From Piracy To Lychee Growing
How Christianity Makes A Difference In Xiyang Village

The fruit tree orchard in Xiyang Village, up in the mountains in north Fujian, is more than it first appears to be. The pastoral setting of young children playing beneath lychee saplings is a dramatic change from the violence and piracy that was common only a few years ago.

The mountains in this area make the transport of goods to the nearby city difficult and agricultural conditions vary depending upon rainfall because water is scarce. The farmers in the village had difficulty making ends meet in the early 1980s because of dry conditions. No other work was available, and Xiyang Village was really struggling.

Many of the young men went down the mountains to the sea and turned to piracy. They looted small boats that served as homes for local fishermen and their families. They attacked small vessels for money or goods. This desperate attempt to improve their living conditions resulted in an even more desperate response from the authorities. Between 1978 and 1984, 28 local men were sentenced to death for piracy.

You Muhua, a local Christian woman, realized that the problem was not only economic, but spiritual as well. She had become a Christian in 1975 when her aunt persuaded her to come to worship. She worshipped with this small group of Christians in secret because the government was not open to Christianity during the Cultural Revolution. They began to take a bus to the county seat to attend church in 1979. The bus ride was almost an hour, but they went because Xiyang had no church.

Confronted with the problem of piracy, she looked for a way to bring about change and she began with Zheng Qinjian, the young man who had proposed to her. She decided to marry him, because she felt called to bring him to Christ. He had been one of the many involved in piracy. Under his wife’s influence, Zheng gave up piracy and was eventually baptized.

Soon, the couple became the leaders of the local congregation. The young peasant woman with the big smile preached every Sunday. Where did she learn to do that? "Oh, I don't have much education," she answered. "I am just a simple woman. But I did go to a training course for lay church leaders in the county town for a couple of weeks."

To improve their economic situation, Zheng started to refine his skills in processing jasmine tea and became well known for the quality of his tea. Local farmers hired him to process their tea crops. With their personal income rising, the couple started thinking how nice it would be for the village to have its own church building. They decided to offer 1,200 yuan (US$145) as capital stock for a church building fund. Many of the other villagers were sceptical but You Muhua persisted. She went to Fuzhou to appeal to other established churches for help.

When Huang Zhaoping, a Nanjing Seminary graduate, returned to her home in Luoyuan County and heard of You's church building efforts, she notified the China Christian Council in Nanjing. Support started to come from the Fujian Provincial Christian Council.
The church was opened in 1990. You Muhua and Zheng Qinjian were pleased, but the building itself was not the solution to their village's economic problems. It was the community of Christians who gradually made the difference. Early on, they had established a visitation committee that kept in regular contact with all Christians, especially those in the surrounding villages. Volunteers visited the sick and the needy, and Christians helped each other out during harvests and with building projects.

Later, Xiyang's Christians started a know-how committee: Seven young Christian peasants were sent to the county town to learn how to grow oranges and mushrooms. On their return, they passed their knowledge on to anyone in the village who wanted to learn, Christian and non-Christian alike. "We have learnt from the Bible that as Christians, we should love our neighbors," You Muhua explained. The results were impressive: In the groves around the village, orange trees were weighted down with ripening fruit, and mushroom growers had a great variety of produce to sell, with some specimens bigger than the palm of a man's hand.

The author with local elders in front of Xiyang's new church turned down other applicants, but it offered the church 10 hectares of land. With all their good work for the village's development, the Christians had won the respect and appreciation of the authorities, who now fully trusted the Christians' good intentions.

In 1993, the Amity Foundation donated 35,000 yuan (US$4,200) for the purchase of 2,500 saplings, and You Muhua hired 18 workers from the village on a part-time basis. She sent them to neighboring counties to learn how to grow lychees and another similar fruit, the longan. The Provincial Christian Council arranged for lychee experts to visit and help the new farmers. Church collection money has been used to cover the workers' expenses until the first fruits can be harvested and marketed in September this year. Only then - three years after the planting of trees - will the workers start to earn money. In anticipation of coming rewards, they have been using the winter months terracing and planting, cutting and pruning. In this way, they make productive use of slack seasons, times when many of them went astray in the past.

Income from lychee and longan sales is expected to be sufficient to cover the workers' salaries. In the long run, the project will need to buy a motor boat to market its produce. Any further profit will go into church-funded projects. The first will be the building of a canteen next to the church. With this, the church will be able to provide mid-day meals for those who walk miles to attend worship on Sundays. The orchard workers are among those who climb over the mountain to attend church, an hour-long strenuous hike. They are looking forward to this project.

You Muhua is happy to welcome newcomers to the small church though its 200-plus members already fill most of the seats. The addition of a second floor is in the planning stages, since the congregation is growing. You's husband, the pirate-turned-Christian, has become a role model for many of Xiyang's young men, and a number of them appear at church on Sundays. The church has a young congregation, with the oldest member being 55 years old. You happily points out that many families come to church, and she hopes that the children will grow up in the church community and continue to live as Christians throughout their lives.
In 1995, You Muhua visited the Philippines with an Amity delegation of Chinese people involved in church-run projects to study church-based social development work there. Many Philippine partners learned about the social transformation in Xiyang Village. In recognition of her work as a community leader, You was invited to Beijing to receive an award for outstanding women in China on International Women's Day (March 8) last year. She also became vice-director of the Women's Federation in her county. However, when some local leaders suggested that she joined the Party, you politely declined: "My loyalty belongs to the church," she said. "What I am doing for the community, I do as a servant of Christ." Amy Snow (An Amity teacher at Ningde Teachers College in northern Fujian, Amy Snow visited Xiyang Village with two Amity staff members in November.)

Church history in Xiyang Village (Luoyan County), is only two decades long. The amazing story of how the Gospel came to this remote place in the mountains of northern Fujian was reported in the Amity News Service (ANS 93.1.13).

The first fruits are expected for September this year: You Muhua in her Christian orchard.

News in Brief

On October 24, Wuding County (Yunnan Province) was hit by an earthquake measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale. Over 40 people were killed and some 10,000 injured. Collapsing buildings left about 73,000 people homeless. Churches suffered heavy losses, too. The Amity Foundation responded quickly, sending two staff members to investigate the situation and contact local churches. Amity transferred 400,000 yuan to the disaster-stricken area for emergency relief work. Half of the sum was designated for the purchase of food and building materials for temporary shelters, while the other half was earmarked for the restoration of churches. Other rehabilitation projects are being anned.

Amity Associate General Secretary Gu Renfa attended the Third Consultation on the Development of Social Welfare in Hong Kong and Mainland China, held from November 6 to 11 in Hong Kong. The meeting was jointly organized by the Chinese Association of Social Workers and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service. Gu gave a presentation on NGOs as a driving force in the development of social welfare services in mainland China today. He took the community-based rehabilitation programs run by the Amity Foundation as an illustration of the fact that NGOs not only participate in China's social service programs but have also become a driving force in their professional development. After the consultation, Gu met with a number of groups from Hong Kong's development and social service circles and gave a presentation on Amity's work in southwest China to the Hong Kong-based "Friends of Amity."

In a new joint program between the Amity Foundation and the Philippine-China Development Resource Center (PDRC), a six-member delegation of the China Christian Council visited the Philippines between October 23 and November 1. The group of pastors and lay people studied social service programs run by local churches, especially in the fields of education, relief, women's and youth work. The Amity Foundation sees one of its roles as encouraging Chinese churches to participate in and contribute to China's social development.

From October 22 to November 16, Amity Social Welfare Division Director Wu An'an, together with Zhu Juling and Zhou Hong of the Nanjing School for the Deaf, visited institutions for the education of the hearing impaired in Oxford and Bristol (U.K.). They were most impressed with the bilingual approach which is becoming increasingly common in Britain's specialist education. According to the Chinese delegates, they are now considering "introducing this approach in their home country to advance the education for China's deaf people."

Video for Sale Video for Sale Video for Sale Video for Sale Video for Sale

Time of Revival - Portrait of a Chinese Woman Evangelist

Ye Xiaolian is a 32-year-old evangelist in Wenzhou, southern Zhejiang Province. This 15-minute film gives a glimpse of her life as a preacher, as well as some insight into the situation of the Protestant church in China today. Originally produced by ZDF German State Television, an English language version is now available from the Amity Foundation Overseas Coordination Office in Hong Kong. This VHS videotape can be ordered in PAL or NTSC. Price: HK$65 (pick up yourself) or US$14 (including overseas airmail postage). Please make checks payable to The Amity Foundation, Hong Kong, Ltd.
Fighting Poverty In The Rainy Hills
An Inspection Tour To Puding's Integrated Development Project

Puding County in China's southwestern Guizhou Province has become a major area for Amity's development work. The following report was filed by our Overseas Coordinator Philip Wickeri after he visited the county together with Amity's Associate General Secretary Gu Renfa.

When we arrived at the airport in Guiyang, it was drizzling. Gu Renfa repeated the rhyme that every Chinese school child knows by heart: "Never three days of clear weather, never three feet of even ground." This is a good description of Guizhou. The weather and the topography contribute to what makes it the poorest province in China outside of Tibet. Of Guizhou's total area, 87% is covered with mountains and plateaus, and the average altitude is 1,000 meters. Only 12% engaged in development work. It also assists these organizations in the investigation, planning, evaluation and implementation of projects at the local level.

The two-and-a-half hour drive (120 km) from Guizhou's capital Guiyang to Puding County took us through beautiful scenery. But the idyllic beauty masks a human condition of extreme poverty and deprivation. This contradiction is reinforced in many photographs from the province. That you would not find three feet of even ground is of course an exaggeration, but we saw few open fields wider than 300 meters. Many of the hills and plateaus were deforested; trees had been cut down for firewood. This will cause even greater problems in the future.

Amity's Philip Wickeri and Gu Renfa (back row, middle) with people who run Amity-supported projects in Puding County

Amity became involved in Puding County in 1994. Most current projects are clustered in the northeastern Miao and Gelao Minority Township of Houchang. An extremely poor spot even by Puding standards, its per capita income is as low as 250 yuan (US$30). Amity projects in Houchang are supported by the Protestant Association for Cooperation in Development (EZE), one of the major Christian development agencies in Germany. Integrated development projects have also begun for the Bulang Miao Minority Township, supported by the Australian Salvation Army.

Houchang's villages are among the poorest places I have visited in China. As there is no running water in the township itself, people need to fetch i  from two to three kilometers away. Villages are widely scattered in the mountains, and most have no electricity. In order to reach Xianmatang Village, one of the centers of our integrated development projects, we had to leave the car and climb 20 minutes on slippery foot paths. We found a hamlet of houses all made of mud bricks, with most of them also having mud floors. The nearest primary school is five kilometers downhill. Since children return home for lunch they have to walk 20 km, mainly on steep mountain paths, each day in order to get an education. Xianmatang...
had only a simple medical station; the nearest clinic was in the township. Ethnically, all of the 1,050 villagers are Miao, and 84% are Christians. Since most families cannot afford to raise pigs or even chickens, people live on potatoes and corn, supplemented by mountain vegetables. Meat is only eaten on special occasions, if at all. Despite the poverty, we were warmly received in both the village and the township. What seems to be true all over the world, we also experienced here: The poor are much more generous in extending hospitality than the rich.

During our stay, we were briefed on the nine programs which comprise Amity's integrated development project in the area: (1) terracing slopes, for growing grain, vegetables and fruit trees; (2) building a pumping station on the Poyu River, for irrigation and water supply; (3) supporting poorer families to meet their children's school expenses; (4) assisting polio victims in medical treatment; (5) training village women in doing handicrafts, for income generation; (6) introducing goat raising, for income generation; (7) equipping households with biogas systems, for energy production; (8) converting cooking stoves, so that houses are no longer filled with smoke from high fluorine content soft coal; (9) training township doctors.

After hearing short presentations on each of the programs, Deputy County Magistrate He Zhixi spoke of the difficulties Puding County is facing in development work. Born in Houchang Township himself, Mr. He has lived in Puding County all his life. He is a good example of an honest and upright county official. Untainted by corruption, he has the genuine interests of the people at heart. The same can be said about his staff team. On Amity visits, we encounter more than a few government officials who are out for their own aggrandizement, and so it is refreshing to work with people like Mr. He.

Although in many areas project implementation was proceeding according to plan, Mr. He spoke frankly about the various problems that had occurred. Not enough time had been spent on the educational component of the projects, he said, and so the people often didn't understand why they should have new gas stoves, or grow fruit trees or send their children to school. Villagers didn't realize that in polio rehabilitation, it is better to start with the youngest children, rather than with young adults of working age. Also, some of the programs had been inadequately supervised. For example, more than 80 goats died at the end of 1994 through an epidemic. Although the authorities were informed right after the first few goats became sick, no action was taken for two months.

Thirdly, inflation had eaten into available resources. Although in the southwest inflation is not as serious as along the east coast, building materials and energy became far more expensive than originally planned. Fourthly, the training program for township doctors had been affected by a lack of equipment, medicines and consulting facilities. Finally, some projects had suffered delays, as the government had not been able to come up with its Amity-required share of funding.

Mr. He hoped to improve things by strengthening leadership and supervision, and by spending more time on "propaganda" and educational work. Propaganda in this sense is actually popular education for development. Villagers would have to be instructed on the purpose and function of the various aspects of the project. Responsible individuals would have to be assigned to oversee particular programs at all levels. More leadership training would be necessary. Some personnel would have to be changed, and new persons recruited.

It was clear that regular visits from the Amity Foundation contribute to better project implementation. On such visits, Amity staff emphasize our approach to development, and the significance of Christian participation in society. Government officials need to understand the relationships Amity maintains, both with overseas partners and with the China Christian Council. In a way, Amity's development work provides a window on reform both for Chinese people and for friends from overseas concerned with social outreach. It is very important that government officials and local people become conscious of this.

Puding will remain an important area for Amity involvement for years to come. Projects in this county are making a valuable contribution, and as the people at the grassroots become more involved, they will in turn contribute to a better understanding of Amity's development approach.

Philip Wickeri
Sustainable development has become a high priority in Amity’s project work. In the summer of last year, the Amity Foundation was instrumental in founding a Network for Sustainable Rural Development in China. Besides Amity, members include 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 of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and a number of local liaison offices in charge of CICETE- and Amity-sponsored development projects.

The Amity Newsletter asked Amity Rural Development Director Qiu Zhonghui about Amity’s concept of sustainable development.

Q: Sustainable development has become almost a magic term in the international development debate. What does this term actually mean?

A: In development, people try to use available resources to their best effect - human, economic and natural resources. These need to be combined and used in such a way that their full potential can be tapped to enhance people's livelihood and well-being. In our development efforts we must avoid any inbuilt time limitations. What we start should take off and keep flying in the long run. The positive effects of our projects must not decline but multiply over time. This can only happen, if programs are compatible with their broader context. Any isolated local or partial development cannot last long. Sustainable development must not rigidly apply given methods or models. It requires openness, compatibility and adaptability.

Q: Sustainable development is usually associated with environmental concerns.

A: Indeed. A crucial question is always how we deal with natural resources. No reasonable business man would live on his capital stock, the very basis of his production. Yet this is what is happening all the time all over the world. In agriculture, water reserves are being depleted and poig,

luxury in a country which has to feed a fifth of the world’s population with just 7% of the world’s arable land?

A: This is an important question. It is true that China is hardly in a position to protect its natural production base by carving out nature reserves or by leaving fields periodically idle. Also, we are not blessed with a tropical climate which would allow us to go into agro-forestry. This is now done in the Philippines, for example. In China, we can hardly replace fields with forests that would yield a great variety of fruit. In China, we need to balance present food demands against the needs of future generations. We can’t starve our people for the sake of the environment, nor must we eat up the very basis of our grandchildren’s sustenance.

Q: How does Amity find a balance between environmental protection and agricultural production?

A: I don’t think there is a principal contradiction between production and protection. We must try to utilize nature without exploiting it. The main discovery of ecology is that all things and events in nature are interconnected. We must abandon the old model of input and output in production. In nature, nothing is wasted. Human manipulation of nature must integrate itself in given ecological cycles. Within small localities, say a village, a river valley or a given hill side, agriculture must attempt to recreate such cycles.

Q: Can you give us an example, please?

A: In Puqing County (Guizhou Province) we have decided to help poor families raise their income by supplying them with goats. They need to be fed. The people are too poor to go and buy fodder. However, letting the animals graze on grassland and in forests on a day-to-day basis would quickly lead to erosion and destroy the village’s production base. Now we are experimenting with ways in which farmers can produce necessary fodder.

Outstanding example of sustainable development in China: the production of traditional medicine.
Orphanages in China
Statement by the Amity Foundation

Recently, the Amity Foundation has received a number of inquiries about our work with orphanages. These have been in response to a report published by Human Rights Watch/Asia which documents serious problems in Chinese orphanages in general, and the Shanghai Children’s Welfare Institute in particular. Unfortunately, this report makes sweeping judgements about the general situation in China, employing highly charged rhetoric but failing to substantiate many claims.

The Amity Foundation has tried, over the years, to address the problems of orphans and orphanages in China in a concrete way. Mr. Ting Yenren, Associate General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, made the following comments:

1. While we at Amity and many others in China are calling for increased government funding for orphanages, the Human Rights Watch report claims that orphanage jobs are high-paying and people land there through good connections. At the same time, it accuses some staff of Shanghai Orphanage of committing what it terms intentional "summary resolution" and gives readers the impression that deliberately allowing infants to die is a wide-spread practice in China. In so doing, the report changes the issue of funding shortage into one of a criminal case and actually puts the government entirely out of the picture. Since the funding shortage will only perpetuate the difficulties China's orphanages are faced with, we have serious doubts about the true motive of the Human Rights Watch report.

As for the charge of "summary resolution," although we do not know the actual situation at Shanghai Orphanage, we cannot believe that the social workers we have come to know through working with various orphanages over the years would share such criminal intention.

2. Orphanages in China are in great need of help, both from within China and without. The Human Rights Watch report, however, distorts the reality that one of the basic problems with China's welfare work is insufficient funding from the government. This is also a problem that schools and medical clinics face at the grassroots level. The funding shortage not only results in dilapidated facilities, but also dampens staff morale to various degrees.

The staff at an orphanage often fall in the lowest income brackets. The government, in order to raise the profile of school teachers, nurses and welfare institution staff, does have a policy of offering them higher salaries than those of other government employees with the same level of education and the same length of work experience. Even so, however, the real income of the orphanage staff is still among the lowest because, by working at a non-profit institution, they receive almost no bonuses or any other fringe benefits, whereas, for their counterparts in other institutions, government salary often makes up only a small fraction of the income.

As a result of the funding shortage, the talented among the orphanage staff may be attracted to jobs that pay better, and the ones left behind are further looked down upon by others or by themselves as failures. Therefore, as we visit orphanages, we do from time to time find low morale and irresponsibility on the part of some staff. We can also believe that some children may die of malnutrition or the lack of adequate care. Yet this is one of the very reasons why we should work with orphanages.

This is not just Amity's assessment of the problem with China's orphanages. It is also the view shared by committed social workers in orphanages and civil affairs bureaus who are deeply concerned that they cannot offer children good care under very low budgets and that not enough young people are willing to take over their positions when they retire. In fact, the problem of funding shortages is so obvious that few people will not wonder why the Human Rights Watch report turns a blind eye to it.

3. Improving the work of orphanages not only requires greater funding. It also needs participatory management and the establishment of accountability. We are concerned that the Human Rights Watch report may provide the pretext for a small number of officials to go to extremes and deny demands for more participation and accountability. The report comes at a time when there is growing public concern within China, and when non-governmental involvement is starting to make a difference to
Chinese orphanages. Ignoring or belittling these efforts and making the orphanage staff suspicious of these efforts damages our work.

These days, all of China is moving toward a market economy, and this is a mixed blessing for China's welfare institutions. On the one hand, the balance is further tilted against them because government funds are also being drained into uses that offer good profit. With inflation and tax evasion, the government is increasingly unable to provide sufficient funds for welfare institutions. On the other hand, this is also a time when we have many opportunities for substantial improvement in the work of these institutions. Thanks to the reform policy, there is more money in nongovernment sectors and in private hands, some of which can be channelled into welfare work. There is also a growing public awareness of the difficulties faced by orphanages, schools and rural clinics. Pressure is building for change and improvement. Eventually, more financial and legislative measures will be taken to safeguard the rights and interests of orphans and abandoned children.

Ms Wu An'an, in charge of Amity's Social Welfare Division, adds to this:

It is not enough to just talk about the situation in the Chinese orphanages. Even more importantly, the root cause of the current problems needs to be addressed: Most of the children in the orphanages are there because they have been abandoned by their parents, either because they are girls or because they are sick or handicapped. To highlight this problem, Amity, together with Shanghai Television 2, produced a documentary about a Chinese couple who had found and raised more than 20 abandoned children. This film, produced in 1989, was subsequently shown on several local and provincial TV stations in China. The documentary was meant to educate the Chinese public about the situation of abandoned children, and it appealed to parents to take responsibility for their own children and not to abandon them. (For further information, see Amity Newsletter No 14, Autumn 1990).

When we first approached Nanjing Orphanage 10 years ago, the situation there was very bad. Children were poorly clothed and fed; the staff had poor working skills and lacked enthusiasm, resulting in a lack of care for the children. There were also administrational problems. This is why Amity wanted to help.

Today things have changed dramatically. Amity sponsored a rehabilitation section at the orphanage, and seconded one American-trained Hong Kong therapist to get it going. This project exclusively served children in the orphanage, not self-paying patients. Since the rehabilitation section was set up in the orphanage, the Nanjing Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children has started to open their services to orphan children also, something that had not happened before. The treatment of these children is paid for by donations from some local organizations.

In addition to the rehabilitation section Amity set up a volunteer program, called the "Grandmother Program", at the Nanjing Orphanage. Four retired nurses and doctors from Nanjing were sponsored by Amity to work at the orphanage five days a week, training staff and improving the care of the children. These "grandmothers", who were there on a day-to-day basis, have told me many times how things have improved at the orphanage. (For more detailed reports about Amity's involvement with Chinese orphanages, see Amity Newsletter Nos. 19, 20, 25 and 30)

Amity has now down-scaled its assistance for the orphanage in Nanjing, as there are now plenty of voluntary workers, as well as individuals and institutions who regularly give donations. Many families have "adopted" children, that is they regularly take them out for short trips or meals, even though they cannot legally adopt them.

Our Grandmother Program, on the other hand, has now been extended to four more orphanages: Yangzhou, Wuxi, Changzhou and Shanghai.

Amity has also tried to raise awareness of the orphanage situation among church workers. Students from the Nanjing Theological Seminary, organized by Amity, have visited the Nanjing orphanage, and have been encouraged to get involved in orphanages in the places where they will be working as pastors.

The Amity Foundation has always believed in changing things by doing something about them.

Nanjing 18 January 1996
with their own resources. They have straw, for instance. This side product of grain production is usually burnt. In Puding, we have taught the farmers to use their straw to produce fodder for their goats. In little cement basins they store layers of straw that alternate with layers of ammonia and microbes. The ensuing fermentation process turns this into nutritious fodder which is much liked by goats and cattle.

Q: A typical response to population pressure is the terracing of slopes. Very often, the results are deforestation and soil erosion, which have become no-future-symbols for Third World countries. Does Amity support the terracing of slopes?

A: In some cases, yes. Because this kind of work does not need to have such detrimental effects. Here I must say again that the question is not whether to use hill sides for agricultural production but how to do so wisely. Deforestation and soil erosion result from over-exploration, and this is true for plains as it is for slopes. Everything depends on local conditions. Rigid application of general concepts leads to the decay we try to avoid. In Puding, we have decided to provide hill tops with tree caps. The highest areas have been reserved for re-afforestation with bushes and shrubs. These need little water but prevent erosion and land slides, and minimize water evaporation. On lower levels, we plant fruit trees, each one on its own little terrace. Only where slopes flatten out to angles of less than 25 degrees, can we create larger terraces for the planting of dry crops. Just above this zone, we plant a ring of special trees, which can keep the water in the soil and prevent it from eroding. In addition, their leaves serve as natural fertilizer. We also dig tiny reservoirs to collect the rain water flowing down the hill.

Q: How do you decide what is best for a given place?

A: Of course, these things are not decreed by Amity. It is our role to facilitate a communication process between local peasants, government authorities and concerned specialists. I am not a trained agriculturist. In the course of my practical work I have learned as much as have local officials and producers. The projects are theirs, not ours. We just assist them. The best we can achieve through our projects is the empowerment of local people, which comes with increased knowledge and the experience of one's own success. Through active participation, local people can keep their community's development sustainable.

News From Amity's

Blindness Prevention And Special Education Division

Staff Increases

The number of staff workers in the Blindness Prevention and Special Education Division rose from one to two, when Miss She Hongyu (photo) was assigned assistant to division director Zhuang Ailing. Miss She previously served for four years as interpreter in the Amity Printing Co. Ltd.

WHO Conference Hears About Amity's Work for the Blind

From 13 to 16 November, a conference on blindness prevention was held in Jiangyin, Jiangsu Province, jointly organized by the World Health Organization and the Health Ministry of China. In addition to WHO experts and health officials from China's central government, the more than 60 participants included officials from 25 Chinese provinces and representatives of international NGOs involved in blindness prevention in China. Among them were Christian Blind Mission (CBM), the Lions Club International and Orbis International. The Amity Foundation was represented by Blindness Prevention & Special Education Director Zhuang Ailing.

The meeting reviewed China's present state of blindness prevention and satisfy the training of grassroots-level medical personnel. Participants also called for innovative and experimental blindness prevention programs suitable for China's particular conditions. The China Health Ministry welcomed NGO contributions within the existing medical system.

Amity's achievements in blindness prevention were made known at the conference and highly appreciated. Many representatives expressed their willingness to cooperate with the Amity Foundation.

Community Based Rehabilitation Captures the Limelight

The Amity-sponsored Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Program in Xing County, southern Jiangsu Province, received public attention when the Amity Foundation, together with many locally involved people, held a solidarity function on 29 November in the town of Yicheng, Xing County. The event was attended by 19 blind and five deaf clients, some of their family members, over a dozen township and county officials, the Christian Blind Mission regional representative Marion Tyrer, and two Amity staff members.
The CBR project in Yixing, which started two years ago, is the first of its kind in rural China. (The next Amity Newsletter will report on it in greater detail.) In eight townships in Yixing County, the Amity Foundation has experimented with an innovative approach to the rehabilitation of the blind and the deaf. Instead of concentrating them in special institutions, as is traditionally done, the CBR program allows its clients to stay in their own social environment. Available resources in the community are brought into full play to assist disabled people to realize a life of self-reliance, self-confidence and dignity. So far, over one hundred people have benefited from various aspects of the program in Yixing. Most of them have been enabled to take care of their own daily needs and do some household work. Some even started income generation activities in the areas of plantation, husbandry or handicraft work.

At the solidarity meeting, Amity Blindness Prevention and Special Education Director Zhuang Ailing gave a presentation on the overall structure and theory of the program. Five blind participants and the relatives of two deaf clients gave testimonies about how the project had changed their lives. A CBR field worker summarized the experiences of the local CBR team.

The meeting, which aimed at publicizing the project and its significance for the overall development of China’s rehabilitation work, was covered by two local TV stations and one newspaper and found a positive echo from the broader public. The Amity office in Nanjing has received many calls and visits in response.

**CBM Delegation Hails Partnership with Amity**

Four staff members of the German-based Christian Blind Mission (CBM) visited China in mid-November. The delegation was headed by CBM Executive Director Christian Garms and included the CBM East Asia Representative Marion Tyrie. They attended the WHO conference in Jiangyin, Jiangsu Province, (see above), held talks with the Amity leadership in Nanjing, and visited a number of CBM-sponsored Amity projects in Jiangsu and Anhui provinces. CBM, an internationally renowned aid organization specialized in blindness prevention and rehabilitation in Third-World countries, carries out its entire project work in China in close partnership with the Amity Foundation. During conversations between Amity and CBM, both sides expressed their satisfaction with the results of the partnership and committed themselves to continued cooperation.

**CBM Consultant Visits**

At the invitation of the Amity Foundation, CBM Education & Rehabilitation Consultant for Asia William Brohier visited the Wuhan School for the Blind, the Wuhan No. 2 School for the Deaf, the Nanjing School for the Blind, and the Nanjing Special Education Teachers College from 12 to 17 October. Brohier, who was accompanied by Amity’s Zhuang Ailing and She Hongyu, evaluated Amity projects carried out in cooperation with these institutions.

**Training Results Put to the Test**

Zhuang Ailing and She Hongyu of Amity’s Blindness Prevention and Special Education Division visited Aba Prefecture (Sichuan Province) from October 3 to 11. Together with a team of two ophthalmologists and one ophthalmic nurse of the Sichuan Provincial Hospital, they visited doctors who had graduated from Amity-sponsored ophthalmological training courses in the provincial capital Chengdu. In order to evaluate the results of the program, they met with the former trainees and local hospital staff, as well as current and previous patients. Interviews and random checks revealed that of the nine trainees, five could deal with common eye diseases and perform minor operations, while four had mastered cataract operations. The training proved to be very helpful in establishing accessible and affordable eye services to the people in Aba Prefecture, most of whom are ethnic Tibetans and Qiangs.

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