

Amity Newsletter

A Quarterly Bulletin of The Amity Foundation

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Building Civil Society

What is Civil Society
in China?

The "Happy Bread Angels"
at Work

Bilingual Deaf Education
Promotes Civil Society



At a gathering of a self-help group of leprosy patients organized by Amity. The banner reads: less prejudice, more love.

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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

Civil Society on the Rise


by Beate Engelen

An Amity volunteer teaches an extra English class to students at a school for the children of migrant workers (above). The quality of teaching in these schools tends to be low. Extra classes taught by volunteers are therefore very welcome to the students.

When my husband and I first became involved with Amity as teachers in a small college in Shandong four years ago, we found that many of our students were interested in some kind of voluntary work. They wanted to do something for elderly people, disabled children or the environment. What really impressed them that year, they told us, was an American who had allegedly spent his summer cleaning up the slopes of Mount Tai behind our campus, walking up and down the mountain collecting garbage tourists had left. The students were keen on doing something similarly useful, they said. The school did not particularly encourage such activities as volunteer work in the community was not part of the official curriculum. But it was obvious that many students were looking for an opportunity to get involved.

This experience was my first encounter with “civil society” in China. Since then I have been looking for more evidence. Over the years I came to realize that Chinese society has still less room for individuals to engage in community work or volunteer initiatives than many other countries. But spaces are opening up. Today, more people in China engage in communal services and fund-raising events than ever before. And since last year, strengthening civil society has received some support from the government. Some officials now see the establishment of civil society as a viable means of easing social tensions and balancing inequalities between social groups.

Promoting certain aspects of civil society has always been an important part of Amity’s work. Amity wants common people to become involved in their communities, to take responsibility for underprivileged members of society and to shake off prejudices. Amity is in a good position because the organization has close links with different groups and communities at the grassroots level. Fund-raising efforts are intensified to give common people an opportunity to give and do good. And - perhaps most important - Amity involves a rising number of volunteers to do social work in the community and get in touch with people in need.

Evidence of civil society on the rise is everywhere. Recently, one of my former students from Shandong signed up to become an Amity volunteer. She finally had a chance to explore how it feels to get involved and take social responsibility. It is people like her who promote civil society in China. 

Who Cares?

by Wang Ying

An Amity volunteer dares to look at social reality a world apart from her own comfortable city life.

At the end of December last year, I took part in an activity organized by the Amity Foundation. We went on a field trip to interview orphans who live in northern Jiangsu, not far from Nanjing. This experience made a deep impression on me. I already knew that life is not easy for orphans. But not until I saw their living conditions with my own two eyes did I realize how poor they really are.

These children lost both of their parents and now live with their grandparents or other relatives. The houses they live in are cold, dark and shabby. They have only a small patch of fields where they can grow crops to make a living. Their grandparents are already old and they are usually not

very healthy. Other relatives are not very rich either. This means they are in for a lot of trouble when they take care of orphaned children. Orphans, therefore, start taking on household and family responsibilities at an early age.

In the morning, the orphans rise very early to prepare breakfast. Afterwards they go to school. Some of the schools are far away from their homes but an orphan normally cannot afford a bike. So they walk all the way. When they come back from school they need to do housework and look after their grandparents and their younger siblings. Seeing them, I became aware how carefree my own life has been.

Comparing our lives

During the days of our visit, the weather became colder. I was rearranging the clothes in my closet when I suddenly realized how many clothes I had - clothes I never wore. There even were some clothes I had never worn at all. But poor people like the orphans wear shoes with holes in them and threadbare clothes which the cold wind blows through. Clothes are passed on from elder to younger brothers and sisters even if they are worn and shabby.

People say that it is a great thing for students, especially for those liv-

ing in the cities, that there are school vacations. Students can either take part in organized vacation activities or they can take trips with their parents to places somewhere in China. But for children who live in poverty these activities are like the tales from the Arabian Nights. During vacation time, poor children are supposed to help with farm work, do housework or take part-time jobs to support their families. We - the kids from the city - take it for granted that we receive nine years of compulsory education. But when we look at poor children we have to admit that for them education is just a distant dream.

Some people say, life is fair and bad luck will eventually turn out for the better. But look at us! Sure, we may have failed to go to a favored university or suffered from love sickness, but apart from that, life has given us so much. Yet for those children who do not have enough food to eat and clothes to wear, fairness is just an illusion.

Friends, only if every single one of us has the heart and the compassion to do something good, no matter how little, can we convince these children that there are still people who care. 🍎

Wang Ying (in pink) and former Amity staff Zhang Liwei at an orphan's home in Northern Jiangsu.



Relationships Rediscovered: Civil Society in China

by Li Xue

“Sir, can you tell me why these people do not allow a stranger into their homes to warm his hands? Look at the bright windows. Their fires must be huge.”

The bus is rumbling up. I hastily withdraw my hand from his and shout: “It’s because these people are more civilized than the mountain people ...”

Ai Wu: A Winter Night

Snow this year was heavy. On the sidewalk of a little street connecting the neighborhood residences with the supermarket, a homeless person was wrapped between a cotton-padded mattress and a quilt, stiff with dirt. As I returned home passing through this modern and expensive part of the city, where people use number codes to unlock their doors, I thought of Ai Wu’s “A Winter Night”. A stranger who wanted to find a place to rest or to warm his hands here would find it difficult.

The next day my mother and I took some money to give to the homeless man. He took the money and stuffed it into his pocket but did not answer any questions. Instead, he just stared expressionless down the street. My mother and I did not give up, though. We kept asking questions, trying to find out if maybe he was mentally ill. It did not take long for people to stop as well. An elderly man said: “He has mental problems. I gave him some clothes but he wasn’t sure if he wanted to wear them and just threw them aside.” A young woman said: “Give him some instant noodles!” And an elderly woman recalled: “My

son has called the television station, which runs a ‘suggestion box’ program, twice so far but they said that they couldn’t do much ...they didn’t come.”

Apparently, quite a few people in this neighborhood knew the man. Everybody stopped to pity him and then -- left again. I could not help thinking: the media felt that showing such a man would not translate into high viewing rates. The people in the street in turn were not sure which government department was responsible in such a case, and should not there be charities to take care of people like this man anyway?

Charity traditions

In Chinese tradition “the poor”, “the scholar” and “the official” are social terms interconnected in a special way. Confucian scholars of the early times liked to be associated with a poor and humble lifestyle because it expressed their aloofness from material pursuits and politics. Poverty was in this sense perceived as a social value. Nevertheless, the term also described the regrettable state of penniless people, a state which destroys family relationships.

About ten years ago, the Taiwanese scholar Liang Qizi evaluated 2615 historical documents on charities of the Ming and Qing dynasties, which he collected in mainland China and abroad.¹ He looked at charities which stressed philanthropy, helped people and did not worry about their own benefits. In those days, he found, charities educated society just by do-

¹Liang Qizi, *Shishan yu jiaohua: Ming Qing de cishan zuji*, (Philanthropy and edification: philanthropic associations in Ming and Qing times), Taipei 1997.

ing good and taught people values shared by Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism alike.

Similar to early western charitable organizations, it was religious belief which prompted philanthropy. But there are differences between China and the West. Unlike western charities in the 18th and 19th century, Chinese organizations were not yet confronted with social change. Chinese society at that time was mainly rural and did not have to deal with an impoverished working class. There was no renewal of ideas, nor were there any irritations with the effects of an industrial revolution. Instead, Chinese charities in Ming and Qing times played their part in preserving the social status quo. As a consequence, reexamination or innovation of the social welfare system was never a topic.

During Ming rule (1368-1644) it was mainly the high-ranking and influential members of the gentry who founded charitable organizations. They did this in a rather off-hand manner. Until the Qing dynasty these charities depended solely on local resources. Only gradually did they draw the attention and support of the

In China, it was religious belief which prompted philanthropy.

central government. When the Qing came to power, local people, who were socially active, no longer relied exclusively on one patron from the elite class. More and more Confucian scholars from the lower levels of society became involved in the smaller towns. These lower-class scholars received an orthodox Confucian education but they were also influenced by Buddhist and Daoist beliefs. They were not concerned with reforming the system, nor did they deliberately side with influential groups in opposition to the Qing government. Instead, they only tried to consolidate their own social position and strengthen their influence on local affairs.

Since the 1990’s, scholars and business people have discussed the question of whether China has a civil society. If it has, they have wondered,

what are its characteristics, and is the emergence of charities and welfare organizations something which will eventually lead to the development of a civil society? Chinese history suggests that even during times of strong central government control, a certain public sphere has always existed apart from the two major focal points of society: family and the nation.

For example, during early Qing rule in the second half of the 17th century, the government was determined to rein in the influence of literary societies. Still, local philanthropic societies prospered. Charities in ancient China were of a non-confrontational sort, trying to teach people basic values and, at the same time, reducing social problems. The government and charities, bureaucrats and members of charitable organizations relied on each other. There were also tensions, though, when, for example, taxes and duties were levied and when organizations like charities could be used to ease tensions between the local governments and the center.

Current Developments

The public space of current society is becoming ever more difficult to de-

scribe. Pages of history books filled until only recently no longer discuss “poverty” as a strain on family relationships or a culturally high-ranking status in the Confucian sense of the word. The texts now implicitly refer to poverty as a group of related social problems: education, health care, job search etc. Poverty is not regarded as having one cause but many: Migrant workers, children who drop out of school, disabled people, AIDS patients, sex workers, drug addicts, and all those people who struggle at the edge of society, having different grievances and needs.


Compared with organizations during the Ming and Qing periods, charities in China have become very diverse. Charities and welfare organizations have worked with various poverty-afflicted groups in many different areas. Some of today’s welfare organizations receive funds from the government, some from overseas and some from individual “benefactors”. Their focuses and work ethics are different from each other, too. And new challenges are emerging.

Today, material goods and financial resources are sent from the east of China to the west, from cities to

villages, from developed areas to economically backward regions. This seems to be a good thing; however, the differences between the local people and those coming from outside in order to help often create problems which are difficult to solve. At Amity we used to say that the resources which come to us from overseas do good to everybody who is involved in Amity projects at the grassroots level; but the geographical distance between the local communities and Amity staff members remains a problem. Amity tries to improve communication by setting up local project offices.

Nevertheless, the effort of building bridges is very important and should not be underestimated. I remember last year’s international HIV/AIDS conference in Henan. Participants had different religious beliefs and, in fact, had never met before, but they participated in the same training class on AIDS prevention. In the special atmosphere of this training class everybody quickly warmed up to each other. The Muslims were able to experience the charms of their Christian brothers and sisters and the Christians caught a glimpse of genuine Muslim culture. The most

important thing, however, was that local people had an opportunity to learn the basic facts about AIDS. Many projects are like this. The scale of such projects seems to be small but the projects have an important and long-lasting impact: a legal aid station for migrant workers, a class in sign language for disabled children and a lot of other activities designed to reach people who are cast away by the rest of society.

In that pile of blankets at the corner of the snow-covered street, there is this poor man. Looking at him, I forget all those theories about where social responsibility fits in between the political arena and the forces of the market. He just reminds me that civil society starts right at our doorsteps. 



An Amity volunteer helping an orphaned child with her homework.

Happy Bread Angels

by Yin Xisheng



Amity's Home of Blessings has opened a bakery as a vocational training institution for developmentally disabled people. Giving them an opportunity to work in a real-life workplace has improved the lives of people with Down syndrome - and those of their customers.

30-year-old Zhou Jian from Nanjing has just mastered the first vocational skill in his life - baking bread. What may seem rather commonplace to most people is far from normal in his case. Zhou Jian was born with Down syndrome and was, until recently, completely dependent on his family. People with Down syndrome often have lower than average cognitive ability; a few are severely mentally disabled. Zhou Jian's parents provided care for him 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, all year round. They will never forget the moment they tasted the first piece of bread baked by their son: it marked a huge step in his life. In the near future, he may even be able to support himself with his new skill, which he learned with the help of the Amity Home of Blessings.

The main reason for Amity to open a bakery was that there is an ur-

gent need for vocational training for developmentally disabled people in China. A great number of them have spent basically all their lives at home, which not only makes them less and less able to develop skills and interact with other people but also adds to the economic and emotional burden on their families. Training developmentally disabled people to take care of themselves, so they don't depend on family members for everything, is of very high importance in the care for these people. However, given the great number of developmentally disabled people who need to be trained in such a way and the few resources available, this is an all but impossible task. Arguably a more realistic approach is to provide vocational training to those who are able to do some light work.

Although this idea is by no means

new, it has proved quite hard to put it into practice. There are few success stories. This is because developmentally disabled people are often not very motivated, or not very willing to engage with other people. Many of them are generally able to work but may find it hard to be at the workplace on time and to comply with basic work regulations. This poses a great challenge to supervisors. Pre-employment training is therefore becoming more and more important - and this is where the Home of Blessings bakery comes in.

How it started

Preparations for the bakery started in March 2007. In September, Chu Chaoyu, the director of the Home of Blessings, started looking for a professional baker. The requirements were quite high: applicants must have excellent professional skills and plenty of experience; they must be happy to work with developmentally disabled people and preferably already have relevant experience. Mr. Li, who was finally hired by Amity after a one-

One of the “Happy Angels” baking sweet buns at the Home of Blessings Bakery.



The Amity Home of Blessings Bakery gives disabled people a chance to learn a profession. Skills not only boost their self-esteem, it gives them an opportunity to reduce prejudice among the public.

week trial period, previously worked for a supermarket bakery and has worked with deaf people.

In November the bakery started its first test runs. The Home of Blessings clients were very eager to start working, carefully implementing the strict hygiene rules they had practiced and washing their hands in seven steps, as Mr. Li had taught them. This kind of training also unwittingly improves people’s ability to look after themselves. According to Director Chu, “The work environment at our bakery is in many ways similar to real-life workplaces, and it gives people who work there the opportunity to develop useful skills. In the future, we will be able to recommend our clients to other employers, so hopefully even with our limited resources we can make quite a big difference in terms of integrating developmentally disabled people into working life.”

Today more than 20 different kinds of bread, cake and cookies are produced at the Amity bakery. Most of the produce is sold to students at the nearby colleges and to the general population. Director Chu says that the bakery project has a good effect on perceptions of developmentally disabled people: they used to have a very low social status and were sometimes even regarded as disgusting. The bread from the bakery, however, shows that they can contribute something useful and valuable.

Inviting participation

The Home of Blessings bakery has also organized “Happy Bread Angel” recruitment events, inviting people to take part in bread making on weekends. On these occasions, those who learn vocational skills at the bakery turn into teachers and show others how to do each of the steps from preparing the dough to wrapping the baked bread or cake. Interacting with the developmentally disabled, participants in these events find that the developmentally disabled are just as good as anybody and there is no reason to look down upon them.

The “Happy Bread Angel” courses have a great effect on the developmentally disabled people’s self-confidence and on their integration into “normal” society. A lot of people have been interested in taking part in these events; due to the limited space at the bakery, however, only relatively few have been able to attend. Generally, the Home of Blessings has too little space and is spread out over different locations in the city of Nanjing, which is stunting its growth and its ability to make an even bigger contribution to society.

In the meantime, Zhou Jian has even learned to cook. He is determined to go on improving his skills. Recently, he bought a scarf for his mother with the money he has earned at the Home of Blessings bakery.

Bilingual Deaf Education Takes Root in China

by Li Xue



People from all walks of life join Amity's sign language classes.

Replanting a potted plant is a long and tedious process. In his book, "Mirror of Flowers", the 17th century horticulturist Chen Haozi recorded minutely what it takes to do it right: choosing the right environment, pruning, replacing the soil and watering the plant. Only if the replanting process is done with the utmost care will the "courtyard bustle with flowers". In a similar way, replanting "European-grown" bilingual deaf education into Chinese soil is a major task. Over the last four years, strong efforts have been made to introduce Amity's SigAm Bilingual Deaf Education Program to eight different deaf schools in Jiangsu, Guizhou and Sichuan provinces. Now Amity's efforts start showing signs of success.

It was in 1995 that a small team of Amity staff first learned about the ideas of bilingual education in deaf education - a cutting-edge teaching method, which involves the acquisi-

tion by deaf children of sign language as their first language. The encounter between Amity and bilingual education took place during a visit by an English PhD student who wrote a thesis on deaf education. What followed was the introduction of bilingual education to a pre-school class at the Nanjing Deaf School. Experts from England were invited to visit the Nanjing project classes. The local teachers of the deaf were asked to participate in designing the experiment and later evaluating it. The seemingly easy experiment in Nanjing turned out to become a very special ten-year lesson in contextualization. After the year 2000, Amity started a cooperation with the Norwegian Signo Foundation in order to expand the scope of the bilingual education program. Finally, in April 2004, five schools in Jiangsu joined the program and in 2006, four deaf schools in Sichuan and Guizhou followed. As was

to be expected, the introduction of fundamentally new teaching methods met some resistance.

Challenges

A principal of one of the project schools, for example, complained: "It is one thing to see the children in the project making very quick progress, but it is another to see some officials not appreciating it. Once, an official responsible for disabled persons came to our school for inspection, they watched our bilingual class where the children use sign language. The inspectors said that what they saw was just empty gesticulating and feet paddling. They left in a huff."

A retired high-ranking cadre from the provincial special education office said: "The curriculum reform in 2000 proposed to make teaching more student-centered. But strong opposition emerged when such ideas were put forward. In the end, we had no choice but to adopt a twin-track approach in special education: the students were now seen as the 'main body', whereas the teachers were considered the guides." According to the executive of the Amity bilingual deaf education project, "a local special education institute has set up a training program for sign language interpreters but no deaf people were involved as teachers. So it remains a big question what kind of sign language is taught and who should be interpreted for? There were no incentives for the officials to hire deaf people, so we have offered to provide an experienced deaf teacher for that program free of charge. But until now, we haven't received any reply." ... All of those who are trying to push the case feel to a certain extent helpless. It is easier to claim that the difficulties arise from the behavior of certain work units or people who are in charge than to say

that they are the result of certain die-hard traditions.

Liu Xiaofeng, the director of the Institute of Comparative Religious Studies at the Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou, has pointed out that, for nearly a century, the evolution of the current educational system in China has been a process of remolding the imperial examination system into a more “westernized” model.¹ But when western learning came to China, this did not cause a radical break with the traditions of the school system. Western influence only changed specific knowledge-related subjects. The (ill-)famed college entrance ex-

than others.

However, the pursuit of excellence comes at a price. Countless students spend their youth doing nothing but “eating the bitter food of learning” (as a Chinese saying goes: 学海无涯苦作舟). In such a learning environment, which is dominated by fierce competition and little concern for students’ personal feelings, it is not surprising that people adhere to traditional, teacher-centered methods. How does bilingual education fit into this system? Could it act as a pioneer in China’s special education system, giving students more freedom and reducing the pressure?

rier between deaf and hearing people and makes it hard for the deaf to find jobs.

Amity’s program is trying to reverse these trends. The success of the SigAm Bilingual Deaf Education Program lies in the fact that deaf people have participated in it on the side of the experts. The schools participating in the program hired teachers who are themselves deaf in order to create a natural learning environment in the classroom. Since students use sign language to communicate with their deaf teachers, they learn sign language quickly. Nonetheless, this method needs some getting used to.



Invite academe

During the initial phase of Amity’s program, deaf education experts, scholars and researchers from various academic institutions (among them the University of Oslo, the University of Stavanger, Fudan University in Shanghai and Nanjing Normal University) were invited to join. The experts

now meet on an annual basis in order to discuss latest developments, audit classes of deaf children and advise the schools involved. At the same time, the scholars are able to collect data for their own research. In this way, Amity hopes to lay a foundation, both theoretical and practical, for implementing bilingual deaf education.

Involve deaf people

In China, the majority of deaf people usually have a low educational level. Most of them graduated from junior middle school, some from senior middle school. Hardly any deaf people hold university degrees. Unfortunately, this typically low level of education keeps deaf people from recognizing that there is a social “problem of the deaf” and consolidates the lack of skills and knowledge acquired by this group. It also creates a language bar-

Stir controversial discussions

Deaf teachers tend to ask questions such as: “Won’t it adversely affect children’s overall language levels when we use sign language in the classroom as language of instruction?” Some teachers say: “In bilingual education, sign language is the first language which deaf children learn. Chinese is only their second language. However, it’s obviously necessary that deaf students learn Chinese well. Isn’t this just like studying English as a second language? Even college students know their second language on a comparatively superficial level. How much worse will it be when primary-school deaf children learn Chinese as a second language!” Such concerns and doubts take up a lot of the discussion time among the deaf teachers. But exchanging views and disagreeing is part of Amity’s program. Discussing about sign language acquisition and bilingual education is not just a discourse on how the public can be involved: it is first and foremost a platform for deaf people, where they can learn how to make their voices heard in public and thus become part of mainstream society.

Involve the public

Amity is now four years into the program and every school has made its own unique experiences. Some schools even went as far as to expand the Bilingual Deaf Education Program by adding their individual concepts, including exchanges with other schools, cooperations with hospitals or sign-language training classes for

Amity staffer Dai Manli teaches sign language in the basement of Amity’s headquarters in Nanjing. Students come from many different backgrounds: a nurse, a cigarette vendor, a woman police officer and a university teacher.

amination (gaokao) as it is used today is the direct descendant of the 1300-year-old imperial examination system. The promise given in the Analects of Confucius that “a student who has completed his studies will assume the duties of a government official” (Lun Yu, book 19, chapter 13) is still the driving force behind the exam frenzy. Passing exams brings people closer to fulfilling their dreams of gaining a higher position in the social hierarchy

¹ Liu Xiaofeng, “Individual Academic Pursuit between National Power and Social Right” Jian Jin Han Zhi (Picking All the Cold Branches) Hua Xia Printing Press 2007, p 6.

the public - parents, teachers and students from ordinary schools. All of these activities have helped to introduce the bilingual concept to the general public. During a seminar on bilingual deaf education held in Chengdu at the beginning of this year, teachers and principals were constantly engaged in discussions about new teaching methods, sign language and cooperation between the hearing and the deaf. Those who eventually profited most from these discussions were the deaf children.

During the seminar we attended a class of pre-school children who take part in the program. The children used sign language to chat among themselves, but when a teacher asked a question they answered confidently and happily – something which is seldom seen in Chinese schools, where discipline has a high priority. Even

when the teachers had not explained things clearly and in detail (e.g. when they had not made it clear what exactly happens to the tails of tadpoles when they develop into frogs), to our surprise, the small students were able to explain it to us during the interviews after class. A four-year-old girl even brought her picture book to show me the signs for all 16 animals in the book. It was wonderful to look at her hands while she used sign language.

Build civil society

Bilingual deaf education stresses the development of deaf people, not just their language skills. It also attaches great importance to whether the teaching methods are teacher-centered or student-centered. Bilingual deaf education studies and discusses the ways how teachers and students interact and

how communication between students works. This method is not just used to improve the language skills of students, but, more importantly, to promote democratic thinking in education. Students should learn independent thinking, explore creative learning methods and become aware of their own learning process, because this generation will determine the society of tomorrow.

Developing bilingual deaf education still has a long way to go. More deaf schools should introduce bilingualism; more deaf people should take part in such programs. High-quality deaf education should be made available. Better policies should be introduced. NGOs may play a leading role in introducing new methods, and public involvement should be admitted and encouraged. All these efforts will make it possible for bilingual deaf education to take root in China.



News



Relief Efforts

Earthquake in Sichuan

A powerful earthquake - probably the strongest in more than 30 years - hit China on 12 May. Its epicenter was some 90 km from Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province.

Amity staff Yue Yaomeng arrived in Chengdu five hours after the earthquake. As the Newsletter went to press, he was monitoring the situation and had already established contact with local partners and regional NGOs.

Amity immediately started releasing CNY 1 million in emergency

funds as a first step. An Amity disaster relief office in Chengdu coordinates the distribution of clean water, biscuits, tents and tarpaulins in 11 counties in the disaster area. A group of psychologists were sent to the area to help traumatized people.

Constant rain, aftershocks and landslides made rescue efforts difficult and kept people on alert. An Amity disaster relief office in Chengdu coordinates the distribution Amity expects to start reconstruction work very soon.

Fundraising

Charity Dinner in Hong Kong

The Hong Kong office of the Amity Foundation held a gala dinner on 20 April. An amount of HK\$ 453,000 were raised that evening to support disaster relief and rehabilitation efforts. Earlier this year, wide areas of Central and Southern China were hit by the worst snowstorm in a century. In response, Amity has worked to raise CNY 10 million in support of the victims. The Hong Kong S.A.R. Government approved a grant of HK\$ 1.29 million from its Disaster Relief Fund to the Amity Foundation for relief projects in Guangxi and Yunnan. Quilts and rice were distributed by Amity to victims in February. We will continue to rebuild collapsed homes, schools, clinics and water systems and will help affected communities to restore their means of livelihood.



Student Activities

“Winter Sun” - Warm Clothes for Qinghai Children

Warm clothes were distributed to children in Qinghai Province as part of the “Winter Sun” project, which is run by the Amity Foundation in cooperation with Gesanghua, a volunteer organization working for poor children on the Qinghai and Tibet Plateaus.

Students from the Nanjing Institute of Technology collected 47 big bags of winter clothes, which were then sent to icy Qinghai, where many people are too poor to afford warm clothing. The clothes had

been sorted and packed at Amity headquarters in Nanjing before Spring Festival. After they had arrived in Xining, the capital of Qinghai, Gesanghua staffers arranged transport to villages in the Nangqian region, where local volunteers took care of their distribution.

Nanjing students have shown great compassion and a strong sense of responsibility. Such activities strengthen people’s awareness of how important structures of civil society in China are.

Farmers United

“Potato Association”

Participants of this year’s Easter Tour to Inner Mongolia caught a glimpse of civil society at work in China’s remote countryside. During a visit to Wulate Middle Banner, an impoverished county in the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, the group was introduced to a recently founded peasant association. The “Potato Association” was formed by a group of farmers after Amity had encouraged them to unite and promote their interests as agricultural producers against greedy profiteers. Farmers now decide together at which price they will sell their potatoes to the vendors, in this way preventing middlemen to pay extremely low prices. Easter Tour participants were impressed by the fact that the “Potato Association” follows basic democratic rules rarely seen in China: membership is optional and the leadership is elected on the basis of “one member, one vote”. Civil society is evidently making inroads into rural China.



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