Development work in Hunan: Integrating Church and Society

In August this year, Theresa Carino, editor of the Amity Newsletter, visited Amity projects in Hunan province. She traveled with Gu Renfa, an Associate General Secretary of Amity, Jane Yao, Vice-President of the Hunan Christian Council and Birgitta Larsson of the Church of Sweden Mission.

In the 19th and early 20th century, missionaries dubbed Hunan as the province with “Iron Gates.” Located in the heartland of China, it was difficult to penetrate. Known in modern Chinese history as the birthplace of Mao Zedong and of the Chinese revolution, Hunan today is rapidly undergoing reforms and opening its doors to foreign investments. Zhangjiajie, one of the province’s best known scenic spots and now only a 5-hour train ride away from Changsha, the capital, is drawing tourists by the tens of thousands. Despite its economic growth, pockets of extreme poverty are not difficult to find in the outskirts of the city.

"Small projects can make a big difference"

It is in these areas that the Amity Foundation has carried out small but significant development projects in an effort to close the widening income gaps. In the township of Liang Shui Kou, a 3-hour bumpy car ride away from Zhangjiajie, Amity recently helped complete an irrigation project by donating to a 240 meter long aqueduct. Costing 900,000 RMB (about US$110,000), only half of which was contributed by Amity, the irrigation project has benefited 6,000 people in 11 villages by doubling crop yields from 250 kg/mu to 400 kg/mu. During our brief visit to the project site, farmers on their way to their fields gathered curiously around us and readily volunteered information. Mr. Du Bi Chai, a local farmer, excitedly told us that the land had originally been very dry. At the start of the project two years ago, farmers could hardly believe that water could be brought from six kilometers away. Now, they marvel at the abundant...
harvests they have enjoyed and the fact that they can grow two crops (rice and rapeseed) a year. Puffing up his chest, Mr. Du said very proudly, "I've never felt so rich in my life! I now can earn an extra 720 RMB (about US$ 90) a year and send my children to school!"

In many of the poor areas, the lack of water is one of the most serious problems. In Zhu Yuan Village, among the poorest 100 villages in Hunan, only an hour's drive away from Zhangjiajie, water for the entire village is collected in three small, uncovered ponds. The day we visited, the water level was so low, large blobs of sediment were floating on the surface. It did not seem potable to us and we were dismayed that villagers would still be drawing from the pond. We were told that if it did not rain in the next two days, the pond was expected to dry up and villagers would have to walk an hour downhill to fetch water. There are plans to construct five more ponds to improve the water supply. Building a road would also allow easier delivery of water from water sources downhill. Villagers had already finished the first part of the six kilometer road and were waiting for more funds to continue its construction.

What was impressive about Zhu Yuan Village, inhabited by the Tuja minority nationality, was the presence of a dynamic team from the provincial government, sent to organize the villagers. Consisting of four energetic young men and women in their 30s, the "poverty alleviation" team had been sent from Changsha to work with villagers in drawing up and implementing their own plans for poverty alleviation over a period of three years. In their first year, the team undertook an extensive survey of the villages and the needs of farmers. They then drafted a 3-year poverty alleviation plan which was modified through consultation with local farmers, village and district heads. The plan was then sent to Changsha for final approval and financial support.

Now in their second year at the village, the team has seen the repair and re-construction of the local school, the construction of a road and the setting up of a limestone factory. Villagers have enjoyed the presence of the team in the area since "they get things done!" Beyond infrastructure, the team has emphasized the importance of education and succeeded in getting all children back to school. They have also organized appropriate technology training for farmers. As Mr. Shen, the team leader, elaborated on the villager's plans, it was heartening to observe the team members' obvious enthusiasm and dedication to their work. They made good local partners for Amity.

Amity's partnership with the church in Hunan has also helped build bridges, especially in local-level church-state relations. The church is numerically very weak in Hunan where there are only 250,000 Christians. Despite this, it is making waves through its growing community outreach. The Hunan Christian Council has established the Xinde Foundation (Faith and Charity) which supports church-run projects such as homes for the elderly, kindergartens and aid to leper villages. It has also collaborated closely with the Amity Foundation in small-scale development projects that have brought greater recognition and respect for Christians in the province.

"Amity: a bridge in local church-state relations"

Because of Amity projects, meeting points in poor and remote villages are being officially recognized and registered. One example is the Christian meeting point in He Ping Gang Village. Although only two hours from Zhangjiajie, the village has no primary school, an indicator of extreme poverty. There is a lack of water for irrigation. When Gu Renfa from Amity and Jane Yao of the Hunan Christian Council visited the village to discuss collaboration on the irrigation project, local officials initially denied that there were Christians in the village. It was only after cooperating with Amity on the project that officials admitted there was a meeting point in the area. They eventually agreed to its registration.

During our visit in August, we had to climb uphill for 30 minutes to reach the meeting point. Local Christians, about 180 strong, worship in an old 100 meter square wooden house that looks ready to collapse, with two of its sagging walls propped up by beams. Women provide vital leadership and we had the privilege of meet-
ing Zhou Cui Rong and Zhao Feng Shan, two relatively young women leaders. They told us that when the meeting point was started in 1995 it had been located in an even less accessible place (three hours’ walk uphill) and they were grateful to have their present church building even if it were dilapidated. They were particularly grateful for Amity’s intervention and that of the Hunan Christian Council in getting registered. Most important, they were taking part in the irrigation project and this was gaining respect for Christians, both from local farmers and officials.

In Xuan Qi Qiao Village where Amity had contributed to a perimeter wall for the primary school, a small road, a clinic and a drinking water project, local Christians had been given the responsibility of running the village clinic. They were also given the task of monitoring the project for Amity. Officials could clearly see the benefits of working with local Christians and during our visit to the village, it was evident that the stature of the local village church had been raised as a result of the project.

On another level, the involvement of the Hunan Christian Council in grassroots development projects provides opportunities for closer contact and greater interaction between provincial and local level church leaders. In our visits to village meeting points, we could see that local church leaders and members were always deeply moved and inspired by the presence and obvious concern of Rev. Jane Yao, Vice-president of the Hunan Christian Council and one of the prime movers in integrating church and social concerns. She obviously plays a vital role in nurturing and strengthening grassroots congregations in Hunan and one could not help but wish that such a model of close cooperation between Amity and the church could be more widely replicated in other parts of China.

Leaving an imprint:

Why Amity teachers are welcome

Cao Yamin

Prof. Cao Yamin is the Dean of the Jiangsu Institute of Education located in Nanjing.

The Jiangsu Institute of Education is one of the major beneficiaries of the Amity Foundation. Since its establishment in April 1985, the Amity Foundation has sent 16 teachers to our institute. This has greatly contributed to the learning ability of students, enhanced the teaching competence of Chinese teachers and, above all, improved the quality of English teaching at the Department of Foreign Languages.

Amity teachers provide students with an environment in which they not only hear "native-spoken English" but also learn to speak English more accurately and idiomatically. Quite a few Amity teachers are dedicated and experienced TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other languages) teachers who have taught in different countries. They have kind feelings for China, which they lavish on their students. In class, they use teaching methods which effectively facilitate
learning. After class, they organize "home visits", inviting students to their apartments to discuss questions related to culture and language learning.

Amity teachers frequent the English Corner on campus, where they chat with both English and non-English majors, exchange information about different cultures and help students with English expressions learned outside the classroom. They direct drama-readings and give lectures on different aspects of Western civilization, cross-cultural communication, and English literature. They also conduct continuing education classes where trainees can improve their language competence.

As a training center for middle school teachers, the Jiangsu Institute of Education has close ties with all middle schools in Jiangsu Province. Its graduates and trainees form the backbone of these schools. Through them, the Institute exerts an influence on the quality of English teaching in the local areas. Amity teachers have done much to ensure that returned trainees are making progress and encourage them to work as pacesetters in their schools. With their (Amity) teachers as a constant source of advice they have taught more confidently and fruitfully. They sometimes invite Amity teachers to their schools to lecture or participate in academic activities that benefit English teachers from the local areas.

These activities are often reported in the local newspapers. In the past year and a half, Amity teachers have regularly visited Jintan Middle School, a pilot school of our department. They have helped students increase their sense of accomplishment by putting into practice what they have learned. They have also given advice on how to improve their English teaching in and outside class.

Amity teachers have contributed to the institute not merely in language teaching and cultural understanding but also in management. How to make proper use of books and reference materials in the institute's library has been one of their major concerns. They often offer constructive suggestions. When a new group of students enter the institute, they organize a library tour, introducing them to materials and how to use them. They re-organized books in the department reference room making it easier for teachers and students to use them effectively.

Amity teachers train "pacesetters" for local schools

Amity teachers have also collaborated with Chinese teachers in scientific research. They often discuss questions in teaching and explore ways of improving teaching methods. Together with Chinese teachers and students, they have written books and compiled dictionaries. The bilingual edition of "Longman's Dictionary of English Roots" (first published in 1996 in Hong Kong and then jointly published in simplified Chinese characters in 1999 by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and Pearson Education China Ltd.) is a product of such cooperation.

The past fifteen years have seen successful cooperation between the Jiangsu Institute of Education and the Amity Foundation, and have been filled with enduring friendships between Amity teachers and Chinese teachers and students. Having benefited enormously from the program we look forward to further cooperation and friendship in the new century. We are grateful to the Amity teachers who have worked at our institute and warmly welcome new Amity teachers to our institute.
Scaling new heights:
Scholars from the world’s highest school

A tall and quiet woman in her 30s, Yangzong teaches English at Tibet University, Lhasa, literally the highest school in the world, as she herself puts it. Now she is studying at the College English Teachers Training Program, jointly administered by Nanjing University and the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. She is one of six young faculty members from her university who received scholarships from the Amity Foundation and are taking a year off for refresher programs in Nanjing, Xiamen and Beijing.

Of the six, Yangzong is the only one in Nanjing, and also the only Tibetan currently studying at Nanjing University. Being close to Amity’s main office, Yangzong has visited Amity twice and met with the staff there. Four of the other five are in Chengdu (Sichuan Province) while one is in Changchun, Jilin Province, in northeastern China. Two are studying religion, one ecology, one folk literature and one international relations. Their ages range from twenty-seven to forty.

“She has no trouble keeping pace with the class even though she is only a graduate from a junior college,” said Professor Wang Xueli, director of the teachers training program, while talking to Amity staff about Yangzong. “She works extremely hard,” added Wang.

Yangzong was born and raised in Xigaze (west of Lhasa). After a tough entrance exam, she attended senior high (middle school) in Beijing, where, along with many other things, she polished her Mandarin. She was later admitted to Tibet University as an English major and upon graduation, stayed on as a teacher. She taught there for nine years during which time she never had an opportunity for any further education.

Two years ago, Amity set up a “Scholarship Program for Faculty Development at Tibet University” (known more briefly as “Tibetan Scholarships.”) Under this program, Tibet University will nominate the candidates and recommend the schools to which they will apply. After they are admitted, Amity will cover their travel, room and board, tuition, text material and other expenses incurred during the year. A candidate must be Tibetan (that is, both parents must be Tibetan.) The scholarship is for one year but renewable upon the school’s request. Amity in fact will encourage the school to let their young teachers stay longer so they can pursue a Master’s degree.

“Last school year, we supported four young teachers from Tibet University for training in Beijing and Xiamen,” said Zhang Liwel, Assistant to the General Secretary at Amity Foundation. “This year, we are supporting six. Beginning next year, we will support ten annually. The goal is to help Tibet University upgrade the academic standing of its junior faculty in about six to eight years.”

“It is our hope,” said Ting Yenren, a Vice President of Amity, “to see more faculty members from that university, the only comprehensive institution of higher learning in Tibet, hold advanced degrees. I hope our program will help make a difference. I was told when I was in Tibet that altogether there are three Tibetans in the whole of Tibet who have Ph.D’s, and only one of the three is in that university.”

Yangzong’s husband also teaches at Tibet University, and their son is in the fifth grade.

“The greatest difficulty is missing home,” Yangzong replied when asked if there was any difficulty while she was living in Nanjing. She calls home every weekend. ♦
Pioneers For Reconciliation
And Mutual Learning
New Amity Teachers Set Out For Assignments All Over China

At the end of August this year, the Amity Foundation placed 65 teachers (including 25 new ones) in 39 schools located in the following provinces: Anhui, Fujian, Hunan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Shandong, Zhejiang. Two of the new teachers were interviewed by Katrin Fiedler of the Amity Overseas Coordination Office in Hong Kong.

Mine Hisashi
a retired pastor who also holds a degree in education, will be the first native speaker to teach Japanese at Changsha University (Hunan Province). Rev. Mine is sponsored by the United Church Of Christ In Japan.

What motivated you to become an Amity teacher?
"I want to be a personal bridge between our two peoples. During the Second World War, the Japanese committed atrocities against the Chinese people. We visited the Nanjing Massacre museum yesterday and were once again reminded of this shameful chapter of Japan's past."

"We Japanese Christians deeply regret this past and want to beg all Asian peoples for forgiveness. In a way, I see my work here as an individual attempt at reconciliation between the Chinese and the Japanese. If there is anything we can do for the Chinese people, we have to do it. There is a Japanese phrase that captures my attitude very well: I want to commit myself completely to this new task."

What are your expectations regarding your teaching experience?
"To give but a small example: I hope to use only Japanese in class. During our orientation program, we also had some training classes. It has been very motivating to see how students respond to a stimulating environment. But I do not want to be only a teacher, I also intend to be a student. I would like to study Chinese and learn more about Chinese culture."

Have you set yourself any specific goals?
"Amity is well known in Japanese church circles, particularly its teachers program. However, I hope to promote Amity's work in all its aspects, not only in education. The newsletters I have to write regularly for my sending agency will provide an opportunity for this. In my opinion, Japanese churches ought to contribute more in terms of support for social welfare projects."

How did you come to know about Amity?
A friend of mine, Rev. Kato, was an Amity teacher four years ago.

Janel Fox
an American sociologist, worked as a teacher in China before joining the Amity Foundation. She has been assigned to teach English at Zhenjiang Teachers College in Jiangsu Province. Her financial support comes from the United Methodist Church.

Why did you decide to leave your old job and join the Amity Teachers Program instead?
"I wanted to become part of serving China rather than teaching some well-off people. You know, the courses I taught in Guangzhou were for affluent people who paid for their English tuition. Now, I can work for people who otherwise would have no access to English instruction by a native speaker.

"Besides, Amity's teachers program is very service-oriented. Few organizations take as good care of their teachers as Amity does. This makes it a very attractive program not only for the schools, but also the teachers involved."

"What I like about Amity is its open-mindedness. There is absolutely no 'convert the heathens' mentality. Our Christian service comes from deeds rather than evangelizing. And, most importantly, Amity was founded and is run by Chinese."

What is your motivation to become an Amity teacher?
"The goodwill between our countries, the US and China, needs to be increased tremendously. There are so many negative media reports. And I want to learn about the church in China, and share my insights with my church at home."

Do you have any other plans for your stay with Amity?
"I am taking part in a young adults program that encourages young people to pursue somewhat more academic interests while in China. This is intended as a further incentive towards teaching in China. I also hope to volunteer in an orphanage, and I hope to improve my Chinese. (Smiling) I know this is an awful lot of plans... I am in China to learn. I am already learning a lot - and having fun doing it!"

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Local-level partnerships in Development
Reflections on a dialogue

Yan Rong, a staff member of Amity's Rural Development Division, represented the Amity Foundation at the "Dialogue on Best Practices in Local-Level Partnerships for Rural Poverty Alleviation in Asia" held March 13-18 in the Philippines. She reflects here on the experience.

This dialogue, held in the Philippines in March this year provided a good opportunity for different sectors working for rural poverty reduction in some Asian developing countries (including Cambodia, China, Laos, Vietnam and the Philippines) to exchange successful partnership experiences and examine the mechanisms of cooperation. The host organizations, PDRC (Philippine-China Development Resource Center) and IIRR (International Institute for Rural Reconstruction), made well-organized and tight arrangements for the conference and field visits. We especially appreciated the documentation work of PDRC staff.

Although tired after the trip, we feel we have learned a lot during these six days. As Amity's representatives and members of China's delegation, He Wen and I introduced Amity's local partnership experience for rural development projects through two examples: "Love for the School-less Project" and Integrated Development Project in Houchang Township, Puding County of Guizhou Province. We are very much impressed by the poverty alleviation and development work of NGOs in the Philippines and other countries. They are playing an important and active role in promoting social development, the sharing of resources and stabilizing society in different political and social contexts. They have accumulated much experience in the field of development. Most of them emphasize the positive functions of the active and joint involvement of poor, local communities, local government, experts and especially NGOs. NGOs are also gaining more and more space for their development efforts in different countries. We all agree that the poor population are not only beneficiaries of poverty alleviation efforts, they are stakeholders in these.

We think such workshops are very necessary. It is helpful for partners in development work at all levels to review and thus improve their work approaches and partnership strategies. These workshops give us a chance to sit back and reflect on our work. For future rural development work, we suggest that Amity:

- further promote the participatory approach in poverty alleviation work at all levels;
- strengthen the cooperation and exchange with other Chinese NGOs to mutually support each other with expertise, experience and techniques;
- strengthen the capability of local government in poverty alleviation work through training and project management. More seminars should be held for Amity's local partners to help achieve this objective.
- keep and develop more contact and cooperation with government organizations and act as a bridge between the people and the government.

News

Chinese college presidents attend leadership seminar

Sixteen presidents from Amity-related teacher-training colleges in China participated in the Educational Leadership Seminar at the Boyer Center*, Messiah College, Pennsylvania October 8-26, 2000. They came from Jiangsu, Jiangxi and Shandong provinces. They were joined by two provincial officials in charge of teacher education, and two interpreters. Zhang Liwei, Assistant to Amity's General Secretary, served as delegation coordinator.

Sponsored by the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, the delegation joined their American counterparts in seminars on various aspects of administration in American higher education. These included governance, institutional structure, decision making, financial management, fund raising, faculty development and evaluation and curriculum design. The college presidents also took time off to visit various types of colleges and universities.

Delegates agreed that the visit had exceeded their expectations. Not only had they gained a deeper understanding of the
American system of higher education but had been stimulated by new ideas. The trip was especially useful for college presidents faced with the challenges of educational reform in China. They come from teacher-training colleges that have recently been upgraded or are in the process of being upgraded from junior to 4-year colleges.

*The Boyer Center was established in 1997 in honor of Dr. Ernst Boyer, a renowned educator and leading educational reformer, to promote innovative education and international educational exchange.

South-south exchange: Amity delegation visits the Philippines

Amity sent an 11-member delegation to the Philippines, October 16-27, 2000. There were seven program coordinators from projects of the Social Welfare Division and the Blindness Prevention and Special Education Division and two from government related organizations involved in Amity's projects. Wu An'an, Director of the Social Welfare Division and She Hongyu, Program Officer of the Blindness Prevention Division, joined the delegation. The visit, part of an exchange program with the Philippine-China Development Resource Center, was aimed at introducing the group to social welfare services for children in the Philippines.

During the 10-day trip, delegates visited 17 organizations with services for children and had two round-table discussions with people in the field. They learned that 2.2 million children in the Philippines are being exploited under various forms of child labor. Projects visited came under four categories: work with abused children, street children, special children, and family and women.

According to She Hongyu, delegates were given a very warm welcome by Filipino organizations. Detailed presentations and patient answers were given at every turn. Everyone was deeply impressed by the efforts of different organizations, the commitment of social workers, the contribution of volunteers and the success in local fund raising. Delegates found the visit fruitful and informative. They felt that the experiences and knowledge gained can be used for improving Amity projects.

Farewell to Theresa Carino, ANL editor

"We've known from the day she first arrived that Theresa would be returning to the Philippines in December 2000. However, regret frequently runs deeper than knowledge. Her work with Amity colleagues and partner agencies has been outstanding. She has helped us move ANL into a new era. Her thorough and incisive reporting clearly reflect a rich background and experience in development work. Although Theresa has prepared us for her leaving, we will miss her greatly." Rev. Ewing W. Carroll, Jr., Amity's Overseas Coordinator.

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The Amity Foundation was created at the initiative of Chinese Christians for the purpose of promoting health, education and welfare in the People's Republic of China. It is an independent Chinese voluntary organization in which people from all walks of life may participate. Amity represents a new form of Chinese Christian involvement in society, through which Chinese Christians are joining hands with friends from around the world to solve the needs of China's modernization.

The Amity Newsletter is distributed free of charge four times a year. If you would like to receive the newsletter, or desire further information on any of our projects, please feel free to write. Institutions receiving the newsletter are welcome to reprint any article from it. Credit should be given to the Amity Newsletter, Quarterly Bulletin of the Amity Foundation.

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Checks or bank drafts made payable to the Amity Foundation may be sent to the Nanjing Office.

Overseas Coordination Office:
The Amity Foundation
13th Floor, Ultraspace Commercial Building
5 Jordon Road
Kowloon, Hong Kong
Phone: (852) 2723-8011
Fax: (852) 2766-2769
E-mail: amityhk@pacific.net.hk

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Editor: Theresa Carino