CONTENTS OF THE 25th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE:
3 THE SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE AMITY FOUNDATION IN CHINA
4 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW
5 AMITY FOUNDATION 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS
10 FROM “DEVELOPMENT AID” TO A “STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP”
11 AMITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN 21ST CENTURY
12 MODERN CHINA: THE INCONSISTENCIES OF POVERTY
14 AMITY INNOVATION AND IMPACT
18 REFLECTIONS ON EARTHQUAKE EMERGENCY RELIEF WORK IN YUSHU
19 FUTURE DIRECTIONS
20 NEWS
The Amity Newsletter is a quarterly publication reporting on the projects of the Amity Foundation distributed free of charge.

Bank details
Account holder: The Amity Foundation Hong Kong, Ltd.
Account number: 127-5-017372
The Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, 238 Nathan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong

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Editorial: Reflections on a changing China
Anders Granberg

I came to Hong Kong as the new editor for the Amity Newsletter, sponsored by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM). Joining Amity in the summer of this year, the last few months have been a whirlwind of activity and change. My priorities have been the Amity Newsletter, the English Amity website as well as assisting with the Amity News Service and other tasks in Hong Kong. With these tools, I hope to be able to both report on current Amity projects and initiatives, as well as offer an insight into the changing development and cultural landscape of China.

I joined the Amity Foundation in Hong Kong because of the vision and mission the organisation has for China. Particularly the concept of “love in action” appeals to my Christian belief that we have a responsibility to care for others in society. The focus on participatory and holistic methods resonates with my own experiences and theories to ensure the long-term sustainability of projects. I look forward to illustrating some of the practical examples of this vision through case studies and analysis of the Amity Foundation’s projects.

This issue, because of the 25th Anniversary celebrations, has largely focused on the event, a historical overview and a theoretical insight into the development process in China. The 25th anniversary celebrations had a particular personal impact, as they brought home the importance of development in China, especially as many now assume that aid can be better spent elsewhere. The need for continued cooperation with China and the Amity Foundation is all the more relevant as millions of Chinese still live in poverty eager for the means to improve their lives. I look forward to embarking on this journey to improve the lives of others together with Amity staff, local and international partners. Together in love we can make that necessary difference one step at the time.

The Amity Foundation is an independent Chinese voluntary organisation. It was created in 1985 on the initiative of Chinese Christians. It has worked to promote education, social services, health, and rural development in the underdeveloped areas of China.

Amity’s work is grounded in the belief that all human beings share the same dignity. Abiding by the principle of mutual respect in faith, Amity builds friendship with both Christians and non-Christians in China and abroad. In this way, Amity contributes to China’s social development and openness to the outside world. It makes Christian involvement and participation in meeting the needs of society more widely known to the Chinese people and serves as a channel for people-to-people contact and the ecumenical sharing of resources. Helping to develop civil society in China is one of the key aims of its work.

The Amity Foundation has about 60 full-time staff at its Nanjing headquarters. Hundreds of volunteers work with Amity all over China. The foundation receives funds from partners abroad as well as in Hong Kong and mainland China.
Amity has now celebrated its 25th anniversary, which marks an important milestone in the work of the foundation. The celebration allowed us to reflect on the history of the organization, as well as consider future needs and development in China.

From humble beginnings, the Amity Foundation has grown in capacity, role and vision for development in China. The political endorsement of reform in the late 1970s encouraged social organisations such as the Amity Foundation to re-engage with society. They have since then taken on an increasingly important role, providing vital services and contributing to improving the lives of millions of Chinese. The Amity Foundation has been a channel for international engagement in this process. The international community has invested RMB 1.5 billion, matched by local resources, to provide more than RMB 3 billion in project funds and donations. This has supported projects ranging from community development to environmental protection, orphan care, education, NGO capacity building, church and social services as well as so much more. These projects have benefitted close to 10 million people in 200 counties in 31 provinces and autonomous regions in China, improving their lives and giving them hope for the future.

The Amity Foundation has a unique role in China; as a bridge for international cooperation, internal social development and catalyst for Church and Christian individuals’ involvement and care. The Amity Foundation acts as an example of Christian service, as Bishop K.H Ting noted, “over the years, Amity has helped more and more Christians to see the beauty of Christians identifying themselves with those in need.” The founding Christian values of the Amity Foundation have been, and continue to be, embodied in philosophy and action. This is evident through a human-oriented development model that embodies Christian care and respect for others. Amity has become part of a foundation for social development in China; establishing standards of best practice and facilitating the flow of information, resources and expertise between international and local partners. This sets the groundwork for future cooperative engagement and social growth, benefitting the disadvantaged with the latest techniques and ideas.

Our slogan of “Love in Action” is a practical development of our Christian care for humanity. Amity therefore works with international and domestic partners to achieve the greatest good for those in need, including farmers, women, the elderly, orphans etc. Our approach has adapted to the needs and our expanding knowledge and expertise base. This has included a move to focus more on the western provinces of China and a concurrent move from singular to integrated projects. We therefore aim to meet a range of needs and address the roots of poverty in a more comprehensive manner. Amity projects cultivate a more holistic approach to social development, which integrates the three local partners of residents, experts and local governments in projects areas. This approach meets the most relevant needs assessed by a range of partners, whilst encouraging a greater social awareness of development and its functions in specific localities.

The celebrations also mark the need to reflect on the future vision and contribution to Chinese social development. The last 5 years have seen the rise of innovations in project types, management, content and ideas. These have increased the professionalism and capacity of the Amity staff to respond to local and international needs, whilst engendering a culture of reflection within the organisation to improve on current practice. New types of projects have been introduced in the hope of directly increasing the capacity of local partners and the marginalised. New ideas and innovations will also lay the groundwork for Amity’s future approach and corporate culture, maintaining high standards within the organisation to improve our reach and capacity to help others.

The Amity Foundation, after 25 years, continues to aim to help our partners and local villagers to improve their lives. We wish to cooperate with both local, national and international partners in this endeavour that will enrich both China and global humanity. As we stand together, we can achieve more and ensure that “Love Never Ends”.

Mr. Qiu Zhonghui, Amity Foundation General Secretary
China is constantly changing and adapting to the changing global and domestic environment. The last few decades have seen the transformation of the economy in China from a mainly rural and agricultural production base, to one rapidly industrialising and urbanising. China has now become the 2nd largest economy in the world, with trillions in foreign reserves. Concurrently, China has opened up and reform has become more evident since the late 1970s, increasing the role of NGOs and civil society. Poverty levels have, according to the World Bank, fallen to 16% from 85% in 1981 thus lifting 600 million out of poverty. At an international level, the Chinese model of development has become toted by some, as a more effective example to emulate. 2010 also marks the year Shanghai hosted the World EXPO, with millions of visitors from home and abroad.

Simultaneously, the scope of the Amity Foundation has adapted. The 1980s saw a focus on poverty alleviation and helping the marginalised and disadvantaged. The 1990s ushered in a move to the western provinces of China and recognition of that poverty is diverse and requires a similarly diverse response. Now in the new millenium, we have new challenges associated with migration and environmental sustainability, which dominate both Chinese and international development discourse. Throughout these changes, the Amity Foundation continues to innovate according to new standards and changing contexts, with the continuing aim of improving livelihoods and possibilities for the individual Chinese through “Love in Action”.

### Historical Overview

Anders Granberg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Major events and innovations in Amity history</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 1985</td>
<td>Inaugural meeting of the Amity Board in Nanjing</td>
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<td>August 1985</td>
<td>Amity holds orientation conference for the first group of 22 foreign teachers</td>
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<td>December 1987</td>
<td>Official opening of the Amity Printing Company</td>
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<td>September 1990</td>
<td>Amity initiates medical training programs for rural doctors and health workers</td>
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<td>February 1991</td>
<td>International cooperation: Amity delegation visits the Philippines on South-South exchange</td>
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<td>April 1994</td>
<td>Amity starts the first integrated rural development project in Puding country, Guizhou province</td>
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<td>June 1997</td>
<td>Amity donates first Mobile Operation Vehicle in China to the Qinghai People’s Hospital</td>
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<td>June 1998</td>
<td>Amity donates RMB 20 million over 6 months to help flood victims in Hubei, Jianxi and Hunan provinces</td>
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<td>May 2004</td>
<td>Amity initiates Bilingual Deaf Education project in Jiangsu</td>
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<td>October 2004</td>
<td>Amity restructuring into 3 departments: Research &amp; Development, Project Management and Administration</td>
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<td>August 2005</td>
<td>Amity starts the Young Adult Program for international exchange</td>
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<td>January 2007</td>
<td>First community-based integrated AIDS prevention and control project starts in Longchuan, Yunnan</td>
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<td>November 2007</td>
<td>Amity Bakery established as a vocational training platform of the Amity Home of Blessings</td>
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<td>November 2008</td>
<td>Amity Children Development Center established to rehabilitate children with autism</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2009</td>
<td>Civil society development: Amity incubator for NGOs established</td>
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The Amity Foundation celebrated its 25th Anniversary between the 6-8th of November 2010. The celebrations included the Fifth Amity International Consultation on Social Development, a 25th Anniversary Celebration ceremony with accompanying banquet and cultural evening and a ceremony commemorating the printing of the 80th million Bible by the Amity Printing Company. The celebrations brought together Amity partners, supporters, beneficiaries and staff from China and overseas. The celebrations also marked the evolving functions of the Amity Foundation; expanding from introducing resources from international churches to providing the impetus for future NGO development and the catalyst for social welfare, rural development and infrastructural developments in China.

Fifth Amity International Consultation on Social Development

The aim of the international consultation was to encourage discussion amongst the stakeholders of the Amity Foundation regarding past achievements, current context and future development. The main topics of concern examined the historical trends of poverty alleviation and social construction in China, with individual panels focusing on current concerns such as the environment, the role of religion, the third sector and rural development.

The theoretical and historical context of social development in China was eloquently introduced by Prof. Guan Xinping of Nankai University. He focused on some of the modern social conditions, governance and administration that the current government faces considering the vast internal geographic, demographic and cultural differences within China. He identified the reliance on continued economic achievement to fuel social construction and lack of effective legal system regulating social services as hindrances for organizations such as Amity engage more effectively in social development. Within this context, he outlined the modern and historical role of social organizations and social development, as mechanisms for promoting greater social order and harmony. The role of organisations such as the Amity Foundation is to improve people’s lives by increasing access to social services and allocating resources paralleling and complementing government initiatives. The future development of these organisations will need to address more than basic needs and an entrance level of economic livelihood whilst maintaining social solidarity. This will become all the more important as China is faced with a host of different variables affecting livelihoods such as; the impact of globalisation, an ageing society, rapid urbanization and environmental degradation. Social construction mechanisms need to address these concerns within the context of economic development. Social organizations therefore act as catalysts to encourage cooperation with the government and companies to increase stability, efficiency and the capacity to encourage positive social construction and development in China.

We were reminded by the Secretary General of the Amity Foundation, Qiu Zhonghui, of the Amity Foundation’s main aims and vision within this context. His brief introduction highlighted the growing social space for organisations to meet social needs and development. Within this context, he envisioned a place for Amity to bridge the gap between affluent society and those in need of resources and help. He further emphasised the importance of sharing resources, borrowing advanced development technology from overseas and promoting a vision of Christian participation through social development. Through the years, Amity has developed a comprehensive holistic approach, with a vision for the future. In the near future, Amity has a role to promote sustainable development, creative solutions to social needs and a responsibility to share knowledge and capacity. Within the Chinese context, there are numerous challenges to supporting the poor, but remarkable achievements have been made that act as a foundation to encourage a harmonious society that caters to all irrespective of geographic area or social background.
regional disparities. These developments affect farmers, migrants and the vulnerable in society disproportionally, strengthening the resolve of the Amity Foundation and its partners to meet these challenges head on.

25th Anniversary celebration ceremony

The ceremony marked an important milestone for the Amity Foundation. Highlights included speeches from important local and international dignitaries, ranging from the United Front to international partners, as well as local partners and staff. The event was attended by the Vice-Governor of Jiangsu Province and the Vice-Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs in Beijing. Mr Zhu Weiqun from the United Front stressed the significance of Amity’s work in the context of social development, encouraging a more ‘harmonious society’, as well as strengthening cooperation with churches and religious institutions. His praise of the Amity Foundation stands a testament to the value that officials place in the work of the Foundation and the impact that we have at a grassroots level. The spokesperson from the Jiangsu Communist Party noted the difficulties in balancing charity resources globally and internationally, suggesting that Amity was and should be a model for NGOs in China. The Amity Foundation therefore continues to be a vital resource for the rural poor but also increasingly in urbanised areas such as Jiangsu, where the Foundation has an impact on social services development, methodology and values represented through their work

Local partners echoed these sentiments. For example, Li Chunyan, a village doctor from Guizhou, stressed the importance of the Amity’s Foundation for those at the grassroots. Since 2000, she has been the main medical resource for a village of 2,800 people and 500 households. She described the importance of the medical service supported by Amity, enabling her and other village doctors to stay in villages to meet vital needs. Initially, villagers did not trust Ms Li because of her age and inexperience, but over a number of years she has become trusted by her patients. Over time, she has even been able to overcome villagers’ fears toward inoculations, therefore limiting child mortality. Similarly, she has helped individuals recover from alcohol addictions and helped patients with long-term illnesses. She suggested that “wherever there is love there is hope” highlighting the continued necessity to meet basic needs, especially in remote rural villages in China. Another local partner, Ms Li Guoming from Guangxi has been in charge of microcredit scheme in Longyuen County. She remarked that the scheme has encouraged social and community cohesion. 24 families not only received loans based on baseline needs assessments but were also trained to manage their new assets and share ideas and skills in the community. She suggested that projects such as these have far-reaching consequences; promoting self-awareness and the capacity to achieve so much more. Amity projects in these areas thereby have the dual purposes of meeting material and social needs, as well as promoting a greater communal consciousness and individual self-worth.

Cultural Evening

The subsequent cultural evening emphasised the variety of local partners involved in Amity’s work as well as important new innovations and changes within the Foundation. A highlight included the establishment of the new Disaster Response team with staff and volunteers; to improve Amity’s response time and strategic planning in relief efforts. The occasion also marked the strategic achievement of cultivating cooperation with volunteers, who were very evident and helpful throughout the whole celebration and officially thanked during this ceremony. These
volunteers will become the foundation for Amity’s future capacity in China, indicating the higher profile of the organisation and the importance attached to its work.

The cultural performances of the minority groups were a testament to the diversity of China, showing the variety of places that Amity works and how different minorities appreciated the assistance and partnership they have received. Close to a hundred members of ethnic minority groups in the four provinces of Guizhou, Guangxi, Yunnan, and Qinghai participated. Their colourful dresses, distinctive music, rarely seen instruments and performances added joy and colour to the celebrations. It was also the first time for the different groups to meet, with many members finding the experience exciting and enriching. There was an obvious sense of pride in their cultural heritage. Their stay in Nanjing included some sightseeing and meetings local NGOs to share their views and culture. The Wa-led minority dance to conclude the carnival brought together the minorities, international, national and local partners as well as the attendees in a symbolic dance to commemorate the work of Amity and lay a foundation for future cooperation.

80 millionth Bible Celebration

The celebration on the 8th November 2010 focused on the completion of the 80 millionth Bible through the Amity Printing Company (APC). The event highlighted the importance of Amity Foundation’s continuing Christian vision and values. This event also marks an important occasion, as the APC has scaled up their operations in the last 3 years, printing 10 million copies of the Bible for domestic and international churches each year.

The celebrations started with a worship service of thanksgiving to commemorate the event. The service and the final resounding notes of the Halleluja Chorus sung by a Christian Miao Choir, poignantly reminded participants of the importance of looking to our Christian values and faith as guiding principles for our work. The Rev. Dr. Cao Shengjie affirmed in her sermon that Christ in his earthly ministry always paid close attention to both spiritual and material needs of the poor. The founding fathers of Amity recognized this and had established both the Amity Printing Company, to print bibles for Christians in China, and the Amity Foundation, which promotes social development for the socially marginalized in some of China’s poorest areas.

The official speeches focused on the importance of the cooperation between international and national churches. Mr Qiu Zhonghui, the Amity Foundation’s General Secretary, underscored three important services provided through the APC. These included increasing the cooperation between the Chinese Church (CCC/TSPM) and Christian society in China with the objective of printing Bibles, involving international churches in the Chinese Christian movement and reaching the Chinese population with the Bible’s and the Amity Foundation’s message of love and charity. From the first Bible printed in November 1987, Amity’s message has been a constant beacon of hope and life for Christians in China. The United Bible Societies’ support and cooperation in founding the press has been vital to the continuing this message of love. Mr Qiu noted a quote from Bishop K.H. Ting; “the Bible connects us, cultures of the West and East”, emphasising Amity’s important role in constructing a common future and understanding of global cultures. The official from the provincial United Front stressed their support for the work of the APC, as a means of promoting church cooperation both at home and abroad. International partners highlighted the historical background of the APC connections to the TSPM. The representative for the
United Bible Societies commented that “all of us today are celebrating a miracle”. The APC therefore demonstrates the importance of “faith active in love” as expressed by Bishop Nicholas Tai Ho-fai of the Hong Kong Christian Council; through practical and spiritual nourishment as well as knowledge.

Reflections on the 25th Anniversary celebrations

The Amity 25th anniversary celebrations combined multiple elements over a few days to cement a strong foundation for the future of Amity’s work in China. The importance of the celebrations cannot be understated, as a meeting of like-minded individuals and organisations with a vision for the poor and marginalised in society. The consultation gave voice to some of the future challenges of meeting these needs in China. The ensuing discussions and conclusions encouraging and informing attitudes and knowledge of international, government and local partners in China. Hopefully promoting further dialogue on how to meet the needs of the poor in a rapidly changing global and Chinese environment. These goals can only be achieved through this type of cooperation, based on the human-centred approach established already 25 years ago. The festivities also marked the growing importance of domestic partners for both project implementation and funding. The occasion allowed the Foundation to showcase the full breadth of projects already engaged in and encouraging more to become involved in collectively building a better and more equitable China for all. The remarkable achievements of the Amity Foundation are only possible through the ongoing support and assistance of our partners and so lastly, we would like to thank you for your past cooperation but also look forward to a continued collaboration and understanding in the future. 🙏

Social Development panel: Impact of Environment

The social and economic development of China is restricted by the environment and the world we live in. Dr. Hong Dayong of Renmin University suggested that many of these problems are avoidable but necessitate more knowledge and experience to properly plan for eventualities and policies. The environmental challenges now faced can therefore be overcome with more effective planning and greater awareness of environmental concerns. Dr. Chen Ajiang of Hohai University furthered our understanding by comparing the Chinese situation with that of the Japanese, where many of the environmental problems are not as visible. But he cautioned that this approach has drawbacks, citing examples such as the Lake Biwa channel to the sea that has badly affected local ecology. Also the levels of energy and clean water consumption in the plastic bottle recycling industry showcase some of the disadvantages of these otherwise positive industries. China needs to learn from past mistakes in other countries to better plan and take into account the environmental impact of development. The two speakers illustrated the need to steward the fragile ecological environment in China and consider the side-effects for and by both social and economic development. The Amity Foundation development projects need to reflect long-term environmental goals as part of a cognitive planning process to improve partners’ and beneficiaries’ livelihoods and capacities and thereby social development in China.
Social Development panel: Third Sector

The Third Sector has seen remarkable changes in China in recent years and is at a crossroads to real engagement and contribution to society. According to Ass. Prof. Chan Kin-man from Chinese University in Hong Kong, the principal catalyst for this was the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008. In response to this natural disaster, over 230 NGOs worked to rehabilitate, rebuild and support new economic enterprise in the affected areas. Modern Chinese NGOs have also developed a much greater level of participation and links with international organisations thereby increasing their capacity to serve. Mr. Xu Yongguang, Secretary General of the Narada Foundation, echoed many of these observations but intimated that there were still restrictions, for example the registration process and lack of a tax exemption system. He further illustrated that there were a number of conditions that affect the range, extent and development of philanthropy and therefore the underlying sustainability of NGOs. These include legislation clarifying responsibilities, government supervision and cooperation, internal organisational governance structures and self-discipline, supervision and participation from society and fair competition between NGOs. Some of these requirements are developed or being developed, especially when examining the larger and more established NGOs such as the Amity Foundation. But to enable the Third Sector to flourish and engage in the larger tasks of social development and construction, a more systematic approach to the prerequisites and internal structures of NGOs needs to be addressed.

Social Development panel: Farmers and migration

The migrant population of China is in a constant state of flux with few choices and even fewer options to engage in the social development process. According to Prof. Ye Jingzhong of China Agricultural University, more than 100 million migrant workers float between rural and urban areas without real status because of the household registration system currently in place. This population has therefore no stake in either social setting to. Dr. Wang Chunguang of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) further elaborated that that this has created a class of outsiders, the ‘semi-urbanisation dilemma’. The migrants face difficulties in the cities with challenges related to citizen’s rights, daily life, social recognition and self-identity. Conversely these same migrants leave social devastation behind in rural areas, where children, women and elderly are left to fend for themselves and shoulder additional burdens of agricultural production and loss of traditional social care systems. The modernisation trend therefore has a disenfranchising effect, promoted by a search for profit and capital, which needs to be studied and managed through a more active engagement with social organisations. The Amity Foundation, in partnership with local governments, is addressing many of the reasons for migrants leaving their villages and exemplifying the need to engage in an urgent dialogue to promote social development in urban and rural as well as for the migrant floating population of China.

Social Development panel: Response of Religion

Religion in China should have a positive impact on and contribution to society. Prof. He Guanghu of Renmin University emphasised that religions, focusing on Christianity, have historically been adapted to Chinese society since Nestorians missionaries first arrived in the 7th century. Now Christianity needs to make a more concerted impact on society, going beyond charitable contributions and social services, as an integral part of the Third Sector. For example, Prof. He suggested that the Christian foundation of moral ethics and in the enlightenment, set a firm foundation for scientific research that will benefit society. Dr. Philip Wickeri, advisor to the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui, re-emphasised the commonality of religions in their response to suffering and poverty through charity and philanthropy. Dr. Wickeri then illuminated participants on the impact of the Protestant Churches ‘ecumenical’ understanding of development as partnership in the 1950s, which developed into a focus on civil society and Millennium Development Goals by the 1990s. Within this historical timeline, Amity’s goals of social development were formulated presupposing 1980s Chinese development goals. Now Amity needs to move beyond these conflicting views of social development, avoiding the pitfalls of working as a church organisation, but embodying the values of Christian ethics and thereby transforming social development in China. Religion therefore has a critical role to play for social development, as a basis for ethics that centre on humanity within a uniquely Chinese context but learning from the experience of churches and religions abroad.
From “Development Aid” to a “Strategic Development Partnership”

Katrin Fiedler

Amity at 25 – Reflections from an Overseas Partner

Coming back from a highly impressive field trip and the ensuing inspiring consultation on social development in Nanjing, my first response is one of congratulations. Clearly, Amity has made another quantum leap since the last big anniversary five years ago. With 2,600 volunteers in its database, a fundraising team that has multiplied the funds raised domestically seventyfold between 2005 and 2010, and dozens of highly qualified professionals on its staff, this success is to a large extent due to Amity’s ever-committed team. As the anniversary celebrations aptly illustrated, this success is also thanks to many dedicated local government partners, and of course the so-called “beneficiaries” who implement the projects in their villages and hometowns.

It is a beautiful yet rare thing that a “third world” development initiative financed largely by western donors reaches or outgrows its sponsors. Yet this is what has happened. Both financially and in its overall work format, Amity has outgrown many of its smaller supporting agencies. One of the first, and perhaps unaccustomed, challenges for Amity’s overseas partners will therefore be how to work on equal footing with Amity. “I would like to send some of my colleagues here for capacity building,” one German colleague sighed after viewing the beautiful and professional video aimed at promoting Amity to new audiences. “For years, our team at home has not been able to produce an appealing English-language video.” It is my hope that many western partners will act on the same impulse and send their staff for mutual exchange and training to China. When it comes to internet-based fundraising or the management of large groups of volunteers, my organization (NMZ) certainly would have much to learn from Amity.

Given the markedly improved economic conditions, international support for development work in China (including Amity) will most likely continue to shrink over the next few years. As ambassadors for Amity in our countries, it will be our challenge to ensure continuous international support for Amity’s work, be it financial or otherwise. Still, our rationale for working together will be based less and less on arguments that centre around Amity’s financial needs or its need for capacity building. Rather, it will – I hope – be based on the global perspective which many of Amity’s partners, as ecumenical organizations with a naturally international outlook, bring to their work. For Amity as a Chinese organization, there will always be strong arguments to engage in development work in China, as long as pockets of poverty remain. For us as foreign partners, however, the strongest arguments for a continuing involvement with Amity comes perhaps from the global perspective. In today’s world, with its interdependent ecology and internationalized economy, China’s domestic development will always have transnational repercussions. To ensure a development that is sustainable both for China and our other partner countries is the challenge to which we all can contribute. This will need new, triangular forms of cooperation that include Amity, western supporters and other partners from developing countries. With its hard-won expertise and coming from a developing country itself, Amity is in a unique position to pass on experience to similar partner organizations, and perhaps in the long run become involved in development initiatives outside of China.

For me as a German, Amity’s development and the challenges we are facing today are symptomatic of our development cooperation with China as a whole. Other overseas partners may see this differently, but it is my hope that Amity’s traditional donor countries will continue to cooperate with Amity financially and, as ever, conceptually. Together, Amity and its overseas partner organizations need to forge a strategic development partnership that can serve as a model for cooperation between China and the West. Because of its sheer size, China’s development affects all of us, wherever we are. We have an interest in supporting a green, strong China which relies on sustainable forms of development both domestically and internationally. Much of what Amity does, be it harmonizing the relationships between different ethnic groups or combating China’s water crisis, benefits not only China, but the global community. With such a strategic development partnership, which defines or justifies itself less through needs and more through goals, Amity would once again be at the forefront not only of China’s development-related NGOs, but also of the wider global development community. In today’s globalized world, we need a strategic development partnership with China to ensure sustainable development opportunities for all the citizens of this world.

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Amity and sustainable development in 21st century

Anders Granberg

The Amity Foundation has and continues to play a unique role in China. From humble beginnings 25 years ago, Amity has grown into an organisation able to tackle larger social issues and promote social development in China. Much of the strength of the organisation lies in its transformative mission and vision, aiming to holistically change attitudes and realities of individuals at the grassroots level. Recent academic and global focus has increasingly concentrated on the concept of sustainable development. Amity is able to implement many of the tenets of this new paradigm because of its integral flexibility and responsiveness to grassroots needs.

Conceptualising sustainable development

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from ‘Our Common Future’, also known as the Brundtland Report (1987); “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs.” The main concepts contained in the report focus on the needs of the poor and the structural limitations inhibiting them from meeting these needs. The idea of limitations is important because it implies a need for outside intervention to change the state of technological or social organisation for the poor in a country. A focus on the needs of the poor implies an approach that considers their view of their problems and concerns. In consequent years, the base definition has been expanded to include elements of environmental concern and a need to consider the capabilities of the poor and ability to improve their perceived quality of life. The environmental concerns are particularly relevant in China, as illustrated in the panel discussion on the environment at the international consultation of the Amity’s 25th anniversary. Recent events such as floods, earthquakes and droughts are part of systemic hindrances to individuals attempting to improve their lives in these areas. Sustainable development in China therefore has to reach the poor, through projects that improve their quality of life whilst maintaining a focus on future generations by preventing large-scale destruction of an area’s environmental capacity.

Sustainable development and Amity’s vision

The Amity Foundation has always had a vision for sustainable development since its inception in 1985. The Foundation was instigated to promote education, social services, health, and rural development from China’s coastal provinces in the east to the minority areas of the west. By nature, Amity has been actively involved in the process of creating an example for sustainable development in China through its project activities and social development promotion. Our vision has three central tenets, which build a strong foundation for sustainable action;

- encourage Christian involvement and participation to meet the needs of society;
- contribute to China’s social development and openness to the outside world;
- serve as a channel for interperson contact and the ecumenical sharing of resources.

These goals underpin Amity’s strategic planning and project focus in a constantly changing international environment. The aims encourage sustainable organisational growth that focuses on a wider holistic development in China. The involvement with church and Christians lies at the core of our engagement with society, showing love in action in a real and practical manner. By giving Christians examples of practical action, we hope to engage both their hearts and minds with care and giving to society, setting examples for sustainable care. This should ultimately promote a healthier and sustainable relationship between church and society and therefore a stable foundation for civil engagement and care for others. Our vision to assist in China’s social development necessitates a long-term approach of gradual change, aimed at supporting emerging civil society and a domestic understanding of needs and practices within such organisations. Our mission to support communication and share resources with the global community facilitates understanding and sharing between partners. The core vision of the Amity Foundation therefore supports sustainably meeting long-term organisational development with a continued focus on the needs of our partners whilst engaging the international community.

Sustainable development and Amity’s mission

The Amity Foundation’s vision translates into a practical reality for sustainable development in China and an example for similar development elsewhere. A model of “love in action” nourishes a sustainable approach to development that places the recipient...
at the centre of the development model. Amity projects use a participatory approach to management that involves a tripartite solution between local beneficiaries, local government and experts brought in by Amity. Such an approach maintains local interest and creates an environment of trust.

This approach also increases project longevity as stakeholders have a legitimate interest in the maintenance of projects for their own benefit. As an example, Amity ensured that local stakeholders were involved in the water project management in Liudong village, Guangxi province. The project was possible because local villagers become involved, providing labour and expertise whilst Amity funded the project through international partners. The project is now self-sustaining as the local stakeholders have created their own maintenance system with checks and balances. The sustainable development approach is particularly evident in rural development projects because of the need to consider larger environmental factors in each project and maintain an ecological balance in local project areas. With greater knowledge-sharing between villagers and project staff, we hope to encourage care for the environment based on a mutual understanding concerning the need to protect these resources for future generations. The same principles of sustainable development are applied to social welfare and other Amity projects. To create a sustainable society we need to consider all sectors in society, especially the disadvantaged and marginalised. In developing a harmonious society, projects and initiatives carefully balance rights and equality, to encourage greater communication and engagement. For example, the orphan project carefully considers the rights of the children when considering their options and the best possible means of reintegration into society.

Sustainable development has therefore been integrated as a concept into many of the projects and methodology behind Amity’s projects. Continued re-assessment of concepts is a must to keep abreast of international developments. Such innovations lie at the heart of the holistic, human-centred approach currently used, but the minutiae of a rights-based approach in management need to be constantly developed. In continuously examining practices, we aspire to affect society, to consider the wider implications for ourselves and our common future.

References


Modern China: the inconsistencies of poverty

Anders Granberg

The Amity Foundation is a Chinese charity, with its headquarters in China and serving the Chinese people. This gives it many unique qualities but also a varied working environment. Modern China reflects many of the inconsistencies of the global economy and society. The incidence of poverty has statistically decreased but inconsistencies within the country show a much more diverse picture of needs. Society is also changing, with a limited but growing civil society. These conditions affect the role and methodology of the Foundation in China, though the vision and mission remain largely constant.

Poverty in modern China

The prevalence of poverty in China differs from region to region depending on levels of global economic integration. The general perspective of poverty in China is that poverty has dropped drastically. Based on World Bank poverty line indications (PPP) that consider poverty at anything below $1.25 per day, the percentage of Chinese poor has dropped from 84% in 1981 to just under 16% in 2005. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China’s statistical communiqué for 2009, using the measure of the rural poverty line with annual per capita net income below 1,196 yuan, the rural population in poverty numbered 35.97 million at the end of the year. These figures show remarkable improvement since the early 1980s and an increasing awareness by the government and international community concerning the importance of addressing poverty at its roots.

However, the picture of poverty in China is also not that simple and exemplifies many of the realities and pitfalls of globalization and rural inequality. Rural and urban disparity is still very evident and many do not have the ability to bring their households our of poverty. The graph displaying basic income inequality from data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics, shows that both rural and urban households have benefited from the economic growth at roughly the same rate. But because of the different
starting incomes of these areas, the inequality gap in real terms has increased substantially to the detriment of rural dwellers. The proportion of expenditure on food compared to households’ total expenditure was 41.0 percent for rural households and 36.5 percent for urban households. Again this exemplifies the different living standards between the rural and urban situation, with the statistics further muddied by great disparities within the rural population between western and eastern provinces of China. This inequality gap is also evident using other measures. For example, according to the China Statistical Yearbook 2009, the number of illiterate adults over 15 nationally was 7.77% but regional statistics ranged from 3.11% in Beijing up to 37.77% in Tibet at both ends of the spectrum. Apart from the regional inequality, China is facing many of the problems associated with more ‘developed economies’ such as a rising age dependency ratio. There has been a rise of roughly 2% since 1980, which may not sound like much unless one compares this figure to the population, showing an estimated rise of 60 million elderly dependent on the working population. The poverty and inequality statistics for China therefore exemplify the complexity of the country and the many challenges now faced including rural poverty, changing age structures and income inequality.

Recently there has been a lot of argument in the media debating China’s status as a developing or developed country. A column by Gideon Rachman, published October 25 2010 in the Financial Times, for instance suggested that “China’s insistence that it is a poor, developing nation is beginning to wear a little thin. This, after all, is a country that is sitting on more than $2,500 billion worth of foreign reserves”. But again, we need a larger perspective of China beyond the simple economic figures. The statistics, as shown, hopefully illustrate that though there have been improvements and huge leaps forward in terms of decreasing poverty incidence, there is still so much to be done.

Other factors in China

Furthermore, an understanding of the modern Chinese context does not only revolve around economic output. Society has been radically transformed in the last few decades, especially civil society and environmental awareness. According to the World Bank, the scale of civil society in numerical terms has increased exponentially, with more than 415,000 officially-registered civil society organizations (CSOs) by 2009. Additionally, thousands of grassroots or community-based organizations are registered as businesses or not even registered and these all play a part providing essential services and providing for the basic needs of the Chinese people. Many of these new CSOs are concerned with the recent environmental developments in China due to its rapid economic growth. The associated environmental degradation directly impacts farmers in rural areas as well as food supplies even for the richer coastal areas. The greater government focus on environmental issues can be seen as a direct response to a growing awareness of global issues such as climate change, as well local economic impact on plant and animal biodiversity. As such, the social and economic climate of China is rapidly evolving with a greater concern for social and environmental issues in addition to traditional poverty alleviation.

Recent development and implications for Amity

In the context of the mentioned data, it is clear that the Chinese context is rapidly changing, which has a direct impact on the Amity Foundation’s methods. Our work has had to evolve to address new dimensions, in addition to a changing international context for our partners overseas. The traditional poverty alleviation projects, as shown with the above statistics, still have as much, if not more relevance. The need to address economic imbalances is important not only for the beneficiaries and local partners but also nationally to promote greater social harmony. In the changing social context of environmental and social concerns, Amity has become a pioneer of innovation and research trends, to create new and sustainable methods and services that respond to these needs. Amity needs to continue to be a learning organisation, sharing knowledge both domestically and internationally. We need to promote a higher capacity to address perceived needs and imbalances in conjunction with government agencies. The greater focus on poverty in rural China and awareness amongst urban Chinese, has helped the Amity Foundation’s profile and reach, creating a positive learning cycle within China for individuals and other CSOs. The changing modern Chinese context presents many challenges but also opportunities for Amity to reach more people and partners to show “love in action” and promote better lives. 🌍
The 25th Anniversary of the Amity Foundation successfully demonstrated the viability of NGO involvement in China. The Christian ideals and values imbued in the organisation carry over into the many projects to improve the lives of the disadvantaged and marginalised in society. The changing environment of Chinese society and Third Sector involvement has profoundly impacted the work of the Amity Foundation. Constant change has provided the impetus and need for project innovation to improve our reach, reliability and assistance to our partners. Many projects use ideas from abroad to enhance services whilst others expand or innovate based on grassroots’ needs and reflections. Amity continues to reflect on the means and methods we employ to reach out to the people of China. We would like to use this opportunity to reflect and highlight some of Amity projects in brief and discuss their impact as snapshots of the wider work of the Amity Foundation.

Social Welfare: Bilingual Education

The social welfare arm of the Amity Foundation has a long history and commitment to supporting the disadvantaged in society, with particular focus on the elderly, orphans and the hearing impaired. Amity intends to act as a facilitator for projects with staff acting in a consultative and supportive role for local partners and projects. Recent focus has been on elderly projects in Nanjing and associated new innovations but ongoing work and innovation is also as evident in the SigAm Bilingual Deaf Education project.

The SigAm project, started in cooperation with Signo Foundation in Norway, aims to reintegrate deaf children into society using sign language. As most deaf children are born to hearing parents, they face communication difficulties not only in society but also at home, making it difficult to communicate needs and express opinions beyond visual gestures. Sign language has been recognised as a means of meeting immediate needs and enhancing communication skills, preventing a loss and risk for children's linguistic, cognitive, social and personal development. Initially in 1987, Amity in cooperation with the Nanjing School for the Deaf, offered only a pre-school program to quickly adapt children to the normal education system. But in 1993, with the help of Dr. Allison Colloway, we came to the conclusion that this was not enough, as the children needed additional skills and a different approach to teaching. Paralleling international research by Prof. Francois Grosjean at the University of Neuchatel, Amity recognised the importance of deaf children acquiring sign language first in order to communicate with their parents. It allows them to learn about the world in general and, at the same time, to integrate into the world of their deaf peers. In addition, sign language facilitates the acquisition of the oral language. It is essential that deaf children be given a chance to grow up with both languages. Thus the bilingual approach in deaf education was first introduced to China by the Amity Foundation in 1996 on the back of measurable success in Norway.

The SigAm Bilingual Deaf Education Project was initiated in 2004. The aim of the project is to establish a bilingual and bicultural program in selected schools for the deaf in China. The project started in 5 deaf schools in Jiangsu Province, with the aim of facilitating the rights of deaf people to education and to a linguistic and cultural development on their own terms. The project has spread to other provinces such as Guizhou and Sichuan, indicating a political willingness to encourage bilingual education. The project has also encouraged the empowerment of the hearing impaired in China through Amity’s participatory approach. This is particularly evident as individuals from the community to become teachers themselves as they are most aware of the difficulties of learning in this fashion following the adage of “don’t talk about us without us”. The SigAm cooperative deaf education project has an impact at the individual, community and policy level in China and is changing the education system at the point of access to become more inclusive and effective.

Sign language taught is taught as part of Amity’s response to needs of the hearing impaired community in China

HIV/AIDS publicity crucial in the communities to combat infections as well as social discrimination
Church-Run Social Service Projects: AIDS project

Amity is an independent Christian social welfare organization that has cooperated with the local Church Council and TSPM, to inform and raise awareness in society about the problems and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Guangxi is one of the provinces with a high rate of HIV/AIDS, caused in part due to drug smuggling and consequent needle sharing amongst drug users. Up to June 2009, 49,948 people living in Guangxi had been infected, making it the second province in China with infected residents numbering over 40,000. Because of this prevalence and evident need, the local Church and Amity through the Nordelbisches Zentrum für Weltmission und Kirchlichen Weltdienst (NMZ - Germany), initiated a project in 2006 to prevent the further spread of infection and educate society about the disease. The project focuses not only on eliminating the fear of HIV/AIDS, but also stereotypes and discrimination, so that carriers can be integrated into mainstream society. Additional work aims to increase public awareness of HIV/AIDS through medical and public health training, particularly amongst the most vulnerable groups.

The emphasis of social service in combination with spreading the gospel is evident in a project in Guangxi, where Amity has cooperated with the local Church Council and TSPM, to inform and raise awareness in society about the problems and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Guangxi is one of the provinces with a high rate of HIV/AIDS, caused in part due to drug smuggling and consequent needle sharing amongst drug users. Up to June 2009, 49,948 people living in Guangxi had been infected, making it the second province in China with infected residents numbering over 40,000. Because of this prevalence and evident need, the local Church and Amity through the Nordelbisches Zentrum für Weltmission und Kirchlichen Weltdienst (NMZ - Germany), initiated a project in 2006 to prevent the further spread of infection and educate society about the disease. The project focuses not only on eliminating the fear of HIV/AIDS, but also stereotypes and discrimination, so that carriers can be integrated into mainstream society. Additional work aims to increase public awareness of HIV/AIDS through medical and public health training, particularly amongst the most vulnerable groups.

The Guangxi TSPM and Christian Council have conducted training seminars, focusing on potential high risk groups in communities and districts. In the southern city of Beihai, they targeted training for drug abusers, employees in entertainment industries and community residents. Particularly migrants areas have been targeted with pamphlets and condoms. The awareness training courses focus on a basic knowledge of HIV/AIDS; causes of the disease and preventative measures. A professional team made up of 4 medical specialists and experts from the autonomous region’s Center of Disease Control have been responsible for planning the teaching materials, setting up the curriculum, giving lessons, offering training and evaluating the results. More than 200 medical specialists and 2,000 lay church members have been mobilized and benefited from the training so far. Public training has aimed to eliminate fear and stigma surrounding the disease, encouraging a focus, care and love for affected individuals and communities. The greatest impact for the project has been the awareness raising exercises within the church and publicly, changing attitudes towards those infected and raising awareness of preventative measures within the community.

Rural Development: Integrated Rural Development

Amity continues to focus many of its projects on the western provinces of China because poverty and the lack of basic needs still pervades the lives of villagers in these remote areas. Villagers frequently suffer from natural disasters and insufficient farm land due to mountainous areas and deserts that make infrastructure development very slow and difficult. For example, for every meter of road constructed in such areas, the local people have to pay several times more than the average. Farming tools, fertilizer and produce from the land have to be transported on the back of horses, donkeys, and even people. The lack of decent transportation makes it hard for local people to improve their living conditions, they have no access to the better resources and technology that would enable their communities to rapidly develop.

Amity’s rural development focus has moved to an integrated approach to address the needs of villagers more holistically and target external limitations. This approach simultaneously targets multiple root causes of poverty indentified by local beneficiaries and partners. The integrated project in rural Guangxi’s Linyun county exemplifies many of the aims and results of this type of innovative approach. The average annual income of farmers is only CNY 1,107 per capita and more than 40,000 inhabitants are living under the poverty line. Natural geographic condition also limit development as the ecological environment is harsh and dominated by steep karst mountains. Amity’s project, in cooperation with the Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED), aims to improve sustainable development balancing environmental protection and agricultural needs; increase local living standards through improved infrastructure; and capacity-building through education and new technologies.

The project has had positive results and impact in local villages. The ecological environment is showing signs of recovery, for example the forest cover in Guangxi Province has increased by 4.2%. These reforested areas improve rates of water loss and soil erosion, which has decreased from 12 acres to 7 acres per year. The skills training has improved levels of production and consequent living standards. For example, agricultural yields in the province have increased from 310 to 390 kg per acre and the average annual income has increased from CNY 930 to 1350 per capita in partnered remote villages. Levels of education participation have also improved, even the number of students starting school has increased by 3% and the drop-out phenomenon has been eliminated. Consequently, illiteracy rates decreased to 15.3%. Farmers have been trained in pig-farming and parallel biogas projects and the material impact on the farmer is evident when visiting villages and noticing the smiles of welcome and appreciation. Farmers and especially women have consequently become more self-confident and participate in projects and the community organisation more effectively. The integrated rural approach propagated by Amity has a material impact by improving livelihoods but also emotional and community benefits, especially for women’s participation.
Basic Health and Public Hygiene: Village Doctors and Clinics

The Amity Foundation has a long-standing relationship with local health authorities in many provinces across western China, aiming to provide accessible, affordable and accountable primary health care to rural communities in these areas. As with many of Amity’s projects, medical needs are exceptionally high in rural and remote areas that lack infrastructure including poor medical services. Medical systems are similarly inadequate and housed in ramshackle personal dwellings with trained personnel leaving for more lucrative jobs in urban areas. Though local governments wish to establish a good medical service network at county, township and village levels, they don’t have enough funds to invest because of underdeveloped local economies. Therefore the aim of village medical programs is to provide the support to build hygienic village clinics and support medical training for rural doctors and medical staff to stay in rural areas.

Amity initiated a village doctor training program in 1989 that by the end of 2004, had provided training opportunities to over 16,000 medical staff in Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Yunnan and Hainan Provinces. Because very few farmers can pay for the services they receive, it takes too long a time for a doctor to make enough money to build an actual clinic from the income earned by providing their medical services. In Majiang County in Guizhou Province, the Amity Foundation has been working with a German development organisation, the Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED), since 2009 to meet the needs of the rural community. The county’s average income in 2009 was CNY 2,576 and a lagging economy had led to low levels of health care and low health awareness. As part of larger rural development project, there was a focus on medical needs to address underlying factors related to poverty in a holistic manner. As a result, new clinics were built to provide better standards and allow the health workers to serve more patients, feel less vulnerable to infections, take more pride in their work, realize higher incomes and stay to serve their communities. The project also provided regular monthly training for the village health workers in the county to increase the sustainability of the scheme.

The Amity health projects often operate within the context of a larger focus on people’s livelihoods in rural areas. The medical component aims to provide the means for villages to have the internal knowledge and skills to address factors such as children’s diseases and gynecological infections more effectively. At a practical level, the clinics also serve as models for the government, demonstrating how cost-effective health services can be delivered even under very difficult circumstances. In fact, the government in Majiang County used Amity’s model to build 25 village clinics after seeing the initial success.

Education: Amity Teachers

The Amity Teachers Program was one of the founding sectors of the Amity Foundation, encouraging international cooperation and exchange whilst teaching essential language skills to teachers in China. This program has had volunteers from around the world participating and teaching in placements throughout China, often small teachers training colleges in rural areas. The program participants are sponsored by churches and agencies abroad and emphasize the importance of Christian service in China by “love in action”. The aim is to have an impact on the skills of current and future generations, thereby encouraging them to support themselves and strive toward achievable goals of improving capabilities and livelihoods. The impact of the program can tangibly be recognized in improving the language skills of future
middle school English teachers and their students.

Rae Sterrett, an Amity teacher, comments on her experience thus far;

“My whole life has changed as a result of doing this program. I came to China in 2005 with a desire to serve others as a Christian, and hopefully learn some practical skills while doing that. I expected to come to China for 2 years, pray for guidance in choosing a future career, and go back to the U.S. ready to pursue that calling. I never expected, after only 2 months of teaching, to be hit with the realization that this is what I want to do the rest of my life. I wanted (and still want) to be a servant of God’s love by teaching English in less-developed areas in the world. I came to China expecting to coax and cajole students into wanting to learn my native tongue while I struggled privately to learn theirs. I could not have conceived of the sheer dogged determination of my students to learn, the joy and pride they took in having a foreign teacher, their delighted enthusiasm when I spoke Chinese, and the encouragement they offered when I shared my difficulties in learning it. My students have expressed, in many different ways, their appreciation for the work that I do in teaching them about Western culture and guiding them in their spoken English. A former student reported that her Chinese and foreign colleagues had been impressed with her inter-cultural communication skills and knowledge that she had acquired with the help of her Amity teachers. However, I think that I have been blessed with even greater joy by being permitted to enter their lives and learn from them what they have to teach me about their culture and perspectives on the world.

In my work as a teacher, I always try to push students to use the oral skills they already have, even if they don’t think they are very good. Since I have taught in teacher-training schools, I use a lot of songs and dialogue in drama skits to encourage students to speak what they are able, and to build confidence in their oral English skills, particularly in front of an audience. I have been thrilled to see many of my students also grow in their belief in themselves as worthy human beings, and I have thankful for that privilege. These 5 years with Amity have been filled with incredible blessings, and while I look forward to this, my last year, with some sadness that it is my last, I am also excited to have one more year of teaching here in China. I am sure that there are still some wonderful experiences to be had, and magnificent students to learn from!”

Disaster Relief, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation: Yushu earthquake overview

The role of relief work for the Amity Foundation has become more important, especially in light of the recent string of natural disasters in China. The work has developed from relief and rehabilitation up to 2007, into more comprehensive disaster management, coordinating efforts with a more long-term vision and scope. The new approach includes training for survivors and emphasises the need to lay the groundwork for the future. 2010 has been a difficult year, with Amity responding to 4 disasters including the drought in the Southwest after Chinese New Year, the Yushu earthquake in Qinghai, the floods in Southwest China and the landslide in Gansu. Consequently, the Amity Foundation made the decision to formalise relief efforts and established the Emergency Relief team during the 25th Anniversary celebrations. This new team can rapidly respond based on initial assessments and engage in more strategic planning; making decisions regarding types of disasters to concentrate on and specialised staff to relieve the pressure on other departments. The specialised team effectively act in relief efforts and can concentrate on evaluating initial assessments and the impact of relief efforts against short-and long-term goals.

The Amity Foundation’s goal in relief work is to satisfy the affected people by providing emergency relief services, and especially the most basic and urgent needs for survival. Once done, Amity tries to restore the livelihoods of affected farmers and herdsmen in remote pastoral areas, in order to lay the foundations for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction. The scope of emergency relief includes: insulation and shelters, food and nutrition, production and education, medical and rehabilitation aspects. The Amity Foundation methodology has always supported the principles of humanitarian relief, the participatory approach, as well as respect and protection of traditional culture. This includes the comprehensive use of the national and international standards for humanitarian emergency work and management practices to standardise the project management process. Specifically, the local context determines the response and planning for the procurement and distribution of supplies, as well as a health-care plan for the injured, with an emphasis on the needs of vulnerable groups such as the elderly, women and children.

In Yushu, Amity provided a lot of direct assistance, for example 2,200 quilts to keep people warm and 32,760 canisters of water. The difficulties with this rescue effort included the high altitude, low temperatures and local food shortages because of poor infrastructure, as well as the length of the relief effort straining staff abilities to respond. Amity’s efforts had real impact because of the rapid response, we were the first NGO on site, and with projects already in the area had a prior knowledge of the local context. Our efforts were supported by large companies such as Tencent as well as the Hong Kong Government, who donated HKD 4.5 million. A total of 43,000 people in 89 villages that were affected received emergency supplies. The Amity relief effort therefore had a real unparalleled impact for those in need. Our past experience has led us to develop a relief effort distinctly suited to the local area but using international and national standards whilst planning for further rehabilitation and training.
Reflections on earthquake emergency relief work in Yushu

He Wen (translation assistance from Maria Vittoria Bortolussi)

During the course of the relief work in Yushu, Qinghai Province, we discovered that the achievement of rescue targets depended on in-depth initial assessments, quality control of relief material, project monitoring, coordinating with other groups and managing efforts in relation to the capacity of staff to assist.

Necessity of in-depth assessment of disaster areas

Project management according to management economics is a process of achieving specific goals and efficiently allocating and using resources. Within emergency relief it is therefore important that planning and goals originate directly from the local context; to understand the specific needs of the affected people and maximize the use of limited resources. After the Yushu earthquake, we conducted a needs assessment to understand current levels of safety, accommodation, food, drink, clothing, nourishment and hygiene of the affected people. Based on this assessment, Amity started with the larger settlements and extended our reach when more aid became available. Constant monitoring was necessary as time passed and needs changed so we were able to adjust quantities and types of goods procured with a view towards long-term nutritional and livelihood needs. For example, food deliveries largely consisted of noodles and vegetables to take into account local eating patterns as well as blocked food sources. Similarly, the main economic activity of the area involved excavating Chinese caterpillar fungus so Amity provided the necessary warm clothing that villagers would not lose a year’s economic activity. The disaster and needs assessment laid the foundation for effective emergency support and provision.

Quality control of aid materials

Resources are the material basis for achieving project goals and without their proper configuration and use, no matter how perfect a project plan might be, it cannot ensure the achievement of project goals. The quality of relief supplies is directly related to the extent to which they meet the demands so we needed to constantly monitor the purchase, transport and distribution of supplies. Experienced staff personally checked quality and made every effort to ensure that all purchased materials met exacting standards and regulations. In addition, staff received quotations from multiple sources to certify quality and price. En route, on the 22-hour journey from Xining, Amity insisted direct delivery to the target villages to minimise risks of related to exposure to the elements. Upon delivery, distribution was immediately organized, according to a pre-arranged system directly to the households, who had to register to confirm receipt of supplies. As a result of strict quality control, the emergency relief was timely and in good condition when it arrived to the recipients and even garnered praise from government-related staff.

Monitoring the emergency relief service

Project monitoring is an important function of the management process. Through constant assessment, it is possible to understand the progressing situation and the immediate products of every activity. With this information it is feasible to continuously improve the relief effort. For example, within 3 days after the delivery of supplies in Yushu, Amity staff were assigned specific villages to monitor feedback and suggestions about the quality and use of received goods. They also encouraged the affected population and local government to express their observations and recommendations regarding the overall emergency relief management. Amity was therefore constantly improving the methodology and scope of the relief effort to provide more targeted relief aid.

Coordination of groups related to the local government and the project

Project management is a social practical activity, necessitating a constant of exchange of information with the surrounding environment. In an emergency context, relief work does not operate in isolation, but is dependent on the strong support of the community, including donors (institutions), volunteers, the affected and the assistance of government departments at all levels. The Amity Foundation therefore kept in constant communication with the immediate stakeholders. The relief effort depended on a spirit of cooperation and close coordination with the approval of local government to ensure within the larger context of the earthquake relief effort.

Necessary humanization of emergency rescue work

The project management structure also needs to take into account that relief efforts are processes dependent on human interaction. Relief work exhibits several differences from other projects, especially regarding the target population who are often in a state of grief and includes people of different age groups, beliefs, health conditions and genders. During this emergency, the participating staff faced a difficult and complex rescue environment, but we constantly endeavoured to show “love in action”. This attitude was apparent in communication with the affected population, local government staff as well as truck drivers delivering the supplies. Amity therefore not only brought goods such as food and clothing to the affected people, but also the warmth and care of society affected people in the earthquake damage zone.
Conclusions

The Amity’s Foundation’s earthquake emergency relief work in Yushu county was able to provide large quantities of emergency supplies to the affected areas thanks to donors, volunteers and the support of government departments. The emergency relief efficiently met the livelihood and basic needs of the affected, helping them overcome the calamity and resume their lives. The project benefited from community care and support as well as the increasing specialization and standardization of management methods. Amity’s relief work still has room for improvement and hopefully the policies now in place will facilitate future efforts in both project management and relief efforts.

Future outlook

Anders Granberg

The last 25 years have been very fruitful for the Amity Foundation, our partners and beneficiaries. But time does not stand still and the changing context in China and globally affects our work and direction. Over the last 25 years we have already been adapting to the environment in China, moving our operations to the western provinces and focusing on new innovations. Future work at the Amity Foundation will follow similar trends, focusing on changing fundraising opportunities, continuing to evolve into source of resources, services and capacity for NGO development and poverty alleviation in China.

The global economic environment has had an effect on the international fundraising capacity of the Amity Foundation. Increasing globalisation and the changing context for our donors in Europe and North America provoke new challenges for our future strategies. The financial crisis since 2008, with the accompanying financial instability, has had an impact on the fundraising capabilities of our partners overseas in addition to changing demographics and concurrent international change in foci. Associated with this trend is the increasing perception of China as a more developed economy and therefore less in need of assistance. Perceptions are often deceiving and Amity continues to meet the needs of the poor in China. Our work has adapted in the more developed areas of the eastern provinces to focus on services for the disadvantaged by advocating new ideas and practices, whilst projects in western provinces continue to address underlying sources of poverty. The rise of Chinese philanthropy is a slowly developing phenomenon encouraged by Amity and other NGOs both domestically and internationally, to encourage participation and ownership of the Chinese development process. But currently the capacity and funding is not high enough so Amity is still reliant on international cooperation for fundraising and publicity. We hope our partners and ourselves can learn from each of our experiences and knowledge of different contexts.

Amity continues to act as a resource provider for poverty alleviation, improving livelihoods and opportunities. In this field, international support continues to be essential. Our methodologies have developed over the last 25 years, with established systems of assessing needs through holistic and participatory approaches. These take account of local contexts in remote villages as well as emergency relief, always focusing on our core aim of showing love to our neighbours in all circumstances. Our projects also focus on improving levels of capacity and self-respect. This is particularly apparent for example in micro-credit schemes that target women from minorities. According to a Yao minority female leader involved in an Amity microcredit scheme, the project has given her both money in her pocket and status to voice her opinions in her family. Additionally, Amity’s projects sustain international cooperation through resources and skills, continuing to build bridges between cultures and peoples both in China and with our international partners.

Amity has long been involved in social care, from the first cooperation with orphanages in the last 1980s. Our social welfare department now has projects that have diversified to provide services ranging from for the autistic and mentally challenged to the hearing impaired. Our future intentions include to provide more services to the elderly to meet increasing demands, starting with our newly established model service centre in Nanjing. We hope that our service models based on Christian values and action, would become institutionalised across the country but adapted to local contexts. Amity hopes to expand our interaction and cooperation with volunteers with emphasis on more church participation, implementing principles of Christian discipleship to serve others. We believe future practice and mythology based on these sound Christian principles will encourage a more harmonious society in China and more interactive social development.

The Amity Foundation envisions a greater future focus on capacity-building both in China and overseas. As reform takes root in China, the need for more professionalism but also integration within the NGO sector is becoming more apparent. Our challenge is now to raise internal levels of competence and
effectiveness, whilst maintaining a broad perspective and vision. The recent developments with the NGO incubators in Nanjing are prime examples of our continuing commitment to the third sector in China and developing further cooperation with overseas social organisations. The aspirations and interests of the charities housed in the NGO incubation centre parallel many of the burgeoning interests of the people in China, with the environment and cultural protection remaining primary foci. The centre allows these charities to learn from the Amity experience but also from each other, to train their staff and volunteers to maximise capacity and reach. The Amity Foundation itself predicts an even greater need for this type of service and possible benefit to NGOs overseas; to learn from the Chinese development experience.

The Amity Foundation looks therefore looks forward to future years working with internal and international partners to improve the lives of our partners and each other through “love in action”. Our vision and responsibilities remain relevant to this constantly changing world so we would like to move forward in cooperation towards shared ideals, creating models of hope for the future.

News

To other tasks

We have had the wonderful company and experience of Dr. Beate Engelen and Oliver Engelen at the Hong Kong Office since August 2006. Beate was in charge of the Amity Newsletter (ANS) and wrote many excellent stories and reports on Amity projects in China. People who regularly read the ANS had found her stories touching and objectively reflecting the situation of the people Amity is privileged to have served. Oliver maintained the Amity Foundation website, giving them their current focus on updating and crisp news clips. His technical IT capacity had made him the resource person to turn to when things went wrong with computers or the network.

Their 2 years as Amity teachers in Tai An (Shandong) before joining the team in Hong Kong had given them valuable insights and helped them to reflect situations with authenticity not otherwise possible. Their perspective about China and her relationship with the outside world has made them a great asset to the Foundation, thoroughly analysing from different angles and helping to illustrate the needs of beneficiaries and local partners whilst effectively communicating with international partners.

As colleagues, they were helpful and their witticism would be dearly missed. The Engelen’s help has been invaluable and we are sure that in returning to their teaching careers in Germany, they will open a window for students there to better appreciate world issues. We would like to wish them all the best in future endeavours as they continue to serve in God’s Name.

New staff

Three new staff have joined Amity Nanjing in the last few months and introduce themselves;

My name is Cui Yazhou and I come from Lian Yungang City of Jiangsu Province. I have been working at Amity for almost a year as a trainer at the NGO Incubation Centre. I am reliable with a pleasant personality and good communication skills. I am also a fresh air fiend. I was attracted to Amity because of the passion for the work that the employees exude, which encourages me. I am very proud to work at the Amity Foundation because I get to do what I like.

My name is Jixiaomin. It is a pleasure and honor to work for the Amity Foundation and with such great colleagues. I graduated from Nanjing University with a major in Journalism. I worked as an editor in a magazine company for some years but the atmosphere at Amity is different. I hope my skills will be fully used in my new position and that I will become an indispensible part of the family at the Amity Foundation.

Hi, this is Wen Fangfang working in Community Development and Environment Protection Team with responsibility for projects in Guangxi and Inner Mongolia. I graduated from Nanjing University in 2009 and joined Amity Foundation that year. I am interested in rural community development because there are still people struggling with poverty but their lives are changing through the work of Amity. I hope my contribution to “love in action” will make a difference for them.