

<b>Title</b>	Care for the Aging : A Visit to Beijing
<b>Author(s)</b>	Brian, Byrd
<b>Citation</b>	聖学院大学総合研究所 Newsletter, Vol.19-3 : 17-19
<b>URL</b>	<a href="http://serve.seigakuin-univ.ac.jp/repos/modules/xoonips/detail.php?item_id=2331">http://serve.seigakuin-univ.ac.jp/repos/modules/xoonips/detail.php?item_id=2331</a>
<b>Rights</b>	

聖学院学術情報発信システム : SERVE

SEigakuin Repository for academic archiVE

# Care for the Aging: A Visit to Beijing

Brian Byrd

Many are familiar with the Komagome “Eki-mae” building that the Seigakuin Schools use for academic seminars, lifelong education classes, Kids English, and Seigakuin Study Extension (juku) for junior and senior high students. On the fifth floor of the building are the offices of the building’s owner: the Love and Grace Welfare Aid Foundation (Aikei fukushi shien zaidan 愛敬福祉支援財団; I will use the popular name, “Aikei”). Aikei (then Aikei Gakuen) began as a Christian educational and social service mission among the children and youth of Adachi Ward by missionary Ms. M. A. Paine in 1930, and was instrumental in founding the Nishi Arai Methodist church. In 1998, the property was sold, and the current building purchased as Aikei redirected its focus from directly running a social welfare institution to providing service and support to such institutions. As a part of its new mission, Aikei has for the past ten years sponsored study and exchange tours for those involved in social welfare to nursing homes and other care facilities in Australia, Sweden, and China, and held seminars addressing issues in social welfare. Currently, cooperation between Aikei, which is rooted in the actual institutions providing care to the elderly and disabled, and the Social Welfare Department of Seigakuin University, which seeks to provide practical training opportunities to students, is under discussion.

I became more familiar with the organization and its members, when, in keeping with the founding spirit of Aikei, I was asked to lead a monthly meeting for gospel singing, Bible study, and discussion of social welfare issues in America and Japan. I was then invited to participate in a study and exchange trip to China this June. Along with visiting private welfare institutions, the group went as a social

welfare delegation from Kita-ku to its sister city, Senpu-ku in central Beijing.

We entered Beijing passing under the soaring ceilings of its strikingly designed airport, built to accommodate traffic for 2008 Olympics. Our tour bus then rolled past miles of greenbelts, some with maturing trees, some still fields of recently planted saplings—efforts to keep out the yellow sands that blow in from the denuded western deserts, and to improve the air quality and image of a capital known for polluted skies. Before long, large complexes of 10 to 15 story apartments lined the roadside; due to the yellow sand problem, most had glassed-in balconies. Approaching the center of the capital, we then passed the glistening glass and steel of new business and finance complexes. Evidence of China’s power, growth, and challenges were everywhere.

## The Peking Church Care Facility

A main focus of the tour was to consider how China is dealing with its aging society. As life expectancy is rising, and the single-child policy is placing a greater burden of care on fewer young people, the government has begun to take action. As has been common in many parts of the world, though perhaps unusual in communist China, the government has partnered with a charitable institution, in this case, the officially recognized Peking Christian Church, in the building of a care facility for the aging.

After a ninety-minute bus trip from the center of town, and then walking down a wide, unpaved back alley past little shop/residences, we arrived at the home. The individual rooms were simple, but rather spacious; the residents welcomed us, but we were hurried through the halls by the facility managers. The home is built on grounds adjacent to a church

that packs over 500 people into its Sunday service—crowded, we were told, because it is the only church in the area. Most residents of the home, half of who are Christian, also attend the church; some non-Christians come to faith and choose to be baptized after participating in the worship services.

Near the church, a walk down the alley was a small Christian bookstore. It did not appear to have a sign, and though a sanctioned shop, it seemed neither prominent nor easily accessible to the Christian or interested party; Bibles, music CDs, and Christian novelty items were plentiful and priced reasonably.

### **The Senpu City Office and Senpu Nursing Home**

China is said to make and implement policy in a centralized, top-down fashion. Our visit to the local government office in the Senpu Ward of Central Beijing suggested the positive potential for this approach. There, the local bureaucracy has taken the lead in drawing up strategies and setting plans in motion to deal with its aging population. In the glistening new city office, we heard a lecture that detailed and analyzed well the challenges the city faces. It focused on the fiscal reality that the great bulk (90%) of care for the elderly must be done in their own homes—not in institutions.

We then toured a home completed in 2008 for the Muslim residents of the ward, a state-of-the-art facility. As we entered, a group of residents were singing folk songs; others were playing majong or other games. We were led through various exercise and physical therapy rooms, and saw Muslim prayer rooms for men and women and a cafeteria and large meeting room decorated tastefully in a style that reflected the culture of the Muslim residents. In our discussion time, we learned that residents joined on

their own volition, that the primary funding source was the government, and that the most pressing problem of the facility was the residents' loneliness. Even in this showcase facility, they missed the companionship of family and friends.

### **Morning at the City Park**

Beijing is blessed with expanses of beautiful and well-tended parks. Unlike Japan, where the lack of parks is lamented, yet the existing ones rarely in full use, the city parks in China serve as social centers for numbers of middle-aged and older people. Entering tree-shaded paths that wind around little hills and past large lotus flower ponds, we encountered groups of men and women pursuing health, human relations, and their hobbies. Some were doing forms of dance-like martial arts or badminton-like paddle sports, and others playing cards or majong, but by far the largest group stood scattered under the trees and on the paths and rocks within earshot of a leader, at whose cry they alternately bended, stretched, rotated and massaged their limbs and bodies. Called San-ichi-ni (3-1-2), this exercise routine has become quite popular. Even the beginner can fully participate in stimulating the 3 pressure points (between thumb and forefinger, above the wrist, and along the lower leg), focusing on the essential 1: breathing, and strengthening the 2 legs, the weakening of which is called the beginning of aging (hence the name, 3-1-2).

The typical older Chinese, our guide explained, arose early, had a simple, traditional breakfast which included tofu and vegetables, but not milk or meat, spent time in the park in exercise, and during the day, between helping grandchildren get to and from school, socialized in the park over games and

hobbies with their friends. This lifestyle seemed a key to a high physical, emotional, and social quality of life.

## Conclusion

Consistent with Aikei's Christian roots, visits were also made to the Beijing YMCA, which runs sports facilities and language and cram schools, and the YWCA, which has renovated a historic property in the center of the city as a hotel and community culture center.

I have here introduced a sample of the current work of Aikei: building bridges between Japan and the world through the field of social welfare. Care for the aging is an issue that differs according to the social context, yet is also borderless need that can bring people together in search of solutions. In the case of China (inspired in part by the late Sumiya Mikio), Aikei has established positive and productive contact at personal and official levels with its Asian neighbor. Also, by bringing together Japanese involved in various aspects of social welfare, Aikei is providing a forum for those seeking to better meet the needs of Japan's rapidly growing population of aging people. In addressing this great and shared challenge, a fruitful partnership between Aikei and Seigakuin may be in the making.

(ブライアン・バード 聖学院大学総合研究所特任講師)