Piped Water No Longer A Dream: Yao Community Integrated Development Project Takes Off

Since 1993, the work of the Rural Development Division has moved from the eastern part of China towards the less developed West. It now has integrated development projects in the southwestern provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi. In Guangxi, two major projects were begun in 1997 and new projects are beginning to materialize in the northwestern provinces of Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai and Tibet.

Much of the terrain in Western China consists of arid, stone encrusted land, steep mountains and underground rivers—what is known as karst topography. There is a dire lack of arable land and soil erosion is extensive. With rapid population growth, tremendous pressure has been put on the land and the environment as vast areas are being cleared for cultivation and more trees are cut down. This has led to serious environmental degradation and a vicious cycle which in northwest China has severely affected the deserts and grasslands. People are extremely poor in these areas—most of them belonging to minority nationalities. They generally suffer from the lack of basic infrastructure and have little access to educational, communication and transport facilities. (Editor’s note)

On October 1st 1997, during our visit to Lingyun County in Guangxi Province, our ascent to the villages was delayed 4 hours by an accident. Finally, at 10:30 in the evening, when we finally straggled into Guobo Village, we were struck by the fact that it was a woman, the leader of the village women’s committee, with a torch in hand and with some villagers in tow, who had come through difficult terrain down the mountain to meet us.

In the village, we were greeted by Yao women garbed in their distinctive indigo blue headdresses and beautifully embroidered blouses. The village was lit with the blaze from a huge bonfire. We gathered around the fire, late into the night, drying our wet socks and shoes and drinking in the soft singing of the Yao women. The sound was mellow and sweet. The calmness and quiet around us was palpable as we listened to the hopes and longings of the Yao people.

After half a year of sheer hard work by villagers, the area covered by the project has shed its barren and arid look. The newly constructed reservoir and a network of aqueducts and canals have brought a lush green color to more than 3,000 mu (200 hectares) of farmland. We sat for a while outside the home of a young couple and watched as the young woman used a clear, sparkling water running from the faucet to wash clothes. Pleased with the fact that piped water is no longer a dream, she recounted the hardships her family previously endured in fetching water uphill from a distant well. Hers is not the only family that has benefited. In fact, more than 8,600 people in 8
villages located in the mountains have benefited from the construction of the reservoir. The water project not only provides for irrigation of the fields which are now planted with Chinese chestnuts but also for potable water which is now piped into homes. In the first year of the project, Longgu and Buling villages have completed more than 5,500 meters of pipeline, providing water to 117 households.

Bringing desperately needed water to these upland villages is all part of a 3-year Integrated Development Project among 12 communities of the Yao minority nationality in Lingyun County that Amity started in January 1997. The county, which covers an area of more than 2,000 square kilometers, has a population of around 175,000 of which more than half are from minority nationalities. Located in the Zhuang Minority Autonomous Region of Guangxi, the area is mountainous and has very limited arable land. With a per capita annual income of only 375 RMB (less than US$45) in 1994, Lingyun is among China’s poorest counties.

The essential idea behind an “integrated development project” is the integration of several sub-projects into one so that the components are mutually supportive and complementary. The project, which aims at sustainable development, combines the construction of basic infrastructure facilities with improvements in the environment, health, education and women’s development. Villagers have actively participated in the planning and implementation of the project, rather than just the experts.

Back to school

Education is a vital aspect of the project. In the first year, Longfu, Shanluo and Hezhou villages have all constructed new schoolhouses that will provide schooling for 208 children. At the break of dawn, when the mountains were still thickly shrouded in clouds, we watched the children of Hezhou arriving in their new schoolhouse, eager to begin their lessons. There, we met 4 students who were receiving assistance from Amity. By the end of the year, 488 children were already enrolled in the “Back to School” project in Lingyun County.

Adults have also been going back to school. In eight training courses involving 1,052 people, farmers were given lessons on slope terracing, pig rearing, and improving chestnut yields, as well as better ways of planting pear trees, mountain corn and star anise. In addition, some project participants with senior middle school education were enrolled in one year correspondence courses on fruit tree farming, animal husbandry and forestry with an agricultural college. This will ensure that there will be trained people and resource persons who can effectively provide support for the farmers.

Children happy to be back in school

Women’s development

Special attention is also being paid to women’s development. Women play a role at every stage of the project, from planning to project implementation and management. Whether it is in tree planting or slope terracing or in the selection of students to send back to school, women are given equal opportunity. In May and June 1997, the project office jointly organized 5 training courses for 367 women in 4 villages. They learned about basic health care, as well as the need to elevate the status of women and the importance of women’s participation in the project.

Apart from skills training in appropriate technology, women can attend literacy classes and learn about health, nutrition, childcare and management. The integrated development project now encourages what is called a “garden economy” which combines the planting of fruit trees and raising of animals with other activities. Training is geared to market demands. If fruit is not in demand, for instance, farmers are encouraged to raise animals. One advantage of the “garden economy” for women is that they do not have to leave home.

In many places, women have to take on heavy manual work because most of the men have migrated to towns and cities in search of better paying jobs. In some villages, the head of the village may be a woman. Since many households are now run by women, the project relies heavily on their participation. There is no denying the central role that women are assuming in the Chinese countryside today.

Compiled from reports of the Rural Development Division
Consciousness-Raising And Beyond:  
Development Work In China

Philip Wickeri, the founding coordinator of the Overseas Liaison Office of the Amity Foundation left in January 1998 to take up a new position as Professor of Mission and Evangelism at the San Francisco Theological Seminary. He shares his insights and vision of Amity’s development work in this interview with Theresa Carino.

TC: In what way has the Amity Foundation changed since its inception?

PW: Amity was founded in 1985 but since 1987 there has been a greater consciousness of Amity being not just a welfare or charity organization, but a development organization. It was also important in the early years to stress that Amity was neither a government nor a church organization but a people’s social organization started by Chinese Christians.

It has only been in the last three years that Amity started church-run projects, and the extent to which Amity is a church-related organization is still being worked out. Church-run projects still represent a very small percentage of what Amity is doing but are mutually beneficial for both Amity and the church.

TC: In Amity’s approach to development work, what are the important lessons you have learned which you feel ought to be shared?

PW: One very basic thing that Amity has emphasized is the importance of doing concrete projects that are of direct benefit to the people and of having the people themselves take responsibility for these projects. Development does not mean that we do things for people but that the people do things for themselves, not just in terms of a vague consciousness raising but through concrete projects.

A second thing is the importance of working in cooperation with the government. Our projects could not have been done without cooperation with the government and it is not simply because we are responding to political necessity. The government has been identified with different aspects of education, social welfare, medical work and so on. This is a different experience from that of many other countries where the non-governmental sector is seen as an alternative to the government. In China the NGO sector is seen as being cooperative.

Thirdly, there is inequality in development and Amity continues to address this issue. Over the last ten years there are people who are benefiting very greatly from the modernization of China, especially along the coastal areas. But there are also people who are left behind in the rural areas.

TC: What would you consider to be Amity’s strengths and weaknesses?

PW: The greatest strength that we have is an extremely dedicated staff. Both in Nanjing and here in Hong Kong we have committed staff with a real sense and understanding of the importance of development work. This strength has developed our other great strength, which is developing very good projects.

A third strength is the support that Amity receives from church related organizations all over the world: from the World Council of Churches to individual congregations, from the more conventional churches to the very evangelical ones. These organizations bring different perspectives and ask different kinds of questions which help to strengthen the work that we do.

I think the major weakness of Amity is our need to develop as an organization. Internally, Amity is in a stage of transition and its consolidation as an organization is needed in order to guarantee its continuing relevance to the changes taking place in China into the next century.
TC: Can you say something about the role played by the Overseas Liaison Office in Hong Kong in the past and whether you think this will change after 1997 with Hong Kong's return to China?

PW: The function of the Overseas Coordination Office has been threefold: interpreting Amity's work to our partners; liaison with our partners in the development of projects; and advice on the international work of Amity. Now that Hong Kong is part of China, I agree with the Amity leadership in saying that the office is still important, especially in its interpretative role.

Hong Kong is still extremely important as a gateway to China, as a window on the world. Since the office in Hong Kong is probably more sensitive to events that are happening in different parts of the world it is better able to interpret what Amity is doing and to provide Amity with a perspective on what is happening around the world. As such, the office will continue to keep its international and ecumenical character. We have staff from five countries and from five or six different denominational traditions which shows that Amity's relationships are broad and inclusive.

TC: With the latest stage of reforms, state firms will close down and there is an anticipation that this will create more problems in the cities. Do you see Amity taking more seriously work in the urban areas?

PW: In the past, if you lived in the city, by definition you were not living in poverty. But this is now changing. As China goes through privatization a lot of the services that were previously provided by the government are no longer being provided. For instance, the government is now encouraging NGOs and people's groups to get involved in medical work and social welfare. We have projects that help children to attend primary school. Surely it is a government responsibility to ensure this, not the private sector. This is one of the areas in which Amity will be called upon to play a greater role and in which initiative will be necessary.

TC: The US government has incorporated the theme of protecting "religious freedom" in its foreign policy. Could you comment on what would be the implications for the Church in China and how it would affect the work of Amity in the near future?

PW: There are several Congressional bills on religious persecution overseas which affect Chinese Christians. For religious freedom to become an instrument of American policy is not something that will help religious groups in China or other Asian countries. Besides, its purpose has to do with what is happening internally in American society. I value religious freedom and the separation of Church and State but I think this new legislation raises serious questions about it. For the American Government to assume to be the "protector of religious freedom" in other countries is a return to the 19th century, to what has been described elsewhere as a new idea of "Manifest Destiny". I think that the way in which a powerful government like the US chooses to intervene on issues of human rights and religious freedom is something that should be carefully watched, lest that government simply exploits these to serve its own interest and policy. As a church-related organization Amity certainly would not be helped in any way by this kind of pressure coming from the US.

TC: What challenges lie ahead for Amity as China and the rest of the world moves into the 21st century?

PW: Firstly, this has to do with responding to the new problems of Chinese society, especially the question of urban poverty.

Secondly, we need to address the question of what are the emerging urban-rural differences -- and even class differences -- in Chinese society in this new era. To address some of these questions effectively Amity would have to develop more of an advocacy role. But to respond to the challenges of a changing society, not only Amity and the Church but many sectors of society have to be commenting on what is happening.

Another challenge is the problem of "scale" versus "quality" of project. What Amity can do is experiment with new approaches to development that can be popularized, like in biogas or the rehabilitation of polio victims or community based rehabilitation.

TC: Do you see further liberalization that would give more political space for NGOs to develop in China? Secondly, with the stress on modernization, rapid growth and money-making, will Amity find it more difficult to recruit staff who are committed and dedicated?

PW: I certainly hope that there will be greater liberalization and for Amity to play an advocacy role. I think this is happening very, very slowly in different ways. Some of the projects that Amity is doing now could not have been done 7 or 8 years ago.

It is now much more difficult to recruit staff. Recently, some staff members have left Amity to go into the commercial sector where they earn 3 or 4 times more. The fact that Amity has tried to stress values and social commitment at a time when there is market mentality and money consciousness everywhere in itself is a contribution to society.
He Yuping Goes To School

Since 1987, the Amity Foundation has been working together with the Golden Key Centre in Beijing to advocate the mainstreaming of low vision and blind children into regular schools. Small scale projects were started in various provinces like Jiangsu, Heilongjiang, Hebei and Guangxi. In 1997, a large-scale project called the "Golden Key Project" was begun in Guangxi province that will enable 1,600 blind children to join regular schools. Preparatory training takes less than one year and involves training teachers in regular schools to teach blind students. They are taught Braille, some psychology and pedagogical techniques. Policy-makers and teacher-trainers are also given intensive courses. The trainers then give courses to teachers. Through the advocacy of Amity and the Golden Key Center, the State Education Commission finally accepted the idea in 1990 and has since made legal provisions for vision impaired children to be accepted in regular schools. (Editor's note)

For 13-year old He Yuping, starting first grade last September at the Xi Pingwan Primary School in Fuyang, a town in Fuchuan county, Guangxi, marks a major achievement. Blind since age two, Yuping has adapted quickly to school life and enjoys it thoroughly.

Entering school has brought dramatic changes to every aspect of Yuping's life. Before this, she had never ventured out of her home and had few friends. Her only playmates were her five year old sister and a six year old neighbor. Her hair always in tangles and her clothes usually dirt-caked and untidy, Yuping was often left on her own. Playing in the mud was her favorite pastime. She was a timid girl with an inferiority complex.

That was before she became a beneficiary of Amity's "Golden Key Project". Since then, she has had the opportunity to enroll in a pre-school education program which has provided her with the basics of Braille. She has also learned to groom herself, do the laundry and, during the busy farming season, help other members of the family with picking peanuts and drying millet in the sun.

Going to regular school has brought an enormous amount of self-confidence and self-respect to Yuping. She is never late for school and would not dream of skipping classes or leaving school earlier than she should. Her enthusiasm for various school activities knows no bounds and she has learned to jump rope, play hop-scotch and other games that most children play. Easy to get along with, she mixes freely with her classmates and is well liked by her teachers. Now that she has become more familiar with her school surroundings, Yuping can move around the school without any help. She can even walk all the way home, as long as she has company.

Her teachers have instilled a sense of discipline in Yuping and under their patient guidance, she is now able to read and write Braille perfectly. Her vocabulary has expanded and she can compose sentences. With the help of the Braille keyboard, she can draw geometrical shapes and is well on her way to doing mathematical equations and formulas. Always attentive in class, taking an active part in discussions and story-telling is sheer pleasure for Yuping. There are times when she offers help to classmates in difficulties.

Grateful for the love, care and patience of all those who have helped pave the way for her to join the mainstream, Yuping vows, "I will study hard so that I can repay my teachers and one day, make an impact on society."
Earthquake In Hebei:
Prompt Relief Averts Further Disaster

A major earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale brought a swath of disaster to an area of 860 square kilometers in Zhangjiakou Prefecture, Hebei Province in northern China on January 10th this year. There were 49 deaths reported and more than 11,400 people injured at the epicenter of a tremor that was felt as far as Beijing, Tianjin and parts of Inner Mongolia and Shanxi Province. Worst hit were Zhangbei and Shangyi counties in Zhangjiakou, where all the fatalities were reported. Many homes were flattened in these two counties leaving more than 43,000 people homeless at a time when temperatures were at 30 degrees Celsius below zero. Damage in these two areas alone was estimated at over 300 million US dollars.

As attempts were made to rush emergency shelters to the victims, the Amity Foundation appealed for emergency relief funds for tents, materials for temporary shelters, overcoats and blankets, food and medicine. The response from overseas friends and supporters has been overwhelming. Donations from churches in Hong Kong have amounted to over 2 million Hong Kong dollars, and 94,000 US dollars have been raised from the US, Norway and ACT (Action by Churches Together) in Geneva. In cooperation with the Zhangjiakou Overseas Friendship Association and the Zhangjiakou Relief Operation Headquarters, Amity set up a 6-member work team at the disaster sites in January and quickly organized two trucks to carry 1,260 woolen blankets to these areas. Blankets were distributed to the quake victims between January 23rd and February 1st. Tents were also distributed by Amity. The quick response of the government and relief agencies helped to avert further deaths from the subzero temperatures in the affected areas and ensured that the homeless could join in the celebration of the Lunar New Year.

Restoring homes and schools

Amity is now engaged in rehabilitation work in Zhangbei and Shangyi counties which will benefit 2,000 people from 621 households. In Zhangbei, this involves the construction of new homes for the earthquake victims, especially in the 4 villages of Yuanshanze, Qiaojialiang, Majiaqou and Hedong. All 301 families lost their homes in the disaster. The school in Qiaojialiang which used to serve the children of the 4 villages was also destroyed. Rehabilitation work will ensure that each family will have at least one room to shelter its members and the school will be restored. Funds from Amity and the government will be used to purchase building materials while the farmers will contribute their labor.

In Shangyi, Amity will help 320 families in Nansuji Village restore their homes. The Nansuji Village School and the Mongolian Village School of Kuitengtai will also be rebuilt.

These villages are all part of Zhangjiakou Prefecture, which is located on the southern part of the Mongolian Plateau known locally as “Bashang”. Between 1,400 to 2,000 meters above sea level, the

Tents provide temporary shelter from the cold
area is dry, barren and difficult to reach. The four worst hit counties are among the poorest in China. Prior to the earthquake, pests and an unusually long dry spell had damaged crops, reducing the harvest to only a third of what had been expected. It was fortunate that despite the rugged terrain and daunting conditions no one froze to death or died from hunger after the earthquake. This has been partly attributed to the prompt response of the government at different levels.

Relief operations began 2 hours after the first major tremor with the evacuation of victims from the epicenters to less affected areas, the provision of temporary shelters and the distribution of blankets. Relief supplies also poured in from other regions in China and many individuals offered donations and free services. All of these have brought temporary relief, cheer and hope to the people of “Bashang”. The earthquake has inflicted deep suffering but the warmth and compassion of Chinese and non-Chinese friends alike have brought to the people a greater awareness of what “openness” means.

By Tan Liying

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**Escaping Poverty: Is Ecology The Key?**

"Ecological improvement might be the key to relieving poverty in the mountainous areas of China where 84% of the country’s poorest counties are located." This was stressed by Shi Shan, Vice-president of the Ecological Association of China during a January 1998 conference on "Sustainable Development organized by the Amity Foundation and the China Association for Science and Technology. He pointed out that most of China’s poor live in areas which suffer from serious ecological destruction such as in the loess plateau in the northwest or in Yunnan and Guizhou in the southwest. His words sparked an intense debate among conference participants which included more than 64 researchers, social workers, local project officials and academics from different parts of China.

Some felt that despite the "partial deterioration" in agriculture and the ecology, development can still be sustainable. Others pointed out that the price for the rapid growth of the economy in the last forty years has been the sacrifice of the ecology. They warned that if this "pillage of the environment" continues unabated in the current strategy of rapid economic growth, the nation will be faced with an ecological and environmental crisis.

One of the highlights of the conference was the importance given to the idea of "participatory development". Participants learned that the adoption of this method will require not only the involvement of officials from all levels but also the voluntary participation of farmers at the grassroots. This has been strongly encouraged by the Amity Foundation in its various projects.

There was little doubt that the conference was highly successful in promoting the vision of sustainable development. The first of its kind to be held in China, the conference, which involved both Chinese NGOs and government organizations, stimulated in-depth and wide-ranging exchanges on the subject and attracted national media attention.

By Qiu Zhong Hui
Dire shortage of equipment in Schools for the Blind

In an Amity survey of 50 Schools for the Blind throughout China, it was discovered that there was a dire shortage of basic equipment. More than half of the schools surveyed did not have a Braille typewriter and many of the large and medium-sized schools did not have enough typewriters to meet their teaching needs. As a result, the Amity Foundation obtained a donation of 40 Braille typewriters from Germany which have already been distributed to 37 schools. These typewriters have raised the teaching efficiency in these schools considerably and relieved some of the pressures on them. Braille books, however, are still badly needed.

Schoolgirls donate to Golden Key Project

Students of St. Stephen’s Secondary Girls School in Hong Kong recently collected HK$ 6,000 among themselves and donated it to the Amity Foundation’s “Golden Key Project” (see page 5 in this issue) which enables vision-impaired children to attend regular schools in China. The principal of St. Stephen’s is Ms. Judy Chuo who is also a member of St. John’s Cathedral in Hong Kong.

Rural development group visits Philippines

A 12-member delegation consisting of Amity project holders in rural development participated in a 10-day tour of the Philippines October 20-31, 1997. Part of a 3-year exchange plan between Amity and the Philippine China Development Resource Center it included visits to rural development and environmental projects in different parts of the Philippines. During the trip, the group encountered people from all walks of life, including farmers, workers, NGO workers, government officials and the local Chinese. Members of the delegation, noting the similarities between China and the Philippines, especially in the area of rural development, felt that there was much to share and learn.

Ting goes to Columbia

Ting Yenren, an Associate General Secretary of the Amity Foundation and one of the mainstays of the Amity Teachers Program, is now in New York completing a Ph. D in Linguistics at Columbia University Teachers College. During his absence, Gu Renfa, also an Associate General Secretary of Amity, will be supervising the Teachers Program while Zhang Liwei will be the acting director.

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Funding for the work of the Amity Foundation comes from sources, both Chinese and foreign, religious and nonreligious, individual and organization. Inquiries are encouraged for direct support of Amity Foundation projects. Contributions are welcome, as are suggestions concerning possibilities for new project initiatives are welcomed, as are suggestions 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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The Amity Newsletter is prepared by the staff of the Amity Foundation and printed by the Amity Printing Company, Ltd.
Editor: Theresia C. Casino