CCC: Campaign Against Sects Should Not Affect Churches

(ANS) A campaign against sects and secret societies underway since October 1995 has negatively affected rural churches in some areas. According to Dr. Wenzao Han, acting general secretary of the China Christian Council, local government officials did not always know how to distinguish between "normal Christian activities" and illegal sects, and sometimes closed down Christian meeting points that were perfectly normal.

"Generally this campaign is not a bad idea," Dr. Han told ANS, "because these sects are good neither for society nor for the church. They call themselves Christian, but throw a bad light on the church." Dr. Han added that the CCC had received a number of complaints from churches in different provinces that had been affected by the campaign.

According to Dr. Han, the most serious problems had arisen in some areas in Anhui Province, where the registration of venues of religious activities had come to a complete standstill. In one county under the jurisdiction of Huangshan City, all Christian homes not yet registered as meeting points had been closed down until the end of the campaign. The local pastor had complained to the authorities about this, but when these efforts proved unsuccessful, she turned to the CCC. The CCC is now taking up this and other cases with the government authorities at the national level.

Furthermore, the CCC has been urging the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council to instruct provincial RABs to help local cadres concerned make clear distinctions between Christianity and illegal sects, Han said. "Local cadres often don't
know the difference between Christianity and sects that call themselves Christian. The RAB has to meet the challenge to train them properly." At the same time, he added, the CCC needed to better train pastors and church workers to deal effectively with sects and heretical teachings.

Sectarian groups affected by the campaign include the Yellers sect, the Full Scope Church, the Lingling (Spirit) sect, the Established King sect, and the Disciples Church (a group which is not related to the Church of the Disciples in the USA). [350 words]

**Director Calls For Strengthening Of RAB Work**

(ANS) The work of the Religious Affairs Bureaus on all levels needs to be improved and strengthened, the director of the RAB at the State Council, Ye Xiaowen, said in his keynote speech at a national conference of provincial RABs in Beijing last month.

Ye Xiaowen has recently been appointed director of the RAB of the State Council. He is not yet 50 years old and comes from Guizhou Province.

According to excerpts from the speech published on February 1 in the newspaper of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Ye suggested that in 1996, attention must be paid to three main goals: 1) completing the registration of venues for religious activities, 2) improving the RABs' understanding of different local situations, and 3) training a better calibre of both RAB workers and patriotic religious workers.

Ye said that the registration process was almost concluded in 13 provinces, that it was continuing in nine provinces, that three provinces had just started, and that five were preparing to begin registration soon. He added that registration was not an aim in itself, but an instrument for the better management of religious affairs. After completing the registration process, RABs on all levels should implement annual reviews of religious venues.

Ye admitted that the quality of the RAB officials often did not meet expectations. In recent years, there had been a great generational shift, with an influx of many young cadres who had not received enough training to do their jobs well. RAB workers should have "good political qualities, a good working spirit, and good knowledge of the religious situation", so that they could properly implement the policies of the central government and protect all lawful religious activities.

Ye also said that to achieve these aims, patriotic religious organizations and personnel should be strengthened. [306 words]
"China's Jerusalem" Sees Steady Development

(ANS) Wenzhou Prefecture in southern Zhejiang Province, known as "China's Jerusalem" because of its large Christian presence, has seen steady development of its churches in recent years.

The prefecture now has 600,000 Christians, making up almost 10% of the population. Many of the believers are entrepreneurs and financially well-off. Interestingly, the richer a village in Wenzhou, the higher is its percentage of Christians. Because congregations are often wealthy, there is no lack of church buildings: The prefecture has more than 1,100 churches, the majority of which were newly built after 1980, and more than 1,000 meeting points. No Christian in Wenzhou Prefecture is more than 2.5 kilometers from the nearest church building, and Wenzhou City has not only 12 churches, but a meeting point on every big street. Churches are often large, with seating for up to three thousand, and boast beautiful decorations and high spires. Still, they are packed to the rafters every Sunday. Church openings attract enormous crowds: When the new church in Ouhai County Town was dedicated, lunch was served to more than 10,000 guests at 1,200 tables.

As they say in Wenzhou, they have a lot of Christians, a lot of worship services, a lot of different activities, and a lot of church workers. This is the more astonishing as Wenzhou was declared a "religion-free area" during the Cultural Revolution. Actually, Christian activities in the region never stopped, but were conducted clandestinely during this period.

Churches in Wenzhou usually have two or three Sunday services, plus daily evening programs like Bible studies, prayer and youth meetings, and many choirs. Other activities include lay training classes, evangelism meetings, baptism and catechism classes, and classes for those who do home visits. Each church conducts at least one or two revival meetings a year, with a week of day-long meetings.

More than 3,000 lay workers serve the churches in Wenzhou. Most of them entered the church during the Cultural Revolution or in the early 1980s. [336 words]

"Church Weddings For Sale" Criticized

(ANS) Unnamed pastors and church workers from Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, have been publicly attacked for setting up a company that sells Western-style church weddings which include a blessing by a pastor and anthems by a choir. According to an article published in the February issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng, some Nanjing church workers founded the "Angel Ceremony Company" which then advertised its services in Nanjing newspapers.
The article, which is strongly critical of the company's activities, stresses that church weddings are an act of worship, and are meant for Christians. Selling church weddings was a perversion of what was originally an act of blessing. "We believe that the church should never do anything like this... it is an expression of the church becoming secularized and money-worshipping. When the church that is meant to worship God changes into a wedding company, pastors can hardly avoid looking like 'business people.' What impression will this give to those who do not believe?" the article asks.

The fact that this harsh criticism was published in Tian Feng clearly shows the concern of the CCC leadership about corruption in the church. It also highlights the fact that there is no church order which would prevent such a sellout of church ceremonies, and that the "Angel Ceremony Company" must have backers in the Nanjing Christian Council who are not willing to close it down or prevent its use of church premises. [244 words]

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How To Run The Church Well: A Young Pastor's Perspective

(ANS) Young church workers are increasingly making their voices heard in the debate about how to run the church well. In an article published in the February issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng, a young pastor from Zhejiang Province, Rev. Chen Dingtong, gives his thoughts on the subject.

Above all, Chen writes, the church needs a good leadership structure. He proposes a tri-level approach: 1) An advisory level, made up of people aged 70 or above who can contribute their experiences; 2) An organisational level, made up of young and middle-aged workers who are able to size up situations discerningly, make decisions, organize, and who have a lot of pastoral experience, and 3) A working level, made up mostly of young pastors and workers with some theological training, who feel a call to the church, have a solid foundation of faith and are able to get things done. Chen stresses that the Chinese church needs new blood to ensure its continuity and survival.

Chen stresses that the church is there in order to serve its members and offer them things which society cannot. Priests need to "feed their sheep well", otherwise the "sheep" will go hungry and may even turn to "poisonous" grass. Therefore, church leaders should be strict with themselves and try to improve their personal integrity.

Church affairs need to be conducted in an open and transparent way, particularly in the financial area, Chen says. Procedures for budgeting, accounting and examining finances should be public. Responsibility for church affairs should be distributed more widely and a "democratic spirit" fostered.

Chen suggests that more effective ways need to be found to encourage church workers to study basic theology. According to his article, only 20% of church workers

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attend training courses, and these courses are ineffective due to poor materials and weak syllabus.

A church work research group is also a necessity, according to Chen. Church workers tend to follow their own personal methods, procedures and policies. Chen suggests groups in each town and province where church workers can meet to discuss issues such as how to run the church today, exchange experiences, learn about developments in the church at home and abroad, and raise awareness of the Party's religious policies, as well as to solve problems.

Citing the fact that the southeastern and coastal provinces of China are rich, whereas the areas in the southwest and northwest are poor, Chen suggests the establishment of a common fund for church work, thereby setting up a system of sharing between rich and poor.

Finally, efforts should be made to increase unity, Chen says. Accusing each other of being "against three-self" or "against loving the country and loving the church" etc. only serves to isolate the church and build walls between believers. Different views should be listened to and welcomed. [461 words]

News In Brief

(ANS) The first lay-training class ever was held in Xishuang Banna Autonomous Region, southern Yunnan, in January. There were 33 participants of all age groups in the 18-day course, mostly from the Dai and Hani minorities. As there are no pastors or seminary graduates in Xishuang Banna, the course was taught by a pastor and a seminary graduate from Kunming who went to Jinhong for this occasion. The lay training class coincided with a large baptism service at the church in Jinhong, as well as the ordination of five elders, one of them a young woman. [97 words]

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Jinhong Church in Xishuang Banna Autonomous Region, Yunnan, is planning to set up a church-run drug rehabilitation clinic. The congregation has several hundred members, 11 of whom are former heroin addicts who became clean after converting to Christianity. A young Christian doctor, who has been treating addicts, is in charge of the project. The plan for the clinic has been welcomed by the local government, and building will begin soon. Part of the funding to set up this project comes from the Amity Foundation. [85 words]

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Huzhou Church in Sichuan Province has grown from just 10 members in 1982 to more than 3,000 worshipping in a dozen meeting points. [23 words]

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Even the church is not safe from counterfeiters: A notice in the January issue of the church magazine, Tian Feng, warns of books published by fake Christian companies with names like "Zhenan Christian Council" or "Heavenly Wind Arts Factory". [40 words]

Ordinations: Two young seminary graduates, a man and a woman, were ordained pastors in Tianjin. *** Six seminary graduates were ordained as assistant pastors in Sichuan Province, and two assistant pastors were made full pastors. *** Seven seminary graduates were ordained pastors in Yunnan Province. [43 words]

New churches: Christians in Chasuji Township, Tuheitezuo Banner, Inner Mongolia, worked together for four months and built their church with their own hands. *** The new church in Xidian Township, Ninghai County, Zhejiang Province, has four storeys and a floor size of 830 square meters. *** The old church in Bingyang County, Guangxi Autonomous Region, was torn down. The new church built in its place can seat 1,000 worshippers. [67 words]

A new lay training center has been established by the Wenzhou Christian Council. Trainees will study for four terms of two months, spread out over two years, and after having passed a final exam, will receive a certificate. In cooperation with the theology correspondence course run by Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, a separate training center was established to assist the many correspondence students in the area. [66 words]

At least 20 church buildings were partially or completely destroyed by the earthquake in Wuding County, Yunnan Province, in October 1995. The recent earthquake in Lijiang Prefecture, also in Yunnan, has also affected church buildings, though damage to the 28 church buildings in the Lijiang area has been light, according to the general secretary of the Yunnan Christian Council. The Yunnan CC has not yet received any news from churches in the Diqing and Nuijiang regions. Zhongdian County in the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Region was badly hit by the earthquake. [90 words]

One thousand Bibles have been distributed free of charge to poor Christians in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. [17 words]
Jianshi Village in Daqiao Township, Neixiang County, Henan Province, has about 60% Christians. The village had long been known as extremely poor, and had always relied on relief from the government, until in 1992, the local Christians started a fruit-growing venture. Using the newest scientific methods to grow vegetables, the villagers have now become prosperous. The average yearly per capita income in Jianshi stands at 2500 yuan. [68 words]


By Philip Wickeri

(ANS) This is an important collection of documents concerned with religious affairs issued between 1979 and 1992. It has been put together by the newly established “Religious Culture Publishers” which was set up last year under the direction of Mr. Zhang Shengzuo, retired director of the Religious Affairs Bureau. Included are Party circulars, policy statements, reports, laws and regulations, and statements and talks by senior Chinese leaders, some of which are published here for the first time. It is a very valuable resource for the study and interpretation of religious policy and practice, and essential reading for those who are trying to understand the political and regulatory context of the Church in China today.

Not all documents on religious policy are openly published in China, and many provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions have issued their own statements and regulations. But most important documents which have been circulated on a national level are contained here. All of these have been edited for inclusion in this volume, and it would be an interesting future project for some enterprising Sinologist to compare the documents which appear here with their original versions. The difficulty in understanding and evaluating religious policy documents is to determine the relative importance given to different kinds of statements. Are Party circulars more or less important than statements of senior leaders? Do newer statements supersede or merely supplement older ones? What happens when laws and regulations and policy statements appear to disagree, or give different emphases to this or that aspect of religious policy?

At least two trends are clear from a preliminary reading of this volume. First, religious policy has become more and not less restrictive between 1982 (Document 19, p. 53) and 1991 (Document 6, p. 213). Chen Yun’s 1990 letter on “the infiltration problem” is evidence that this has been a concern of government leaders at the highest level. Second, an effort is being made to give religious policy a stronger basis in law, as exemplified by the regulations published in 1994. What is not clear is whether these two trends reinforce or contradict one another. [407 words]
Yunnan Churches Growing Amidst Difficulties

(ANS) Churches in Yunnan Province, a region that traditionally had a large number of Christians, have been growing rapidly in recent years. In Kunming City alone, more than 500 people were baptized last year. And in Jinghong, the capital of Xishuang Banna Autonomous Region, where no church existed before 1988, 96 new Christians were baptized in January. Leaders of home worship gatherings in the region report that they often see more than 100 baptisms a year. Rapid church growth has also been reported from Nujiang Prefecture in the northwest, and from Simao and Honghe Prefectures in the south.

The number of Christians in the province can only be estimated. The Yunnan Christian Council speaks of at least 640,000 Christians, with a possible maximum of about 800,000. About 90% of the Christians in Yunnan are not Han Chinese, but belong to different minority nationalities. Of 25 minorities in Yunnan, at least 12 have Christian churches.

Missionaries were very active in Yunnan from the late 19th century, and as a result, several minority nationalities (among them the Miao, the Yi, and the Lisu) have been largely Christian for several generations. But among several other minorities who traditionally had no Christians at all (like the Dai or the Hani), churches recently started to spring up. This has led to problems in some areas, where local governments have gone so far as to completely outlaw Christianity, saying that only traditional religions were protected by the Chinese constitution.

Traditionally, conversions to Christianity happened by family or in even larger groups. There is now a large number of Christian villages in the Yunnan countryside. Research by a Chinese social scientist has shown that most of these village are high up in the mountains, above 1500 meters. Christian villages can be found among the Lisu, Jingpo, Miao, Yi, Lahu and Wa minorities. Fugong County in northwestern Yunnan, which has the highest percentage of Christians of any county in China (almost 90%, see ANS 95.5.6), is largely inhabited by Lisu.

While the number of Christians is growing, serious problems remain. There are less than 60 ordained pastors in Yunnan, the majority of whom are very old and often frail. While more than 200 Yunnan Christians have graduated from different seminaries since 1980, few of them have been ordained. Many graduates have left church work altogether as local churches are unable to pay them any kind of salary. Others continue, having been given fields to grow their own food. But having to secure their families' livelihood first, many of these church workers are not left with much time for doing the work they were trained for. Adding to these difficulties is rough and mountainous terrain: Most churches in Yunnan can only be reached on foot or by mule cart, making it impossible for outside church workers to visit often.

Communication is another problem: Many minority Christians do not speak any Chinese, and even rural church workers and pastors often cannot communicate well.
in this language. As a result, the provincial Christian Council is often not made aware of local problems until they have become very serious. Even then, intervention may be difficult.

Bibles exist in six minority languages, for those groups that have larger numbers of Christians. But these were printed several years ago, and have sold out. According to the Yunnan Christian Council, at least 100,000 minority language Bibles are needed, as well as new hymnals in several minority languages.

Numerous lay training classes are run, usually on a county or regional basis, to alleviate the lack of trained church workers. Such training classes are mostly conducted in minority languages, but may be held in Chinese if trainees from many different minorities attend. Most of these classes are short-term. Two lay training centers, both of them in Dehong Prefecture on the Burmese border, offer long-term training classes which last 3 months each year during the slack agricultural season. Trainees attend for three consecutive years, and then graduate with a certificate that will enable them to later become ordained elders or deacons.

Problems remain, though. The distribution of lay training centers is uneven. Zhaotong Prefecture, with its many Miao Christians, has neither the land, nor the money, nor the trained personnel to conduct lay training courses. And even where courses are available, many churches lack the financial means to send trainees. Bus tickets, living allowances and study fees can add up to several hundred yuan, an enormous sum for churches in areas where most believers have almost no cash income. And finally, running courses for Christians from different regions and minorities is difficult. Teachers at the Longchuan Lay Training Center report that students from different ethnic backgrounds, with different languages, and different living habits do not always get along well.

Problems in Yunnan are not only due to the churches' internal weaknesses. Implementation of the policy of religious freedom has been uneven, and in many instances, church property taken away in the fifties and sixties has not yet been returned. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that missionary bodies active in Yunnan bought huge tracts of land, resulting today, in some instances, in churches' claims for the return of whole city blocks. Negotiations have, in many cases, been protracted and difficult.

The structural weakness of the churches in Yunnan also results in their heavy reliance on local Religious Affairs Bureaus. New churches can often only be built with government assistance, and the organization of regional lay training courses would be impossible without the help of the RAB. On the other hand, this kind of reliance on government agencies limits the freedom of churches, and in some cases makes them vulnerable to government pressure.

But amidst their numerous difficulties, Christians in Yunnan keep to their faith. Says Rev. Ms. Han Chaqiong, a third-generation minister in Kunming: "The Lord provides, even when there are problems. Prayer is powerful." [990 words]
Yunnan Seminary Still Facing Problems

(ANS) Yunnan Theological Seminary, which has been closed since 1992 due to intra-church conflicts, may reopen this summer. This was confirmed by the Yunnan Christian Council in January.

According to the provincial Christian Council, there are still a number of problems facing the seminary. Prominent among them is a serious shortage of funds: Almost no local church in Yunnan can raise the necessary money to see a student through a two-year or even a three-year program. The Yunnan Christian Council does not have funds to support a large number of students, either.

Furthermore, the language problem has not been solved. The majority of Christians in Yunnan are not Han Chinese, but come from twelve different minority nationalities, each with their own distinct language. Christians in rural areas often speak little Chinese, and cannot read Chinese characters. As the seminary has almost no faculty who speak any of the minority languages, communication with minority students would be difficult. And even if minority students were to learn enough Chinese to follow the theological courses, they would still face the problem of translating what they have learned into their own language and culture. Reports from former Yunnan Seminary students show that many found this extremely difficult in the past. [214 words]

First Tibetans Training As Church Workers

(ANS) The first ethnic Tibetans to ever undergo training as Protestant church workers are currently participating in a three-month lay training course at Longchuan Lay Training Center, not far from Ruili. The two young men come from the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Region in northwestern Yunnan, about a week’s rough travel from the training center.

They told ANS that there is now a small number of ethnic Tibetan Christians in Diqing, an area mainly inhabited by Tibetans and Lisu. Spread out over several mountain villages, all of them participate in Lisu-speaking churches, and most have been evangelized by Lisu Christians in their neighborhood. There is not yet any Tibetan-speaking church.

The two men said that they had not been church workers before, but that they hoped to be allowed to preach and lead church work after graduation from the course. They added that they planned to reach out especially to ethnic Tibetans, as all the Lisu in their area were already Christians.

The two men said that they had never seen a Bible or any Christian materials in the Tibetan language, and that they did not know how to preach other than in Lisu. [200 words]
Luquan: A Landscape Dotted With Churches

(ANS) There are at least two regions in China where, driving through the countryside, the visitor will come across a church building in almost every village. One of them is Wenzhou in southern Zhejiang (see this issue, ANS 96.1.3), the other is Luquan County in northern Yunnan.

Luquan is an autonomous county, mostly inhabited by Miao and Yi people. Of its 430,000 inhabitants, about 90,000 are Christians.

Christians in Luquan have found a unique solution to acquiring church buildings with very limited funds. When individual enterprises were encouraged in the area in the early 1980s, local congregations bought up a large number of huge production brigade barns that were no longer needed, and converted them into sanctuaries.

Luquan County now boasts 297 registered churches, most of them simple white-washed structures, identifiable as churches only by large red crosses painted on their walls.

The county has two old pastors, six seminary graduates, 78 elders, and more than 100 evangelists. [160 words]

ANS Feature: Jingpo Minority Churches In Western Yunnan

By Andy Nicholson and Jon Lochhaas

(ANS) Recently, on a trip to the western Yunnan town of Ruili, right on the border with Burma, we had the opportunity to visit with members of the Jingpo minority and to see some of their churches.

The Jingpo people, known in Burma as the Kachin, live in the mountainous region which straddles Yunnan and northeastern Burma. More than 119,000 Jingpo live in China today, most of them in the mountains of the Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture. There are about 10,000 Jingpo in the Ruili area.

Originally, most of the Jingpo people practiced ancestor worship. However, in the late nineteenth century, an English missionary who had been serving in Burma moved to the Ruili area, set up a mission school and quickly won many Jingpo for Christ. Among other achievements, this missionary developed a written form of the Jingpo language, using the Roman alphabet. Today all written material, including Bibles and hymnals, use this script.

Many of the Jingpo in China are Christians, but there are no exact figures. In the Ruili area there are about 1,700 Jingpo Christians, but only 450 of them are baptized. Many people do not wish to make a commitment to Christianity that restricts them from smoking and drinking alcohol, and therefore defer baptism until they are in middle age. Despite these restrictions, many of the young people in the villages are interested in Christianity.

Since the Jingpo mostly live in mountain villages, places of worship are scattered widely around Ruili. Altogether there are 15 churches and 25 meeting points, served by two pastors, as well as a number of elders, evangelists, and lay workers.

We visited two churches, travelling by car, though it was obvious that both places were meant to be approached from the hills and not
from the main road. A small dirt path off the highway wound up between a few buildings, through a field, and brought us quickly to our first stop. The church was a brand-new, plain white cinder-block and tin roof building with the words "Ruiju International Baptist Church" written colorfully across the front in English. When we asked why English was used, we were told that a large number of English speakers come to the church, either Burmese residents or foreign traders.

The church building is an interesting hodge-podge of images and ethnic influences. The order of service is given in Chinese, Jingpo, Burmese, and English on a board at the front. Above the board are paintings of Christ, captioned in Spanish; perhaps brought there by a foreign visitor? Though the narrow benches of rough wood can only seat about 40 people, more than 60 attend Sunday services, with some people standing outside the wide front doors. Most of those attending have to walk several miles to get there.

The money problems facing the Jingpo churches became visible at our next stop. We were taken to see a pile of rocks and a ragged collection of bricks in the middle of a field. The story here was painfully familiar: During the Cultural Revolution, a church building had been taken over and turned into a factory. Years later, when apologies were being made, it was decided that the factory would not be moved, but that the government would give land, building materials, and money for the building of a new church. However, after everything had been settled, the church members were still some 20,000 yuan short of construction costs. No one is really sure when construction will finally start.

What struck us most, however, were not the problems being faced, but the people facing them. Sitting around a scarred wooden table, sipping tea brewed over a wood stove, we looked at the faces of a few of the Christians here. A middle-aged woman, who had served as a lay preacher for more than 25 years, sat listening silently. A 59-year old Burmese businessman recently returned to China reviewed for us the history of the Jingpo church in excellent English. Next to him sat an energetic young man. He was eagerly looking ahead to the ways in which Christ's church could grow here. Despite differences of background, language, and culture, they were united in their commitment to their church. Despite the outward weakness of the churches, we could feel their underlying strength. [732 words]

Andy Nicholson and Jon Lochhaas are English teachers with the Amity Foundation.

ANS Feature: Church Workers In The Yunnan Countryside

By Claudia Währisch-Oblau

(ANS) "We have enough to live on," says Mi Bingxin. A weathered, middle-aged Jingpo peasant from a village close to the Burmese border, he grows rice, wheat and sugar cane on his nine mu of land. "The harvest is not bad, about 1,200 jin (600 kg) per mu. This is enough for my family, and we can even sell some on the market." The house he built for his wife and five children, a roomy structure made from mud-bricks and wood, shows that the family is moderately well off.

But Mi Bingxin is no ordinary peasant. Besides working his fields, he is the secretary of the Yingjiang County Three-Self Committee, and an ordained elder of the local church - each of which may well be described as a full-time occupation. With all this goes preaching every Sunday in the big central church not far from the county town, and organizing the affairs of 120 village churches spread out over mountainous terrain, not to mention the fact that he also teaches for three months every year, from January to April, at the county-run lay training class.

"Well, I live close to the church office, so it isn't so difficult," he shrugs. "And my wife really supports me." This is why Mi Bingxin can afford to stay at the lay training center for weeks on end, coming home only occasionally to pick up a bag of rice for his food. Fortunately, the training courses take place during the slack rural season. During harvest time, all church activities stop.

Like most church workers in rural Yunnan, Mi Bingxin has not had much theological training. "I attended two 3-month courses in
Kunming," he says, "in 1985 and in 1989." But this has been enough to enable him to preach and teach New Testament at the Training Center.

Ruth Li is a trained theologian. The young woman, an ethnic Jingpo, graduated from Yunnan Theological Seminary in 1992. Since then, she has been a resident teacher at the Longchuan Lay Training Center, training church workers for southwestern Yunnan.

Life has not been easy. "None of us here has a salary," she tells me. The seven resident teachers at the training center rely on fields that the Yunnan Christian Council has bought for them. Full of pride, Ruth Li shows off the rape in full yellow blossom, the green shoots of winter wheat, and the vegetable garden that provides food for teachers and students alike. Her hands are coarse, and her fingernails blackened from daily work in the fields.

Behind the center, pigs grunt in their sty. Feeding them is also Ruth Li's responsibility. When they are slaughtered, there will be some meat to eat.

Ruth Li is not yet ordained. When I asked her about this, it was the county party secretary, also present, who answered: "This will need some more thought."

Dabanli Village looks like an Asian traveler's dream. Nestled in the rolling hills of Lancang County in southwestern Yunnan, surrounded by bamboo groves and terraced sugar cane fields, its bamboo houses with their large sunny balconies, blossoming creepers and curved beams convey a sense of overwhelming beauty. Interestingly, the curved beams end in crosses - Dabanli is a Christian village. Its inhabitants are ethnic Lahu. The village in all its beauty is remote: About 10 kilometers from the nearest road, it can only be reached on foot or by jeep.

Li Zhaxin is the head teacher of the village's primary school. Built with funds from the Yunnan Christian Council and the Amity Foundation, the school provides an education for 274 pupils from five surrounding villages. Li Zhaxin is proud of the fact that 95% of the school age children in Dabanli are in school, and that almost all of them finish grade six. More than half of the children then go on to middle school, as boarders in a township some 20 kilometers away. These figures are unusual for a village as remote as Dabanli and bear witness to the Christians' commitment to education and of the head teacher's hard work.

Ca Yaw, a darkly tanned man in his early forties, is an agricultural technician with the township government. He is also the secretary of Dabanli church. Dabanli is a Christian center, and there are many believers in surrounding villages who come to church on Sundays. The simple stone building is surrounded by blossoming bougainvillaea and stands on a knob above the village. Ca Yaw organizes the church activities: The three Sunday worship services - morning, noon, and evening - as well as the daily evening Bible classes and prayer meetings. The only ordained minister in the county lives in Dabanli, but is often out preaching and teaching among the 7,000 Lahu Christians spread through the mountains. It is Ca Yaw who makes sure that the daily church activities are running well.

There is also a young theologian in Dabanli Village. Duan San does not do pastoral work, though. The quiet, young woman has been put in charge of a small clinic set up by the local church. Trained in basic medical procedures for a month, she now treats simple ailments like colds and diarrhea. The clinic with its three beds is housed in a simple wooden house with a grass roof, spotlessly clean and well, if basically, stocked with medicaments and equipment. There is no charge for consultation at the clinic, and patients only have to pay for their medication. Duan San does not get any salary from the church, she relies on the profits from selling medication for her income. Lately, she has not made much money. A young man, trained by the church to become her assistant, has opened his own clinic. And even though he charges a small amount for consultations, people rather go to see him: After all, he is a man, and he has had more medical training than Duan San.

Tan Mian looks every inch the successful businessman he is. In his starched white shirt and immaculate sarong, this young man oozes self-confidence. Relaxed, and in an off-hand way, he talks about the 500,000 yuan he plans to invest in a new house and business.

Tan Mian is a Dai from Jinghong in Xishuang Banna, and he is one of the small but growing number of Christians in that area. He is
also among the first Dai to have undergone a lay training course, and has recently been ordained an elder.

Tan Mian became a Christian in 1988, the year that Christian activities had finally become possible again in Jinghong. Sick with a painful illness that no doctor seemed to be able to cure, he had tried Buddhist rituals, without success. It was his mother who then remembered some old Christian women. They came to pray for him, and the next day he was healed. Since then, he has been active in the church, and it seems only natural that he should be a leading figure in the Jinghong congregation.

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Mi Bingxin, Ruth Li, Li Zhaxin, Ca Yaw, Duan San and Tan Mian: Their ages and educational backgrounds are different, they speak different languages and belong to different ethnic groups. But they have in common their love for and commitment to the church, and their willingness to put the church’s needs above their own plans. It is people like these who build and sustain the churches in the countryside. Without people like them, Christianity could not survive in China. [1206 words]

Claudia Währisch-Oblau visited Yunnan Province in January 1996.

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Rev. Ms. Han Chaoqiong (Kunming), tells the following story:

"Recently, we ran a lay training class here. One young Christian man came from the countryside to participate, but he did not have the requisite permit from his local RAB which is needed for study in a lay training course. We pleaded with the Kunming RAB to let this man participate, as he had already made all his arrangements, and spent a lot of money to come to Kunming. But they would not relent. We prayed together one last time before this man went back to his village.

When he got back, he immediately visited his local RAB and told them about this incident. The official in charge listened, and then replied: "People from this county should participate in the course! We will send you back there with a permit, and two more people from the church here as well." The RAB even paid for their bus tickets!"