev. Zhu Shaotang of the Anhui Provincial Christian Council. "Funds," he demanded, "must be administered under supervision and accounts should be accessible to all church members. Without greater transparency, the church will neither be fit to venture into social projects nor even to survive."

"This workshop was a short-term training course for us all," concluded Rev. Shen Guanwei, Vice-Principal of the Northeast China Theological Seminary in Shenyang, Liaoning Province. Amity agreed that workshops of this nature should be held regularly to coordinate and multiply experiences of churches involved in service to society.

Ting Yen-Ren (Ting is Amity Associate General Secretary responsible for the teachers program and the funding of church-run projects)

When Dreams Come True
Fund For Church-Run Projects Installed

In Banli Village deep in the mountains of Yunnan Province, houses are made from rocks, bamboo, mud and straw. Inside one of these houses, a young woman is explaining to a mother why babies need vaccinations and how they work. Posters on the whitewashed mud walls display basic information on public hygiene, family planning and maternity care. On the desk of the young woman lies a copy of The Doctor Is At Your Side, the Amity-printed Chinese version of Where There Is No Doctor, a standard handbook on basic health care for developing countries.

This modest place is one of the many clinics established by local Christian communities in China. It is an old hut in which village Christians used to meet before they built a church next door. The village is part of a region mostly inhabited by the Lahu ethnic minority. Two-thirds of the 3,000 villagers are Christians.

The woman health worker, Li Jiumei, a Lahu herself, grew up in this village and recently graduated from Yunnan Seminary. The initiative of village Christians has been supported by the local government and by the county health bureau, which offered training to Ms. Li and another health worker.

The village has no electricity, no running water and no machinery. To reach the nearest doctor before the church clinic started, villagers had to walk a ten-kilometer mountain path which became impassable during the monsoon season.

Upon a personal visit to the Christian clinic, Li Enlin of the Amity Health Division decided to support the project with a number of handbooks and a small fund for the purchase of basic medicines and the repair of the house.

With China's reform and the emergence of a market economy, more and more local churches are launching into social service work and turn to the Amity Foundation for help. "There is hardly a day on
which I don't receive a letter from a church or an individual Christian requesting support or advice for a project," says Gu Xiuhui, who manages the newly established Amity Fund for Church-Run Projects along with her colleague Ting Yen-Ren. A recent executive staff meeting decided to give priority to these projects despite the difficulties involved. One problem is that these projects are small-scale, numerous and geographically scattered so that careful monitoring from Amity's office is almost impossible. Another problem lies in the fact that most of these projects are run by beginners who lack the experience to put each donated yuan to the most effective use.

Ten of the bigger church-run clinics are currently on Amity's support list. Their locations stretch from Jiangsu in the East to Sichuan in the West, and from Hebei in the North to Guangdong in the South. Donations are mostly given for staff training and medical equipment. Frequent items on the purchasing list are X-ray machines, microscopes, electro-cardiograph machines, ultrasound scanners and simple operation tables. For all these projects combined, the Amity Foundation has been seeking a total grant of US$ 85,000, of which one third is still missing. Thanks to a generous grant from the Evangelical Church in Westphalia (Germany), which did not designate its donation to a particular place, Amity is now able to give out very small sums to less established clinics. Sometimes it takes only US$ 200 to send somebody to a training course, or even less to supplement local collections for second-hand beds and other furniture, but for the receiving Christians it can make the difference between the failure and success of an entire project.

This is best illustrated by an experience which Gu Xiuhui had on her last trip to Henan Province, where she visited eight different church-run clinics. It was only due to the public bus schedule that she had to stay for a day in a little town where she learned of a nearby village church attempting to establish their own little clinic. The idea for this project was first raised by a retired health worker. Since people were rather poor, the local Christians could not collect enough money. To get funds, the health worker sold his family's water buffalo. When the money still was not enough, he sold all his furniture, too. In the end, he had a place for the clinic, a few beds, a treatment table and some very basic instruments. Lacking the funds to buy medicine, he and some other Christians went into the mountains to find medicinal herbs. They picked enough to produce some medicines, but they still were short of too many things to get the clinic off the ground.

"On the day I came to the village," recounts Gu, "the Christians went to call this old health worker. He came running immediately to meet me. He was wearing tattered and dirty clothes, and his legs were caked with mud because he had been out planting. When he saw me he became so excited that he could hardly speak. Finally he uttered, 'It seemed that our clinic was going to fail. I was so desperate because I thought that I had sold all my belongings in vain. I felt ruined. But last night I dreamt that God sent someone to me from far away. When I told my son about this morning, he said, 'Father, don't give up. God will help you. Soon, your clinic will be running smoothly.'" Well," concluded Gu, "there I was, and this health worker could hardly believe that I was not just another dream. I was ever so moved."

Ting Yen-Ren / Gotthard Oblau
Amiti Responds To Natural Disasters In Three Different Provinces

In 1994, the Amiti Foundation spent a total of 2.45 million yuan (US$ 295,000) in natural disaster relief and rehabilitation. Grants of 200,000 yuan (US$ 24,000) were channelled to Boyang County in Jiangxi Province through the Boyang Christian Council and the local Overseas Friendship Association to rebuild churches that were completely destroyed by a typhoon in April. In addition, Amiti assisted families who lost their houses or property in the floods in Yichun (Jiangxi) and Shaoying (Zhejiang), Chaohu and Wuhu (Anhui). All of these areas are medium-sized or smaller cities on a prefecture level in remote and less prosperous areas. Amiti has selected these schools in line with its teachers program policy of assisting China's English education at the grassroots level. The newly selected schools bring the number of schools receiving Amiti-sponsored foreign language teachers to a total of 52, of which 35 are teacher training colleges and 17 are located in cities ranked lower than provincial capitals.

Village Teachers Receive Amiti Awards

Amiti's newly established Lynn Walters and Mose Kimata Memorial Fund saw its first two award-giving ceremonies this spring. Forty-five school teachers from the countryside in south Jiangxi received prizes of 200 to 400 yuan (US$ 24 to 48) each in recognition of their professional merit and dedication. Many of them have worked for over 20 years in villages which each have only one teacher. Candidates for the awards were selected upon local recommendation and screened by the relevant county education departments. The award-winners were honored in public teacher conferences at county levels. The fund is named after two Amiti teachers who died in 1992 and 1993 respectively during their assignments to Jiangxi Province, and was made possible through donations from their friends and relatives.

Norwegians Sponsor Poor Children

The Amiti Foundation has newly established a project to assist selected children in several villages in Fei County, Shandong Province. The first 13 boys and 8 girls, all orphans looked after by grandparents or relatives, received 1,240 yuan (US$ 150) each in support for one year. All families involved are officially classified as poor. The funds have been raised from a number of individual families in Norway on the basis of a long-term commitment and is channelled to Fei County as part of a large-scale integrated rural development project.

Amiti's Work For The Blind Receives Attention In Europe

Zhuang Ailing, coordinator of Amiti's blindness prevention and special education projects, visited Germany and England in April. In Germany, she visited the headquarters of Christian Blind Mission (CBM), sponsor of most of Amiti's blindness-related projects. At the Fourth International Special Education Congress held in Birmingham April 10 - 13, Zhuang introduced China's special education situation as well as its contribution to the Amiti Foundation in this area.

National Seminar Held On Blindness Related Projects

From May 13 to 17, the Amiti Foundation held a seminar in Kunming (Yunnan Province) for local and regional partners in Amiti’s nationwide program of blindness prevention and special education. They discussed project strategies and management, as well as plans for 1996. Also present were the Christian Blind Mission (CBM) East Asia representative and a CBM-sponsored trainer for the rehabilitation of the blind.

The Amiti 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 Christian organization in which people from all walks of life may participate. Amiti 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 social development. The Amiti 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 Amiti Newsletter, Quarterly Bulletin of the Amiti Foundation.

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