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China's Society Makes a Comeback

Carol Lee Hamrin

Perhaps the least known "side effect" of China's rapid economic growth is the wholesale transformation in social structure underway. In early 2002, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) published the first official study of China's ongoing shift from a homogenous rural society to a much more diverse urban society.¹ The result of a three-year research project by nearly 100 sociologists, the report provides a portrait of an "embryonic modern social structure" and classifies Chinese society into ten occupational strata.

The report was intended to justify President Jiang Zemin's earlier recommendation that the CCP recruit from the most advanced social groups, including new entrepreneurs.² After a popular reception over several months, however, the report was banned from further circulation due to controversy. Workers and farmers—the traditional constituency of the Chinese Communist Party—were placed near the bottom of the social ladder, while the first four strata (state and social administrators, managers, private business owners and professional/technical personnel) were praised as "representatives of advanced productive forces." This ranking fueled speculation that the

Party was abandoning the newly poor for the newly rich.

How the political elite manages its complex and fluid relations with all these new social groups and addresses growing income inequalities is probably the most important challenge facing the new leadership coming into power in late 2002. In any case, the secret is out. Fifty years after the CCP nationalized the economy, destroyed all independent social groups and launched a series of experiments to create new state-dominated social organizations, the trend is being reversed.

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China Joins the Global “Associational Revolution”

Along with a more open and pluralistic society and a rising middle class has come a proliferation of public institutions, which may number over 200,000.³ These range from membership-based “social organizations” to private charities and foundations. There are consumer groups as well as chambers of commerce, and advocacy organizations such as environmental and women’s legal aid groups. Few of these nonprofits (NPOs) are truly nongovernmental (NGOs), since the state still exercises strong influence over policy, personnel and finance; however, the trend is toward greater autonomy. This article will focus on organizations that provide social services, the arena most open to faith-based involvement.

Deng Xiaoping’s reform program has aimed at economic efficiency and rapid growth. Reflecting a global trend to downsize government and free up economies, China set a goal of creating a “small state; large society.” To lighten the heavy load of central state subsidies for social services, this responsibility was given to local governments. They, in turn, have sought help from the nonstate sector in “burden sharing.” NPOs have been set up as arms of the state but have also sprung up spontaneously at the grass-roots level.

Pioneer “GONGOS” (a tongue-in-cheek oxymoron for China’s “government-organized NGOs”) were set up by state agencies primarily as affiliates to raise foreign funds, which usually are matched by in kind domestic contributions (labor, land, construction etc.). However, growing competition has

forced even China’s top-down NPOs to allow foreign participation, as well as funding, to develop a domestic donor base and, increasingly, to promote the interests of their constituencies, not just state goals.

State-organized institutions

The most influential ones include:

- *China Association of NGOs* (CANGOS) was founded in 1991 as an umbrella organization for the nonprofit sector. Its

- *China Charity Federation*, since 1994 the official “umbrella” organization for relief aid and social welfare, is an arm of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA). Under the leadership of former MCA executive vice president Yan Mingfu, CCF has improved accountability and international recognition for China’s Third Sector as a whole.

- *Amity Foundation* since the early 1980s has been a channel for outside funding and services from Protestant



Rural well-baby home care.

creation was a first step toward separating nonprofit activity from government departments.

- *The China Youth Development Foundation* (founded in 1985 by the Communist Youth League) and its leading charity, Project Hope, pioneered domestic fund raising for poor students nationwide. For example, in Xinjiang they helped 40,000 school dropouts return to school and built 76 primary schools and 252 school libraries from 1990-99.⁴

religious organizations. Amity is affiliated with the China Christian Council and registered under the Party’s United Front Department. At first, Amity focused on English teaching and eastern China. It now also has departments for rural development, social welfare, medical and health work focused on southwest China. Amity is respected by others in China’s third sector for the quality of its work.⁵

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ChinaSource
Partnering Resources with Vision

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Other Faith-based Chinese NGOs

Small-scale social service agencies are linked directly to local congregations or religious associations. One interesting example is the Signpost Youth Club affiliated with Ningbo's Catholic diocese in Zhejiang Province. A "virtual" club, it uses the Internet to promote spiritual formation for Catholic youth (ages 18-30) working and studying in different parts of the province.⁶



Farmer's work group training session.

The YMCA/YWCA in China, headquartered in Shanghai with branches in ten cities, is a state-run NPO with a long pre-1949 history. The Shanghai branch is pioneering a new type of multifunctional community center to provide better services than those available from the government street offices.⁷

Charitable efforts by unregistered religious groups often are spontaneous responses to pressing needs out of good conscience. One elderly woman, for example, has taken in abandoned babies but her unregistered Protestant house church has had difficulty buying property or getting permits for an orphanage. Senior leaders of a large partnership of house church networks that met in early 2002 listed such "social ministries" among six top priorities for the Chinese church and invited foreign cooperation.⁸

An example of a registered but independent faith-based organization is the

Holy Love Foundation in Chengdu. A young couple, taking pity on idle handicapped youth unable to attend school, registered the foundation in 1992 under a business sponsor. They raised funds to refurbish an old warehouse into a boarding school. Board members include a government representative from the bureau of civil affairs, which takes up to one percent of donations. The School has survived several crises with bureaucrats and devel-

opers due to the influence of grateful parents and local popularity from winning Special Olympics events.⁹

The International Factor

Outside nonprofits have made major contributions to China's economic and social development. Authors of the *Directory of International NGOs Supporting Work in China* (China Development Research Services, 1999) concluded that China was receiving well over \$100 million each year in project funding directly from or channeled through international NGOs (INGOs) and foundations. Gifts in kind, such as hundreds of thousands of volumes of books, would add substantially to that total. As of late 1999, there were at least 70 grant-making foundations, 70 advocacy groups, 200 humanitarian organizations, and 150 faith-based charitable groups involved in China. (The latter figure included 100 organizations working through Amity Founda-

tion and therefore is a low estimate.)

Major actors include the Ford and Asia Foundations, which have offices in Beijing through affiliation with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. These and other INGOs began in the 1980s to support educational and professional development and exchanges, but branched out in the 1990s to support projects in civil society, law and governance. The Asia foundation sponsors monthly forums and a networking website (www.ChinaNPO.net) for the China NPO Network.

Faith-based Contributions. The third sector has become home to many international faith-based organizations. Many church-based or denominational organizations, such as the Mennonite Central Committee, work in partnership with the Amity Foundation. Most "parachurch" and many church agencies find partners in their special functional sector or "niche." For example, several organizations providing teachers of English or professional skills work jointly through the Foreign Experts Bureau and state educational organs. One international institute with expertise in linguistics affiliates with state institutions responsible for minority nationalities. At several grass roots locations they help sponsor dual language schools.

The Jian Hua Foundation, CEDAR Fund and Caritas have been pioneers among the many humanitarian INGOs that work out of Hong Kong. Along with CBN-China, based in Beijing, they do humanitarian work at all levels through China's charities federations or Red Cross and the government bureaus responsible for specific types of projects (see www.cbnchina.org).

Develop the West. Many such humanitarian INGOs got their start in providing relief to areas in China struck by disaster in the late 1990s. The Salvation Army and World Vision International (see www.wvi.org), along with Oxfam, are the largest INGOs involved in relief and antipoverty work. They have since expanded support for community development projects as the government has encouraged international participation in its ambitious ten year plan for

antipoverty and development work in west China, home to most of China's poor ethnic minorities.

Some localized efforts have been developed by expatriates responding to warm welcomes where grandparents or parents had served as missionaries. Examples include Evergreen Family Friendship Services in Shanxi Province and Gansu Inc., a US nonprofit that brings ophthalmologists to teach and perform cataract surgery for poor villagers, choosing a different county hospital base each summer.¹⁰



Kids at a community center library.

comprehensive—approval of application for registration, political and ideological work through Party branches, finance and accounting, personnel management, policy research, and external relations.

- Before registration, organizations must meet strict standards—such as a designated work place, certified professional staff, a minimum number of members, proof that no other similar local organization already exists and that a “need” for the service is present. (Note that some of these require ac-

nonprofits “press the envelope” of bureaucratic controls in order to get things done. To gain more freedom, organizations doing nonprofit work often register as businesses or register through personal relationships involving little restriction. All this can lead to either creativity or corruption!

NPOs closely tied to the government are often misused by bureaucratic supervisors scavenging for funds. Many local Charity Federations have a bad reputation, and the YMCA was notorious for corruption and abuse of power under the former director and his family. A huge controversy in 2002 over alleged illegality in Project Hope's fund-raising efforts has forced more public attention to mechanisms of accountability in the third sector as a whole. Its sponsors at the Youth Development Foundation have requested a formal government audit to prove their innocence.¹¹ Accountability is a special challenge for unregistered grass-roots humanitarian efforts, given inexperience with management and auditing and the temptations of handling cash or funding through personal accounts. One now successful suburban “halfway house” ministry to “street boys” and handicapped orphans, for example, suffered an early crisis due to the founding director embezzling funds from overseas Chinese Christian supporters.¹²

As a result of all these problems, the Chinese public remains leery of giving. The chronic “catch 22” situations for Chinese NGOs also affect their partnering international NGOs and foundations. Moreover, the long-delayed regulations for INGO operation in China—promised by the end of 2000—have yet to see the light of day.

NGOs a “Hot Topic”

The study of the nonprofit sector has become an intellectual “fever” in China. Qinghua University has set up China's first Center for the Study of NGOs as part of its School of Public Policy and Management. The Center sponsored China's first conference on NPOs in October 1999, and other

Regulatory Problems and Corruption

All nonstate social organizations are heavily regulated and closely monitored. The red tape gives headaches and teaches patience to all who seek to operate within official boundaries. Specific regulations and style of implementation vary somewhat by sector and locality, but tend to share the following characteristics:

- There is a dual control system: government registration and functional affiliation. Oversight of most nonprofits is carried out by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, but there are specialized agencies for labor, youth, religious and women's groups.

- Day-to-day line supervision is carried out by functional party or government agencies or their designated monopolies. Supervision is compre-

hensive—such as renting, hiring, recruiting—*before* registration that are technically illegal until *afterward*.)

Fund raising so far has focused on outside donors; a typical Chinese NPO is funded eighty percent from overseas and twenty percent from Hong Kong. Fund raising inside China is still quite new and for the most part restricted to national GONGOs. While the 1999 law on donations allows individuals and corporations to donate money, it is not clear about the right to solicit funds, including through the state-controlled media. Tax benefits for giving are even more recent.

Like many laws and regulations in China, those for NPOs are so vague, contradictory or burdensome that they end up being circumvented or ignored. Thus, there is a large grey area of semi-autonomy and semilegality in which



Work as Ministry

Foreign Nonprofit Organizations and the Church in China

Andrew Kaiser

Most foreign Christian organizations working in China today are unequivocal about their commitment to sharing Christ. Indeed, many describe church planting, evangelism and discipleship as their main reasons for being in China. It is understood that this is their real “work,” while other projects they engage in may be viewed simply as the means of maintaining a presence in the country. Underlying this approach to work in China is an assumed dichotomy between work and ministry, a conflict typically resolved by slighting so-called secular work in favor of the “more significant” ministry.

This article will describe briefly some of the characteristics of effective nonprofit work in China, and then go on to give a number of concrete examples of how this kind of work relates to evangelism. I believe that China’s nonprofit sector provides a healthy resolution to the false work-ministry dichotomy; however, this may require us

to adjust our understanding of what it is we are supposed to be doing.

A Model from Scripture

The Apostle Paul is not the only model of Christian service in a foreign country contained within the pages of Scripture. In particular, Joseph and

— This understanding of the Christian mission is often called life-style evangelism. In fact, **it is not a technique but rather something that God expects of all His people.** —

Daniel can serve as powerful examples for today’s foreign Christian professionals. Remember that both men served as officials in pagan nations that were not always friendly towards God’s people. The excellence with which they did the work that had been entrusted to them greatly increased the influence of their testimonies.

In the New Testament, it is clear that there are certain things expected of all

believers. Rather than creating a class of super Christians who do real ministry while the rest of us muddle about in second-class secular works, scripture admonishes all believers, “whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (Col. 3:17). Though Dualism has always been a temptation to a church under stress, many strands of the Reformation sought to reclaim a fuller understanding of vocation and recover the role of faith in all aspects of life. As Martin Luther so famously explained:

If you ask an insignificant maidservant why she scours a dish or milks a cow she can say: I know that the thing I do pleases God, for I have God’s work and God’s commandment. God does not look at the insignificance of the acts, but at the heart that serves Him in such little things.¹

This understanding of the Christian mission is often called life-style evangelism. In fact, it is not a technique but rather something that God expects of all His people. All of Israel proclaimed God’s character through its very existence. As John’s Gospel shows so eloquently, Christ also revealed His identity through His deeds. Finally, verses such as 1 Peter 3:15 remind us that how we live our lives—particularly when we are suffering—will draw others to ask us where our hope comes from. In this sense, all of life is a wit-

ness. The Puritan minister Richard Sibbes summarized this approach to Christian living in the following way:

There is nothing that we do but it may be a “service to God.” No. Not our particular recreations, if we use them as we should. We would not thrust religion into a corner, into a narrow room, and limit it to some days, and times, and actions, and places. To “serve” God is to carry ourselves as the children of God wheresoever we are: so that our whole life is a service of God.²



Church choir members learning to play brass instruments.

The Model at Work in China

In China today, an organization guided by these principles will evince certain characteristics. First and foremost, this approach to work in China demands excellence in our work.

Whether medical or educational, giving loans or scholarships, our nonprofit public benefit programs should be done as well as possible. Rather than seeing our work as an inconvenience to our ministry, we should be like Daniel and Joseph using all God has given us to do our work well. In so doing we show the world how excellent God is.

Given China's current bureaucratic structure as well as her cultural background, most effective nonprofit programs will also require a long-term approach. Put another way, excellent work in China will almost always require years, if not decades, of hard work. In addition, this work will be done in a specific local context, and tailored over time to meet very specific local conditions. For the same reasons, excellent language skill—and the cultural awareness that it requires—is almost always a key to effective work. Recall that Daniel and his companions had done so well in their studies of Babylon's literature and culture that they were considered ten times more knowledgeable than the local magicians and wise men (Dan. 1:17-20).

Finally, many of the more effective nonprofit Christian organizations working in China place great emphasis on teamwork. While this can certainly have a multiplying effect on the work, teamwork is also an essential means for maintaining accountability. Discussions with teammates can often help us avoid some of the more tricky cultural pitfalls of working as a foreigner in China. More importantly, teammates serve as a

—Since public benefit work is by definition doing things that benefit people, it should come as no surprise that the recipients often ask why they are being helped.—

constant check working to ensure that we are being both salt and light—maintaining a witness that is both visible and distinctly Christian (Matt. 5:13-16).

Some organizations require all members to circulate their prayer and support letters amongst their teammates. This keeps us honest and can help keep us faithful.

Though there are many opportunities for glorifying God through nonprofit work in China, I would like to present just a few examples from three general areas wherein nonprofit work rightly understood can yield significant fruits for God's Kingdom.

Example 1

Work as Witness

The assumption behind the approach to work being described here is that what most people think of as ministry should actually flow out of the kinds of activities that most people describe as work. This is especially true for those working in China's burgeoning nonprofit sector.

Since public benefit work is by definition doing things that benefit people, it should come as no surprise that the recipients often ask why they are being helped. This is especially true in China today where fifty years of communist rule has produced great cynicism and a general lack of hope. It is rare to have a day pass by where foreigners working in China with medical training, disaster relief, English teaching, microloans, scholarships or anything else for that matter are not asked to give the reason for the hope they have within them. One foreign microcredit loan program has been so successful in changing people's lives that the foreign worker is perceived locally as something of a hero: people want to meet him, and they want to know why he would help them if he is not getting rich himself. Starting with "Love your neighbor as

yourself," it does not take long before these conversations about work are transformed into encounters with the Christ.

The better we do our work the more opportunities we will have to share our reasons for working. This is seen most clearly perhaps in the growing number of nonprofit initiatives that target children throughout China's provinces. In one example, foreign Christians were asked to provide physical therapy services through a large city hospital. The evident care and consummate skill of the foreign workers earned the admiration of local hospital officials—and now

they have been asked to expand their work into homes and hospitals throughout the region. In another location, foreign Christian workers began a private orphanage. Their compassion has since earned them the trust of local officials who have granted permission for them to open three more private Christian foster homes. In both cases, local workers and officials are curious to know more about how these foreigners do such good work and why they do it at all. Excellent work has made these successful operations that impact the children, their parents, and local officials for Christ.

Example II *Building Bridges or Planting Churches?*

In the West today we see those sent abroad to serve as people who personally bring others to Christ. It is often difficult for us to admit that we Westerners may not be the most effective evangelists. If we do accept this as true, then it seems as if there is nothing for us to do. This dynamic is most evident in recent debates on the appropriateness of Western church-planters working in China today.

Nonprofit service that is openly Christian provides a middle road—if only we Westerners are humble and willing to take a smaller role. I know of one recent instance in China where the presence of long-term foreign Christian professionals engaged in nonprofit work led directly to the establishment and registration of a local church. The medical and development programs that the foreigners were running took them into villages and townships throughout the county. Over time, the small number of local Christians were drawn to the openly Christian foreign workers—and in some cases joined them in their work. In addition to discipling a handful of key local believers, the foreign organization used its relations at the provincial level to help the local believers establish contact with Christian leaders throughout the province. At this point the Chinese believers took over, sending teaching elders from a nearby estab-

lished church. They are now helping the local believers there to register a meeting point and appoint a shepherd for their flock. This whole process has taken seven years—with the same foreign workers persevering in their work and prayer all along. The local church has now grown to over 200 believers. No foreigners preached, and only a few local people were brought to Christ through the direct agency of the foreign workers.

Example III *Enabling the Church*

There are many ways in which nonprofit work can make positive contributions to the growth of God's Kingdom in China. Many of these ways, however, require that we foreigners take on roles that attract little attention in our home churches. In my experience, nonprofit foreign organizations that see themselves as enablers of the local church are able to make great contributions to God's Kingdom through their support efforts.

In one case, there is a Christian nonprofit organization that regularly participates in the local and provincial church's own aid programs. When the registered church announces clothing collections for the poor, or church

building programs in poor areas throughout the province, the foreign workers mobilize their resources to assist. Churches back home are contacted to contribute; the local foreign fellowship contributes; and in some cases, the nonprofit organization authorizes its own relevant programs to cooperate directly with the church. Since this is the kind of work that these particular foreigners actually do—and since it is under the authority of the local religious bodies—it is not only legal but in many cases encouraged. The result is that the church's work is multiplied and local believers are becoming known in the city for their generosity and concern for the poor. In the villages where aid has been distributed, a testimony also exists upon which the church's own itinerant evangelists can build on subsequent journeys.

Yet another example of enabling is found in the growing number of instances of foreigners teaching English through local churches. With Chinese society's growing emphasis on English language skills, the churches in more and more areas are responding offering classes either to young people in the church or sometimes as components of weeklong "Vacation Bible

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Bible story lesson.

East-West Exchange Promotes Nonprofit Development in China

Carol Lee Hamrin
and Brent Fulton

"The spirit of love" is what one Chinese official noted as key to the success of charity endeavors while visiting a number of nonprofit organizations in the United States. During the fall of 2000 a delegation of six national and provincial officials from the China Charity Federation (CCF—see box below) spent 17 days interacting with leaders of nonprofit organizations in four U.S. cities. The trip provided a window through which these leaders of China's emerging "third sector" could learn about the development and see the fruit of a variety of charities in the United States.

Hosted by the Maclellan Foundation, the delegation toured organizations serving a wide range of constituencies, including persons with disabilities, the elderly, urban youth, prison inmates, and new immigrants. Their itinerary also included meetings with business and education leaders and the media.

Viewing the work of one agency in Atlanta, the head of the delegation remarked on the amazing transformation of a poor, rundown

area into a very healthy, clean, safe and valuable environment. This example made concrete for the delegation one of the key themes of the trip—cooperation of the three major sectors: government, business and NGOs. At "People's House," in SE Washington, DC, the delegation was struck by the Christian commitment to help through mentoring inner-city youth.

High on the delegation's agenda was learning more about the management of nonprofit organizations. How to ensure accountability in the use of funds and other resources, as well as issues related to public-private partnerships, were of particular interest. Meetings with executives of foundations, including First Fruit, Inc., in Los Angeles, as well as scholars, several management consultants, and the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability provided a variety of viewpoints on these topics. They also attended the annual conference of Washington-based Independent Sector.

Rob Martin, executive director of First Fruit, Inc., said he found the group "intensely curious, genuinely interested in learning about how the American nonprofit sector works and in doing what is best for the people in China whom they serve."

The group learned much about internal organization, discipline and management of NGOs, along with government policy and regulations toward NGOs and how government and nongovernment relate to each other. Delegation members felt these issues were especially relevant to China and asked whether a future visit by US nonprofit leaders to China could be arranged to provide further training. Having observed the importance of the independent sector in the United States, the delegation came to see it as potentially equal to government and business in influence.

The delegation also noted that the motivation for charity—the spirit of love, a heart of compassion—is central. Delegation members commented on the clear connection between the Christian faith and effective nonprofit endeavors and were touched personally by the devotion they witnessed. Said one provincial CCF official, "I was most impressed by the spirit of love." The leader of the delegation said, "We can get rules and laws; the most difficult thing is lack of love. We cannot put this in people's hearts."

On the personal side, the delegation members had time to share informally with their hosts in various cities. They also visited a variety of cultural sites, attended a Chinese church service and spent an evening in the home of an American family—something they said they would have enjoyed doing more of during their visit.

As a result of the dialogue launched during this visit, the Chinese government has begun granting tax-exempt status to charitable organizations in China. During a recent follow-up visit to China, US foundation executives discussed with leaders of CCF and the NPO Network (an association of nonprofit organizations in China) the establishment of new nationwide standards to help ensure accountability among charities. This most recent visit also laid the groundwork for a training program for leaders of charities and foundations in China, with some of the courses to be taught by nonprofit leaders from North America and elsewhere.

Commenting on the progress to date, Tom McCallie, executive director of the Maclellan Foundation, said, "The long-term effectiveness of the church will depend on its ability to be involved in meeting social needs. I think the work we've done with CCF and the NPO Network will lead toward greater clarity in laws and regulations and increased stability for charities to operate."

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China Charity Federation

China Charity Federation (CCF) is "a nongovernmental charity institution that sets its purpose to help needy individuals and groups, and serves to enhance the humanitarianism and traditional Chinese virtues of aiding those in distress and poverty." Located in the capital of Beijing, CCF is the largest national-level charitable organization in Mainland China. CCF was established by the government as the umbrella organization for local charitable agencies and has 79 local affiliates located in over 20 provinces throughout China. The President of CCF is always a retired executive of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, which in 1998 devolved the following key tasks to the China Charity Federation:

- Raising funds for charity
- Developing public welfare programs for the poor and needy
- Assisting the government in emergency relief work including collection and allocation of both domestic and overseas donations
- Establishing and supporting social welfare agencies

- Developing regular donation programs and managing such donations, both cash and in kind, and executing aid projects

China Charity Federation collects funds through a variety of sources including corporate donors, throughout China and abroad. The CCF constitution specifies that all donated funds be used for charity programs, and administrative costs are covered by the interest proceeds generated by the founding fund. In 1995, forty-eight percent of the donated funds were used for charity activities, such as providing food and clothing, training of disabled orphans and rehabilitation education exhibition; twenty-nine percent of donated funds were used for disaster relief; twelve percent for other projects and eleven percent for rehabilitation of disabled orphans.

China Charity Federation has primarily focused on orphans and the elderly due to the immense social need in China. CCF is also providing funding in extremely poor areas in China to improve the people's production and living conditions. In response to the 1998 flood disaster, CCF initiated an emergency fund-raising campaign and, through a telethon and other means, succeeded in raising a total of US\$ 70 million.

If one pictures China as a colorful and beautiful flower garden, then the beauty and color of the garden are reflections of the gardener's creativity. During the time of China's "planned economy," although there were not a wide variety of flowers in the garden, they were, nevertheless, planted by the gardener personally. With the arrival of the market economy, more and more flowers that were not planted by the gardener appeared. While there are now more varieties of flowers, those planted by the gardener are gradually withering away. Furthermore, other weeds, plants and trees that were feared by the gardener now blossom by leaps and by bounds. Among the new plants, there is a little one that has the potential to grow into a large tree—the NGOs of China.

From GONGO to NGO

A nongovernmental organization (NGO) is a nonprofit civilian organization. Under Communism, every segment of Chinese society exists to serve the Communist Party. The so-called NGOs in China are special organizations such as labor unions, the Women's Federation, the Communist Youth League, writers' associations, trade associations and so on. Although they are not officially government agencies, everyone in China knows what they are and their "semiofficial" status.

As China opens her door to the outside world, her government senses that it is inconvenient for it to be at the front end of every kind of interaction with the rest of the world. Therefore numerous new mass organizations and groups such as "Project Hope" and "Helping the Poor Foundation" have emerged. These kinds of organizations may even have branches all over China. Suddenly, many so called NGOs have appeared on the scene. Despite their connection to the government, almost all claim publicly that they are not government organizations in hopes of earning the trust of the people. In the garden which is China, these NGOs are like bonsai plants—plants whose primary purpose is viewing pleasure.

However, no matter how nice looking bonsai plants are, they are cultivated manually and not grown naturally. So it is with the new NGOs. People gave them a new name: government organized nongovernmental organizations or GONGOs. Even those who work in GONGOs acknowledge that their organizations are not true NGOs as they have heavy political overtones.

Nevertheless, GONGOs serve the government as valuable organisms by performing functions that are not appropriate for it to carry out, such as accepting donations—especially

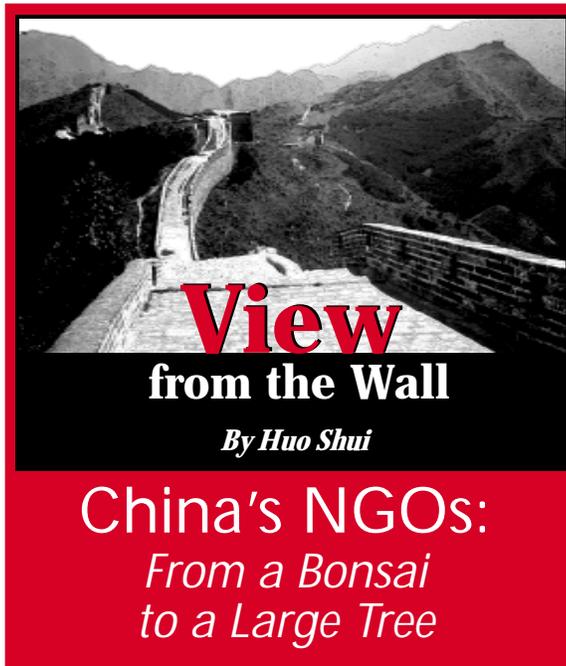
donations from overseas. When citizens donate money to Project Hope or Helping the Poor Foundation, it is not the same as giving to the government. Compared to the old days when the party and the government had direct control over everything, a new entity like a GONGO is an improvement even though it is not considered an authentic NGO.

At the same time, many civilian groups are trying to form their own NGOs. In order to obtain legal status, many civilian NGOs have no choice but to align themselves with certain government offices. This process of seeking a relevant government office to "adopt" their new NGO is called "align and adopt." Through "align and adopt," many NGOs have found ways to become new, semiofficial NGOs in order to exist legitimately. When things get rough, they can always bring out their government backing in order to protect their own interests and activities. From the structural standpoint, it is difficult to call them GONGOs because they were not related to the government at their inception. Even though they have some affiliation with the government, they normally do not have government officials working in their organizations; they are more dynamic than GONGOs.

On the other hand, many civilian-conceived NGOs and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) that did not have any government

backing were purged after the Falungong became a hot issue. Since the purge, there are very few true NGOs in existence. It is clear that as China becomes successful in economic development the government has not let up its tight grip on activities originating from the private sector including the freedom to form NGOs. This is because true NGOs and NPOs may pose potential threats to the government. Given this understanding, many "align and adopt" NGOs are aiming to become completely independent of the government within five to ten years by moving from GONGO to NGO status. China's NGOs understand that the growth of a bonsai is limited. Healthy growth only comes when a plant is no longer confined to a pot. China's NGOs want to become large trees.

The Chinese government is currently working on creating laws and regulations that will govern NGOs in the nongovernment sector. These laws and regulations will likely be divided to regulate the public NGOs, that are linked to the government, and the private NGOs, that are not linked to the government. The Government will also introduce policies for income tax deductions for charitable giving. Once these laws and regulations are implemented, there will no



View from the Wall

By Huo Shui

China's NGOs:
*From a Bonsai
to a Large Tree*

doubt be unprecedented “NGO fever” in China. Chinese society will finally have completely independent third party organizations that can legally accept charitable donations and provide legal papers to help relieve tax burdens for prospective donors. Currently, the government is working, along with the academic world and civilian organizations, to establish these new laws and regulations regarding NGOs. What will these new laws and regulations look like? We are watching very carefully.

Integrity: The Key to China's NGOs

As mentioned earlier, NGOs in China today usually carry a heavy political overtone. Similar to other branches of the government, they are also plagued by serious problems of corruption. For example, one of the largest NGOs in China, the Youth Education Foundation, in 1989 started a well-known project called “Project Hope” that provides financial aid to students in poor areas of China. Since the inception of the project, it has received donations worth hundreds of millions of RMB. However, several months ago it was revealed that this foundation had misappropriated the funds in high risk stock trading and real estate transactions which caused a huge amount of financial loss. Only a small portion of the donated monies were actually given to needy students. Such embarrassing news received no media coverage—it was as if nothing had happened. Worse than that, it is an open secret among almost all parties within NGO circles that misuse of funds and corruption are not unusual within NGOs. The Youth Education Foundation received no criticism due to its own powerful government backing. Almost all foundations engage in some sort of risky investment schemes and stock trading to boost their portfolio value. Common citizens are not able to see how the foundations account for donated funds. How finances are managed among the foundations is a closely guarded secret. The exposure we have regarding the corruption within the Youth Education Foundation was only

possible as a result of the Foundation's internal power struggle among senior leaders.

There does not seem to be any way for an ordinary Chinese citizen to evaluate a foundation and examine its accounting practices. All efforts and pressure from the society to keep the foundations accountable cannot match the government's administrative power. When the government controls the media as well as the other nongovernmental organizations, criticism against these organizations is viewed as criticism against the government. Officially, the government permits and welcomes this kind of criticism but, in reality, there is no real voice of dissent in a state-controlled media. For more than ten years, many people have given to charitable organizations in a spirit of love. The reputation and credibility of China's NGOs has suffered greatly as more and more people have discovered their dark side. This begs the question, “Who is going to keep China's NGOs accountable?” The answer depends on how much power the Chinese government is willing to share and how much of its control it is willing to delegate to the private sector.

We know that as long as there is no accountability there will be no integrity. No integrity means donors will one day stop contributing. The government can establish many GONGOs, but it cannot force people to accept them or support them. China must establish a system of self-regulation and accountability. Also, it is important to have free competition. The laws and media should also bear responsibility to keep the NGOs accountable. The government must permit freedom for civilian organizations to exist. Until these things become reality, can we talk meaningfully about keeping NGOs accountable and expect integrity from them? We do not know when this is going to happen but we do know one thing: that day is coming.

Huo Shui is a former government political analyst who writes from outside China. Translation is by Tian Hui.

Work as Ministry Continued from page 7

School” programs. By advertising such programs and making them available to interested parties from the local community, the church is given a natural evangelistic opportunity. The presence of a foreign teacher lends credibility to the program and helps draw students. Having the Chinese language skills necessary to communicate clearly with church leaders, long-term attendance and participation in other church activities are the keys to earning the trust that makes these opportunities available to specific foreigners.

Conclusion Planting or Watering?

I once heard a Chinese pastor discussing the role of foreign Christians in the growth of Christ's Kingdom in China. He had seen foreigners in his local area engaged in various forms of campus work, and he had also witnessed the fruits of a foreign nonprofit organization's long-term presence throughout the province. When asked what purpose foreigners could best serve, he responded simply. “Foreigners are able to go to places where we Chinese Christians rarely go. They can talk to people we rarely meet. Foreign Christians are like the spade that breaks up the soil.” Afterwards, we need to step aside so the Chinese laborers can come in and plant seeds, water the seedlings and eventually harvest the crop. There is plenty of work for us to do—but we may have to adjust our definition of work to see it.

Endnotes

1. From Martin Luther's exposition of 1 Peter 2:18-20 as quoted in Leland Ryken's *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 131.

2. Richard Sibbes, “King David's Epitaph,” in *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863), 6:507.

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Peoples of China

Serving Minority Groups in China Through NGOs

Rob Cheeley

Southwest China's Yunnan Province, nestled against Tibet, Burma, Laos and Vietnam, is home to more than 17 million people of minority extraction, the highest density of minority peoples in all of China. Most of these are poor farmers living in the rugged mountains of this beautiful and remote region. Extremely few are aware of Christ's love for them.

For various historical and cultural reasons, poverty has been a predominating reality in the life of a majority of these peoples for centuries. In spite of a recently strong trend on behalf of the government to deal effectively with the needs, signs of significant poverty remain. For example, the primary cause of neonatal death in Yunnan is still "failure to sever the umbilical cord with a sterile instrument," and the primary causes of death in those under the age of five are still diarrhea and simple respiratory tract infections. Without reasonable access to medical care or schools to educate, adequate roads to bring the outside world's assistance, or the ability to afford most things even where there is access, these people are held in bondage by the poverty cycle. The deadly synergism of centuries of poverty, destructive cultural/historical forces, alcoholism, corruption, prejudice, the remote, steep and forbidding terrain (which is difficult to farm effectively and has already been spoiled by erosion in most places), and minimal or no education forms a significant barrier to forward advance for many minority as well as for poor Han peoples. Industrious, hard-working lifestyles, which are often (though not always) present, are not enough, in this setting,

to overcome the barriers.

During the past two decades, however, the government of China has begun to specifically emphasize the development of this region through infrastructure establishment, poverty alleviation programs, health and education advancement projects, microenterprise assistance, agricultural extension, ero-



Leprosy wound care.

sion containment and various other assaults on poverty. A visible and sustained fight against corruption, the broad use of new agricultural concepts and technologies, increased access to better education and health care, and a generally increasing standard of living is clearly apparent at the village level in many parts of Yunnan. The need, however, is still immensely overwhelming. An openness on the part of the government to working together with foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is one of the keys to the advance. We have found a general desire

among most officials to work in cooperation toward this end.

Cooperating with the government's thrust into transformation of villages one by one has proven to be an excellent means of fulfilling Christ's mandate to care for the poor as well as bringing His love to unreached peoples who have been dwelling in such dark circumstances. Governmental agencies such as the Poverty Alleviation Office, the Foreign Affairs Office, the Bureaus of Public Health, Education and Agriculture, the Disabled Federation, the Women's Federation, and many others have welcomed our assistance in working together towards fulfilling the government's mandate to increase the living standard of these minority peoples and other villagers who are in

bondage to poverty. Working together at provincial, prefectural, county and township levels to promote and implement training, extension and assistance programs at the village level has proven both viable and effective. The number of invitations to extend the programs and work in new areas is overwhelming. The limiting factor has not been lack of openness to our presence, but rather our own ability to provide the broad number of human resources necessary to respond to the need.

Two decades of significant involvement with massive programs brought in

by United Nations entities have had both positive and negative results. Though some relief has been effected, the tendency to think that giving away large amounts of money to governmental entities who then initiate and oversee projects is the norm. This approach to solving poverty problems has been relatively unproductive (because either the money is not spent on what it was given for or those in charge are unable to bring about the desired result), and one of the largest barriers NGOs have had to overcome. Most poverty problems are not as expensive to solve as many may think, and working this way teaches the government and the people that only huge sums of cash will deal with the issues. In this “UN culture” and system (which in practice encourages and promotes filling the departmental coffers of the various governmental agencies involved), NGOs without deep pockets or a willingness to “grease the skids” are sometimes scorned. Because of decades of such practices by the World Bank, the UN, etc., officials who discover that poverty alleviation will not be positively impacting their own personal or their office’s financial situation are often un-



Home teaching.

against poverty. Secondly, finding ways of building an official’s “face” without bribing or filling his office’s coffers is a healthy and viable means of building cooperation. When the central government so strongly encourages a broad approach to the fight against poverty, many lower level cadres eventually fig-

desire to love and help their country by actually serving the poor with governmental resources.

This learning process is growing rapidly and the positive results are easily seen. There are always too many governmental entities with the mandate to overcome poverty who are anxious to receive us and build partnerships in actually caring for the poor for the right reasons. Here in Yunnan, for example, we find the Poverty Alleviation Office, our primary governmental partner, has no interest whatsoever in obtaining our project money for themselves or their offices. They contribute a portion of the cost to many projects. They do not seek to inflate the actual costs of projects and are pleased to see the job done for less investment. They are genuinely sincere in simply and aggressively pursuing the fulfillment of their mandate, which their name states. This sets a good example for lower level entities. Ten years ago, such an attitude was rare. Today it is spreading broadly. In one prefecture, the Communist Party Secretary (the top official) came to the capital city to see our work and became one of our best working partners. He procures cooperation and assistance for us from all who are under his authority and many who are not.

The true needs of the minority people are directly impacted on a daily basis. **We are not the only NGO doing such work. Dozens of foreign Christian entities are finding this a viable way to serve the Lord and love the people.**

interested in further involvement. We have also encountered many church entities which, for the same reasons (this part has been promoted primarily by foreign Christian entities), think a large influx of cash is their biggest “need.”

Through involvement we have discovered, however, that there are two positive trends working against this tendency. Firstly, there is a quickly growing number of officials who are buying into the government’s push to truly fight

ure out that they can indeed “gain” personally from simply being an advocate for and partner in such efforts. Recognition for helping the poor, and the ensuing promotions up the career ladder are positive forces which are clearly impacting the thinking of many officials with whom we work. Others are simply impacted by our positive example. We are finding a large number of government officials, doctors, teachers, Christians and other involved individuals who have developed a heartfelt

Because of people and offices like those mentioned here, our plan and ability to train and teach local people to be the primary resource for providing the necessary aid to their own people is being received for the wise approach that it is.

To demonstrate China's openness towards such cooperation, I would mention that the central government, in the year 2000, awarded our organization the China Friendship Award, the highest governmental honor China bestows on non-Chinese. Village doctor and village teacher training projects, agricultural extension agent training projects, physical and educational rehabilitation of the disabled, infrastructure establishment projects (roads, bridges, electricity, water and sewage systems, etc.), AIDS prevention education, income generation projects, caring for the leprosy-affected, and many other similar approaches to helping the poor are now being accepted, promoted and requested from most areas of the province. The central push to truly alleviate poverty is quickly building the pressure and desire to establish effective programs broadly at the local level. As the vision is received and the work gets underway, the realization that outside expertise can be a great help in realizing goals drives governmental entities to seek cooperation with NGOs. The true needs of the minority peoples are directly impacted on a daily basis. We are not the only NGO doing such work. Dozens of foreign Christian entities are finding this a viable way to serve the Lord and love the people.

Openly and honestly stating to our governmental partners (as well as to the people we are assisting) that we are Christians who care for the poor because Christ loves them and with financial resources supplied by Christian foundations and donors has built trust and friendship between ourselves and local officials. It also helps China understand that Christians, both national and foreign, might potentially be as great a help to their nation as Christians in other parts of the world have proven to be. We often point to Hong Kong as a great example of how Chris-

tian NGOs have cooperated with the government to care for the poor. Though there remains some tension as well as a partial difference of understanding and motivations between Christian poverty alleviation workers and our governmental colleagues, openness and honesty have proven effective in keeping our cooperation healthy and effective. When disagreements have occurred as a result of these differences, frank and honest discussion of the issues and solutions, accompanied by the strong recognition on our part that we are guests here, has generally brought resolution to the situation. Many of our partners in the work are being impacted by the reality that we do indeed have a genuine love to offer the disabled, the leprosy-affected, the uneducated, and the millions who are simply too poor to afford the basic necessities of life. Love impacts the hearts of all who will acknowledge its reality and strength, and even more so those who acknowledge its Source.

There is also a growing willingness on the part of the government to allow foreign NGOs to cooperate with the

equipping and training of local Chinese Christians who are increasingly willing to demonstrate their love for the poor. We have, for several years, proposed this concept to any government officials who have displayed openness. With time we have witnessed a growing acceptance in some areas to having national Christians join in the governmental plans to assist the minorities and the poor. Foreign NGOs can (and often must) initially serve as promoters, liaisons, trainers and representatives for encouraging and promoting such things. (See box below for examples.)

China is strongly displaying her willingness to openly work with NGOs which brings foreign Christian professional expertise to aggressively pursue cooperation towards effecting a better living standard for those minority peoples who live in poverty. We must respond and work together with her to fulfill our Lord's desire that the poor be loved in His Name.

Rob Cheeley works with Project Grace in Yunnan Province.

Ways in which we have recently been involved

- ✦ A potato-growing project which helped poor Yi minority Christians triple their yield sent them with their tithes in seed potatoes to an even poorer group of Yi peoples in a neighboring area.
- ✦ Believers from two minority groups were trained to do community development work and give medical care to the leprosy-affected minority peoples in their area. They are also staffing a mobile library project in poor villages.
- ✦ Minority Christians have been helped to establish medical clinics then provide medical care and preventive health programs to the poor minority peoples in their area.
- ✦ National Christians have been trained and mobilized to educate the public on the realities of and solutions for the coming devastation of AIDS among the minority and Han peoples of Yunnan (where AIDS in China has its highest incidence).
- ✦ A Lisu Christian is mobilizing others to initiate assistance in foster care and leprosy projects among other minority groups.
- ✦ A minority church in a remote site has requested training and financial assistance to help a leprosy-affected village and a group of non-Christian deaf.
- ✦ A minority church in a remote site has mobilized the gathering and distribution of clothing to poor Tibetan, Yi and Lisu peoples in the mountains of their area.
- ✦ Deaf and disabled Christians from several minority groups (as well as the Han) are giving vocational training and guidance in life issues to the deaf and disabled.
- ✦ An older disabled Christian woman, moved by the sight of all this, gave her family's life savings (nearly \$15,000) to further the work among the minority peoples who are affected by poverty.

Book Review

China's New NGOs

250 Chinese NGOs: Civil Society in the Making, Nick Young ed., *A Special Report* from China Development Brief, Beijing, 2001, 300 pages. To order: E-mail: <orders@china.developmentbrief.com> with "Order for 'Civil Society in the Making'" in the subject line, and they will send you the pro-forma invoice; or write: 24 Xiehe Hutong, Wajiaobujie, Dong-chengqu, Beijing 100005, PRC. Cost: USD 35 or CNY 290 per copy plus carriage. (China Development Brief subscribers pay only USD 25 or CNY 210 per copy plus carriage.) Carriage is free within Mainland China. Purchasers from Hong Kong, Macao or Taiwan should add USD 8 per copy, all other international orders should add USD 16 per copy. For further information see the website: www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com

A review by Jim Nickel

For a very helpful overview of the growing nongovernmental sector in China, turn to *250 Chinese NGOs: Civil Society in the Making*. It is not, nor does it claim to be, comprehensive, but it does list most of the major nongovernmental organizations in China today, as well as a number of smaller ones. Four Mass Organizations and 43 National Organizations are listed, as well as at least one provincial-level organization from each of the 31 Administrative Districts of China. Directors, contact information and a bulleted description of each organization are included.

The Introduction, by Nick Young, editor of the *China Development Brief*, is a relatively complete overview of the current situation with regards to the development of the nongovernmental (and quasi-governmental) sector in China. Mr. Young considers the typical division of society into three parts (public, corporate, nonprofit) to be "a rather dull instrument of analysis," (p. 10) but acknowledges that it is widely employed in China today. He reckons this is "partly because government, commercial and nonprofit sector activity are so closely interwoven in China that there is an understandable quest for clearer demarcation of functions and roles, and partly because the paradigm appears to validate the notion

that autonomous organizations have a natural place in market economies, without directly addressing the more sensitive questions of the relation between the state and private citizens, and the sources of state legitimacy" (p. 10).

He raises some important questions about how much freedom of association the Chinese state can afford its citizens and how much it can afford to deny them. He points out that the government of China "faces a daunting mix of service gaps, increased demand and fiscal constraints," (p. 11) which it is trying to meet through allowing the development of nongovernmental organizations, while still trying to maintain control over the whole process. He comments: "The Communist Party and government have so far proved unwilling to make the imaginative leap necessary to release fully independent, bottom-up social forces. The initiative and creativity of ordinary Chinese people, that has proven so potent a force in economic development, is still severely constrained in social development" (p. 14).

He acknowledges the legitimate concern the government has about maintaining social stability but points out that using repressive measures to do so will ultimately prove counterproductive. "The longer you keep the lid on, and the more pressure that builds up in the pot, the harder it may eventually

blow" (p. 15).

In discussing the various forces driving the development of the nongovernmental sector, Young points to individual activism, religion, and concern about the environment. While

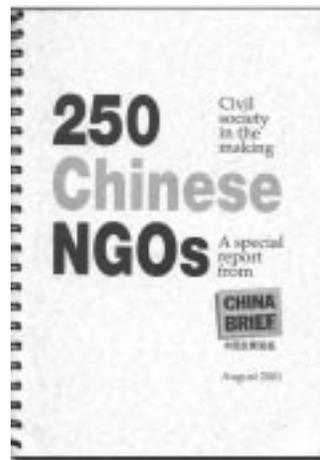
Young appears to be a rather thorough-going secularist, he does seem to have a pretty good grasp of the situation concerning religion in China and even makes some comments that could be viewed as friendly towards religion, such as: "For the present, it is not surprising that some Chinese civil society advocates should attempt to "draw a line" between religious ac-

tivity and the kind of associational engagement they endorse. And yet it may well be that, for the Party, the most compelling argument in favour of liberalisation of religious association would be the capacity of religious organizations to mobilize service delivery by 'social forces,' and deliver harmonious, community development" (p. 17).

The Introduction also contains some helpful observations concerning the role of the International Development Community. While acknowledging the universal need Chinese NGOs have for additional funding, Young cautions against drowning them with outside money. "In the interests of both long-term sustainability and of rootedness in (and accountability to) the Chinese community, it is extremely important that these organizations develop local funding bases" (p. 18).

He makes a number of very practical suggestions as to how the International Development Community can help Chinese NGOs develop. He recommends that grants be kept small and that assistance in capacity building be offered.

Apart from project funding, nearly all the organizations listed in this volume have other areas of need, in organizational development, leadership, management, communications, planning and professional capacity" (p. 19).



Each section of the book begins with an overview of the category or geographical area into which the NGOs listed are divided. Four Appendices listing governmental regulations for nongovernmental organizations and donations and an Index complete the book.

This review would not be complete without making reference to the other useful resources produced by *China Development Brief*. The quarterly briefing itself is a very fine publication, each issue filled with very useful information. The summer issue includes profiles on 30 new Chinese NGOs as a supplement to the book. The website (www.china-developmentbrief.org) contains a wealth of resources, including access to back issues of the brief, a searchable directory of international NGOs supporting work in China and a notice board that includes job vacancies and events listings. You can register on the site to receive free e-mail news updates and NGO briefs and can also subscribe to the *China Development Brief* in both its electronic and print forms.

Jim Nickel is the international vice president of *ChinaSource*. 卍

China's Society Makes a Comeback Continued from page 4

specialized conferences have followed. The China NPO Network has registered as an enterprise with the Bureau of Industry and Commerce in order to become a for-profit provider of training and information services for the third sector.

The government plans to further privatize social service institutions as well as expand the role of nonprofits. This will expand opportunities to establish not-for-profit schools and hospitals, all of which until recently were solely state owned. In June 2002, the State Office for Public Sector Reform launched a third phase of a joint program begun in 1990 with the United Nations Development Program and China's International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges. Their next five year reform effort will redefine nonprofit and public institutions

to clarify and strengthen their autonomy and encourage a stronger market role.¹³ Policies are being introduced to lift limits on total NPO investment and offer tax breaks or exemptions as well as favorable treatment regarding customs, foreign exchange use and land use rights. As a result, both foreign and domestic corporate donors are becoming more active in philanthropy. Clearly, the structural transformation of Chinese society has just begun.

End Notes

1. Lu Xueyi, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo Shehui Jiecheng Yanjiu Baogao (Research Report on Social Strata in Contemporary China)*, Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe (Social Sciences Documentation Publishers), January 2002.

2. See Jiang Zemin, speech at the meeting celebrating the 80th anniversary of the CCP, July 1, 2001, *Beijing Review* 29, July 19, 2001.

3. Josephine Ma, "Sect fears put new NGO laws on hold," *South China Morning Post*, October 15, 2001.

4. *Xinhua* English edition, December 8, 1999.

5. Author's interviews with Amity staff in Nanjing and other NGO staff in Beijing and Shanghai, June 2001. See: <www.amityfoundation.org>.

6. "Young Catholics Explore Internet to Maintain Faith," *UCAN News Service*.

7. Author's interview with the director of the Asia Foundation office in Beijing, June 2001.

8. David Wang, "What House Church Leaders Discussed," *Asian Report* 249, January/February 2002.

9. Personal conversations with the directors in Chengdu, 1997, and communication with supporters in the US, 2002.

10. Author's interviews in Gansu, November 1997, and in Taiyuan and Yangqu, Shanxi, November 1997 and 2000.

11. Personal communication with a Project Hope leader, March-April 2002.

12. Personal communication from a supporter, June 2002.

13. *People's Daily*, June 19, 2002 at www.china.org.cn/english/2002/Jun/34976.htm

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Resource Corner

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Hardware Requirements: CPU - Pentium 166MHz; RAM—64MB; Hard Disk Space—50MB; CD-ROM Drive—2X; Sound Card—16-bit sound card (if playing hymns)

China's Growing Third Sector: How Will the Church Respond?

The “associational revolution” currently gaining momentum in China has significant implications for the church in China and for faith-based organizations outside.

Relegated to the fringes of society for the past several decades, Chinese Christians are now finding increased opportunities to make an impact on society through their involvement in meeting social needs. The role of non-profit organizations (NPOs), including those in which Christians are involved, continues to grow in importance in the face of a shrinking government and decreased government funding for social programs.

By taking the lead in areas of society where other groups might not be as willing to venture, Chinese Christians—often in partnership with believers from outside China—can demonstrate the love of Christ in tangible ways. This incarnational approach to witness can already be seen in Christians’ concern for orphans, people with disabilities, the poor, and those lacking access to educa-



Brent Fulton

tional opportunities. Now AIDS victims, the unemployed, families in crisis, abused women and China’s burgeoning migrant population are emerging as segments of the society in particular need of Christian love and compassion. Organizations and individuals with experience in serving these populations are finding more than ample opportunities for involvement in China today.

Just as important as the actual services provided by NPOs are the mechanisms by which these organizations can build capacity and multiply their effectiveness while being responsible stewards of the resources entrusted to them—whether by contributors inside China or concerned individuals and groups abroad. China’s fledgling “third sector” lacks the well defined procedures and accountability measures that are so common in the nonprofit world abroad. Meanwhile, the rules by which NPOs in China will be governed are still being written. At this historic juncture there is much that nonprofit leaders outside China can offer in helping to set standards, providing training and mentoring China’s future NPO and

foundation executives.

As much of China progresses rapidly toward a more urban and globally integrated society, the Chinese church will struggle to maintain its social relevance. Life-changing spiritual revival may continue to sweep the countryside. Yet if Christianity is seen as disconnected from the everyday concerns of those in China’s cities the rapid church growth of the past 25 years may be slowed or even halted.

China’s emerging third sector provides a unique—perhaps unprecedented—opportunity to demonstrate that the same message that has brought meaning and fulfillment to millions in China during the past three decades is still relevant in the radically changing China of the 21st century. How the church responds to this opportunity will influence considerably its own future and the future of China as a nation.

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