

# Amity Newsletter

A Quarterly Bulletin of The Amity Foundation

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No. 84/1 • January-March 2008



## New Homes

A Home with a View  
in Butuo

An AIDS Orphan Needs  
a New Shelter

Amity's Snowstorm  
Relief Efforts



Zizuo, an orphaned girl whose parents died of AIDS, sitting in her "kitchen corner".

The **Amity Newsletter** is a quarterly publication reporting on the projects of the Amity Foundation. It is distributed free of charge. **However, we welcome an annual contribution of US\$10 from readers.**

**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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Published by The Amity Foundation  
 Printed by the Amity Printing Company, Ltd.  
 Editor: Dr. Beate Engelen

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Amity has responded to one of the most devastating winter storms in China's recent history by offering disaster relief. Reconstruction efforts will follow.

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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 40 full-time staffers 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.




Background

## Mud Huts into Brick Houses

by Beate Engelen

For a week, Gong Sheng, Yue Yaomeng and I explored daily life of the Yi people in Butuo, a mountainous, high-altitude county of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Region. Down in the lowlands of Liangshan at the shores of Lake Qionghai, the air and the scenery felt like Italy. But up here, in the rugged mountains (above), biting night frosts made us shiver even in our comfortable hotel. How much more the locals had been freezing who lived in mud huts we could not imagine (below left).

Together with Habitat for Humanity, Amity supports a program in this area which replaces collapsing mud huts (above left) with solid brick houses (opposite). After the successful end of the project, people will not be afraid anymore of being buried alive under a collapsing wall. And if everything goes well, it will not rain any more through the roofs. Local people are confident but building new homes in remote areas is not always easily achieved. Building material has to be transported where roads are in bad shape, or where there are no roads at all. Young people who are strong enough to help with construction are not always available. Earning money as migrant workers is their main duty because somebody has to raise the money for the RMB 5000 mortgage every family pays themselves for a new home. But defying all odds, thirty families are planning to move into the new homes soon. 



## House Building

# A Home with a View

by Gong Sheng

The land around here is barren. For many generations, the Yi people of Butuo County have been working hard to turn this patch of Southern Sichuan into a more beautiful place. The mountains are towering high. For several thousand years, the Yi have been toiling to cultivate this wasteland. However, poverty seems to have spread like an epidemic among Yi families - generation after generation.

It was in 2001 that staff from Amity's integrated development division first came to Butuo. Since then, people

from the local Yi minority have developed an idea what social responsibility and care for the underprivileged can mean in practice: people moved from their mud huts, which they shared with their animals, into new homes. A system for clean tap water has been installed so people do not need to fetch water from holes in the cliffs any more. Slippery dirt roads were replaced by plane concrete roads, which makes walking a lot easier. And for the first time in their lives, the villagers have been able to learn some basic mathematics.





Now they can check if their eggs they bring to the market are sold at the agreed price.

It seems that the high mountains of Butuo can block peoples' view but they cannot keep them from realizing their dreams. Edizitu, an Yi man in his early thirties, tries to do just that: owning a little house with windows and a tiled roof. He lives with his family in Liupo, a tiny mountain village in Butuo County. From long hours of work in the fields, he has come to look more like fifty than thirty.

When he was five years old, his father died from a severe disease. His mother could not bear the loss and kept crying all day long. Two years later, she died too. All she left to her son was a primitive hut built in the 1980s of sun-dried mud bricks. From this time on, Edizitu survived only because other people fed him and gave him clothes. With the help of some kindhearted neighbors he managed to complete four years of elementary school. But after this, he did not want to trouble other people anymore, so he quit school and took up farm work instead.

Talking about these miserable past events, Edizitu says that he blames nobody because he firmly believes that problems are always temporary. He thought that, if only he used his two hands and worked hard, things would turn better. Now he has his own family with three lovely girls and a little son who has just started to walk. His oldest daughter is 13 and the youngest not even two. To support his family, Edizitu works in the fields from dawn to dusk. At times, he also helps old widows in the village with their own farm and house work. The family raises four pigs and three chickens, which they sell in the county seat market. This is the annual income of the family.

Edizitu had always had a dream, he told us. For a long time he wanted to have one of these beautiful tiled-roof houses. Over the years, the house which his parents had left to him had become wretched. Layer after layer of the sun-dried bricks were coming down and people would see ever more clearly the family's misfortune.

Then, in 2007, Amity and Habitat for Humanity started the house-building project in Liupo. When people from Amity's local office came to the village with the good news, Edizitu was brimming with enthusiasm for this project: "I was so excited that I couldn't sleep for several days," he remembers, "I had always thought a new house would remain just a dream."

One worry remained, though - he had to raise RMB 5000 by himself. In addition to his own savings of RMB 2000, he had to borrow RMB 3000 from several other people before he was able to take part in Amity's project.

Edizitu will move into his spacious new home after some final construction work is done, he told us. Unlike his old hut, the new house has windows so fresh air can circulate easily. Also, he is not afraid anymore that the walls might collapse. His children are all excited to move in, too. Every day they run down the hill to look at their new home.

What is even better, the project has changed the villagers' outlook. They are now much more willing to work together and help those families who do not have enough people to build a house on their own. Now, an atmosphere of helpfulness and cooperation can be felt everywhere. When we arrived at the construction site, Edizitu himself was working on a neighbor's rooftop. "Amity has done good for the village and its people," he says. 🍵

Members of an Yi village community in Butuo County (Sichuan) help each other build their new homes, which Amity and Habitat for Humanity co-finance. (above)

Edizitu (below left), a young father of four children, in front of his old and new houses. He firmly believes that life is bound to get better when you work hard. As regards his home, he has proved to be right.



# An Orphan “Princess”

**A Girl from the Yi Minority Might Get a New Home - But Not a Family**

by Beate Engelen

The photo of a big-eyed girl captures my attention when Ajia Rebu, a local official in charge of orphans in Butuo county, hands us some files as we are sitting in the back seat of the car. He hopes that Amity will decide to support

some of “his” girls, who have lost both parents. Their numbers are rising in the area. As our rusty four-by-four turns into a reddish dirt road and right onto a narrow bridge without a guardrail, the car starts bouncing and I grip the handle tighter. In Butuo, an impoverished county of the Liangshan Autonomous Region in Sichuan’s mountainous south, few roads have tarmac and bridges look like they will collapse at any moment. But as I have decided to visit members of the Yi minority in the mountain villages, I have to defy the potholes and brave the sight of water torrents below the car windows. This afternoon, it is the big-eyed girl I want to meet.

With Gong Sheng and Yue Yao-meng, two of my colleagues from Nanjing, I take a week-long trip to visit Amity projects in a region gripped by severe poverty. Covering an area about the size of Ireland, Liangshan has a desperately low economic profile and Butuo is one of its poorest counties. Average per-capita income is around US\$ 90 a year. The high valleys and mountain ridges of Butuo with their pine forests and waterfalls offer stunning views - but little to feed the local people.

As I look out the dusted car windows while we are spiraling up the mountain, straw-thatched earthen houses roll by. Passing through a village, the driver keeps hitting the brakes and pressing the horn in a futile effort to scare away families of pigs, sunbathing dogs and sleepy cows. Beyond the scramble of huts, where the terraced fields begin, peasants walk behind their wooden ox ploughs, which are still commonly used among the Yi. Women and children stumble after them, breaking up the bigger lumps of soil with hatchets before corn or buckwheat is sown.

A satellite dish perched on the roof of a mud hut here and there indicates that modern life has not entirely passed by Yi villages; but except for electricity, modern-day amenities seem completely absent. Mobile phones are hardly known and instead of driving cars or riding motorcycles, people use carts. They are pulled by sturdy horses the size of large dogs. On the face of it, life out here has a laid-back charm.

## Drugs and AIDS

Yet this peaceful atmosphere is deceptive. The downsides of modern life, like the use of drugs, have long entered this pre-modern world, with AIDS following in its wake. Butuo is located at one of the major transit routes for narcotics, which connects the poppy fields of the so-called “Golden Triangle” with the underground markets in Gansu Province and beyond. Many of the locals are affected by this, especially the young.

In Butuo, the gateway drug is not marijuana but - heroin, which is generally considered the most devastating drug of all. According to a local official, a great amount of villagers use it. Most of them are men but the number of female addicts is rising. Estimates are hard to verify because drug use is still considered a serious crime and people are reluctant to admit they are addicted. However, the temptation to “get hooked” is great in an environment where a first shot of heroin costs less than US\$ 2. “Where drugs are cheaper than medicine,” says Yang Huiming, Amity’s local partner in Butuo, “people will choose heroin to kill their pain.”

To save money, heroin addicts usually share needles - not aware of

the dangers of HIV/AIDS. Most of the 2700 orphans of Butuo, says Ajia Rebu, lost their parents to AIDS. Nevertheless, most people in the mountain villages have never even heard of the disease and, as a consequence, do not take any precautionary measures. Unsurprisingly, the number of AIDS orphans is increasing.

One of these orphans is the big-eyed girl from Ajia Rebu’s files. She is the daughter of an Yi family. Her name is Zizuo, we are told, and she is 13 years old. First she lost her father, who was a drug addict. Some years later, she lost her mother, too. Both parents died of an unknown disease. Very probably it was AIDS. A rich donor from a major church in Zhejiang, a well-off coastal province, has pledged to support an orphan by covering her living expenses and, if necessary, having a solid hut built for her. It is now our turn to get to know her and make sure that she really needs outside support.

## Meeting an orphaned girl

The sun is setting when we arrive at the village. At the end of a narrow path in front of an earthen wall, a young mother and a group of children sit on a pile of corn stalks, basking in



In Butuo, people use horse carts instead of cars.

the last rays of the winter sun. A pretty girl, small and shy, is introduced to us: Zizuo. She is so embarrassed that she hardly dares to raise her eyes. But even though her thin cape looks drab and dusty, she wears it with the grace of a little princess. I immediately feel drawn to her.

We are invited into her tiny, windowless room, which has a bed, a small desk and an open hearth. Here, she lives all by herself. A sister of her late mother keeps an eye on Zizuo but this aunt is obviously not in charge. Officially, Zizuo does have relatives who are responsible for taking care of her. Her father's older brother was appointed her guardian after both parents had passed away. But this uncle and his wife have long since left in order to live as migrant workers further east. Only once a year do they return for a short visit.

Meanwhile, Zizuo does her washing, cooking and housekeeping without anyone's help. When she comes back from school, she does her homework and then collects firewood and food for her aunt's pigs. What is her favorite food, I ask her - "Meat, just meat, any kind." Meat is what she never gets. Her meals consist of noodles, potatoes and vegetables, which she stores on a small shelf next to the hearth. We regret not having brought any food for her, but at least we have some other small presents: a little notepad and a few colored pens.

These are things seldom seen in the village - much less in the hands of


an orphan. From behind, a crowd of children press into Zizuo's shed, craning their necks to get a glimpse of what is happening inside. Seeing so many young children, Gong Sheng asks Zizuo if they are her friends. But Zizuo hides her face behind her patched-up cape and keeps silent. "Orphans," says Ajia Rebu in her place, "don't have many friends." And an orphaned girl is at the very lowest level of a society which values boys and family networks.

### Future prospects

Zizuo is struggling to overcome her embarrassment as we are taking photos. Watching her, I wonder about her uncertain future. Girls from poor villages in Sichuan are often married off to some moneyed men in the east, who can afford a higher dowry than the prospective spouses at home. Little does it matter how girls feel about this kind of marriage transaction. Grinding poverty shifts people's priorities. Zizuo could be one of those married off for a good price. Moreover, who knows for sure that she will not be driven to join the rising wave of migrant women who head for the big cities? Sex workers are more than welcome in the growing entertainment industry in places like Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan. What if Zizuo is given an initial free dose of drugs by a dealer who is looking for new customers?



Many addicts in Butuo make a living and finance their addiction by selling drugs to other young people, even on the local school campus. If nobody tells Zizuo about the dangers of addiction, she may well be drawn into the shadows of the drug business.

However, Zizuo's future does not look all bleak. Her monthly allowance and a new home will help her a lot to carry on and eventually find her own place in the community. Maybe she will find emotional warmth, attention and care, too, despite the fact that she has no family. As we wave the villagers goodbye and return to our car, I glance back at the scene. Some of the children have already grabbed the new notepad from Zizuo's hands. Will they return it to her? For the other children, she is just an orphan, not a princess. 



Curious children look at Zizuo's presents (left). A notepad and pens are seldom seen in the village, at least not in the hands of an orphaned girl.



Sichuan

## Butuo County

Almost 23,000 of a total of 140,000 residents live below the poverty line (= less than 1000 RMB/ US\$ 140 annual income). Many of those who happen to live above the poverty line are still too poor to afford a new home.

More than 95% of the population of Butuo belong to the Yi minority.

## Yi Women

For Yi women, child bearing is essential. Childless wives are commonly sent back to their families in disgrace. Official estimates say that women's life expectancy in Butuo ranges around 45 years (national average is 71). Drug usage and the old tradition of having several sex partners before marriage make Yi women increasingly vulnerable to get AIDS.





Disaster Relief

## Snowstorm Victims Relieved

The fiercest snowstorms in fifty years wreaked havoc in Central and Southern China around the Lunar New Year Festival. Millions of people traveling home for the festival were stranded after travel routes were blocked. With 1.7 million evacuees the storm has made more people temporarily homeless than Hurricane Katrina, according to international reports.

Mainly due to interrupted railway services, energy supply lines were disrupted as well. This caused a rising energy shortage in more than half of the country. In the affected regions coal and other fuel could not be delivered for several weeks. Drinking water also became scarce because pipes were frozen. In the hardest hit areas people were cut off from any kind of information because there was not even enough electricity to recharge cell phone batteries, much less for television. The storm has caused most damage

where people are not used to cold temperatures or big amounts of snow and ice. Amity responded by sending staff and relief supplies to the city of Majiang in Guizhou Province. This city had never seen a snow disaster of this extent in its recorded history. Amity has provided RMB 150,000 of urgent rescue funds along with 1000 warm blankets.

Amity staffers Tan Hua (above) and Cao Hui went to Jingyang Xiang, a remote village in the vicinity of Majiang, to distribute much awaited blankets and thermal underwear. "The road went up two very steep slopes and was covered with ice," says Tan Hua, "and people were afraid that the car wouldn't make it all the way, so we used shoulder poles to carry the stuff up the mountain." When they arrived, a crowd of people was already waiting in front of the village committee house. "We also brought material to homes far away and to those who

could not walk," says Tan Hua.

Meanwhile, Tan Hua and Cao Hui found out that one of Amity's biogas projects had unexpectedly become a factor in disaster relief. 300 farmers who had been provided by Amity with biogas systems remained independent of dwindling power supplies during the snow disaster. The lights went out in many households during blackouts - but theirs did not.

Amity will help with rehabilitation work in Majiang. The reconstruction of houses above 60 square meters which have collapsed under the snow will be supported. Amity will also help to replace damaged greenhouses to minimize the financial loss of the peasants. Farmers who have lost their animals because of the cold or whose stables were destroyed will receive financial help from Amity as well.

Over RMB 2 million have been donated by national and international donors and organizations. The money is used to reduce the impact of the disaster on people in Guizhou and Hunan. We would like to thank all our donors who have contributed to relieving the hardship of people in the snowstorm-affected areas.

Exposure Tour

## Hong Kong Students Visit Guizhou during a Christmas Trip

During Christmas time, 28 young people from the Hong Kong Swatow Baptist Church experienced first hand how different life can be as a child of a mainland farmer. For one week, Tong Su from Amity's Hong Kong office accompanied a group of middle school students to the mountains of Guizhou near Puding, where they visited poverty alleviation projects (biogas, water) and several Amity-supported schools.

Bringing the spirit of Christmas to farmers in Guizhou was the Hong Kong students' declared purpose, but they felt that they themselves were the ones who received most. The group met with many teachers, students and parents from the

mountain villages and were able to go to the students' homes to take part in family life and learn more about the underlying reasons for poverty in the area.

The Hong Kong students were impressed by the village children's discipline and dedication in helping their parents with household chores and farm work. "I just watch TV or play with my computer when I come home from school," says Tan Weixing, a Hong Kong student, "but these kids take care of the housework".

Staff at Amity's Hong Kong office offer exposure tours to Amity projects on a regular basis to groups interested in development work. at the grassroots level in mainland China.





Amity Printing Company

## Bibles for the Olympics and the World

The Amity Printing Company (APC) has celebrated the printing of the 50 millionth bible on 8 December 2007.

Mr. Qiu Zhonghui, General Secretary of the Amity Foundation and Chair of the Board of the Amity Printing Company, enthused that the work of the printing company serves Chinese Christians, overseas Christians and the social service work of the Amity Foundation.

Bishop Ting, quoting 1st Corinthians 13:8 "Love never ends," proclaimed that the Bible printing ministry provides a way to spread the gospel and the love of Jesus.

Sending his congratulatory message to the celebration, the most Revd. Dr. John Chew, Archbishop of the South East Asia Province of the Anglican Church, said that the completion of 50 million copies of the Bible "is truly a public and most commendable witness and testimony of the genuine and fruitful partner-

ship of many Christians and churches both in and outside of China."

Speaking at the celebration, Mr. Ye Xiaowen, Director of State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) announced that Bibles printed at APC will be made available at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

The Amity Printing Company is now one of the biggest Bible printing presses in the world and one of the thin paper printing experts in China. To date, the company has produced 41 million Bibles for distribution in China and 9 million Bibles for overseas distribution. The 9 million Bibles exported have been printed in 75 different languages, including English, German, Spanish, French together with many African languages.

Amity and the United Bible Societies (UBS) agreed that they will continue their joint venture for another 10 years, to 2018, at a signing ceremony that preceded the celebration (above).

## New Calling

Zhang Liwei, former associate general secretary and a long-time member of Amity's Nanjing staff, has assumed a new position, following a call from Nanjing University. For many years, he served Amity and contributed a lot to the organization's advancement with his professionalism, thoroughness, devotion and cordiality. He will be greatly missed. Fortunately, Zhang Liwei will remain a consultant for Amity.



## Fundraising

### Hong Kong Bank Donates

Amity has received a donation of HKD 300,000 from Hong Kong's Wing Lung Bank as part of a celebration commemorating the opening of the bank's new branch in Shanghai. She Hongyu, associate director of Amity's research and development division and Anthony Tong, board member of Amity's Hong Kong office, received the money to be used for victims of the latest snowstorm disaster. The donation was made following the first national and international call for disaster relief by the Amity Foundation. So far, Amity has already received some CNY 2 million worth of donations, both disaster relief material and money. Amity has started disaster relief work in the hardest-hit areas of Guizhou, Hunan, Guangxi and Anhui.

## CCC/TSPM

### Social Service as Testimony

Qiu Zhonghui, General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, has given a comprehensive account and outlook of Amity's work during a speech at the 8th National Conference of the China Christian Council/Three-Self-Patriotic-Movement (CCC/TSPM). He pointed out that social service should be seen as a testimony of God's love. "Persisting in the belief that even the Son of Man came to serve," Qiu said "we strive to serve the society's weak and powerless." Since Amity was founded, US\$ 135 million have been raised by the foundation to help millions of people. Amity's success, Qiu said, was rooted in the adherence to several principles, among them strict project management standards, regular on-site visits, and a transparent work ethics. He and his staff, he said, will continue to be servants to all as Jesus Christ had told every Christian to be.