Growing in the Right Places: Amity Turns Fifteen!

By Dr. Wenzao Han
General Secretary

The Amity Foundation is no longer a "baby" but at the age of 15, I believe it has become more than just a teenager. It has achieved so much in such a short time, all my expectations have been surpassed!

"Friends abroad and quality staff contribute to success"

There are manifold reasons for Amity's success. One major reason is the continuing support of friends overseas. These friends have shown not only their love but also their readiness to support the Chinese people. Over the years, their contributions to Amity have continued to grow. This is because people feel, and rightly so, that China still has many needs. In spite of China's economic development, the east-west gap between the rich and the poor in China is growing wider. China is still a developing country and more than 42 million of its people live below the poverty line as set by Chinese standards. By international standards, the number living below the poverty line is even higher.

Foreign support has also contributed much to staff capacity building. This leads me to the second major reason for Amity's success. I believe that staff is a key factor and staff quality is critical. We keep emphasizing the three C's: compassion, commitment and competence. Compassion and commitment are not enough. Our staff have to improve their competence and expertise. Many of them do not have social work expertise—just the desire to serve the people. Staff development and training is very crucial and should be continuous. We encourage our staff to study and develop their skills by sending some for training abroad or inviting experts to share their knowledge and experience with us. In addition, it has been our policy to develop a core group that is very stable.
and committed. We have given a free hand to division directors—now they can fly on their own. We also need staff of different generations to carry out the work.

Our staff must all go to the grass roots. We work with local officials but we should not just consider ourselves as project “funders”. We are in fact “facilitators” or “enablers”, monitoring and screening projects. To ensure that people at the grassroots receive the help they need, we must reach the grassroots in our evaluation and screening of projects. Evaluation is also a process for maintaining project quality. In China, project evaluation is a new idea but I believe it is essential since it allows us to summarize our experience. Evaluation is a learning process, a mutual learning procedure, not just for a particular division but for Amity as a whole. In the past, project evaluation has not been done sufficiently well. To do it better, we are now setting up small evaluation teams that include Amity board members and experts or specialists.

It will take a long time before China attains the status of a developed country. Besides, social needs will be around for a long time. There will always be the weak and needy. As early as 1993, Amity had already made the big move westwards towards the poorest regions in China (long before it became government policy) and advocated the idea of “sustainable development”. We should continue to work in remote areas in western China, but we should also address new needs in urban areas. These include the needs of migrant workers from the countryside, the retrenched and unemployed, the old and destitute. These are new problems for China and we have to find new ways to solve them.

\[ \text{“Our response to new challenges: promote human development, not charity”} \]

Amity will grow even as China develops. The number of staff will grow but not too much. Amity itself cannot have branch offices in other provinces since it is incorporated in Jiangsu and is not a national organization. Our model is the Lanzhou office in Gansu which coordinates the Medical Division’s village health workers’ training program in northwest China. There, Amity subsidizes the office which has staff seconded by the local government.

In other places, we have project offices in which we involve local personnel such as the liaison office in Yunnan which uses the staff of the Poverty Alleviation Office in Kunming. During the 1997 earthquake in Lijiang, Yunnan, for instance, we worked with the Lijiang Poverty Alleviation Office. In this sense, having good local partners is crucial, otherwise we cannot achieve much. If they are not good enough, we should look for other partners.

We should fully recognize the contributions of our local partners and the local people. In project-funding, our “Three-in-one Principle” has been very successful and should be maintained. It is a requirement in our projects that Amity only contributes one-third of the necessary funds while the local government provides a third and the local people contribute another third either in cash or in the form of labor. Thus, there has been substantial local inputs and these must be taken into account in assessing overall contributions to projects. After all, projects are for human development not charity. In the final analysis, we should ensure that people have human dignity, encourage self-reliance and help them develop themselves.

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**In This Issue:**

**Editor’s note**

“In most issues of the Amity Newsletter, information about Amity projects has been the main focus. In this special issue, I believe many of our readers will be interested to learn about some of the “movers and shakers” in Amity - the people who carry out the projects, often behind the scenes. The following interviews and “profiles” are intended to provide glimpses of the personal experiences, perspectives and plans of the leaders of various divisions and programs. Together, these people constitute the “core” of Amity. Their collective wisdom and practice will help shape Amity in the years to come.”
Conscience and a Good System
Interview with Stephen Ting Yen-ren

Why did you join Amity and what were the early years like?

I was teaching at the Jiangsu Education Institute when I joined Amity in June 1985 as a part-timer. I believed Amity would do good work. My assignment was to start the Teachers Program. Initially, there were no divisions in Amity. There were only four staff members who shared three desks! The Teachers Program took some organizing. I had to "sell" the program to various colleges and institutes, relying on my "connections" such as knowing the principal of the Nanjing Foreign Language School—I had been his student! I had to visit schools in Jiangsu Province. At first, Huanan College was the only college outside of Jiangsu to contact us about having teachers. Amity began by sending English teachers to 11 schools where some kind of personal friendship existed with Amity staff or their friends. After a year, people began to appreciate the Teachers Program but schools in other areas and provinces continued to harbor suspicions about Amity.

Being a Christian-initiated organization, there was much skepticism about Amity. We had to convince officials in various sectors of the government. It was not easy. At that time, officials were "sixiang jiefang" or "liberated" if they were willing to deal with Christian groups. Even then, the external relations officer of the Jiangsu Educational Institute of Technology remarked that "Christians are like Buddhist monks—preaching all the time. What would they know about teaching?" Thus, in those early years, our main task was to change people's perceptions of Amity. Our motives and abilities were suspect and our first step was to convince Chinese people that Christians can participate in development.

What were the origins of Amity's emphasis on the Three Cs (compassion, commitment and competence) among staff and local partners?

We began emphasizing the need for the Three Cs after noticing some staff taking advantage of their positions. For instance, we noticed that after visiting a project, instead of taking the bus home, one of the staff demanded that the partner organization send him from Anhui to Nanjing in a car. Some staff wanted the local people to thank them. For example, when Amity donated a van, they wanted Amity's name on it. "Enjoying banquets" also became a bad habit. Thus by the late 80s, there was discussion among the staff and a decision was made to emphasize the Three Cs. Most of our new staff members, who do not have much work experience in the first place, probably do not fully understand what the Three Cs really mean at first. They learn it only through a process of involvement.

Our local partners tell us they appreciate the Three Cs but we do not always know how well they implement the principle. Corruption among local partners is sometimes a problem although it involves only a very small percentage of our projects. Sometimes money for projects is diverted to other uses. In one place in Fujian, we stopped our cooperation after receiving a complaint from a farmer about relief funds being channeled to local government projects. Because local officials disliked spending time and energy on relief work, they submitted a false report. Amity took action after receiving complaints from a villager. Farmers do write letters to Amity about such things. In some cases, kickbacks are involved. Sometimes, if several partners are involved in a project, those through which funds are transferred may ask for kickbacks. Amity does not have a foolproof system to prevent corruption especially since we have very few staff. Even though there is a system of bookkeeping and auditing these cannot always uncover anomalies. In future, Amity should rely not only on the conscience of its staff but also on a good system.

How do project proposals find their way to Amity?

In the 80s, Amity used to receive a large number of funding requests but many of them could not meet Amity's requirements and standards. Those who approach us are usually county officials and their friends in the provincial government. But for
them to approach an NGO is rather unconventional so it means that they tend to be unconventional officials since in China, the usual way is to apply to upper levels of the bureaucracy. Amity is one of the few NGOs not funded by the government. This gives Amity more flexibility. There are not many like us.

There is also the “snowball effect.” After we have implemented projects in an area, those in neighboring villages learn about them through the grapevine. We also receive recommendations from people with whom we have worked well. Some government officials like to recommend their pet projects but Amity can say no! Because Amity knows more about development projects these officials cannot influence us too much in how projects are implemented.

What are some of the challenges in the new millennium?

We should do more for education, especially in local teachers colleges where there are currently no Amity teachers. We should provide more training for local teachers. Beginning Fall 2000, there will be 10 Tibetan teachers from the University of Tibet training in key universities in eastern China. Amity is helping to sponsor them. Two local teachers were also sent to Stiliman University in the Philippines for three years. One of them, Zhu Hui Ming is now a Vice-Dean in Shangrao, Jiangxi. Currently, there are four teachers from the minority nationalities institutes from four provinces training at Payap College in Thailand.

Geographically, we should do more in Tibet, one of the poorest provinces in China. At the moment, Amity is supporting a yak regeneration project in Tibet. It is the biggest Amity project so far in that autonomous region. I hope we can raise more funds for projects in Tibet.

Stephen Ting Yen-ren has been with Amity’s Education Division since it started. He was an Associate General Secretary from 1988 to 1999. In 1999, he was appointed Vice-President of Amity’s Board of Directors. He was interviewed by Theresa Carino, ANL editor, Amity Overseas Coordinating Office in Hong Kong.

Christian Connections: Strength and Weakness

Interview with Gu Renfa

What has been the most valuable experience for you in Amity?

Since working here, I have acquired a much better understanding of Christianity and Christians. Before joining Amity I did not understand Amity or Christianity. I was working in the Jiangsu Overseas Friendship Association when Dr. Han Wenzao invited me to assist Amity in receiving foreign guests. That is how I joined Amity at its inception in 1985. Since then, I have learnt much about the history of Christianity and how foreign missionaries used to go to the most remote and difficult areas, often bringing benefits to Chinese society by setting up schools and hospitals. I have pondered about this and felt that it was their way of putting their faith in practice and expressing Christian love. Their love for people and humanity has been a great contribution. Over the past few decades, Chinese Christians have been able to help society separately and individually but not as part of a Christian organization. However, through Amity they can express their Christian love—Ai Ren. I feel I better understand this now.

Amity has given me the opportunity to serve the poor. My parents were very poor and never had any education. I was the third child and had to be given away because they were too poor to take care of me. My foster parents, who were childless, were very poor themselves. They took care of me but I grew up in extremely poor surroundings. I fully understand the needs of the very poor. I could survive only because I was given away. Of my eight brothers and sisters, two were given away. I know that the poor are very hardworking and think of different ways to survive so they need help desperately. My work in Amity
has much to do with my own experience. I have given the best years of my life to Amity and have no regrets because this is where there is Love: Ai ren de difang.

**Among Chinese NGOs that started around the same time, Amity is one of the few that has survived and grown in the last 15 years. What were some of the difficulties and what have been Amity’s strengths?**

Being Christian-initiated and having close connections with the church has been both a strength and a weakness for Amity. Our strength is that we have received tremendous support from foreign friends and the bulk of our funding is from overseas. Similar Chinese organizations did not have this kind of support. We have friends who give of their love and their support.

Because of our church connections, we also face difficulties. Since the reforms started in 1978, there has been more openness but some bureaucrats are still very conservative and skeptical about religion and religious connections. Amity thus continues to face difficulties in this area.

Despite this, we must continue to cooperate with friends abroad and try to understand their way of thinking. This is because foreign friends want to help develop China and the church. We can and should expand church-run projects. This will help Chinese people more fully understand the church—that it is concerned with the people and can contribute to society. Projects are concrete expressions of Christian love. Through them, both officials and local people can see and not just hear about the church’s contribution to society. These projects show that Amity serves non-Christians as well.

**Can you say more about Church involvement in Amity projects?**

Amity can and should do more to promote greater participation of Christians and churches in social development projects. Church-run projects should be incorporated in each division rather than treated as a separate area.

Though I am not a Christian, I do pay a lot of attention to the church in areas where I have helped implement Amity projects. In Hunan Province, for instance, we have several community development projects involving the church. In Xinhua County, there are projects incorporating a clinic, a primary school, biogas and irrigation systems. Except for the school, which received government funds, the local counterpart funding for the rest of the projects came from cash donations by local Christians. As a result of the church’s involvement, a church meeting point will soon be established to meet the needs of local Christians who are presently meeting in a house.

Amity had a water project in Guo Jia Ping Village, Shan Zhi County in Hunan last year.

This area has many Christians but local officials were initially reluctant to acknowledge their presence. After the project was implemented, local officials felt Christians were doing good things. Local Christians had donated to relief work as well. Official permission was then given for the building of a small church to function as a meeting point.

I hope to develop 10 such Community Development Projects in the next two years in Hunan Province. All these can strengthen relations between Christians, the local community and officials.

**What do you foresee as future frontiers for Amity in the 21st Century?**

China is still very rural and the rural problem will persist. 42 million still live below the poverty line. There is a need for environmental protection, reforestation, and the recovery of lakes. This will affect people’s livelihoods. How will they live if their lands are re-converted?

There are also 80 million migrant workers looking for jobs in the cities. Those who cannot find jobs become a social problem. We need to address those among the 80 million who cannot find jobs, housing or education.

In the cities, there are many intellectuals who have difficulties locating jobs on their own. If graduates who originally came from the rural areas cannot find jobs, they have to return to the countryside and their “social status” and IDs will be reverted to “rural”. This could in the long run affect social stability. With the streamlining of the bureaucracy, 8 million civil servants will lose their positions. Not all are old. Some can find new jobs and some cannot. Where will they go?

Urban poverty is a new social phenomenon. The number of unemployed in cities is growing. By the end of 2000, 21.3 million will be unemployed in the whole of China. Compared to farmers they are worse off since they do not even have land for subsistence. We have already started working in Nanjing and Wuxi Cities in Jiangsu Province, with the re-training of retrenched women workers but not enough has been done. ♦

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*Gu Renfa is an Associate General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, responsible for Program Coordination, and was the director of the Rural Development Division from 1988 to 1992. He was interviewed by Theresa Carino, ANL editor, Amity Overseas Coordination Office in Hong Kong.*
Combining Faith and Healing: A Dream Come True

Li Enlin grew up in a Christian family in Anhui Province. Her home was always open to those who sought both healing and prayers since her mother was a doctor and her father a pastor. Her parents dreamed of running a clinic but this was not possible in those days. Becoming a “barefoot doctor” in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution was the closest Li came to emulating her mother. After the Cultural Revolution, despite her own desire to train as a doctor, Li conceded to her father’s wishes that she attend seminary. After graduating from Nanjing Seminary, Li taught at the Wuhan Seminary for some time before settling in Nanjing after her marriage. When Dr. Wenzao Han invited her to join Amity, she felt she was being given the chance to do something her parents had only dreamed about. Her initial assignment was to work with Amity Press as an interpreter for David Thorn. Then in 1988, she was asked to start the Medical Division.

Initially, the program provided small-scale training for village doctors in Yencheng, Northern Jiangsu. Li also worked with CBM (Christofel Blindenmission International), supporting cataract operations for farmers. The training of gynecologists from Qinghai was another project. Amity had started with the donation of equipment to hospitals and clinics but soon discovered that it was not a good idea. These institutions used the new equipment to raise revenues but never quite reached the grassroots with their services. It was decided that instead, training should be provided for grassroots health workers. In 1989, while visiting six provinces in Western China, Li noticed the dire lack of qualified doctors. She proposed the training of 600 village health workers (100 per province). Amity began with a three-year training program but after the first year, the number trained was too small to meet needs. The training period was reduced to two years so that 1,800 could be trained. For Li, it was an issue of time and money. The emphasis on training continues today.

Li believes that Amity is where Christians can express their love for the people. She recalls how appalled she was with the social indifference of seminary students. One morning, as she entered Nanjing Seminary, she noticed an old man having difficulties pushing a cart heaped with cabbages. None of the young seminary students around offered a helping hand. In the end, it was an old lady who did. The incident affected Li who says, “I felt bad that those seminary students who attend church religiously on Sundays did nothing to help someone in need. I felt then that Amity is a good channel for Christians to express love for fellow-beings and that seminary graduates should be more socially involved.”

“Working in Amity is different”

What Li treasures most from her Amity experience is the “lesson of love.” “Working for Amity is different from other jobs because the money we receive for projects come from the goodwill of friends and ordinary people. When we ‘help,’ we are partners, not donors. It is a special relationship.” Li is grateful for the warm relationships that have sprung up through her work. In one project in Feixian County (Shandong Province), which Li has visited many times, an elderly woman has grown attached to her and treats her like a daughter. “She is always concerned about me. She worries if she thinks I have lost weight. People do not need just money, they need ‘care.’ I remember a Hong Kong woman who had been donating to school-less children. She was willing to give money but unwilling to take time to write to the children. Sometimes, I regret that I do not have the time myself to give love to everyone.”

Many experiences have compelled Li to continue working with Amity. She was deeply moved and inspired by the dedication of Dr. Norval Christy whom she accompanied on his visits to China. She saw how close and loving he was with his patients, “no matter how poor or dirty they were.” In her frequent travels to remote areas, she has seen the tremendous needs in the countryside. “As an individual you can do very little but through Amity, you can make a real contribution. My husband gave up a lucrative job offer in Malaysia so I can continue working in Amity. He believes it is more important for me to stay. I can help more people in my work.”

Gazing at the crystal ball, Li believes that rural development and poverty alleviation will become increasingly difficult to achieve in China. Difficult terrain and inhospitable natural conditions, the lack of education and the growing gap between rich and poor will all conspire to make the work more difficult. Li believes that the needs will grow and the challenges to Amity as well. Amity projects have spread to many provinces, but compared to the size and population of China, they are of a small scale. There is much to do.

Li has many plans for the medical division. In many villages, where women health workers are sorely lacking, there is an urgent need to train people in maternal and child health care. Amity plans to acquire a mobile surgical clinic for use in Tibet, in addition to the one operating in Qinghai Province. There are plans to make dental care more readily available in township hospitals and clinics through the use of ART which is being promoted by the World Health Organization. Amity is also joining the fight against tuberculosis which is still prevalent in China.

In the area of training, there is a need to run
Discovering Amity

Born in Ningxia, Zhuang Ailing graduated from Ningxia Institute in 1984. She taught at the Ningxia Institute of Education for three years before pursing and obtaining a Masters Degree in English and American Literature from Nanjing University in 1990.

At Nanjing University, Zhuang took a course entitled, "The Bible as literature" taught by Prof. Guo Siumay, spouse of Bishop K. H. Ting. At that time, Prof. Guo was confined to a wheel chair so the class met in her home. Sometimes Bishop Ting would join the class for tea break and talk with the students about Amity and its efforts to serve China's neediest people. The more Zhuang heard about Amity, the more curious she became. In 1989 she volunteered to serve as translator for a foreign delegation visiting the Amity Printing Press. The visit so impressed Zhuang that she wrote Amity's General Secretary in early 1990 and offered her services to work.

In 1992 Zhuang became the Director of the new Amity Blindness Prevention and Special Education Division. Zhuang noted, "Amity's General Secretary, Dr. Wenzao Han asked me, 'Do you want to take up a new challenge?' I was intrigued and of course said 'yes'. What I didn't realize at first was that I had only one week in which to learn about the program and meet the budget deadline! Fortunately I made it and spent the next three months visiting all our Blindness Prevention and special Education projects." During this time Zhuang discovered she was pregnant but carried on with her work up to the day before her son was born.

Having a wide circle of professional friendships and connections helps keep Zhuang at Amity. At the same time, she believes that, "Amity is one of the first Chinese NGOs to work for the welfare of the Chinese people. My personality is suited for this kind of work. I can use my fortunate, I was on top of heaven! Through Amity I found I could help people meet life's basic needs. In doing so, I have experienced a special joy, especially in getting to know lots of people who support our work, not for the money, but because they care about people."

Li Enlin is an Associate General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, Director of the Medical Division and Coordinator of Church-run Projects. This article is based on an interview conducted by Theresa Corino, ANL editor, Amity Overseas Co-ordination Office in Hong Kong.
Zhuang observes that the quality of life remains poor, especially in remote mountainous areas inhabited by minorities. At the same time, rapid hi-tech developments are influencing all of society. Amity is more holistic. According to her, “We try to do more than meet needs. We try to help prevent social problems. Therefore, we need to participate in current issues. China’s social work development continues to lag behind other countries in both quality and kind.” Zhuang believes that greater attention should be given to promoting community service: “We want to make such work available, accessible, affordable and acceptable.”

From Zhuang’s perspective, China is in the midst of new avenues of development. China has a huge population and tremendous needs. Some parts of the country are well developed, others are not. For her, “There’s much to do and we have a long way to go. During Amity’s fifteen years of existence, we have learned several things about development: we need to emphasize the richness of cultural differences and adapt developmental programs accordingly; strike a balanced approach; and use appropriate technology based on a holistic concept of development.”

Local Leaders can be Agents of Change
Interview with Zhang Liwei

Why did you join and why do you continue to work with Amity?

One reason [for joining] was an interest in Christianity. This interest began in university when I studied the Bible as literature and took Western Civilization courses. In 1992 I went to Oxford’s Centre for Post-Graduate Hebrew Studies in the UK, and studied Hebrew, antiquities, the Holocaust, and the revival of Hebrew. I also became interested in missionary history, and wrote a graduation thesis on the translation of the Bible into Chinese. Originally my interest was in language and linguistics, but I gradually became more interested in how missionaries started schools, hospitals and so forth; I also became more interested in cultural transmission and the cultural impact of missionaries.

I had been working in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature of Nanjing University, teaching and compiling dictionaries. I came to know about Amity through other Nanjing University people who worked for Amity, such as Stephen Ting, Cao Jingxin, and Xu Xunfeng. I became interested in Amity because I saw them helping the socially disadvantaged and marginalized. In the university I was also helping people, but in Amity the contact with the needy was much more direct.

I still find the work interesting, and there is still a lot to do. It allows me to help more people. Since joining I have been able to visit remote villages, and I was appalled to see such poverty. For example, the homes and roads in one Miao minority area I visited in Yunnan were terrible, and so was the environment and poverty in an area I visited in Ningxia.
What lessons have you learned about development work, especially in the Chinese context?

In the West, it is not uncommon to have conflicts between the state, businesses, and NGOs. Usually NGOs have an adversarial relationship with the state. But in China, given China’s social structure, NGOs mostly enjoy a cordial relationship with the state. China already has existing structures for promoting development work which share Amity's goal of poverty alleviation, so there is every reason for NGOs to take advantage of this and work hand-in-hand with the state for the well-being of the Chinese people. This is why Amity adheres to a “three-in-one” policy that requires, for each project, contributions by local government and the local people, as well as by Amity. Moreover, poverty is very much related to the education of people, so training and the human development of local leaders and people are very important. Once local leaders become better educated, they can serve as agents of change in local areas.

How is Amity different from other NGOs in China?

Amity really is different from other NGOs in China. For much of the past half-century there has not been much room for NGOs in Chinese society. Some have appeared since 1979, but most are quasi-NGOs that have direct ties to government. There are few real NGOs that work with people at the grassroots level, and many NGOs in China do not really have any projects; they live off the interest from money given by the government and focus mainly on their own financial survival. In contrast, Amity is really able to do something to help people out of poverty. Because its support comes mainly from overseas partners, its funding is relatively reliable. Amity is also different because its funding is project based. "No projects, no funds." Amity has a stable source of income, but only because it builds credibility by running good projects. Another unique aspect of Amity is that it is Christian-initiated. Though it is not a Christian organization, most of its partners are church-related.

What are new frontiers in development work in the new millennium, and what contribution can Amity make?

There are two types of poverty in China: rural and urban. There is still much to do in the alleviation of rural poverty, but in the new millennium there is increasing need to focus on urban poverty. This is not just because of current job lay-offs. It is also because there is less of a social safety-net for urban workers who lose jobs than there is for rural people (who can go back to their fields). Urban poverty is also an increasing problem because many things which used to be paid for by the state in urban areas, such as housing, are no longer free or subsidized.

A special problem in the city is the aging of the population. There are now 120 million people above the age of 65. In 2025, there will be 236 million - one out of every five people in China. Who will take care of all these people, especially as their children are increasingly likely to live away from their parents?

Another growing problem is migrant workers in cities. They contribute a lot to cities, but their rights to education and social security are limited. Under China’s household registration system, children of migrant workers lack the city residency permits that make them eligible for city schools. I recently visited a shanty school in Nanjing for children of migrant workers. There were holes in the roof, and three children to each desk. How do we ensure the rights of these workers and their children? Amity needs to help both urban and rural people. We have already started working with the elderly. In January 2000, we started supporting a primary school for children of migrant workers. There are only eight teachers there for 190 students crowded into six small classrooms.

How are you preparing to respond to new challenges?

One of my areas of responsibility is publicity and promotion work for Amity. This is very important for fund raising. In this area, we need to make more use of the internet. However, face-to-face contact with donors is still very important. So, this April we are having a consultation with our partner agencies that will include exposure visits to Yunnan, Hunan, and Gansu. These visits help partners get a better picture of what China’s needs are, and also what Amity is doing. These exposure visits will be followed by meetings and consultation in Nanjing.

We also need to start using a greater variety of media to promote Amity. For example, over the past year or so we have begun producing videos that introduce various facets of Amity’s work. We may also need to make a fund-raising trip to North America sometime soon. There is more potential there for support of Amity projects, but at present partners in the US account for only a relatively small part of Amity’s support.

Zhang Liwei joined Amity in 1996 and served in the Education Division, becoming its Acting Director in 1997. Since Fall 1998, he has served Amity as Assistant to the General Secretary. He was interviewed by Don Snow, Overseas Staff Associate, Amity Overseas Coordination Office in Hong Kong.
From Model Peasant Student to Amity Staff

Wu An'an was born in Anqin (Anhui Province) and was basically raised by her “Cherished Granny with bound feet.” During the Cultural Revolution, her father was targeted as a “capitalist roader.” She still remembers seeing him sitting at home, day after day, writing pages of “self-confession” and later, sweeping streets. Wu herself was sent to the countryside for two years. “I learned a lot from the peasants,” she says. She also feels that her good behavior in the commune helped her gain friendship and recognition from villagers she lived with. She notes, “When you live with the people and try to really learn from them and become one of them, they take wonderful care of you.” Thus, she was selected to study at the university as a “worker-peasant-soldier” student.

Wu joined Amity in 1990, after she and her husband returned from studies in California. During their time there, they met many Christians and Wu became Christian. She was impressed with their caring attitude for others. “I hoped to find that in Amity” she says. She was fed up with the Cultural Revolution style of treating people. “People were so combative, so hateful and so jealous. The bad side of human nature had been exposed to the extreme.” Wu says she was looking for a position in which she might help change this approach. Amity sounded pure. She appreciated the fact that Amity was Christian-initiated. She also wanted to work with an NGO. “I was looking for an organization with a vision to help local people. Amity was that organization!”

Wu first worked in the Administrative Division and then with the Teachers’ Program. In 1992 she joined Tan Liying in the Social Work Division. Speaking about her Amity experience, Wu says she has learned how to use foreign aid, not in selfish ways, but as a model for sharing of resources. “It is important to use financial assistance in ways that bring new life and new hope to people so that their lives can improve, thanks to their own energies and the support of others.”

“Aid should be part of global resource sharing, not charity.”

For her, development work must be client-centered, not a show-piece. “Our work with children must stress long-term effect and benefit, not just better food and clothing. I would rather that these children grow and live like other members of Chinese society so they can be integrated into every day life with others.” Wu notes, “I want to help better equip our clients, not create dependency. Even children with physically challenging conditions need to learn to fly!”

Wu’s experiences have taught her that it is better for Amity to work with government institutions and schools to create and develop their own programs rather than create programs run by Amity. “This way, I can share my concept of development. Alone, we might only be able to help five or six children. Together, with government organizations and schools we can help many, many more children and their families.”

Working with government institutions has its problems. Some government programs tend to be administration-centered rather than child-centered. They are more show-pieces. Such programs want the world to know, “Look, how well we are doing.” Others look for the easiest way to run children’s centers. Some local officials like the show-piece style because it may lead to job promotion for them. “This may be understandable,” says Wu, “but such approaches do not help the children.”

Compared to foreign NGOs working in China, Wu believes Amity has an edge. As a local NGO, Amity can better understand local people, their culture, environment and needs. This is not really possible for foreign NGOs. “We can work more effectively with the same amount of money and we can get to the point more quickly!” Wu exclaimed. For the immediate future, Amity will still need to rely upon financial assistance from outside China. Meanwhile, however, Amity will continue working towards generating interest and support from within China.

According to Wu, China started receiving foreign aid for development work through NGOs when the open-door policy was adopted in the 1980s. Compared to those in other Third World countries such as India and the Philippines, Chinese NGOs have less experience in the field. Says Wu, “Development is about working with people by empowering the people.” This is what she learned from the Social Development Course at Selly Oaks last Autumn. This is the key to sustainable development. Globally, the situation of development work may not look very optimistic but the goal of
sustainability is not impossible to achieve. China needs to learn from the development patterns of other countries, to know both their strengths and weaknesses. Aid should be part of global resource sharing, not charity. Wu remembers, “Chairman Mao once taught the Chinese people: We welcome foreign aid, but we should not always rely on it. Doesn’t this still hold true for development work?”

In meeting development needs, Amity faces many challenges. Wu observes that “Amity projects are expanding but there is insufficient staff. It is therefore important to keep close contact with grassroots organizations and people. Amity’s work style is a different model from most. Our goal is to mobilize, encourage and support local development. In doing so, we need more skilled and experienced workers. We also need to further develop our listening skills.”

Wu is critical that “Sometimes in planning, we are driven by donors’ wishes rather than by planning from within. Or, from the other side, we find tremendous needs but cannot secure adequate funding. We cannot afford to work only one way, both ways are important. Otherwise, as an organization, we will not survive.”

She believes Amity has made and will continue to make significant contributions to China’s development. It has raised awareness of social problems to a wider audience in China. It has helped introduced new concepts and values to social work, especially a client-centered or participatory process. It is employing a new style of administration that empowers local people with vision, concepts and technical skills. In its projects, it will continue to challenge government to follow different approaches in social development.

**Wu An’an is the Director of the Social Welfare Division in Amity and was interviewed by Ewing W. Carroll, Jr., Coordinator of the Amity Overseas Coordination Office in Hong Kong.**

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**Society is a Big Classroom**

During the Cultural Revolution, Qiu Zhonghui was exposed to a bitter dose of village life through his brother and sisters who had been sent to the countryside. Helping them during harvests, he learned how hard village life was. He remembers sleeping on the dirty floor and being bitten on the head by a rat. Like many others of his generation, Qiu missed his chance for higher education during the Cultural Revolution. Years later, when he could resume his studies, he majored in English and started translating books on Christianity into Chinese.

It was then that he came into contact with the China Christian Council and learned about Amity through a brochure. Qiu explains, “After the Cultural Revolution, I became interested in different philosophies and in Christianity. After reading the Amity brochure I thought perhaps I could do some real work for the Chinese people - not just talk. China is poor and needs people who can do solid work. I felt Amity could do something.” Qiu was then teaching English at a college in Nanjing.

He joined Amity in 1992. After spending the first three months in publicity work he was assigned to the Rural Development Division. Qiu says, “I found it was true that Amity does concrete work for the people. ‘Serve the People’ was a slogan during the Cultural Revolution. Now, in Amity, I could see it in action.”

Observe Qiu, “In my work with Amity, there are many people both Chinese and foreign who want to serve the people. They are full of love. This gives me inspiration and energy. Christians from overseas work very hard for our Chinese people! When I accompany them to projects, it is very hard work, climbing mountains. Sometimes, we can only reach one village after a whole day’s travel and arrive back in the hotel at midnight. I am encouraged by them.” Qiu finds great satisfaction working in Amity. “Here, I can develop my potentials and capabilities and purify my spirit. Through my work I have learnt many new ideas and techniques, both theory and practice, from foreign friends, from people at the grassroots, and also from experts and officials. I have learnt much more than I ever could have in school.” For Qiu, “Society is a big classroom.” [She hui shi ge da xue xiao.]

Qiu also draws inspiration from the positive impact of Amity projects on local communities. In Lingyun county, Guangxi Autonomous Region, the integrated development project with the Yao community has brought great changes to the Beilou Yao Village. Qiu remembers, “When I first visited the village, it was extremely poor and most people thought it would be difficult to bring about any change. Now I can hardly believe what I see. The village is really developed, clean and well maintained.” He continues, “I want to emphasize that human development is so important. I went to two villages and the contrast is striking. The other village is
not as clean or developed, though the projects undertaken in both villages are similar.”

In Beilou Yao Village, says Qiu, his face lighting up, “We put up a ‘culture room’ where people can read, watch television and thus broaden their minds. It was also a place for the community to get together. It has become the political, social and economic center of the village. Now we can sit together, meet and discuss ‘development.’ I ask villagers about their future plans and without prompting, they themselves mention slope terracing, drainage ditches and another cistern for drinking water. Now that they have water, taking baths is important! The elderly want segregated bathrooms! The women propose the setting up of a night school. When asked to sign up for it, the women were initially shy but in the end 33 women signed their names. Luo Jin Hua, had to sign her three times to get it right (she was so nervous) but she did it with much encouragement from the others! This is really people’s participation! People do not lack ability—they only lack opportunity!” In some areas, the desire for participation is so keen, even those physically challenged want to contribute their share.

The impact of Amity’s work may be small, considering the size of China, but Qiu believes it is important pioneering work. According to him, “We can affect or even improve policy to some degree. Good projects can help local governments improve development work.” For instance, in Guangxi Autonomous Region, Amity started an Integrated Development Program for the Yao Minority in Lingyun County and an Ecological Poverty Reduction Project in 1996. Five years later, officials at different levels in Guangxi have begun to emphasize poverty reduction by means of ecological protection, education, science and technology. Said the Lingyun County Magistrate, “Inspired by the experience of Amity projects in Guangxi, we have decided to shift our stress of poverty reduction work from hard programs (that is, construction projects) to poverty alleviation projects by means of education, ecological conservation, science and technology. We will also put more emphasis on community integrated development and human development.”

“People do not lack ability, only opportunity.”

In the near future, Qiu foresees there will still be many living below the poverty line in China. Natural resources such as drinking water and vegetation are very limited relative to the needs of a large population. The pressure on the ecology is tremendous. China’s imminent entry into the WTO will affect agricultural production. Qiu thinks that in the short term, there will be many difficulties, even if joining the WTO will benefit China in the long run. Western China, with the majority of its population living off agriculture, will be most affected. Here, Qiu sees both challenge and opportunity.

He stresses, “On the one hand, we need to continue poverty reduction. On the other, we must emphasize ecological protection through the proper use and preservation of natural resources.” Qiu believes there is no stopping the free market and further reforms in the rural areas. In this context, he says, “We need to analyze market conditions, organize the poor to organize themselves and enhance their ability to compete. It is the whole issue of sustainability. We will focus on ‘human development.’ People need to take initiatives to develop their own organizations in order to develop themselves.” Qiu foresees China moving towards the industrialization of agriculture and the development of agro-industry. He is hoping farmers will receive more representation on different levels, both national and local. Says Qiu, “We hope to get farmers to work in a collective spirit. For instance in Ningxia, there is a farmers’ association that is raising pigs in greenhouses. It is very cold in winter, so the association has built a greenhouse for pigs. Some have been able to buy fodder cheaper so they have decided to purchase in bulk to reduce costs for every one. They help each other and are beginning to organize themselves. In summer, the same farmers will raise goats since there is more grass. They have done all this by themselves, through their own initiatives.”

Like all Amity staff, Qiu travels frequently and to very remote areas in his work. Asked what he does for relaxation, Qiu smiles and cracks, “My hobby is ‘Shang shan xia xiang!’ [Climbing mountains and going down to villages!] Some call me a workaholic but I do love life! I read newspapers to relax! My wife complains that I still remain behind a desk at home but I like to read to improve myself, to find solutions to problems, especially in social development and agriculture since I was not trained in these fields. It is alright to have practice but one must not forget theory.”

Qiu Zhonghui is an Associate General Secretary and Director of Amity’s Rural Development Division. This article is based on an interview conducted by Theresa Carino, ANL editor, Amity Overseas Coordination Office in Hong Kong.
"I believe in equality."

After working as a journalist in Beijing for many years, Tan Liying moved to Nanjing in 1980 to work as an English teacher and foreign affairs secretary at the Nanjing Forestry University. She learned about the Amity Foundation from the newspapers. "I was interested in Christianity because I was, and still am, an idealist," she recalls. "The introduction of market economy to China had brought along many negative side-effects. All over China, materialism was on the rise. I was not a Communist, but I admired people with faiths. They would even sacrifice their lives in the interest of others. I perceived Christians as being pure and kind-hearted."

Since three of Amity's first batch of teachers happened to teach at the Forestry University, Tan took part in the first Amity Teachers Conference in January 1986. "The program included a visit to one of Amity's earliest projects - support for mentally retarded children. This visit left me deeply moved, and I decided on the spot that I wanted to join the Amity staff."

Two months later, Tan Liying changed jobs! Soon after joining Amity, Tan was appointed Assistant to the General Secretary. Since the Amity staff was very small in the beginning, Tan's work initially covered almost all Amity projects. Later, she became more involved in social welfare projects with the handicapped and publicity work. Today, although nominally retired, she is Coordinator of Amity's Relief and Rehabilitation Program.

"I like grassroots work," says Tan, "because I like the people. Farmers live a simple and hard life in China. Genuine and hard working, they are thankful for any help they receive. The relief work that I am now doing targets disaster victims in the rural areas, where Amity's priorities are. It contributes to alleviating suffering at the time when people are in most need of help. It is meant to boost their confidence in meeting challenges and rebuilding their lives."

"A good relationship with local partners and the right approach towards project beneficiaries is the key to successful project implementation. We must respect project beneficiaries and not assume a patronizing attitude towards them. We also respect our local partners who actually facilitate the carrying out of projects."

Many of them - government workers, community leaders and church members - are very talented. Having a rural background, they are eager to help the grassroots even though most of them are no longer farmers. They help us prioritize the needs of the target groups and give good recommendations in screening and implementing projects."

When it comes to funding, Tan stresses the need for a systematic and serious approach to ensure the proper use of money. "A great deal of our project money comes from ordinary people. I sometimes share with local partners my experience in collecting donations from friends and individuals in Europe many years ago. I was impressed and moved that most of them maintained a simple lifestyle and were happy to give generously."

"Working with Amity is very rewarding," she concludes. It provides learning experiences for its staff. "We learn from our partners and project beneficiaries in terms of methodology, work style and a positive attitude towards life. Work at the grassroots is very challenging. First of all, you must find the right people if you want the project to be properly implemented. Secondly, people will observe you. If they see that you are serious about your work, modest and not self-centered, they will follow suit." Tan sees this as important in curbing corruption.

"Work at the grassroots is very challenging."

For Tan Liying, development is inevitable. Unfortunately, in the process, some may take advantage of others. For instance, many migrant workers in cities only have duties but few rights. Says Tan, "Farmers who are less informed about the market cannot make ends meet despite hard work. It is a kind of oppression. I believe in equality! We feel we can't do much, but we can do something."

So, would she see Amity's work as a counter to inequalities in the development process? "Yes, that's a good way to put it. But there is much room for improvement. For example, the poorest villages are usually in remote places accessible only by foot. This may create difficulties for fact-finding tours, a prerequisite to Amity's assistance, and hinder Amity's reach to the poorest of the poor." On the other hand, she notes that after completing relief projects, "We often leave project sites with a network of reliable partners. In my opinion, it is a pity to give up those places which already have a solid foundation of cooperating with Amity. Perhaps we could continue our involvement there with other projects of a sustainable nature."
Building Relationships of Trust
Interview with Liu Ruhong

How did you get involved with Amity?

After graduating from college I was assigned to teach English. The school I worked for offered further education courses for adults, with a focus on training cadres. My students were not very motivated, all they wanted was to get their certificates. I was introduced to Amity by a friend working for Amity at the time. When I joined Amity in 1986, it was only one year old, and I knew very little about it. However, after joining, I found the work much more satisfying than my former teaching position. Instead of helping people within the hierarchy to learn something they were not interested in, I was aiding people at the grassroots level who had genuine needs and who appreciated my help.

Which lessons do you think you have learned over the years?

The most important lesson I have learned is the need to cultivate relationships. When I first started with the Teachers Project, I would visit Amity teachers and begin by asking, “So, what problems do you have?” I shocked teachers, giving them the impression that they should have problems and that this was all I was concerned with. But I have learned that whether dealing with teachers or school leaders, Chinese or non-Chinese, the first thing to do is to make friends and build up relationships of trust.

The Education Division is unique within Amity in that we deal intensively with people on a day-to-day basis. Other divisions receive financial support from overseas but we are sent both funding and people. Learning how to deal with many different people is perhaps a greater challenge for our division than for other divisions.

How has the nature of your work with the Teachers Project changed over time?

When the Teachers Project first started we placed most teachers in key universities in big cities. Our aim then was to sell the project and make it known within education circles. Later, as China developed, we realized that small teacher training colleges in rural areas had a greater need for our help. Thus, in the early 90s, we gradually shifted our focus to these areas. The key universities certainly had a need for teachers in the late 80s but now they have their own resources and can find their own foreign teachers. So, the Teachers Project began with the aim of making our work known but then shifted to where there was greater need.

What do you think are the particular strengths of Amity’s Teachers Project?

I would identify three main strengths: First of all, we clearly contribute to China’s development by helping Chinese students and teachers raise their English proficiency. We help them communicate with people from other countries and gain exposure to the rest of the world. Secondly, Amity teachers are a Christian presence in China, representing their home churches and establishing relationships with local Chinese congregations. Thirdly, our teachers are peacemakers,
building bridges between China and their own people. There is obviously a big difference between Asian and Western cultures, and between developing and developed nations. Our teachers are like ambassadors, bringing information from their home countries and taking information about China back with them when they leave.

**Many organizations now send foreign teachers to China, including some Christian organizations. What do you think makes the Amity Teachers Project unique?**

I think we are different in that we encourage our teachers to forge close links with the local church in their city, to become part of a local congregation and to make friends with local Christians. Many other Christian groups encourage their teachers to avoid the local Chinese church, to worship by themselves and to keep apart from Chinese Christians. Some groups even encourage their teachers to be secretive about their faith.

Amity encourages its teachers to witness openly and honestly about their faith through their work. When we send teachers to schools, we tell them clearly that the teachers are Christians. We also tell them that we encourage our teachers to visit the local church. As a result, many schools now offer to provide transportation to and from the church for their teachers on Sundays. Amity also provides letters for teachers to take to their local church which introduce them to the local congregation. In this way, our teachers enjoy a higher degree of religious freedom than is allowed by some other organizations.

Close cooperation with provincial education commissions is another of Amity’s strengths. If a school approaches us for help, we always refer them to their provincial education commission first. In years when we happen to have extra teachers, we turn to provincial education commissions first and ask them where the needs are. Through such mutual respect and cooperation, we receive a lot of support from local authorities which ensures the smooth running of the Teachers Project. If there is a problem with a school, we talk to both the school and the provincial education commission directly and give some time for all sides to work things out.

![Liu Ruhong](image)

**What are the challenges and difficulties facing the Education Division at this time and how are you dealing with them?**

We face two big challenges at the moment. One is a shortage of foreign teachers. We receive requests from new schools for Amity teachers every year and are finding it increasingly difficult to get enough teachers. A second challenge is the lack of communication between Chinese schools and Amity teachers in some instances. When this occurs, teachers can feel isolated and their enthusiasm declines.

To recruit more teachers, we need to sell the program and make it better known. We need to advertise, play on our strengths and draw people’s attention. For instance, the Amity website on the internet has enabled more people to learn about our program. We are also thinking of opening our door a bit wider. Asking teachers to commit themselves to teaching at least two years, as we have done in the past, may put some people off. Now we are thinking of accepting teachers on shorter, one-year contracts, subject to negotiations with sending agencies.

To improve communication between schools and teachers, we have recently compiled a set of revised guidelines for schools. These guidelines make concrete proposals, such as regular meetings between our teachers and their schools, which do not always take place at the moment. We also make suggestions about items which are difficult for our teachers to negotiate, such as how many writing courses they might be expected to teach in any one semester, given that writing courses require extra time spent on grading.

**Thinking of the future, are there any new initiatives or projects which are being considered by the Education Division?**

The Teachers Project is only one part of the Education Division’s work. We are also trying to facilitate training programs for Chinese college teachers. So far, we have offered financial support for some Chinese college teachers to undergo further training at key universities in China. We hope to carry on with this program. In addition, we are seeking more scholarships from overseas organizations to enable women teachers, including some minority teachers, from Amity-related colleges, to study abroad.

The education situation is still very difficult in many places within China. Especially in poor rural areas, elementary school teachers are often only high school graduates with little or no formal training. These teachers often do not even receive a full salary, they only receive a “subsidy” from local authorities. However, this
subsidy is rarely enough for teachers to live on. Thus, on top of their teaching load, these teachers are often expected to work as farmers in the fields so they can make enough to live on.

Amity wants to help improve the lot of these "subsidized" teachers. We can help them receive more training or simply offer them financial awards to encourage them. We cannot help everyone, and that is not our aim. We just want to provide some incentives to lift the spirits of such teachers. We once awarded some money to such teachers in Jiangxi Province, and I visited them once. It was only a small amount but it made a big difference to their morale. One teacher told me, "I have been working at my post now for over 20 years and you are the first person to pay any attention to me or acknowledge my work. Now, at least, I feel that someone has noticed I am here and what I am doing."

Liu Rehong, Director of Amity's Education Division was interviewed by Ian Groves, Overseas Staff Associate, Amity Overseas Coordination Office in Hong Kong.

Amity is on the world wide web!

Check out the Amity website:

http://www.pacific.net.hk/~amityoco

In case you haven't noticed, our e-mail address is now:

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