"A New Engine"
An Interview with Qiu Zhonghui

The challenge:
• Strengthening Amity's organizational development
• Enhancing advocacy work, in particular through a Research and Development Center
• To continue functioning as an avenue for Christian involvement in social work

Does the government do enough in terms of internal redistribution? And how do you respond to critics who argue that much of what Amity does is the government's responsibility?

Different elements of society have different responsibilities. Basic education and health for example are definitely government tasks. But does this mean that NGOs should not be involved in these tasks? Certainly not. Years ago, I took one such critic to a decrepit village school in the mountains and asked: Do you want us to wait all the years until the government is ready to help here? If we help now, at least these children will have a chance for a better life. The villagers had prepared boiled potatoes for us guests to eat, but the children did not know better and started eating while we were talking with the villagers. I will never forget the face of the small child that wanted to eat the last potato. When he stretched out his hand to take it, he realized that the last potato was small and had gone bad and could not be eaten. That impression has remained with me for long.

Coming back to the role of a government, from a moral perspective, of course the critics are right. But we also have to consider the practical side, and then the argument turns hollow, because the government does not have the capacity to help everywhere. And finally, being involved allows us to shape government policies. Recent changes in policies like central government's decision to cover tuition fees for the poorest students are also a result of initiatives like Project Hope and Amity’s Back To School Project. On the whole, we have to face real-

"That All May Have Abundant Life"
AMITY TURNS TWENTY!

Editor's Note:
On the occasion of Amity’s twentieth anniversary, we are proud to present you with this double edition of the Amity Newsletter. In a series of interviews conducted in summer 2005, some of the movers and shakers in Amity have shared their experiences, hopes and beliefs with ANL. This issue of ANL allows you a first glimpse at excerpts from these conversations. All interviews will be reproduced in their entire length in our upcoming anniversary book, Growing In Partnership. We also share with you the congratulatory notes received on the occasion of the anniversary.
ity while at the same time push for better policies. As NGOs, we cannot possibly fill all social gaps, therefore it is so important to do advocacy work that will influence the policymakers.

**In what way can Amity influence policies?**

Our way of doing advocacy is to work through practical examples. We expose the government to our work at the grassroots while we also try to maintain good communication with the policymakers higher up. With our twenty years of experience, we also want to contribute in theoretical areas, for example through a Research and Development Center. We hope to bring the academic world more in touch with reality at the grassroots, so that their research can contribute in a more practical way. In that way, closer cooperation with academic circles can also help us to influence policies. The exposure to non-profit work will also help to foster non-profit organizations in China, particularly through training personnel. We would like to encourage young people to join non-profit organizations. Zhu Chuangu, the acclaimed scientist, recently remarked on the growing trend for educated young people to work in non-profit organizations. “In the 1960s and ’70s, educated young people would go to the countryside, in the ’80s, they would go into business, in the ’90s, they would ride on the IT wave, and today, they join NGOs.”

We hope to strengthen certain areas of research and develop better evaluation methodologies. For Amity, enhanced cooperation with academic circles will definitely be our new engine for the next twenty years.

**Amity was set up to provide an avenue for Chinese Christians to engage in social and development work. Has this role changed over the years with the changing situation of the church?**

Our organizational culture is based on the idea of love, of a human-centred approach, and the “6 Cs” - commitment, compassion, competence, communication, cooperation and creativity. Our emphasis on love is certainly related to our Christian background. Of course we are not a purely Christian organization - we have representatives of different faiths among our staff, and we will not discriminate between them. God is love, and God does not distinguish between people of different faiths. Our shared notion of love is very basic to our work, it is fundamental to what we do.

Twenty years ago Chinese Christian leaders established Amity in the hope of bringing religious believers and non-believers together in their service for society. The idea was that people of different faith backgrounds would contribute together towards China’s development. At that time, this was something new and very special indeed.

Today we can say that the practice of the past twenty years shows that through Amity’s work we can indeed witness Christ’s love, that we are salt and light through our actions. And even if the form of Christian involvement changes, we will continue along this line. Amity will continue to serve society through serving the people and glorifying God.

Amity has run a number of very successful programmes in conjunction with local churches, and we will continue to implement such projects. However, in general the lack of education of Christian leaders at the grassroots still is a problem for the implementation of social services, be they run by Amity or the China Christian Council (CCC). Training will be essential to make them ready for such tasks, and Amity will help the CCC with training, but also technical and management help. Through these contacts, I expect our relationship with the CCC to be strengthened over the next few years. The virtually simultaneous leadership changes in Amity and the CCC have naturally caused some delay in our cooperation. Some people fear that the existence of the Social Service Department will diminish the funds available for Amity. I see us as working together for a cause, and as long as our cause is served, both of us will benefit.

Christians working in China still have to respect sensibilities. For example, we cannot say that all non-Christians will go to hell - remarks like this will hurt many people. The Christian religion calls on us to share our love with all human beings in a non-discriminatory way. If we work in such a spirit, our approach will also contribute to theological reconstruction in China; we can help to shape a theology that is suitable for the current Chinese context and does not discriminate between people of different faiths.

Finally, the Amity Printing Press has been a way for Amity to serve the church, and we hope that this work can be further improved when the press moves to its new location. With the new premises, which will be much bigger than the current press, we will be able to meet the demands of Chinese and overseas Christians in an even better way. Apart from serving the domestic market, we also produce Bibles that are exported. Right now, we are looking forward to the moment when the Amity Printing Company will have printed forty million Bibles (complete editions, that is Old and New Testaments) at the end of this year.

**What tasks lie ahead of Amity for its organizational development?**

Although we have strengthened this area over the past five years, much remains to be done. We have to continually balance the task of preserving the worthwhile elements of our existing organizational culture with the need to integrate new elements. Training will remain very important and we will try to do our best to free staff for training opportunities. Our human centred approach holds true not only for our beneficiaries, but also for our staff. As the organization develops, our staff follow suit. Organizational development will be the basis for our future work, and for this we need to work on the hearts and minds of our staff. Of course, the project work will go hand in hand with the organizational development - the latter will help us to serve our beneficiaries even better.

Sustainability is one big concern, not for the survival of Amity as an aim in itself, but because the social needs continue to be so great. With our new fundraising division, we are taking a first step towards this organizational sustainability. We will not become a “real” foundation that lives on endowments but maybe we can develop
Finally, we hope to strengthen all our networks, from our relationship with the church and with other Chinese NGOs to our international supporters. Perhaps the nature of international support will change over time, shifting towards more intangible contributions like training, rather than consisting mostly of finances. Our recent trip to the U.S. has been a very inspiring visit for strengthening our ties with American partners.

Qiu Zhonghui joined the Amity Foundation in 1992 and served as director of its Rural Development Division before becoming General Secretary in 2003.

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**Increased Freedom For NGOs**

**An Interview With Gu Renfa**

**The challenge:**
- To continue to identify hot social topics and set them on the agenda of social players
- How can NGOs make most of their increased legal space?
- Evaluation of Amity’s projects needs to be done in a more systematic way

When you compare Amity’s situation today with the situation five years ago, at the time of the 15th anniversary, what are the biggest changes?

Over the past five years, there has been a lot of development, especially in economic terms. This development refers to China as a whole; development has been more pronounced in the east than in the country’s west, and although the government is pursuing a policy of developing China’s western regions, the discrepancy between the coastal areas and the country’s western regions is enormous.

In terms of social development, NGOs enjoy a more stable position in society today than compared with five years ago. Not all of the many NGOs that started to emerge twenty years ago survived, some disappeared due to external pressures. Five years ago, there was no legal framework for our work, and we had to be very careful because of the legal insecurities. In the past five years, a number of regulations have been passed, and it’s always better to have regulations than to have none at all. With these regulations, the government acknowledges the existence and role of NGOs within society and in that sense, we can be much more carefree now. We can approach projects with more confidence, this has strengthened Amity from within and also means that we can engage in a greater variety of programmes.

Why did Amity survive as opposed to some other NGOs that emerged around the same time?

Some NGOs were too informal in their way of implementing projects; others were so small that they did not play a very significant role in meeting people’s needs. I think two factors have been particularly important for Amity. From the very beginning, Amity has had a very clear mission, and work was done in a well-regulated way. Amity has always had a very clear aim in its work, and that has helped us. Being part of the religious world in China, peace, justice and love have always been core elements in the way we think about our work. Our excellent cooperation with international as well as national partners has also been instrumental. The idea of love, the Christian idea of love for our neighbours is something that echoes traditional Chinese ideas of love for the people. Of course, the results of Amity’s work have also always been obvious.

Talking about Amity’s Christian connection, it is important to note that we can now talk much more openly about it than at the very beginning. At the beginning, we did not emphasize the religious aspect and would just say that we are an NGO. At that time, people had very little understanding of any religion. As the country has continued to open up, people’s understanding of the different religions has grown. We still wouldn’t describe our work as wanting to evangelize, but we do not hide our close relationship with the church either.

At the beginning, the cadres that we would encounter were already puzzled by the fact that strangers would want to come and help, let alone have much understanding about Christianity. Later people came to realize that we do not pursue any religious aims with our work and just want to help the poor. We have always helped regardless of how many Christians were at a project place. They also found out that sometimes our way of working was more thorough than the government’s way of doing things - we did not just hand over the money. We work in the spirit of Jesus Christ, but we do not have any religious aims. Therefore, many foreign friends see our work as done according to God’s teaching of helping without asking, as pure love to our neighbours. When the Communist Party does the same kind of work, they call it “serving the people”. We all help the poor, in that sense Christian love and the idea of serving the people have things in common.
Amity's projects have unfolded within a developing environment. What does this mean for the evaluation of our projects?

Evaluation is an area of work that is still not developed enough within Amity. Our staff is limited and so the focus is on good implementation rather than evaluation. Some projects are evaluated, others not at all. Added to this is the problem that it is the long-term effects that are so difficult to gauge. When a pumping station manages to raise the yields on a certain plot of land, the increased yield is easy enough to measure. But we have to see what happens after the pumping station has been in place for a while. Is the increased yield only eaten up, or is it invested in other ways? What happens with the money earned - is it spent on pleasure or invested into education? And so on. We have to strengthen our work in this respect.

Looking back, where has Amity been most successful?

Successful projects always are the product of cooperation with other successful players. Rather than talk about specific projects, I would want to locate our biggest successes in our approaches. We organized a number of conferences on topics that were sensitive at the time and required government approval - "Christianity and socialism", a conference on urban poverty and one on market economy. We persevered because we felt a need to discuss these topics, and all of these conferences proved to be successful in illustrating social needs and where we can be of influence. Of course, the results of this kind of involvement cannot be seen overnight, but we should continue to look for suitable topics and organize conferences. So, for me the first area where we have made significant contributions would be dialogue on social and development issues.

The second significant contribution is the community-centred approach of our work. We help people within their environment, we see the needs not only of an individual but the situation of the whole group in question. For example, when we started working in the west, we were not very much aware of the minority problem as such, although the poor communities we were helping belong mostly to ethnic minorities. Later, we received an award from the State Council for our promotion of unity between China's different ethnic groups.

Thirdly, with help from our partners abroad we have been able to work in many innovative and creative ways. When we started to be involved in rehabilitation work, the idea of rehabilitation was very new, even in strictly medical terms. Leprosy or polio victims basically had to recover on their own after surgery. The idea of community rehabilitation was even more alien. Programmes like the Pizhou polio rehabilitation project have shown that the affected people can change their lives, attend school and - in the case of one girl - even take part in the Paralympics. If it were not for us, these young people would still be crawling on the ground. When we started the Pizhou project, officials from neighbouring communities did not even want to see what we were doing. Now, the government is running similar programmes and is willing to spend money on them, thanks to the exposure to our work.

Gu Renfa has been with the Amity Foundation since the very beginning and is now serving as one of its Associate General Secretaries.

"The Needs Are Enormous"
An Interview With He Congpei

The challenge:
- China's development gap is probably at its widest in the area of health care
- 30,000 villages in China's west are still without a doctor or a pharmacy
- To find viable systems of basic health coverage for China's rural residents

In August 2005, the Development Research Center of the State Council publicly acknowledged that China's efforts in reforming the medical system have basically failed. Is not much of what Amity does in the area of health care the government's responsibility?

It is commonly acknowledged that the government has not invested enough in health care over the past two decades. As a people's organization, we cannot wait for the government to become involved - we need to do what we think is right and what helps the people. Amity has contributed significantly in the area of health care. In the past fifteen years, Amity has trained over 17,000 village doctors for western China in cooperation with local government bodies. But to solve problems you ultimately need a good government policy.

A new area of involvement for Amity in cooperation with the government and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is an experiment for a rural cooperative medical insurance system. Like many other government bodies, some universities and organizations, we are trying to find a system that will provide rural residents with basic medical coverage. There are many different models being tested. I think what is special about the Amity model is its emphasis on people's management of their own contributions for basic medical service and health care education. This project is in its early stages, however, and we will have to see how things develop. There are many very basic questions that need to be addressed before there will be a real cure for the current medical system. For example, consultation fees are so low that doctors
have to rely on medicine sales to survive. This is unsound both medically and for a health care system as a whole.

Where do you see some other challenges that you are facing in your work?

How can Amity do more research about Chinese society? This is a problem that affects all our projects. When we receive project proposals from local government officials, they have their own ideas in mind. We need to be well prepared to see whether the suggested project makes sense not only from the micro-perspective of the local leaders, but also from a broader perspective. After all, some projects may make sense to the locals but are not necessarily ideal when seen from a broader perspective. We cannot only listen to others.

From a medical point of view, choosing meaningful programmes is not so difficult because the needs are enormous and whatever we do will be welcomed both by the locals and the government. If we see ourselves as complementing the government, the question is rather which areas the government will make its focus, so that we can emphasize other areas in our work. For example, after the government has substantially increased its support for AIDS victims in Henan, we plan to move on into areas that are still being neglected.

Another challenge for us is the internal management of our work. China’s needs are still so big and Amity has only 40 staff with limited energy and enormous workloads as it is. How can we raise our project management skills to keep up with the increasing workload? We have to train incoming staff, but also our project partners at the grassroots. If we manage to train local partners well, this counts like new staff for us. As Amity has been running projects for twenty years now, in some projects we are now confronted with the problem that local project staff are retiring. As a result, project proposals may decrease for a while and we have to go through a phase of retraining of local partners before our work can pick up again.

How have Amity’s church-run projects developed over the past few years?

Our church-run projects have developed rather slowly over the past few years. We are still struggling with the fact that local Christians who wish to initiate social service projects often have only very little relevant knowledge. When they learn that running a project includes preliminary planning, reports and evaluations, they sometimes are a bit taken aback. They also are extremely good-hearted people and in most cases would like to offer their services free of charge. It is difficult for them to overcome this kind of thinking. This results in projects with little chance of sustainability. As for the nature of projects, clinics, old people’s homes and kindergartens are still the most popular types of initiatives for local church groups.

In our work with local Christian initiatives, training is therefore extremely important. Many local church leaders are used to thinking that “God will provide - you only need a strong enough faith,” but to successfully run a project, you also need planning abilities. When this happens and local church leaders gain the skills needed, this is very uplifting for us to see. These people really have very loving hearts and when they acquire the necessary skills, they are able to do a lot of good things. I have had a number of such experiences in our AIDS work in Henan. Together with a group of HIV carriers, one pastor has initiated a successful pig-raising project. Everybody learned a lot in the process. On one of my recent visits, a pastor from a neighbouring community learned that I was visiting and travelled all the way to see me and consult me on how to start a programme. “We are so ashamed that we have done so little to help our AIDS victims,” he kept saying. That encounter moved me a lot.

He Congpei is Acting Director of Amity’s Medical and Health Division. He joined Amity in 2000.

Combining Modern Approaches With Traditional Culture

An Interview with He Wen

The challenge:
- To enable China’s 26 million absolute poor to participate in the country’s development
- How to promote modernization while preserving local cultures
- “They may be sitting in a remote village, but China’s farmers are still confronted with the WTO world.”

How do the effects of China’s WTO entry make themselves felt three years on?

Many sectors where experts had predicted tightening markets due to China’s WTO entry are surviving surprisingly well, such as insurances and IT. However, in the agricultural sector we do feel the influence of the WTO. From Amity’s side, one response in anticipation of this has been our early shift to organic production, because this is a niche where China’s poor farmers can compete. For a very long time, China’s overall concern was raising the production of agricultural produce. Now marketing is becoming more and more of an issue, and quality plays an increasingly important role.
as well. This is also true for refined products, which would also offer a way out of the constraints of the current market, but then again quality is crucial. A second effect is that farmers are unable to deal with market forces as small individual producers. For Chinese farmers, the transition from being a "farm worker" under the planned economy to being an "all-round farming manager" in the household-based farming economy was a big step. Now, we have to introduce cooperative ways of dealing with the global market forces. They may be sitting in a remote village, but China's farmers are still confronted with the WTO world.

Where do you see other structural challenges at this point?

The government is changing in many ways and this includes structural changes. However, we still have to get to a point where government departments of every level serve the people. Currently, this ideal has not been fully realized. The government should help in those areas where the market neglects or harms the weaker elements of society - but this is not always happening. Also, the work of different government departments needs to be better coordinated.

Talking about the role of the government: How do you respond to criticism that much of what Amity does is really the government’s task?

The government certainly has the responsibility to serve the people and to provide basic social services. But we as a people's organization can work in fields in which the government is not working yet, so as to motivate society to make this issue a concern and get involved. As an NGO, we have a certain charitable aspect to our work, but above all we do development work. Of course, this will include practical elements, be it an electric pumping station or something else that can act as a "carrier" for our real purpose.

What makes Amity special among Chinese NGOs?

Amity has a reputation for doing good work. I would say, in comparison with others we really emphasize the participatory aspect of our work. We go beyond merely holding a meeting with the villagers once in a while; the community shapes the project from the very beginning throughout the whole implementation process.

Of course, training has always been important in our projects. Our focus has shifted from material well-being (providing food and clothing above all) to an idea of development that also emphasizes the spirit. We lay more emphasis on cultural elements and activities. Community culture is important, as is harmony within the community.

In this context, how do you see the government's call for a harmonious society?

The government's idea of a harmonious society shares many similarities with our goals. We are also concerned about people, society, the environment. Maybe some people think the government has started this debate in its own interest but it is still a good thing.

Personally, I think to promote social development we need to combine modern approaches like participatory development with our traditional culture in a creative way. The combination is important, but not easy.

Where do you see possible areas of involvement for Amity in the future?

One area of work that we need to strengthen is disaster prevention. Amity has been involved in disaster relief for many years, but like the rest of the country we have not done enough to move towards systematically preventing disasters rather than offering help once they have happened.

In general, strengthening civil society to equip our country to deal with the multitude of social problems will be essential. One way to do this is to instil a sense of social responsibility and solidarity in people, especially the young. The increasing individualism and affluence of some people mean that we have to bring them in touch again with those who are in need of help.

He Weiqun was a local project partner for Amity in Puding in Guizhou before joining Amity in 1998. He now is director of Amity’s Rural Development Division.

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Fresh off the press! Amity 2006 Calendar

The 2006 Amity Calendar brings you a selection of stunning photographs taken during Amity's encounters at the grassroots. Meet primary school student Tian Xiaomeng, rehabilitated leprosy patient Pu Shigen, mobile medical doctor Huang Jichen and many more as they tell their stories in a series of pictures from January to December!

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"Education For All"
An Interview with Liu Ruhong

The challenge:
- Education for all, including students in China's remote and underdeveloped areas
- To meet educational needs in the multi-cultural context of a "global village"
- To raise standards of instruction on all levels of the education system

You joined Amity in 1986 when it was one year old. Now, in 2005, Amity is celebrating its 20th anniversary. How would you compare the work of Amity's education division in 1986 to that of 2005? How has the work changed over the past two decades?

Over the last 20 years, I have seen two distinct changes in the work of the education division. First of all, our work has expanded greatly. When we started, the education division only worked on the Amity teachers program and nothing else. Now we are doing many other education-related projects besides the teachers program. Secondly, the target groups we are seeking to help through the Amity teachers program have changed over time. In the beginning we focused on big universities in big cities, then we gradually shifted to smaller teacher training schools in smaller cities in eastern and coastal provinces, and now we are concentrating our efforts on teacher training colleges in the underdeveloped western parts of China. We have always tried our best to go wherever the need is.

What are the current challenges facing Amity's education division? How do you plan to tackle these challenges?

The main challenges we are facing are in two areas. Firstly, we have nowhere near enough teachers from overseas to meet the needs that we have here. Over the last five years, the number of Amity teachers that we have been able to invite each year has been steadily decreasing. Secondly, we do not have as many resources as we would like, both from overseas and from within China, to support the other project work in our division besides the Amity teachers program.

We have some ideas about how to face these challenges. First of all, we have to strengthen our publicity work to let more people know about what we are doing in China, so that we can attract more support for our work. For instance, regarding the teachers program, we need to help more people abroad understand why it is beneficial to work with Amity, what our program offers and what they can gain from participating in it.

As I mentioned already, we are planning on conducting an evaluation of the Amity teachers program and its effectiveness over the past 20 years. We hope this will give us some answers to the challenges I have mentioned. We also want to find out what impact the Amity teachers program has had upon Chinese students. We want to know why and how our program is still so well-received by Chinese schools even though it has been running for 20 years.

Amity has now received over 2,000 teachers, and we believe that many of them still remember their time with Amity fondly and are willing to help us where they can. To this end, we are now trying to set up different "Friends of Amity Networks" or FANS for short. We are trying this first of all in North America as many of our former teachers come from there, but we hope eventually to set these up in other countries too.

Our aim is to keep in touch with former Amity teachers, keep them updated about what is happening with Amity and with China, and also to encourage them to help us with our recruitment and our publicity work wherever possible.

China's education system is currently undergoing great changes. What are some of these changes and are they influencing the work of Amity's education division in any way?

In terms of education, one of the major changes in China is the idea of "Education for all". In other words, all children in China should enjoy the right to receive an education, from basic education up to higher education. I fully support this goal. However, China is still a developing country, we have some better-off areas but most parts of China are still very poor. As a country with a large percentage of its population located in rural areas and in remote western parts of China, there will obviously be some disadvantaged groups that need additional support and help from Amity. For example, more and more children are now being admitted to schools but there is a chronic shortage of qualified teachers to cope with this increased intake.

So, our work in helping train Chinese teachers at various levels will never go out of date or be superfluous or irrelevant.

From another perspective, the whole world is now becoming like a global village. China is now growing closer to the rest of the world in ways that it never was before. More and more people from China and from other nations are expected to have more and more contact with each other in the future, which can also lead to tensions if there is a lack of mutual understanding. So, Amity needs to run projects in terms of facilitating cross-cultural exchange, building bridges and breaking down barriers. One example is the new Young Adults Program I have already talked about, as well as Service-learning Projects which involve young people from abroad. We hope to do more work in these areas in the future.

(Liu Ruhong joined The Amity Foundation in 1986 and is currently serving as Director of the Education Division.)
**"We Show That The Whole Of Society Cares"**

**An Interview with She Hongyu**

**The challenge:**
- Prevailing attitudes towards blindness and other physical and mental impairments
- An aging population means an increasing number of blind people
- The number of people with mental disabilities or depression is on the rise

*What are some of the challenges that you are facing in your work?*

First of all, there is increasing competition between different NGOs that are coming into China, especially in the area of blindness prevention work. We try to do our best to coordinate our work with other NGOs, for example, we are part of a WHO workshop with Lions, Orbis, Cedar Foundation, and Christoffel Blindenmission.

The second challenge is the prevailing attitude towards blindness. Recently, we were again confronted with this problem when we were screening for visually impaired children. Thanks to information given to us by the hospitals, we contacted the parents of visually impaired children, but the parents did not want to acknowledge that they had a blind child. There is still great discrimination, and of course this attitude has also to do with the environment and the insufficient possibilities and services offered to the visually impaired. Many parents still do no have enough courage to admit that they have a blind child.

*What does it mean to work with a medical system that is not very functional?*

A government-sponsored study came to the conclusion that health reforms have been largely unsuccessful. As an organization, this gives us more reason to ask for government funding because the government is not claiming any more that everybody has access to medical care. Secondly, we work with the existing system because we feel it is still the most efficient way to work. Setting up our own structures would cost millions. On the other hand, although we work with government clinics, we set up our own systems for elements like the pricing and evaluation of cataract operations. In that sense, we are using the existing structures to significantly cut costs, while at the same time introducing a new structure of our own, at least in parts.

*Will China's aging population put additional pressure on existing resources in the field of blindness prevention?*

The aging of China's population will indeed affect blindness prevention work in China, but from what we can see, other areas of rehabilitation work will be affected as well, for example for the visually impaired or the hearing impaired. The real challenge will be the prevailing attitudes in the countryside, which often prevent elderly patients from seeking help. There is a lot of reluctance among the elderly to spend their children's money on an operation, and all the more if the result of the operation cannot be foreseen.

In general, the hesitation to come forward for eye surgery is a big obstacle. Loss of vision in elderly cataract patients is something that happens gradually, so patients get used to living in a dark world. There has to be a good motivation for them to go for the operation - a reasonably priced operation with good results. Both of these are not always guaranteed. Another problem, linked to this, is that some doctors expect "gifts" in return for particularly good care. As a result, patients do not trust such doctors very much and wonder whether they can really do a good job on their eyes.

Talking about China's development, one of the emerging challenges will be the growing number of people with mental disabilities or depression. Already, the increased pressures in life such as the competitive education system and so on have led to an increase in depressions, and the number of persons with mental disorders has increased dramatically. A lot of people know that they are suffering but they have no place to go unless their condition turns very severe, in which case they will be hospitalised. Sometimes, the central government makes a policy but it is not implemented at the grassroots. In one of our projects we waited in vain for government subsidies for medication that was supposed to be given to patients with mental disorders. According to a central government policy, each patient would be entitled to a 30 RMB subsidy per month, but the money never arrived.

*What can Amity do to prepare people for life in a modern, highly complex society?*

A lot of people have difficulties adjusting to life in modern society. We have started to incorporate services for people with mental disorders into our programmes. We are also thinking of other approaches. In India, I visited an orchard that was part of a project for patients with mental disorders. The beautiful surroundings helped them to calm down. We are considering of starting something similar. People could go to such a farm to prevent further distress. Of course, prevention is also strongly linked to schools, parents...
Taking a more personal perspective, what has kept you going over these past ten years in your work with Amity?

I think it can be summarized in one word - change, the change that we can bring about in the lives of disabled people and their families. Whenever we see this change, it enlightens us and keeps us working. People’s lives change and that is really an encouragement for us and pushes us forward. On a recent visit to Ningxia, I bumped into one of our beneficiaries as he was on his way to the mosque. Before, when he was blind, he could not go to the mosque unaccompanied and because of religious tradition his wife was not able to bring him to the mosque either. Our eye surgery had enabled him to retain his faith life.

She Hongyu joined Amity in 1995, after working at the Amity Printing Press as a translator and assistant, and has since been involved with Amity’s Blindness Prevention and Special Education work. She now serves as Division Head of the Blindness Prevention and Special Education Division.

"Problems To Which We Do Not Yet Have A Solution"

An Interview with Ting Yen-ren

The challenge:

- More space for religious communities means new ways of working with the church on social development
- Moving on from food security to solving complex social issues
- China's tremendous economic achievements are accompanied by "all the problems that capitalism entails"

What are the big changes that have taken place since 2000, when Amity was celebrating its 15th anniversary?

One big challenge is that we are now faced with many problems to which we do not yet have a solution. For many years, we were working on problems related to poverty in rural areas, particularly in western China. Increasingly, we are facing problems that are not so much a matter of lacking resources but rather linked to problems with the social system, with the distribution of resources. Urban poverty has become an issue. It affects two different groups of people: those who are originally from the countryside and migrate into the cities to improve their lives or their children, and those who have always been city residents. Some of the city residents are, overall, like the laid-off workers, but others like people with chronic diseases or disabilities have always been at the margin. If a rural community is poor and needs an irrigation system to produce more to feed themselves, this is easy enough to do. But how can we find a system of accessible healthcare for those disadvantaged when they actually live near a well-equipped hospital? This is the type of new questions that we are facing now. It is no longer only a matter of solving people's food problem. To be frank, Amity does not have a good strategy for many of these issues - the government probably doesn't have one either.

Stepping back and looking at China now, we see that we are having a class society. In 1949, the people who rose to power were close to the very poor people and committed to working for their welfare partly because of their guerrilla experience. These former combatants however, pushed the revolution to excess, similar to what happened in the Jacobin Terror in the French Revolution, and their grip of power culminated during the Cultural Revolution. Their idea was to have a classless society, but obviously that could not work in a country like China that was predominantly household-based agriculture. So through the reform that started in the late 1970s, we brought capitalism in. The economic achievement has been tremendous, but we also have all the problems that capitalism entails.

You have just mentioned Amity's involvement with local churches. How has this developed over the past years?

One thing has always been very clear: Our aim is to help the people, and we are willing to work with anyone who wants to help the people. For instance, we have worked a lot with the Catholics, though not on a very large scale. We have also worked with some of the local Buddhist temples. And of course we really hope that more Christians can be involved in social service work, but it is a fact that Amity has not been able to do much in helping local Christians in this respect. There are three
problems linked to this. The first obstacle comes from the government. Some people always think that such involvement will increase the influence of Christians on local communities. This is a view held by some very narrow-minded officials who have a prejudice against religion per se, not just Christianity - or rather a prejudice against anyone who is not a Communist, although it is a question how much Marxism they know themselves. Amity has done a lot over the years but on the whole, there has been very little newspaper coverage because newspapers hesitate to give a Christian organization too much credit. And some people would not like to see Amity channel resources to Christian communities.

The second difficulty comes from within the church. Many people in the church say that much of the work done by Amity should be done by the government, even though they have forgotten that before 1949 churches had all kinds of charitable institutions. After decades of having a planned economy, people can’t see the need for such involvement any more. There is also religious conservatism. Some persons are more interested in personal salvation than in serving their neighbour. Others do social service work but they use conversion to Christianity as a precondition to serve you, for example if you want to move to an old people’s home. It also happens that a church-run health clinic will offer a discount to Christians who come for their service. This kind of narrow mindset won’t allow you to go very far.

The third problem is related to Amity’s staff. People like to do big projects and to get things done quickly. But to work with local Christians, you need to be very patient with them, for example sit down with them to explain why they shouldn’t give discounts to their Christian clients. And after all these efforts you’ve spent very little money - this is not seen as cost-effective.

And after many years of running projects, Amity staff tend to know better than the locals about how to run projects, so they find local Christians narrow and ignorant.

We no longer have many church-run projects, although we do have some, including a number of fairly big ones, where the partners have become very experienced and competent. Providing more training for church workers on how to run projects will certainly help, but we sometimes wish this could happen faster. The good thing is that the China Christian Council is now having its Social Service Department, and the Catholic church has its own foundation, Befang Jinde. In that sense, the situation is very different from twenty years ago.

Stephen Ting Yen-ran 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.

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“Give Them Quality Of Life”

An Interview with Wu An An

**The challenge:**
- “Prejudice can make you blind and deaf even if you are not physically impaired”
- To introduce new concepts in the fields of social welfare and special education
- Quality of life rather than “safety” in an institution for children

What will be the focus of Amity’s Social Welfare work in the following years?

In our field you need consistency to achieve results, so in that sense we do not have plans to switch to other areas of work. The tasks we will be dealing with will be basically the same. While much has changed already, for example in the resources available at local orphanages, the challenge remains how to let the children benefit individually. The most important thing will be to change attitudes and challenge some existing notions, for example in the field of special education. We have actually launched a revolution in deaf education in China through our bilingual approach.

When it comes to changing attitudes, parents can also be a very big challenge. They play such a crucial role, and yet it is so difficult for them to accept that their child is deaf. Training is very important to bring people together and educate them, and it is a mutual learning process from which we benefit as well. Our projects are the basis for promoting new approaches and changes in attitudes. In our leprosy work, for example - we make the community aware that it is not only a matter of guaranteeing former leprosy patients a basic life, but to give them quality life.

You have mentioned the need to influence policies. How does Amity do advocacy work?

Influencing policymakers happens mostly through our practical work, and also through our participation in conferences. In general, you have to be confident and not be afraid to speak out. You must not be concerned about what the government thinks when you speak out for justice on behalf of the poor people. Maybe some officials in charge will think that you are very political - but politics is everywhere, you cannot avoid it if you are involved anywhere at all. You must not think of things like your personal promotion. Of course you also need a strategy to unite people who share the same values and visions as you. You can be polite, but you have to be clear about your values. This is easier said than done - it is difficult to advocate things
that affect the interests of the officials concerned.

How do you respond to criticisms that much of what Amity does is the responsibility of the government?

I think we are working on tasks that are really the government's responsibility. We are involved to let the government know about their responsibility, and to show them how to work. If you don’t challenge the government, you cannot change society. There is no point in always praising the existing system, be it education or something else. But although the tasks we are concerned with should be undertaken by the government, we should be involved to bring awareness and certain attitudes into the field - because there are different ways of working in our field. It is more important to transmit values and promote empowerment for the poor rather than help in a charitable way.

What does it mean to work as a small organization with a social welfare system that is not very functional? Is change possible at all?

The difficult part is that in real life we are confronted with real persons and in many ways that is harder than shouting for a policy. I always try to remind myself that when the people I work with don’t see the points of my arguments it is because they lack information on the issues involved. But it is also uplifting to see so many people who understand me and strive for the same goals. Take the foster care project as an example. Children cannot speak up for themselves that they each deserve a family, but some orphanage directors from the government see how the foster children have changed through the foster experience in our joint pilot projects, and now they are working for the same goals. In the policy of the departments of Civil Affairs, there used to be an emphasis on “safety” for the children (thinking institutional care is safer) rather than quality of life. It is a big reward and a source of much satisfaction and encouragement for us to see the change.

One group of people I always speak up for are the deaf. I try to tell the professionals I meet to listen to the hearing impaired. Hearing people usually do not listen to them, they look down on them and don’t understand them. Some of the government officials had actually never thought of consulting the deaf. Once you start listening, the voice of the deaf is very loud. Of course it takes a while to learn to listen to them, and there is a communication barrier in most cases. So I speak up on their behalf, because the current situation is unjust. We have the possibility to change society because the change in attitude is everything. Prejudice can also make you blind and deaf even though you are not physically impaired.

As a Christian, what does Amity’s connection with the church mean for you?

For me, it's the reason why we were able to stand by ourselves all this time - because this faith is our belief that we are grounded in. Everybody needs to be grounded in beliefs. Our values are of course Christian-based - the idea of spreading love to our neighbours. But as Christian social workers we should also push for the development of society and should let people know why we do this. Of course you don’t have to share your faith all the time but at least you should know yourself why you are doing this. In my work, many natural opportunities come up where I can share my motivation with others.

Wu An An joined Amity in 1990 and worked in the Administrative Division and with the Teachers Program before becoming involved in Amity's Social Welfare work. She now is Director of the Social Welfare Division.

Fresh off the press! Growing in Partnership: The Amity Foundation 1985-2005

Few countries have changed as dramatically over the course of the past two decades as China. One social player that has not only witnessed the country’s profound transformation first-hand but also contributed to it is the Amity Foundation. As a development agency dedicated to providing social services and development aid to China’s poor, the organization has followed the country’s development closely as it responds to social needs.

Amity’s successful development work is the result of fruitful partnerships between individuals and project partners at the grassroots, Amity staff in Nanjing and Hong Kong and a circle of international friends and supporting agencies. In this book, all parties involved in this partnership speak out in a collection of articles and interviews, making it into a reader that reflects both Amity’s and China’s development from 1985 to the present day.

"Seen from the perspective of China’s long history, twenty years is just the blink of an eye. But what an extraordinary blink it has been, for China and the Amity Foundation." (Theresa Carino)

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Fundraising Is Friendraising
An Interview with Yu Qun

The challenge:
- To develop Amity’s domestic fundraising capacities
- Fundraising is a new field in China both for donors and fundraisers
- “We have no hard and fast rules”

You are working in the newly created Publicity and Fundraising Division. What are some of the ways in which you try to establish this new field of work?

Fundraising is a new thing both for Amity and in China, therefore much of our time at this point is devoted to publicity and awareness building. We spend a lot of time bringing people to see projects. Recently, we took a group of students to see our poverty alleviation project in Butoo in Sichuan Province. Now, after their return, they can serve as ambassadors for our work. We will have to see how they can support us in the future. We have done a bit of fundraising for poor university students already. Another upcoming project visit will be a trip to our Mind and Body Project in Feixian in Shandong Province.

Fundraising and publicity are really inseparable, and especially now, at the beginning, our strategy is to enhance our publicity in the hope that people will then approach us to help. Already, we have to deal with many related enquiries. A lot of people come to us in the hope to cooperate, but we always have to check whether we are compatible first. It is a pity we cannot take up all offers. Some persons want to use our status as a charitable organization to improve their name; others have a genuine wish to help. We recently had a book donation campaign for migrant workers’ children, for which different companies sponsored the books and the publishers gave us a discounted price on the books. One of our bigger fundraising efforts was a company charity dinner in spring, which raised about 40,000 RMB [US$ 5,000 approx.]. But fundraising is friendraising - the important thing was to make the connection with these businesspeople. In Nanjing, we have also had a number of activities recently - a concert by foreign language students, and a writing competition for migrant workers' children. We are now also considering project-specific fundraising.

Does Amity’s strong reliance on funds from overseas create a form of dependence? And do you share the concern that the images often used in fundraising make the beneficiaries into mere objects of compassion?

We preserve our independence in several ways, one is the fact that we have a large number of partner organizations. The question you raise about the relationship between fundraising and dignity - I see the concern, but I also know that our foreign partners need stories to raise funds. And as for the beneficiaries themselves, I think they would like you to do fundraising in this way because they need help.

We are already discovering that the questions raised by local donors are quite different from the international donors. Some concerns raised by our overseas partners are not shared by the Chinese, because they know the Chinese situation very well. In other respects, they are particularly demanding, for example when it comes to financial efficacy, because they know the price of things. These strict demands are good for us, because they challenge us. Individual donors also like projects where they know where the money will go, and where there will be a case-by-case follow up, like in the case of support for orphans. Therefore, big poverty alleviation schemes like rural development do not have a lot of appeal for Chinese donors. They like an individual approach - to be able to walk into our office and pick a child because it’s a girl, or because they like the name. Others have certain expectations as to the acknowledgement of their donation, they would like their name to appear on the equipment they sponsored. In such cases, we try to strike a compromise between our policy and their ideas, and spend a lot of time explaining our approach.

What are some of the difficulties that you are encountering in your work?

Fundraising and publicity work requires good networks, and we spend a lot of time cultivating relationships. The volunteers in particular need a lot of attention. It is difficult to retain volunteers, you have to constantly keep in touch. A while ago, we made a phone call to one of our volunteers and the person said “You must have a problem since you are calling me. You only ever call when there is a problem to be solved.” This kind of thing must not happen. We need to work out our internal management of the volunteers.

The second problem is that we don’t have any hard and fast rules. Because this is a new field of work for us, we do not know what the ratio between money spent on publicity and fundraising and the funds actually raised should be. And sometimes it is difficult to work out what people’s motivations in wanting to support us are, there are so many different kinds of people. For some of our younger staff, we also notice that they know less about our project work than the older staff who have had experience and exposure in this respect.

Does being the “public face” of Amity create any special sensitivities for your work?

In general, we are more careful with the media than with the government. The government is very supportive, and we make it clear that we have both Christian and non-Christian staff. Sometimes we have to clarify these things and explain that religious activities are not part of our work. In a sense, work with the general public also serves as an indicator of our reputation in public. We become aware of problems regarding our reputation earlier than the rest of the organization. And of course, it is very easy to harm your reputation with a single unfortunate incident. We have to be very careful in order to keep a good reputation.

Yu Qun is part of Amity’s publicity and fundraising team. She joined the Amity Foundation in 1992 and worked in Amity’s Blindness Prevention and Special Education, Rural Development, and Medical and Health divisions before.
The Other Side Of The Coin: Urban Poverty
An Interview with Zhang Liwei

The challenge:
- "Why are we being treated like this since we are all part of Chinese society?"
- China's 130 million migrant workers - the country's biggest industrial workforce - are "a social group without a social identity"
- Five percent of China's entire population belong to the urban poor

What are the major changes that have taken place since 2000, when Amity was celebrating its 15th anniversary?

As I have noted on earlier occasions, my general supposition is that China is still being caught in two historical transitions, the first one being from a peasant society to an industrialized one and the second one being from a planned economy to capitalism. The figures show a continuing high GDP growth, but after 25 years of reforms, Chinese society has totally changed, for example when we look at the area of poverty reduction or the Party. A significant number of people have been lifted out of poverty, and the current government has adopted a people-centred approach, particularly in regard to some crises such as SARS and bird flu. These seemingly untimely events served to show the government that we need to take a more people-centred approach. On the other hand, the existing social gaps between the rich and the poor as well as the cities and the rural areas continue to widen. Yu Jianrong, the famous sociologist, has recently done a thorough piece of research into the situation of Hunanese farmers. According to Yu, farmers are now trying to regain their constitutional rights.

One interesting trend during this process of social development is that NGOs have been experiencing growth, especially since 1998. A series of regulations on social groups, NGOs and NPOs [non-profit organizations] have been issued, which shows that the government now takes a more open attitude towards NGOs in China. Of course the situation is still not fully satisfactory and there is still a long way to go. But the government is now encouraging NGOs to be involved in poverty reduction, and the involvement of NGOs is even part of the current ten-year poverty reduction plan by the government. Amity has also been changing over these past years as we are keeping pace with the development of society. Last year, our funding increased to 84 million RMB [US$ 10 million approx.]. Our project work has also expanded in terms of work areas - we now serve migrant workers and have made migration an issue in conferences. We also support a legal aid centre the clients of which are mostly migrants.

You have already mentioned migration as one of Amity's concerns. Do you think Amity's rural and urban poverty work should be more closely interlinked?

I do not know how the two can be linked together, but we will definitely walk on both legs, meaning work in both fields. Until now, the existing schools for migrant workers' children are far from enough. Four to five percent of our entire population belong to the urban poor. Most of these poverty-stricken people in the cities are laid-off workers, migrants, single parents, and the chronically ill. I still have the vision of starting more local projects in Nanjing, to serve the needy, raise funds locally and to enhance our profile in the city. Donors need to be able to see what we do if they are not to feel that Amity is far away. Our publicity needs to project that Amity is nearby and can be reached for help.

There are ways in which the rural poor could be served before they migrate to the cities - for example in the areas of legal aid, AIDS/HIV awareness, and vocational training. Overall, the focus of our work will likely remain the same, but we will pay more attention to other groups of urban poor.

What can Amity do to prepare people like the migrants for modern life?

At one point we offered some training for migrants on issues such as their legal rights. This would be one possible project that could be continued to help them integrate. In general, I am more concerned with the second-generation children of migrants. Most of these children were born and raised in the urban areas, yet they don't have a social identity - they are neither here nor there. We did a speech contest for migrant workers' children recently. Some of these children asked: Why are we being treated like this since we are all part of Chinese society? When these children are puzzled about their social identity, this can harm the government and society.

Can Amity as a Christian-initiated organization play a special role in this?

Above all, we reach out to all people and we will continue along this line. We can also express our Christian-based values like a sense of caring, loving, and sharing. Migrants have a feeling of being forgotten by society, and our help makes them feel that they still belong to this society. We help people live in dignity and make them realize that they still retain a value. They are responsible members of society and not mere recipients of help. ♦

Zhang Liwei is one of Amity's Associate General Secretaries. He joined Amity in 1996 and first served in the Education Division, becoming its Acting Director in 1997. Since 2000, he has been in charge of Amity's newly created Publicity and Fundraising Division.
Voices From Friends Of Amity

As Amity turns twenty, friends from all over the world reflect on their partnership with Amity. Below are some of the congratulatory notes received.

Greeting to Amity at its 20th Anniversary

As one of the first overseas organizations to work with Amity in China, Aereopagos would like to congratulate on this your 20th anniversary. Amity set out to be an arm of the Christian church and contribute towards the modernisation of China by serving the needy and improving their life quality. During these past 20 years tens of thousands of people in many parts of China have seen their lives changed as a result of your dedication. For us it has been an exciting and enriching experience to be part of this great endeavour. Your commitment to serve the less privileged among your people continues to be an inspiration.

Rev. Ernst Harbakk
Aereopagos

Dear Mr. Zhang Liwei,

After the start of the Amity Foundation in 1985 we in the Netherlands wondered whether or not to join this new initiative. From many of our sister organizations in Europe we learned that they saw great chances for building up new relationships with China. Having had such relations in the past, now was the moment to build on these in a new way.

For us the situation was different. We did not have ‘historic’ ties with China. So the question was raised whether to enter into a partnership with the newly formed Amity or to leave this to others. Talking to some of you we were told that the Dutch should not be missing. We would bring ‘fresh’ insights and we had a role to play. So without hesitation we decided to become part of the Amity family and we put a lot of energy in the European Amity Partner Network (ENAP).

At this juncture in time we congratulate you (and ourselves) with the decisions taken in 1985 / 86. Over the years we have enjoyed our relationships with Amity and it is with great admiration that we have seen the development and growth of the Amity work. Through several teachers sent by us, we made our humble contribution to one of your first programs. Unfortunately we were not successful finding new candidates during the last years. Hopefully this will improve in the period to come.

Let us express our heartfelt congratulations for the 20th Anniversary of the Amity Foundation. We wish you all the best for the next 5 years and we hope and pray that your important work for so many poor Chinese people will bring what is needed for a better and more righteous society.

Kind regards,
A.M. Mook
Head Asia-Pacific Desk

Congratulations on your 20th Anniversary!

Dear friends of the Amity Foundation,

On behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria we should like to extend our sincere congratulations on the occasion of your 20th anniversary. We are grateful to God for guiding and leading you during all these years and for empowering your ministry for the benefit of the weak and disadvantaged people and regions in the PR China. A lot of projects like schools, aid posts and rural development projects would not have been implemented if Amity had not given hands and knowledge and management capabilities, uncountable young people would not have been given the chance to improve their foreign language skills and to get a good job to take care of their families. Many handicapped and elderly people experienced the care of loving people just because you were there. Congratulations and thank you so much for your marvelous engagement for the benefit of the underprivileged. We also want to express our deep appreciation for our smooth and faithful cooperation especially in the Amity Teacher’s Program where we are involved since the year 1988. For all our teachers it was both: On the one hand they were pleased to contribute towards this program and on the other hand they had the chance to make a lot of new experiences while living in China and being exposed to the rich and most fascinating Chinese culture. May God continue to bless your ministry and may He empower you to meet the challenges of the future.

Rev. Dr. Hermann Vorländer
Director

Rev. Thomas Paulsteiner
Regional Secretary for East Asia
Amity’s Future Directions: Challenge and Opportunity
Ewing W. Carroll, Jr.

Congratulations to Directors, Staff and domestic and international partners as Amity turns 20!

I still remember very clearly that Spring 1985 day when Bishop K. H. Ting, Han Wenbao and Philip L. Wickeri held a Press Conference in Hong Kong to announce the establishment of The Amity Foundation. That decision was the beginning of an incredible journey now twenty years old.

Established in the early years of China’s Open Door Policy, Amity enabled new directions of partnership with both China domestic and international religious and secular organizations. Some critics believed China’s political realities would not permit such partnership. Other lamented the birth of Amity would be in name only. Fortunately, more sensitive and open-minded friends of China saw in Amity’s formation occasion for many challenges and opportunities.

I feel both honored and grateful to have been an initial supporter of Amity’s work and later a part of Amity’s Overseas Coordination Office staff in Hong Kong. During the past twenty years, I have watched and worked with anticipation and joy as Amity has sought to be an agent of growth and development for people all across China. In many ways Amity has been a pioneer of holistic development; nurturing new forms of partnership with various Chinese governmental agencies, local people’s organizations and caring and supportive organizations across the world.

It would be foolish to say everything Amity has sought to accomplish has been successful or useful. No individual or collective life is every that easy! The scientist-philosopher Alfred N. Whitehead wrote, “It’s better to fail in moving ahead, than to succeed in standing still.” Amity has certainly not stood still! Fortunately, Amity staff and domestic and international partners have not shied away from accepting challenges and opportunities, even if/when some have not been successful.

Some may feel that at age twenty, Amity should “an shen li ming” - to rest on its laurels and enjoy its considerable domestic and international prestige. That would be disappointing and disastrous. The rapid changes taking place throughout China are an ever-present invitation for Amity to move forward with new dreams, decisions and plans for a better day for more and more of China’s citizens.

On the other hand, Amity should not try to “be all things to all people” [ba mian ling long]. Limitations of human, financial and political resources remain. However, as a pioneer, Amity should continue to look for new ways to serve the needs of China amidst tremendous geographic and economic disparity and inequality.

I believe Amity is called to be both a “message” and a “model” of development. However, seeking to bridge differences of nations, cultures, religious and political beliefs and economic realities is not for the faint-hearted. Amity’s challenge and opportunity for the next twenty years will continue to be finding ways to be a faithful servant to the diverse needs of Chinese society. I pray strength, courage and vision for Amity as you face the challenges and opportunities of the next twenty years!

Amity 20th Anniversary
Message from ‘Friends of the Church in China’

We are delighted to send our congratulations to the Amity Foundation on your 20th Anniversary!

As our two organisations were established at almost the same time, we have been privileged to witness the development of the Amity Foundation from its early beginnings. We have been impressed by the way in which Amity’s work has progressed from the original more localised projects set up in response to a variety of needs, moving not only to a wider geographical network of projects across China, but also to a more proactive role in taking new initiatives. We have seen expertise developed, structures and processes tightened, research and analysis produced - but all without losing sight of the central importance of people.

Above all, Amity has not rested on its laurels, but continued to push the boundaries to establish work in new fields and to tackle new and sometimes sensitive issues - the programmes relating to HIV/AIDS and to migrant workers come to mind.

FCC members have been privileged to visit many Amity projects over the years, and we have been able to follow the progress of some quite closely. We have also engaged with Amity staff members, both in China and in the UK, and we know what energy and dedication you apply to your tasks. We have seen Amity’s ‘Love in Action’; may it continue for many more decades!

John Pritchard & Maqgi Whyte
Chair & Vice-Chair, FCC.
Twenty years of the Amity Foundation
Dr. Han Wenzao’s Remarks on the 20th Anniversary of the Founding of the Amity Foundation

Twenty years have passed since the establishment of the Amity Foundation. From the very beginning I was made as its General Secretary and stayed on in the position for as long as 18 years, witnessing it from the ‘infant baby’ stage gradually to ‘adolescence’. Truly speaking, I am a witness of Amity’s growth indeed.

I remember the incident at a press conference in Hong Kong in March 1985, jointly attended by Bishop K H Ting and me on the eve of Amity’s inauguration. One news reporter challenged us: “How large a fund does the Amity Foundation boast of?” I answered: “In terms of funds, the Amity Foundation is a foundation without much foundation. However, it shall have inexhaustible fund resources for support.” The reality of past twenty years of Amity tells well for what I said above. Last year the funds Amity raised (including donations in kind) exceeded one billion US Dollars. An important rationale for Christianity is the ecumenical sharing of resources. I strongly believed that this rationale would be carried out in China too and it did indeed. For that, we must certainly owe much to the wise decision of Comrade Deng Xiaoping, who insisted on pushing forward the great strategy of China’s reform and opening to the world, thus creating the key exterior conditions for making the ecumenical resource sharing possible in China.

For the last twenty years, Amity has consistently based its work on projects. In writing a project proposal, it would involve procedures like field trips, investigations and research. Our mandate is to make projects adaptable to the local conditions in the greatest possible ways, best use the local resources and meet the needs of the less advantaged groups in the targeted localities. By such doing, we also mean to facilitate the donor agencies or individuals to have their choices of investment.

In the past two decades, Amity’s role has not just been restricted in the provision of project funds but also helping the local people in implementation of projects. In this regard, our valuable experience to ensure the proper implementation of projects to the benefits of the people is the locating of qualified partners. I remember the Lijiang earthquake in Yunnan Province occurring in early 1998 amidst the coldest season of the year. Amity had raised about 3 million Chinese yuan as the emergency relief funds, which, however, were far less than what some bigger international relief agencies did then. Thanks to the efforts of Amity’s local partners, who were empathized with the disaster-stricken people and worked with high efficiency, Amity’s relief goods reached the victimized areas in due time, winning a reputation of “delivering charcoals in the depth of winter”, a Chinese saying in praise of the people who help others in the right time.

In the last twenty years, Amity has developed the ‘participatory approach’ in working with the local people. The beneficiaries are invited to participate right in the early stage of project planning so that they would change their roles as passive beneficiaries to the masters of their own fortune. The approach aims at giving a fuller play to the positive spirit of the beneficiaries in self-reliance and hard-working so as to enable them to have hopes for their future. As we all understand the change of the spiritual features of the benefited people is of the utmost importance in our work.

In the twenty years, Amity has been working with a down-to-earth attitude and making progress with every passing day. In the early days after its establishment, the majority of its projects clustered in East China. Frankly speaking, at that time, we knew little about the general situation of the country. Then, from our experiences, we found that the western regions of China seemed to be more in need of Amity’s assistance. In 1992 the Amity board meeting made the decision of moving the projects to the western part of the country. Now, we are proud to say that our projects have spread widely in the 12 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in Northwest and Southwest China.

In the twenty years, our staff members have also acquired the awareness that Amity’s prospects are determined by the staff qualities. In early 90s, in an experience sharing session, we set the goal of three Cs for staff capacity building, i.e. Compassion, Commitment and Competence. One Hong Kong colleague commented: “You may expect to raise the staff competence through proper training but it does not work for the acquisition of compassion and commitment.” However, our experience is otherwise. We think that it is also possible to enhance and foster the staff compassion and commitment in the process of fulfilling their missions. One staff member put it well: “The process of working for Amity is also a process to purify our own souls.” In working with our partners, our staff keep in their mind that they can by no means appear to be ‘saviors’ ‘givers’ or the like, nor they can have any reasons to accept gifts from our partners. At present, the Amity has developed the three Cs to six Cs to add Communication, Cooperation, and Creativity to enrich staff code of conduct. I wish that the six Cs would be well received and popularized among the staff members to the good of the Amity’s further development.

It is my sincerest hope that the Amity Foundation would become an even outstanding non-profit organization in the next twenty years.
On behalf of Mennonite church agencies in Canada and the U.S., I would like to offer congratulations to the Amity Foundation on its 20th anniversary. The accomplishments and work of Amity have been significant, and it has been our privilege to observe and in a small way participate in this success.

Anniversary celebrations provide an opportunity to look back and assess the past. After twenty years we can more fully appreciate the vision and wisdom of the leaders who began the work of Amity. They may not have anticipated the direction and contribution which Amity would make, but their ideas and dreams established the foundation.

Amity provides a meaningful way for overseas churches and church organizations to be involved in China's development. Similar to many other denominations, Mennonites were active during the mission era in China. Amity opened the door for overseas churches to again be connected with the Chinese people. However instead of administering program, overseas churches were invited to participate in China's development through a completely Chinese entity. This provided a healthy way for overseas churches to again build relationships with and be enriched by the Chinese people.

Our 20-year relationship with Amity has given us the opportunity to learn much about what is happening in China. While the incredible pace of change in Chinese society is well known and easily observable, personnel at Amity have provided helpful analysis and understanding of issues which are often hidden. Through reports, articles, conferences, meetings and personal travel, we have a better grasp of development and church issues in China. I have also appreciated the times when Amity workers have shared personal words of instruction and wisdom regarding specific situations and problems. This instructive role has been one of Amity's most important contributions.

Amity has shown itself to be a flexible organization, willing to change and adapt at times to different situations and needs. Even though Mennonites have carried out their own education exchange in Sichuan province since 1981, Amity invited CEE to participate in its education program. There has been a strong desire to cooperate and share information and resources, which has greatly benefited our presence in China. Amity staff have shared advice and words of caution.

The Rural Development Division was willing to adapt to new organizational patterns in carrying out a 7-year poverty reduction project with funding from the Canadian government and the Mennonite Central Committee. While there were many difficulties, Amity staff were committed to this project which brought water, education, health care and a better economic outlook to many. Amity graciously worked through each challenge, including the added government oversight and bureaucracy which this project brought.

Through communication and seeing the work of Amity, it becomes quickly obvious that there is a genuine concern and compassion for people. Amity recognizes that even though China has experienced an incredible economic boom, there are still many who live in poverty. As in Western society, there are those in China who have been marginalized and forgotten. Amity's care for AIDS victims, for orphans, for children who cannot afford an education, for underprivileged women—these are examples of Amity's compassion.

Workers at Amity are aware of the many great changes in society and how they have benefited people, but they also know that there are many problems. They are concerned for the environment and for how progress and change affects people. Amity highlights the plight of migrant workers and their children, as well as those who have lost their land. As an NGO with Christian roots Amity can exercise its voice in an increasingly modern society which is searching for concrete values.

Amity has inspired us with its concern for churches and believers in China. The many church-run projects and the assistance which Amity has given to churches attempting to reach out to society is exemplary. The contribution of the Amity Printing Company is something which is well known outside of China. We are proud to tell persons who harbor negative ideas about the church in China about the millions of Bibles which have been printed and distributed in China.

Finally, I would like to mention the personal relationships which we have developed through the years with persons we have learned to know at Amity. It isn't just about program and projects, it is also about people. I represent many who have established meaningful friendships with persons at Amity. We have learned to know each other at deeper levels, shared hopes and dreams and talked about our families and our problems. It is this human touch with a divine spark which we cherish the most.

Submitted by Myrl Byler, Director
China Educational Exchange
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