Empowerment Through Market Access
Village Women Discover The Talents Of A New Sister

For the Amity Foundation, project no. 94.1.28 in Lianshui County (north Jiangsu) was just another women's vocational training course. For Hou Tingying, it was a life-changing experience that gave her a new sense of purpose and self-esteem, and restored her family's harmony and happiness.

For generations, Tingying's family had lived on the periphery of Yunnan Province, close to the Vietnamese border. Through an arranged marriage to a farmer in north Jiangsu, she had hoped to change her luck. She would exchange the misery of her mountain village in one of the remotest corners of China for the prosperity of a coastal province, or so she thought. Too late, she realized that her new in-laws were no better off than her own family. Life in Youfang Village was harsh. With only a little farmland and over ten family members to support, her new family was so poor that she considered leaving her husband and going back to the mountains. When he found out about her plans, he panicked, locked her up and did everything he could do to keep her indoors. For 25-year-old Tingying, marriage became a prison.

In 1994, the Amity Foundation became involved in the area and suggested an income generation project for women. When the first training course, a wool-embroidery project, was established, the Youfang Village women's committee selected Tingying for participation because they pitted her. They knew little of her great potential and inherited skills. Brought up in an ethnic Miao family, Tingying had learned her people's traditional embroidery and batik techniques. She picked up the skills of wool embroidery in no time and became far and away the top student in her class. Whatever design she tried, the end product showed her eye for true to life patterns and artistic flair.

Soon Tingying became a teacher herself, sharing the best of her home culture with the women of rural Jiangsu. Together they discovered new and creative ways to fight the poverty which for too long had been the unquestioned plight of their families. Tingying was always to be seen sitting with village women in front of her house, discussing designs and demonstrating techniques. Gradually, more and more women learned to produce wool-embroidered pieces of marketable quality. Tingying received the materials from town and distributed them among her sisters.

Today, Youfang Village has over 80 sewing machines in full operation. Tingying is in charge of the technical design and quality control for wool-embroidery, crochet and the production of soft baby toys. To be sure, market demands determine production. Traditional Miao patterns have been pushed aside in favor of Santa Claus, Christmas angels and other symbols of Western commercialism. But this does not (yet) irritate people seeing the first cash ever flow into their purses and gratefully realizing how their lives are being redeemed from the worst of hardships and scarcity.

Tingying has gained respect and popularity among the villagers. This success took her husband by surprise but also made him beam with pride.
Adding Opportunity To Ability
Amity Projects Open New Chances For Village Women

"Women are less capable than men!" This is a typical prejudice I encounter on my visits to the countryside when I plan and monitor our rural development projects. Wherever I go, I try to convince the villagers that women do not lack ability but opportunity. If they appear weaker, dumber, shyer or less articulate then men, it is simply due to sexist conditions which favor males. Give women a real chance and they will flourish. If our projects serve only to demonstrate this message, they will have made an essential contribution to the women's movement in China.

Amity has not made use of feminist rhetoric in its work. We are convinced that social development can only be achieved through true partnership between women and men. This does not mean that we would pursue the abstract goal of gender equality. Where the entire community lives in destitution, equality cannot be the remedy. But as Amity makes an effort to create opportunities for the poorest of the poor, women in remote rural areas are naturally our main partners and beneficiaries. Our concrete project work gives clear evidence of this.

Women and water supply

Over recent years, Amity has helped hundreds of thousands of villagers in ten different provinces to gain convenient access to clean and reliable drinking water. Where previously water had to be fetched from distant springs or ponds, it is now available from public taps in the village streets or even in private courtyards. While all people drink from the new water source alike, women have profited most, because as part of the typical household duties, fetching water was traditionally regarded as women's work.

Before we established our drinking water projects in west Henan, the women of Luoyang and Sannenxia spent an average of half of every day just fetching one load of water. It had to be carried on shoulder poles over slippery slopes or pulled on wheelbarrows through difficult terrain. Thanks to Amity's efforts, thousands of women have been freed from this backbreaking burden. Today, they have more time for themselves and their little children again, of course, for productive work - with positive results for their families' prosperity.

If all family members together have only one small bucketful of water to keep themselves clean, hygienic conditions are inevitably very poor. I have seen the clever ways in which families made the most out of each drop. After a day's work in the fields, all household members would first wash their faces, then their hands, and finally their feet, before the water is taken out to water the animals. A more generous water supply improves hygienic conditions radically, and again, women benefit most.

In addition, increased water supply permits the expansion of animal husbandry - another traditional female domain. A rising number of hens and pigs increases not only the household income but also, in due proportion, a woman's status and esteem within the family.

Women and basic health care

Since 1989, Amity has supported the training of over 6,000 village health workers and helped build and equip a number of village and township clinics. Almost 70% of basic health care and prevention is the work of women for women. According to government regulations, any village clinic with only one staff person must be staffed by a woman, as gynaecology and obstetrics, pre-natal and infant health care rank most prominently on the grassroots health agenda. Where health standards are poor, women suffer most. According to a survey conducted in poverty-stricken Wuding County (Yunnan Province), where Amity has been involved with a variety of projects, one third of all women suffer from uterine descent.
and an equal number from cervicitis (cervical infection).

**Women and household energy**

Our bio-gas projects are another type of activity which has an immediate effect on rural women. Since 1992, we have equipped households in more than 1,600 villages with the necessary tanks, toilets and pigsties to allow people to cook with self-produced methane gas. This again is not an undertaking exclusively targeting women. But given the traditional division of labor between men and women in China's countryside, the introduction of bio-gas mainly improves the lives of women. Cooking becomes faster and cleaner, the outdoor toilet more hygienic, and natural fertilizer de-toxified. Thus, the environment of private households and the entire village improves, and women gain time for extra activities.

**Women and male migration**

In addition to these service-oriented projects, women also benefit from programs which aim at improving the productive base of a village economy. This is especially the case today as over 100 million migrants have moved to the cities for work. Most of these are men in the prime of life, who leave the field work to their wives and elderly parents. In many places, mainly in remote and less fertile areas, as much as 90% of all agricultural production depends on women. Consequently, quite a number of Amity's agricultural development projects turn out to be women's projects by default. When I visited Benjie Village in Puding County for the planning of an integrated development project, the village assembly consisted mostly of women.

Migration provides opportunities for development in both rich and poor areas. However, it not only becomes a strain on agricultural production but also leads to alienation between husbands and wives. When the men return to their villages, they have seen the world, broadened their horizons and acquired new skills. The women, on the other hand, have been confined to their old lives which now appear backward and narrow to the returnees. Some rural families have disintegrated as a result. In this situation, it is essential to also offer the women the chance to develop new skills and economic opportunities. While the men plunge themselves into the centers of modernization, development needs to be brought from the centers to the backwaters.

**Women and job opportunities**

Our experience shows that an improved productive infrastructure creates new job opportunities for women.

Amity's hydro-electric project in Xiang Shanhong Village (Yixing County, south Jiangsu), completed in 1988, has boosted the local, decentralized generation of electricity. This has allowed the extension of mechanical tea processing, which in turn increased the demand for tea leaves. As a result, all 875 able-bodied women in this village have found jobs as pickers of tea leaves or as workers in tea processing factories or other village-run plants. Eighteen of the women became accountants and technicians, and one took over the management of a tea farm. Since this was a novelty in this area, she became a focus of media attention.

**Women and training**

In remote areas, women's education is very often neglected. Not only is China's illiteracy rate 2.5 times as high among women as among men, most women in the countryside also lack the money-making skills needed in China's emerging market economy. The All China Women's Federation has responded to this situation with the systematic vocational training of women in areas where farming alone does not provide enough income. Training is typically offered in textile production and animal husbandry.

The Amity Foundation has also arranged a number of such training courses, with remarkable results for many women and their families (see the front page article on Hou Tingying in this issue). In most instances, we support these courses as one element within a broader integrated project which usually targets a number of neighboring townships or even an entire county.

In Yulinshan (Fei County, Shandong Province), we have helped the villagers to build a simple meeting house for women. It has been used as club house, meeting room, vocational training and production center.

**From production to liberation**

A notorious fault line in China's traditional family life lies in the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. We have observed that vocational training courses often have a positive effect on the harmony of the participants' families. In many cases, women who weave, sew and stitch bring home more cash than their farming husbands. Their mothers-in-law, instead of sitting around idly and complaining about things, now need to look after the children or do the cooking, thereby indirectly contributing to the family's welfare. The daughter-in-law has enough cash in hand to
acknowledge her mother-in-law's newly acquired constructive role by buying her some new clothes or some sweets, and thus the family atmosphere improves tremendously.

Productive occupation has also improved countless marriages. In winter, peasants are usually under-worked and men spend their time with drinking and gambling, to the great dismay of their wives. Those who now have income-generating work all year round present their husbands such good examples that they in turn increasingly take over household duties during slack seasons.

In the future, we plan to include a women's health care training component in every integrated rural development project. We have started this in Fei County (Shandong Province), where the County Women's Federation and the County Children's Health Care Institute have been involved. We aim at very basic grassroots education in which women learn about hygiene and nutrition in their home and village environment and also receive advice on possible ways to generate income. The women who teach in these village courses are themselves trained on the township level.

A very positive side effect of all their strength in the community. From this experience, they go on to take initiatives and responsibility in the village community, and suddenly the men have to realize that it is no longer that men help women but that women help themselves and the entire community.

Qiu Zhonghui

Holding Up More Than Half The Sky
How Henan's Village Women Struggle For Equality

Through the help of the Amity Foundation, Theresa Carito, director of the Manila-based Philippine-China Development Resource Center (PDRC), visited income generation projects of rural women in Henan Province in September last year. Her findings about gender problems in China's countryside were first published in Currents, the PDRC quarterly magazine. The following article is a slightly shortened version.

"Do many Chinese men share the housework with the women?" My question caught the men around the table a little by surprise. They were managers of county level enterprises involved in poverty alleviation among women in Henan, China's most populous province.

"Well, I do the cooking at home but I definitely hate doing the laundry. Besides, my wife complains that I never do the job properly," was one quick response. "I am sure many of the men do help their wives," stressed Mr. Li, manager of a drawnwork factory, rather defensively. "In fact, when we visited some households involved in our projects, we caught several of the men at home washing clothes or cooking lunch."

"Sure, some of us even do the marketing for our families," Mr. Wang of the county government proudly added. "Ha! I'm sure that's when you sneak in your cigarettes and liquor!" teased Mrs. Liu, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

These opening shots preceded a heated exchange between the two representatives of the Women's Federation and the men. Mrs. Li and Mrs. Liu argued that Chinese women cannot enjoy real freedom until men give up their deeply rooted "feudal ideas" about women. As in many debates on gender equality in China, the men were quick to repeat the oft-quoted remark of Mao Zedong about women "holding up half the sky."

"In reality, women hold up more than half the sky," retorted the women. Besides tending the fields and engaging in sideline production, women had to carry on traditional duties of home management and child rearing. "In raising the incomes of rural women, we should not increase their burdens and responsibilities," Mrs. Li reminded the men present.
"Women should be in leadership positions. They should be managers, not just assistant managers," Mrs. Liu pointed out. "We are discussing women's equality, not women's domination. If women begin to take over everything, we will have to initiate projects for men's liberation! You know that we, in Henan, love our women very much!" declared Mr. Li.

The women were unconvincing but conceded to cease their fire for the moment. Mrs. Li from the Henan Provincial Women's Federation and the feisty Director Liu represented China's new breed of local and middle level women leaders. Vibrant and effusive, Mrs. Liu painted for me a vivid picture of how women's lives in rural areas had been transformed in the last two decades.

Fifteen years ago, she recounted, village women were extremely shy. They shunned going into town and would shield their faces with their hands when speaking to strangers. Many were illiterate and could not count. They were ashamed even to undertake simple transactions like selling firewood in town for much needed cash.

Learning and competing

Now, things are very different. Women have options. They can now choose whether or not to listen to their husbands because they have an income of their own. For Mrs. Liu and many in the Women's Federation, the basic issue confronting most Chinese women is that of financial independence. She believes that increased incomes for women will give them a higher social status and hence self-esteem. Her work as director of the Shangcheng Women's Training Center involves raising the incomes of women through education and the teaching of skills. One major program of the Center has been the "shuang xue, shuang bi" (learning and competing) campaign. Launched in 1989 by the All China Women's Federation, the campaign is designed to raise women's productivity in rural areas.

Nestled in the Dabie Mountains of southeast Henan, Shangcheng County is located in an area where much of the population lives below the poverty line. In this county alone, I was able to visit several projects which aimed to raise the economic and social status of close to 40,000 women through training and close coordination with county level enterprises. The projects ranged from silkworm raising and drawwork to embroidery and bristle processing. All of them involved remote villages some of which were inaccessible by car. Most took two hours to reach by dirt roads that dissolve into muddy trails when it rains. To visit some households, I had to hike fifteen minutes from the nearest road. Many houses had only mud walls and straw roofs.

Factories play a crucial role in the poverty alleviation projects. The ones I visited were based at the county level and apparently went to great lengths to involve women from outlying villages where communication and transportation facilities were very limited. Through a system of organization that relied heavily on the network of the Women's Federation, these factories were able to distribute raw materials and designs to the women in poor households and retrieve the finished products in time for export to major Chinese cities or even overseas. Despite the extra efforts required to supervise and monitor production at the village level, these factories appear to have succeeded in maintaining quality control over their products and kept up with production schedules.

Hands-on work style at the grassroots

In the factories, I saw quality embroidery, drawwork and brushes beautifully packed for export to Japan, Southeast Asia and even France. Almost all of the raw materials were locally available and abundant. Production plants were very simple and labor intensive. Most important, much of the profit earned was plowed back into upgrading facilities, and expanding the enterprise.

Salaried of plant managers were barely higher than those received by the highest paid worker. For one factory, a worker received 200 yuan (US$24) per month. The general manager earned the top income of 300 yuan (US$36) per month. His salary was in fact lower than that of the company driver whose total income, which included additional allowances for overtime and outstation assignments, amounted to 600 yuan (US$72) per month.

Not only were salary differences very low, some factory managers still spent regular hours in laodong ("doing labor") on the factory floor like any other worker. They lived in simple quarters and biked to work. There was a palpable closeness between management and workers. Managing a factory in China today, especially at
the lower levels, is still very much a hands-on job. In one small garment factory I visited, the manager was eager to raise levels of production so that the factory could eventually become a joint enterprise, with some infusion of foreign funds. This way, the factory hoped to bypass the huge provincial and national trading companies which still control overseas trade.

By keeping production household-based, factories and local governments in China have found an effective way of combining industry with agriculture. Villagers can augment their incomes without leaving the countryside. In this way, local-level enterprises help to limit rural-urban migration and all of its attendant problems.

Just as the factories link up household-based producers with the markets, the Women's Federation organizes the grassroots labor force for the factories. In doing this, the Federation relies on its extensive network that reaches out to the remotest village. In the projects I visited, the Women's Federation was responsible for the selection of trainees, for the implementation of training programs and the supervision and monitoring of projects.

The local women leaders I met were between 20 and 45 years of age. Most were energetic, confident and articulate. Many had completed some years of high school education but a few were illiterate. They invariably claimed that the village committees, which tended to be male dominated, had no say in the selection of participants in the women's project. The village women produced participation lists through consultation among themselves. Practically all of the organizational work for the projects was done by women. Women leaders were visibly engaged in the distribution of raw materials, in the collection of finished products, in training and in supervisory work.

**Self-confidence through achievements**

At the production level, the women were encouraged to work in groups. Since much of the production took place at the household level, participants had some flexibility in their use of time. During planting and harvest seasons, women spent more time in the fields and had less time for sideline production. During slack seasons, when they had more spare time, they tended to gather in small groups to do embroidery, to crochet or to process bristles. To work together, women gathered in private homes with more space or at village production centers where work was done in a more intensive way.

In all the households I visited, income levels had risen quite dramatically as a result of the projects. Most women engaged in sideline production could earn at least 120 yuan (US$14) monthly in additional income. The increase was substantial considering the fact that participating households had started with incomes below the poverty line of 300 yuan (US$36) per capita per annum.

As a result of their increased incomes, families were able to send their children to school, to pay for medical care, to buy basic appliances and even to renovate their homes. Apart from the improved social status of the women who now had an independent source of income, those who were illiterate acquired some basic skills and education. Others even acquired management skills which they put to good use.

In one village, I was introduced to a budding entrepreneur, Zhou Jun, who had recently set up a small embroidery factory. Thirty-eight years old and a middle school graduate, she had come from a poor household of five earning less than 700 yuan (US$84) per annum. After her training in a poverty alleviation project and a year of experience, she had decided to organize her neighbors and had set up a silk embroidery workshop in an abandoned schoolhouse. The workshop now employed 200 women and produced silk embroidery and tapestry. With her household income now at 6,000 yuan (US$722), Zhou had ambitious plans for expansion.

The income generated from their participation in these poverty alleviation projects had undoubtedly increased the women's self-confidence and provided opportunities for self-improvement. Those with drive and dynamism found open doors to further their self-realization and to nurture their management and entrepreneurial talents. Two of the women I interviewed were illiterate. Despite this, they were outspoken and seemed very much in charge of their households.

**Increased responsibilities without power sharing**

In many of the homes I visited, I saw tangible improvements: electricity, electric fans, electric water pumps, sometimes new bicycles or small black-and-white television sets. While some of these new acquisitions helped ease the burdens of the women's household work, they did not lessen their household responsibilities. Many of the women were still housebound and home-centered.

While increased incomes had raised the social status of village women significantly, village decision-making and politics still remained largely a male domain. The husbands of outstanding village women apparently basked in their wives' success and were often members of the village committee, while the women themselves were not. Kept busy from dawn to dusk by work in the fields, sideline production, household chores and child rearing duties, women had little time and energy left to participate in village meetings.
In many of the poverty alleviation projects which require women's participation in sideline production, women's burdens and responsibilities have doubled. Unless the men share more of the household and child rearing responsibilities, it will still be difficult for women to participate in village politics. Simply raising the economic status of women cannot guarantee that they will gain more decision-making power beyond the household. In these and other areas, the struggle for greater equality and participation will no doubt become a growing concern in the Women's Federation.

The network of the Federation exemplifies the highly organized nature of Chinese society, which is perhaps one reason why China has been more successful in implementing poverty alleviation projects with much greater scope and impact than the Philippines. The Federation's capacity to mobilize people at various levels of society is highly impressive. The dedication and social commitment of some of the local-level officials and factory managers is also something worth emulating in the Philippines.

Theresa Cario

"Just Remember You Are Only A Girl"
But Her Response Is Only A Smile

How mixed and ambivalent the status of women in China is today, Pamela Whitfield was able to find out from her colleagues and students in southern Fujian Province. Sponsored by the National Council of Churches of Christ (USA), she has been an Amity teacher since 1993, teaching English at the Zhangzhou Teachers College.

When it comes to International Women's Day, here in China we do it up big. At the small teacher training college where I work, we each receive a bonus of 20 yuan (US$2.40) and were told to take the day off from classes. The various departments organized sports matches, a banquet dinner, and a free dance in the dining hall. Students swamped the dance party, finding its one rule both provocative and promising: girls must invite boys to dance. But the idea quickly fell flat. I was the only female I saw inviting boys; the males often asked a girl quickly, before she could ask him, out of social discomfort, or because the girls were paralyzed by tradition or shyness.

Women's issues are hot topics today, and China prides itself on fostering equality of the sexes. According to the domestically published 21st Century, the PRC has higher percentages of female engineers, scientists, technicians, and even congressional delegates than the United States. Fifty-six million Chinese women work outside the home, comprising 44% of China's employed labor force (the average world rate is only 34.55%). People keep quoting Mao's slogan, now become proverb: "Women hold up half the sky." But another female-male concept is the basic symbol of yin and yang, nearly as ancient as the Chinese culture that embraces it. Male is hot, dry, active. Female is cold, wet, passive. He is the sun, she is the moon. From the polarity of such long-associated symbols comes another proverb: "However bright the moon is, it cannot air grains." The older and more conservative Chinese are fond of this saying. For them, it means there are always some basic tasks a woman is not capable of, some things it is not her place to do.

However, in the cities and fast-developing coastal areas, women don't like to be told "no." They are business people, managers, doctors, ministers, taxi cab drivers, graduate students, train conductors. These women manage their households with an efficiency that can be frightening. They see their children off to school or daycare, oversee family finances, care for a pair of elderly parents living under the same roof. For them, equal division of household duties is an important first step to social equality. "Nowadays, you see so many men in the market, doing the shopping," said one male administrator. He buys the food and cooks it; his wife takes care of the cleanup. Another couple, both of whom are teachers, now prepare the meals by turns and portion out the other housework as well. The wife said, "This seems like a simple change, but it has made our family much happier. My husband feels he has more stock in daily family life and now spends more time at home, helping me or our daughter."

Reverting feudal ideas

A new and surprising trend: in cities, girls often choose to continue living at home after marriage, and bring their husbands into the household. This completely reverses the feudal idea that a woman, once married, became the property of the husband's family and went to live with them. It also avoids the infamously tangled mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship, which during the dynastic period, traditionally meant a young indentured servant for an old and often authoritarian matriarch. This change is partly the result of the one-child policy. Although most men still hope for a son, city women now often prefer their only child to be a daughter. They say a girl is equally if not more filial, is gentle and helpful in the home, and enjoys her parents' company even after marriage. The parents consider a
son-in-law more easygoing and considerate of them than a daughter-in-law would be. One retired professor, whose son has married and moved out, but whose daughter will gladly bring her future husband into the household, said Chinese men aren't necessarily as independent as they'd like to appear. "As a boy he is the mother's son; as a man he is the wife's son."

Yet, stories about female infanticide have not disappeared from the countryside. And in this technological age, the continuing preference for male offspring takes the modern form of pre-natal screening for sex and unauthorized abortions. The country's orphanages, always overcrowded and underfunded, find that almost any male child is adoptable, regardless of background, physical defect, or mental handicap. Abandoned females are always in the majority, and even if seemingly "perfect," are difficult to find homes for. Women are still disposable in certain situations, and even today's youth describe instances of young rural girls being sold off to pay family debts. The illicit sex trade is growing, and its victims are also young, uneducated rural girls. If countryside girls can move to a town, the best jobs open to such women are the traditionally female ones such as waitress, shop assistant, hotel or office maid, street-sweeper.

Secretarial or office administration requires increasing skills in education and etiquette. Oftentimes, the best occupation for a woman is still teaching. But even in the academic realm, extremely few women are made full professors or given high administrative posts. At my four-year college, the female vice-dean of the English department described herself as a mere figurehead, appointed for both her gender and her considerable experience, but ignored by her male colleagues during meetings. With amused irony and not bitterness, she told me that several of the reforms I outlined to the department leaders after one semester's teaching, she had also suggested on several previous occasions.

But her ideas were brushed aside or overruled at the time, and only implemented once suggested by a "foreign expert," who, ironically, is also female.

Matriarchy in the churches

One realm where women decidedly run the show is China's Protestant churches. The majority of the average congregation is female, usually older women with grandchildren or a young couple in tow. Although the China Christian Council and its provincial and county-level bodies are predominantly male, it is these behind-the-scenes matriarchs, with their grey hair pinned neatly in a bun, who keep the local churches running and oversee the social life of these spiritual communities. Most evangelists and many ministers are women. In one of Xiamen's largest and most established churches, two women stand in the pulpit. One delivers the sermon as the other translates it into local dialect. In such sanctuaries the women are so earnestly involved and steward-like that the male worshippers, in contrast, appear ineffectual and almost out of place.

Through the middle kingdom's history, beset by a long chain of social, political and environmental upheavals, a soft but steely undercurrent of matriarchy runs down through time. Because it is the women who have, for five thousand years, stood for stability and the continuation of life.

Therefore, Chinese women still enjoy a rather traditional image. The self-described female ideal is gentle, demure and lovable, with graceful steps, long silky hair and wide eyes. Chinese society actively urges young girls to take up "female pursuits" such as singing, dancing, sewing, knitting or reading. More affluent parents shelter their female child, raising her in a "greenhouse," as one rural girl described it. In this respect, peasant girls may be luckier, having the freedom to play outdoors with peers of both sexes. They can be seen climbing trees, building small dams in streams, chasing insects. Such girls who grow up to recall their tomboy years, invariably say, "I was naughty, just like a boy." But a hint of pride lurks behind their words, a touch of defiance and self-realization that becomes increasingly acceptable in society. Anxieties come from older authority figures, as on soft-spoken but ambitious student wrote in her journal: "Just remember that you are only a girl," one of my relatives told me. Some criticize me for never acting in a girlish way. But my response is only a smile."

This is the response of so many 20-something women. They smile and go on making the small, seemingly unnoticeable improvements in their lives that eventually give them more freedom and autonomy. But such hopes are the privilege of women who see opportunity, and such possibilities are for the most part only available in modern, coastal, urban areas. Rural women prepare themselves for the same existence their mothers had, and their mother before. Disturbing disparity is found between the cities and the countryside. Although national statistics assure the about 46% of students in both primary and secondary schools are female, small-town or rural girls are often forced to forgo secondary education to work in the family fields or village factory instead. A full 70% of divorce cases are evidently initiated by wives themselves, but domestic violence an male tyranny in the home are common and accepted in rural communities.

Elderly women keep local churches running.
"Women have to be tolerant ... they have to be dominated by their husbands, however cowardly he may be," explained a college-educated girl of peasant background. She also saw enlightenment as potentially disadvantageous for women, citing a study that found highly educated or politically successful women intimidated Chinese men and so had more difficulty finding husbands. "How can we say women hold up half the sky?" she lamented.

Acceptance through child-bearing

Equality for women in the countryside seems a far-off dream. There, the government allows two children per couple, and legal marrying age is two years younger than for city residents. Still, many girls can't wait until 21, and bribe local officials for a marriage certificate at age 18 or even 17. Through marriage and homemaking, they begin to create a separate identity for themselves. They become indispensable in their roles as helpmate and mother. In many ways, child-bearing is still a woman's most important, most symbolic act. One 27-year-old woman, who suspected her husband of philandering, asked her best friend for advice. "You'd better have a baby soon - then he'll be afraid to leave you," she said. Such advice is very common. Bearing a child not only cements the relationship, but brings social acceptance. A child-less woman, or worse yet an unmarried one, invites gossip and risks being ostracized. And the old double standard prevents women, once married, from having close male friends or going out in public places without a spouse. A male bank clerk in a large town said, "No wife goes out dancing or to karaoke without her husband. They dare not, lest someone accuse them of infidelity."

China has a progressive policy for maternal leave, but it can backfire on the very women it is designed to protect. Female workers receive six months' leave with full pay, and an optional extra six months with 80% salary. Many employers are loath to hire women if male candidates are available for the job, or only hire women who have already borne a child. One college English department dean admitted his preference, after emphasizing that he wasn't prejudiced against women. But he avoids hiring young female teachers because they cost his department in working hours and efficiency. This year, four of his 25 full-time teachers are on maternity leave, adding to their colleagues' already taxing workload and forcing the department to curtail several courses. Since the majority of graduates of teacher-training institutions are female, and young male teachers are more likely to leave the profession for more profitable work, schools like that one will be hard-pressed to fill their teaching posts with men. And maternity leave only applies to women workers in the public sector, in business or state-run enterprises. Pregnant rural women commonly work right up to the day they deliver, then carry their newborns to the fields, bundled on their backs. Paradoxically, peasant women can't leave crops spoiling in the field to have offspring, but children are just what they need to tend the fields and care for them in their old age.

Recognize or patronize?

Young Chinese of either sex can pinpoint the source of female oppression: "Thousands of years' feudalism has rooted itself in people's minds," as one 26-year-old student leader said. In a country so vast, varying from cave dwellers to residents in high rise glass-sided buildings, Chinese women's roles span a very broad spectrum, as do their ideas and feelings about equality and opportunity. Some wave Women's Day like a flag, proud of their achievements so far. Others see the observance as condescending. My sophomore students spent hours debating the nature of Women's Day itself - to honor and recognize, or to placate and patronize? They were equally divided on the issue, and not necessarily along gender lines. One predominant opinion was later echoed by a disabled colleague, who pointed out, "We only have special days for the weak, like the handicapped or children." He seemed to sum up the sentiments of both sexes by saying, "I hope one day we won't need a Women's Day."

Pamela Whitfield

Women in the Chinese Church

- Since 1979, the church in China has ordained one female pastor for every three male pastors.
- In 1993, of the 172 pastors ordained, 70 were women.
- During the last four years, 537 women were baptized compared to only 87 men in the Chongwenmen Church in Beijing.
Number Of Bibles Reaches 10 Million
Braille Bibles Now Available

The ten millionth Bible was run off the press at the Amity Printing Company on July 25, 1995. On the same day, the company started the printing of Bibles for the blind as an additional production program.

A Braille press was purchased with financial assistance from the United Bible Societies. The Hong Kong-based Christian Literature for the Blind supported the project with technical and organizational assistance including staff training and the preparation of the necessary computer programs. Over the next three years, the Amity Printing Company plans to produce 1,000 complete Bibles in Braille, each consisting of 32 volumes. While the production of one volume costs 27 yuan (US$3.25), it will be sold in China for only one yuan. Production will be subsidized by the United Bible Societies.

To ensure product quality, the Printing Company has employed two blind persons as proof readers. They both are 18 years old and have just graduated from the Nanjing School for the Blind. According to estimates, there are at least 7.5 million blind people in China. In recent years, 600 Bibles for the blind produced in Hong Kong were shipped into mainland China.

The Amity Printing Company is a joint venture between the Amity Foundation as the domestic and the United Bible Societies/Asia Pacific Region as the foreign partner. Since company operation commenced in September 1988, its productivity has increased dramatically. Bible production grew from approximately 500,000 copies in 1988 to 2.3 million in 1994. For 1995, 2.61 million copies have been ordered by the China Christian Council. In light of the growing demand for Bibles in China and the increasing volume of Bible orders from the China Christian Council, the company decided in 1994 to purchase a second high-speed web offset press, costing US$ 1.7 million. With this new machine, which is expected to be installed in October, the company will double its capacity to about five million Bibles per year.

The Bibles are printed on specially thin paper imported from Japan. Paper costs, which amounted to US$ 2.6 million in 1994 and accounted for approximately 75% of total production costs, were covered with donations from the United Bible Societies. In this way, retail prices of Bibles could be kept at an affordable level.

In addition to Bibles, the company also prints hymnals and other literature for the China Christian Council and its seminaries. In 1994, the number of hymnals reached 710,000, and 1.2 million copies are expected to be printed in 1995. The company also accepts orders from local publishers, commercial companies and government departments. However, such commercial jobs are relatively few, accounting for only 5% of the company's revenue in 1994. Most of the production capacity is taken up by the company's basic mission - the printing of Bibles and other Christian literature for the church in China.

Bible Printing: A Women's Project?

Ten million Bibles have already been printed at the Amity Printing Company, but many more are still needed. As most Bibles in China are in daily use, many of the ones produced seven to twelve years ago have started falling apart and need to be replaced. Continuing demand also comes from new converts and from countless remote meeting points which are still under-supplied.

The great majority of Christians in China are women, and the groups who still face the greatest Bible scarcity are under-educated villagers.

In fighting illiteracy, China has already achieved a lot. Before the socialist revolution, 90% of all Chinese women could neither read nor write. Mass literacy campaigns in the 1950s and the systematic promotion of school education for girls raised the educational level of women tremendously. In 1993, female illiteracy had fallen to 32%. Among females between 15 and 24 years of age, illiteracy stood at 18.9%, while six out of...
ten women above 24 were still illiterate. Of all illiterate and semi-illiterate Chinese, 92% live in the countryside. Statistics on education betray the fact that, as in the old days, gender inequality persists in China. Today, 70% of the country's 220 million illiterate over the age of 15 are women.

Though China's Protestant churches do not keep elaborate statistics, three facts are obvious to any observer. Women make up the clear majority in Christian congregations, often up to 90%. In most places, elderly women outnumber their middle-aged and younger sisters by far. And, Christianity grows faster in the countryside than in the cities.

These observations matched with general statistics about illiteracy lead to the realistic assumption that among China's church-goers illiterate and semi-illiterate women must be highly over-represented. Many of the elderly sisters who sit in the pews and follow sermons and scripture readings have never been to school. Others have forgotten most of the characters they once learned because reading and writing has never been part of their lives.

In this context, the educational impact of Bibles and hymnals cannot be over-estimated. These two books have become the first and only reading materials for countless women. While they sing the hymns which they know more or less by heart, they follow the characters below the notation. As they listen to the readings from the pulpit, their fingers go along the lines of the text in their personal Bibles. They become gradually acquainted with the characters, until one day script and language fall into place. Many Christians in China recall how the Holy Spirit suddenly removed the cover from the Holy Scripture and opened their eyes. They could read.

Many local churches organize reading classes for their believers. For this purpose, Amity has printed a Christian primer which was developed by the church and starts with simple but central sentences: "God loves me; I love God."

The gospel itself is truly liberating for women who have learned to be submissive and subservient and to feel inferior to men. How much more empowering is the good news if it is conveyed in a community which leads people to grow and to flourish!

Gotthard Oblau

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Yan Rong (see photo) is the new assistant in the Rural Development Division. She joined the Amity Foundation in June after her graduation from the English Department of Jinling Women's College in Nanjing.

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Four Amity staff members attended the NGO Women's Forum held in Beijing from August 30 to September 8 in connection with the Fourth World Women's Conference. Tan Liying participated in the Jiangsu provincial delegation of the All China Women's Federation; whereas Li Enlin and Yu Qun were members of the China Christian Council contingent within the China YWCA delegation. Overseas Coordination Office staff member Claudia Währisch-Oblau attended with the women's delegation of the World Council of Churches.

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Under the exchange program jointly sponsored by the Amity Foundation and the Philippine-China Development Resource Center (PDRC), a delegation of 13 women from the Philippines visited China from May 15 to 28 to study the status of women in China. In Beijing, they held discussions at the All China Women's Federation and with the organizers of a privately run women's hotline, the only of its kind in China so far. They also visited the Family Planning Institute in Xian, discussed female migration problems in Shaanxi Province, met with Christian women in Guilin and studied the impact of rural development projects on women in Guizhou's Puding County.

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From August 7 to 17, a six-member delegation from the Philippines visited a number of Amity's bio-gas projects in Shandong and Jiangsu provinces and the Asia-Pacific Regional Training Center for Bio-gas in Chengdu, Sichuan Province. The visit was sponsored by the Philippine-China Development Resource Center (PDRC) and the Amity Foundation as part of their cooperation in frequent and regular people-to-people exchange programs between China and the Philippines.

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The Amity-organized summer English courses for middle school teachers, which first took place five years ago, saw a record number of trainees and places this year. A total of 14 classes were held in the provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi, Shandong, Jiangsu and, for the first time, Guizhou. Foreign teachers were sponsored by Cooperative Services International (CSI) and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Over 1,000 Chinese school teachers of English participated, mostly from middle schools in the countryside. For the majority of them, the training courses were the first opportunity in their lives to communicate with English native speakers.

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In the 1995/96 academic year, 82 foreign language teachers are participating in the Amity Teachers Program. They are from the United States (44), the United Kingdom (10), Sweden (9), Germany (5), Norway (4), Canada (4), Japan (3), the Netherlands (1), Denmark (1) and Finland (1). With the exception of the three Japanese and three German
teachers, they all teach English, 59 of them at teacher training colleges in the provinces of Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Fujian, Zhejiang, Anhui and Shandong. Of the 33 teachers colleges now included in the program, six have been added this year. They are located in Changzhou (Jiangsu), Yichun (Jiangxi), Shaoxing (Zhejiang), Wuhu (Anhui), Zaozhuang and Heze (Shandong).

A young woman who grew up as an orphan in the Gaocun County Social Welfare Institute became the second person to be awarded the Amity scholarship for college students with disabilities. Yang Hongxia, 20, passed the college entrance examination and was enrolled at Jinling Vocational University in Nanjing. She is the first from her orphanage to make it into college. To support her school education, staff members of the orphanage gave private donations. Yang's college education is jointly subsidized by the Social Welfare Institute and the Amity Foundation. The first such Amity scholarship was granted in 1994 to a young man from a peasant family in north Jiangsu. He is now studying medicine at Nanjing Medical College.

Headmasters from over 20 schools for the blind in China convened in Tai'an (Shandong Province) between August 23 and 28 for a workshop on integrated education and vocational training for blind children. For many years, the Amity Foundation has joined concerned forces propagating integrated school education for the blind. As the concept has become widely accepted for the primary school level, the Amity Foundation has shifted its emphasis and made secondary school educators its new target group.

During the 1995 summer months, the Amity Foundation started 18 ophthalmology-related training courses in 10 different provinces, including Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, Yunnan and Guangxi. The over 500 participants were doctors and nurses from all levels, from city hospitals down to village health stations. Course durations range from 10 days to one year.

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.

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A Network for Sustainable Rural Development in China was established between the Amity Foundation, CICETE (The China International Center for Economic & Technical Exchange), the Institute for Rural Development at the People's University in Beijing, the Center for Integrated Agricultural Development (CIAD) in Beijing, the Nanjing Soil Research Institute and a number of local liaison offices in charge of CICETE- and Amity-sponsored development projects. From July 17 to 31, their representatives met at a workshop on sustainable agriculture as guests of the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction in Cavite, Philippines. They studied agricultural projects run by Philippine NGOs and discussed ways to apply their ecological methods and experiences in a Chinese context. The workshop was funded by the German-based Protestant Association for Cooperation in Development (EZE) and attended by its agriculture consultant Lothar Peter and China secretary Kirsten Gade. Amity was represented by Rural Development Division head Qiu Zhonghui.

From August 7 to 13, Amity's Qiu Zhonghui took part in a consultation on rural development in Cambodia, sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee, with participation from India, China, Laos and Vietnam.

The number of Chinese citizens in absolute poverty decreased from 80 to 70 million, according to the Statistical Bureau of the Chinese government. The new figure, however, is met with scepticism by the Amity Foundation. "Our government plans to eradicate poverty by the year 2000," commented Amity Rural Development Director Qiu Zhonghui. "They will certainly try to achieve this goal on paper, but the reality is something else again." According to Qiu, poverty alleviation showed relatively quick results in the 1980s, when the removal of earlier mismanagement let agricultural production soar in many places. The remaining pockets of poverty are all located in remote mountains, at extreme altitudes, in areas with poor soil or endemic diseases caused by local conditions. "While it is easy to feed people on public welfare programs," said Qiu, "it is much more difficult to find long-term solutions for those areas in order to strengthen their local economies."

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 non-religious, 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.

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