

Tie Gou Village Clinic - Dr. Ma Tingfei

Through this project, our partner, the Amity Foundation, is reaching out with a loving and helping hand to those in need, while simultaneously fulfilling another of its goals, that of making the presence and the caring of Chinese Christians for all people more widely known in Chinese society by working with people of many different backgrounds to bring concrete expressions of love that touch the deepest needs of others in tangible ways that make a difference in their lives. Through our help in the building of the village clinics and through our provision of some needed medicines, we American Baptists have also become a part of this ministry of love-in-action. Here is the story of Tie Gou Village and of village doctor, Dr Ma (Ma Tingfei)

Tie Gou Village is located in and near the hilly region of Tou Ying Township in the Yuan Zhou District toward the southern end of the Ningxia Autonomous Region of China. More than 300 families comprising 2,200 people live in this rural farming village. Four hundred of the villagers are children ten years of age and under, with about 40 of them in each age category. Originally the villagers lived in the hills with quite a number dwelling in cave-like rooms hand-hewn out of the hillsides before adding a front wall to enclose the home. However, over the past few years the government has been working with the villagers, helping them construct some simple homes further down the hillside and helping them try to boost their standard of living. At the moment villagers live scattered over an area that spans a radius of about 5 km or 3.1 miles and some of their fields are still back up in the hills where their homes used to be. Some homes are accessible by a network of dirt roads in the area and others can only be accessed by walking in on foot.



A November look up the road toward the hills and the rest of the Tie Gou Village



A water catchment and Tie Gou village fields in the flat land below the hills



A June look at some Tie Gou village homes built with government help in the flat lands below the hills



A June look at the road going up the hill to other parts of Tie Gou village



Former hand-hewn cave dwellings of Tie Gou Villagers



Looking over a steep cliff into a deep ravine to see a home on the valley floor and terraced fields on the opposite hillside

Dr. Ma Tingfei, a villager and farmer, graduated from Amity's one-and-a-half-year village doctor training program in 2001. Before that, his father, also a farmer, had served as the village doctor. However, as his father was becoming too old to carry on the work as village doctor, Ma Tingfei, felt called to respond to the need by going through the village doctor training program and by serving as his father had in the past. Since 2001, in addition to his farming, Dr. Ma has also fulfilled his responsibilities as the village doctor so that villagers

continue to receive treatment for the most common illness they face right in their own village instead of having to walk or bike or take a bus for miles to reach the county hospital clinic. However, their small village clinic was a tiny, one-room mud structure that was both too small for the need and badly in need of repair.



The old broken down clinic



Dr. Ma outside and inside the new Tie Gou Amity Village Clinic and answering some of Judy's questions about the village and his work.

With \$1000 in One Great Hour of Sharing funds contributed by American Baptists and sent through the Amity Foundation added to funds from his farm work along with help from relatives and friends, Dr. Ma has been able to build a small brick clinic according to the specifications of Amity and the requirements of the Provincial Health Bureau.¹ The clinic has three rooms—a reception room, an examination and treatment room, and another room with a bed for patients who might need to stay at the clinic overnight.

Dr. Ma, his parents, his wife and children, and his siblings' families lived up in the hills until the government helped them build a house along one of the dirt roads at the foot of the hills. Although their house and courtyard may look large, each immediate family unit just has one small room for parents and children to share. The fields they farm are still several kilometers up into the hills.



Dr. Ma with his wife and two children and some of his extended family at the gate to courtyard of their family home.



The side of Dr. Ma's extended family home. He, his parents, his wife and children and his siblings families all live here



The small potato field Dr. Ma farms is several kilometers up the hill from his home and clinic on the first terrace across the deep ravine in the foreground

The Tie Gou villagers belong to the Hui Minority (one of 56 different ethnic groups that are recognized as vital parts of the population in China today). The Hui Minority people have Muslim roots and considered themselves ethnically Muslim.

Relatively poor mountain farmers, the villagers usually have an average yearly per capita income of about 1000 *yuan Renminbi* (approximately \$125). Their main crops include wheat,

potatoes, beans, benne (a type of sesame grown in this area and used to make edible cooking oil), and a little corn. The plots of land allotted to each person or to each family are relatively small and farming is generally done by hand. Some families may also raise two or three goats or sheep or one or two head of cattle. The past two years have been particularly difficult for the people of Tie Gou Village. In May 2004 they had a severe hail storm that destroyed all of their crops except for the potatoes. In 2005, they faced severe drought. In June, you could see that the crops were not growing or maturing properly. So, these past two years their per capita annual income has dropped to 500 *yuan Remminbi* (approximately \$67.50). The drinking water supply has also been depleted by the drought. Therefore, villagers have had to buy water for themselves and for their goats and cattle. Although it sounds inexpensive to us at 10 *yuan* (approximately \$1.25) for a ten-day supply, you can quickly calculate how much of their annual income it would take to buy their water throughout an entire year.



The number of patients Dr. Ma sees each week depends a lot on the season. More become ill and seek the doctor's advice in the winter and spring than in the summer and fall. Overall it probably averages out to around 20 patients per week. The main conditions he treats include high blood pressure; respiratory illnesses such as coughs, bronchitis and pneumonia; digestive problems such as indigestion and diarrhea; various women's health problems; and small injuries such as burns or cuts and bruises; and various nutritional deficiencies in children. Dr. Ma also provides prenatal care and advice for pregnant women. In addition, he provides other preventative medical care for his villagers by giving appropriate vaccinations for the children, posting hygiene and disease prevention information on a blackboard on the outside wall of the clinic and giving lectures when there is special need or interest. Each time a patient visits him for a medical problem, Dr. Ma also take the opportunity to offer additional advice on matters of nutrition, hygiene and disease prevention. In the evenings, Dr. Ma can either be found in the clinic so that he can be available for a villager who might come seeking medical advice, or he can be found making a home visit or two at the request of the families of ill patients who live a little farther away.

If a patient comes to Dr. Ma with an illness that is more serious than he is trained to treat, he will help that person get to the county hospital clinic in Guyuan. There are public buses to Guyuan that pass by on roads within walking distance from the clinic, which is helpful. Nonetheless, it is good the clinic and Dr. Ma are right there in the village, to evaluate each patient's need, to treat the cases he is trained to handle and to encourage any he cannot treat to go the distance necessary to get appropriate treatment.

Many times patients who come to see the doctor cannot pay for the small cost of the medicine they need, let alone any fee for the doctor. In this case, they usually sign some kind of I.O.U. These patients will always try to pay the doctor back gradually and will do their best to clear their debt at harvest time. Others go to distant cities to work as day laborers to try to earn enough money to pay off their debts. Nonetheless, there are always some who are so poor that they cannot pay



Dr. Ma looks over the medicines donated by ABC International Ministries for use in treating

patients who cannot afford to pay.

back what they owe, and the doctor continues to pay for their treatment out of his own pocket even though the doctor and his family are also quite poor. This is true of Dr. Ma, as it is of other village doctors as well. To help mitigate this problem and enable village doctors to continue to serving the poorest of the poor in their villages and surrounding areas without totally draining their own resources dry, American Baptists, with the help of the Amity Foundation and the Ningxia Provincial Health and Sanitation Office have started to provide a supply of commonly needed medicines that these village doctors can use when treating those who cannot afford to pay for their care. ABWM is currently raising White Cross funds to help with this project.

Dr. Ma and other village doctors regularly attend additional training seminars held by the County Health and Sanitation Bureau in Guyuang. These include a one day meeting each month to update village doctors on pertinent health and hygiene information they need to share with their villagers, as well as important vaccination and treatment information relevant to diseases appearing in the area. Moreover, there are periodic three day seminars on specific issues such as hepatitis vaccinations or appropriate use of various medicines.

Thanks again for your part in this ministry of “love in action” in Tie Gou Village and in nine other villages, also in the southern part of the Ningxia Autonomous Region in China.

¹ ABC International Ministries is interested in helping other similar villages with their medical needs in the same way. The \$1000 reflects what was needed for the construction and provide basic equipment for each clinic in 2004. As costs have been rising, any future clinics built will need \$1400 for construction and basic equipment.