Helping Believers To Read The Word

(ANS) As the Chinese church continues to grow at a phenomenal rate, one of the questions it faces is how to encourage and nourish a healthy spiritual life among believers. As Luo Zesheng points out in July's issue of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, this question is all the more urgent as the Chinese economy and society also see breathtaking changes and believers are faced with more and more material temptations.

This is a question which the church in Shantou, Guangdong Province, has been grappling with for a number of years and, as Luo points out, they have found an answer in the promotion of a comprehensive program of Bible studies. A Bible study program was implemented with the church's reestablishment in 1981, where one of the pastoral staff would speak on a designated passage of Scripture each week. Over the years the participants have formed into small groups of 10 in which the passage is discussed and the believers have a chance to share their ideas, express their feelings, raise questions,
seek answers, and generally increase their comprehension of the text. This basic method of encouraging believers to be involved in the systematic examination of Scripture has resulted in an increase in individual faith and spiritual growth.

Nevertheless, it was soon discovered that new believers found even this level of Bible study too difficult. As Luo puts it, they were still "nursing infants" and yet these infants were somehow expected to "eat rice". Addressing this situation, the leaders of the Shantou Church initiated a "Life of Jesus" class, a basic level course that establishes a foundation from which to understand the basic truths of Scripture. The curriculum is divided into 30 lectures, with two main goals in mind - to make clear what it means to be saved and to give each student a clear understanding of the basics of faith. Luo admits that it is not expected a person will instantly become a mature Christian through this course, however it is expected that superstitions and heresies can be avoided through the instruction given. It is also hoped that each student will gradually adapt to a specific style of studying the Bible and will then be equipped to participate in the church-wide Bible studies.

Luo goes on to say how one group within the Shantou church was discovered to have even more basic needs, namely those who are illiterate, some of whom are unable to recognize even numbers. For these believers there is no way to read the Bible or even use the church's hymnbook to join in hymns of praise. To remedy this problem, the Shantou church has followed the lead of other churches and developed Biblical literacy courses. These classes are organized on three levels. The first level teaches numbers and very basic level literacy. The second level continues teaching literacy through the Scripture passages that the pastor is to use each Sunday, thereby allowing learners to first of all be able to read along with the rest of the congregation during Sunday worship. As Luo points out, this consequently means these learners can also more easily understand the preacher's message. The third level group is designed for those who have already participated in basic literacy classes for a few years and who recognize a number of characters and words. This third class stresses the study of the Bible according to its individual books, allowing learners to practice their reading and even become familiar with every passage of an entire book.

The Bible literacy courses also focus on teaching the hymns that are to be used each Sunday. The learners not only learn to read the hymns but also learn some basic music theory. At important festivals, such as Easter and Christmas, the learners are organized into groups and offer songs before the congregation. This increases their self-esteem and motivation to learn tremendously, says Luo. Family members of many of the learners support and assist in this kind of work.

Over the course of the past ten years, the believers in Shantou have worked their way through the entire New Testament in their Bible studies, and for the past four years they have been involved in an intensive study of the Old Testament. However Luo reports that during the initial stages of the Old Testament study, it became apparent that many of the new graduates from the "Life of Jesus" course were finding the curriculum rather difficult. In response, the church has also sponsored a separate study
course for these learners at the city's West Church in order to allow these believers to start their Bible studies from the New Testament. This allows an easier transition from the more basic "Life of Jesus" course.

All of the Shantou church's classes have been developed on the basis of the real needs of their 12,000 believers and with the resources available at hand. Believers attend classes suited to their own degree of learning and spiritual development, which leads to much more beneficial results. It has become apparent over the years to the Shantou church that this type of organized Bible study not only allows people to mature and progress in their spiritual lives but also draws believers closer to the church as a loving fellowship.[885 words]

Reaching Out Through Care, Commitment and Example

(ANS) Zhenyuan county in Gansu province has seen a staggering tenfold increase in the number of believers over the past two years. In 1995 there were only 157 Christians in the 24 towns and villages making up the county yet, only two years later, the number of believers has now risen to 1,400. In the August edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, Chen Xuehou gives an explanation for this phenomenal rise in numbers.

Chen points out that when people are attracted to the church in Zhenyuan, it is often due to the fact that they can see the leaders of the church practising what they preach. When church leaders encourage others to give up widespread harmful practices, such as excessive smoking, drinking, gambling, spreading superstition or being involved in dishonest practices, then people can see that the leaders follow their own advice. Similarly, church leaders do not just tell people to respect and observe the law, pay their taxes on time and respect and love others as themselves but can actually be seen to be doing this.

Chen cites an example of a time when certain heresies had taken hold among the believers in the county. "If you only pray hard enough then your grain store will be so full that you will have more than you can eat", "It is against God's will to use artificial fertilizer on the soil", "If you are ill, don't go and see a doctor, just seek the Lord", "The kingdom of God will come soon so give up farming work altogether and wait to ascend in to heaven" - these were common heretical teachings and caused many believers to become confused and go astray. On hearing these heresies, one church member personally got on his bicycle and cycled to all of the 24 towns and villages within the county, going from door to door, patiently clarifying the truth of the faith and refuting these teachings. In the end this church worker won back over 100 believers who had gone astray. Therefore, Chen sees the strong and exemplary leadership of the church in Zhenyuan as one of the reasons for its growth.

Secondly, Chen explains how the church pools all its efforts, wisdom and experience to look after believer's needs. He cites the example of how the local Three-
Self committee recently set up a "Contact Group" made up of 70 church members who were each assigned 20 other believers within the county. Through assisting these 20 believers in spiritual growth and development, as well as in matters of daily life, the group members get to know them well. Every village now has at least one contact person and such a group keeps the church in touch with what is happening among grassroots believers. Jobs are clearly assigned and tasks divided, and each level is responsible to the next. This gives believers confidence in the church.

The concern of Zhenyuan church for its members extends in many different directions, and is another reason for its growth. Chen mentions the very harsh conditions in the county, with a lot of poverty in the villages and mountain areas. As a result, the church noticed that it was very difficult for hard-up believers to find a suitable marriage partner. Therefore, three church members decided to set up an "Introduction Service", open to local people too. So far the service has brought together over 90 different couples, 30 of whom have already ended up getting married.

Finally, Chen writes that the church's greatest attraction in Zhenyuan county is its clear love for the local community. During the busy farming seasons of the year, the church organizes a "Believers Mutual Aid Group", where some 400 church members go out to the homes of the old, weak and disabled in order to offer them assistance whilst their family members are busy in the fields. The church is also active in providing relief in the forms of money, clothing and food to families affected by local natural disasters such as flooding. Therefore, through their care for each other and for their neighbours, Christians in Zhenyuan provide a powerful witness to the gospel and achieve a good reputation in the local community. [710 words]

A Place To Call Our Own - Church Building In Zhenjiang

(ANS) Since Cultural Revolution days, the church in Yu Yao city, Zhejiang province, has grown from 22 meeting points to 37 today, with a total of 14,000 believers. Faced with such a large number of believers and meeting points to provide for, Sun Tianren tells in the July issue of the church magazine Tian Feng how the local CC/TSPM committee has been working hard to provide new or refurbished space for believers to worship in.

Sun describes how, with the re-establishment of the local Three-Self committee in 1981, a concerted effort was begun to recover church property confiscated during the previous couple of decades. Although the process was slow and complicated, by 1992 all of the church's property had been returned. However, Sun goes on to mention that this was not the end of the church's problems. Due to rapid economic growth, many of the old buildings in the area were being torn down by the government in order to make way for redevelopment. The Yu Yao CC/TSPM committee stepped in to assist local congregations whose facilities were affected by this redevelopment and helped them to find appropriate locations for new buildings. They also made sure that the congregations received reasonable compensation from the government. Sun cites one
instance where the main church building in Yu Yao was demolished. In this case, the CC/TSPM committee liaised with the city’s Demolition and Relocation Department and was able to secure a favourable settlement for the church. The original church building stood on area of 1.27 mu (1 mu = 0.0667 hectares) whereas the congregation managed to obtain 4.07 mu of land as compensation. Today, an attractive, modern church building stands on the new piece of property.

Sun points out that the Yu Yao CC/TSPM committee has pledged itself to work honestly and with dedication to build up the church and provide local Christians with an environment within which they can lead a normal religious life. In conjunction with the local Religious Affairs Bureau and local government agencies, they have worked to create space for 15 new meeting points, relocated or reconstructed 17 new worship centers, and refurbished, improved and enlarged all the other meeting points in the city. A recent example which Sun mentions is the church building erected in an isolated area of the Siming mountain region on the outskirts of the city. A defunct bamboo factory was purchased on behalf of the meeting point, which hitherto had only had one small room to worship in. The factory is comprised of 20 rooms, which could be used for various church activities. The entire 30,000 yuan (=US$ 3,530 approx.) cost of the purchase of the building was donated by the Yu Yao CC/TSPM committee and, following renovations, the old factory was converted into a comfortable and spacious place of worship.

Another important aspect of providing for the material needs of the church is the organization of church management. According to Sun Tianren, the Yu Yao CC/TSPM committee has established three points of focus in this regard, which they define as "group", "pulpit" and "finances" - each congregation must choose a leadership group, provide for a designated preacher and establish a system of financial accountability. In conjunction with this congregation-level management plan, the Yu Yao CC/TSPM committee has established eight "church management groups" to oversee the individual meeting points and churches. These management groups meet twice a year to discuss issues within the local church. [589 words]

Shenyang Pastor Back at Work, Assumes New Responsibilities

(ANS) Rev. Gao Liangyi, the young pastor who was at the center of a widely publicized intra-church conflict three years ago (See ANS 94.4/5.16 and 96.3.8), is back at work in the northeastern city of Shenyang. He was restored to his ministerial standing in December of last year, and this past April, he was appointed Associate Pastor of the Dongguan Church.

Rev. Gao told ANS that he wants to move beyond the conflicts of the past. "I must correct my own faults and forgive others," he said, "so that in Christ, with one heart and mind, the gospel message may flourish."
The Dongguan Church is now putting up a new building, and Rev. Gao is involved in many aspects of this work, alongside his regular responsibilities for leading worship and Bible Study and teaching in a voluntary layworkers training program. "But I hope I can have more time for prayer, devotion and Bible Study of my own," he added, "for I need to strengthen my inner life in order to be an effective pastor to this congregation."}

The Church Is Growing Among Han Chinese In Urumqi

(ANS) To meet the needs of its growing congregation, a new Protestant church has been built in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region (See ANS 94.4/5.5). The population of Xinjiang is largely Muslim, from the Uighur, Hui, Kazakh and other ethnic minorities. Urumqi's Christian community is mostly Han Chinese, and is now estimated to number more than 5,000. There are two churches and 20 meeting points in the city, and the church is served by two ordained pastors and a number of lay workers.

The new seven-storey church on Mingde Road near the center of the city was built at a cost of 2.6 million yuan (=US$306,000 approx.), and most funds were contributed by local Christians themselves. It seats 3,000 people for Sunday worship, and there are prayer and Bible meetings on other days of the week.

Church sources say that there are small meeting points in most of Xinjiang's cities and larger towns. The total Protestant population is estimated at 30,000-40,000.

ANS Focus:
Six Congregations, Different Traditions, One Body : A Portrait Of The Church In Shantou

The following information comes from visits by Rev. Judith Sutterlin of the Hong Kong Overseas Coordination Office of the Amity Foundation to Shantou City (formerly known as Swatow) in Guangdong province over the past five years, and from conversations with the Rev. Hong Tiande, Chairman of the Shantou Christian Three-Self Patriotic Committee and Director of the Shantou Christian Affairs Commission in July of this year.

(ANS) According to Rev. Hong, the six churches in Shantou City, Guangdong Province, have a unique level of cooperation as they share staff, funds and teaching materials. The city's approximately 12,000 believers see themselves as one body, with different groups of believers gathering at the six church sites for worship and other religious activities. Every Tuesday morning the twelve pastors and six seminary trained workers meet together to plan the work for shepherding their large flock. A rotating schedule of preaching takes the pastors to each of the city's churches on a regular basis. In addition to worship, the pastors and church workers lead Bible study groups each week at three of the church sites, with a total of about 1,500 people attending these groups. To provide further encouragement and pastoral care, they have divided the city into regions, with each pastor responsible for one region. Within each region the believers are further divided into groups of 40 to 80 households which meet together to talk
and share on a regular basis. When there is a special need, these groups will let their region’s pastor know and he or she will make contact and respond to that need.

Most of the services at the city’s churches are held in the local Shantou dialect, but on Sunday afternoons you can hear Mandarin emanating from the city’s West Church as about 500 gather there for worship. Rev. Hong points out that more and more people continue to move into the Shantou area from other parts of China and that newcomers often do not speak the local dialect, so they would find the morning and evening services difficult to follow. Thus, the 3pm Mandarin service reaches out to meet these people’s needs. According to Rev. Hong, some of these Mandarin speakers were Christians before they moved to Shantou, while others are new believers or seekers.

During worship, four of the churches have special programs for children age four and under. At the West Church, for example, ten teachers lead 100 children in songs and Bible stories.

The Shantou church is growing each year. Every month, one of the worship services is evangelistic, and believers are encouraged to bring other friends and family members to attend. Any seekers are invited to stay following the service and to fill out a form so the church can maintain contact with them. If they request it, one of the pastors or church leaders will pray with them. In July of this year two baptismal services were held for 600 new believers. Each year, pastors use immersion in one of the baptism services and sprinkling in the other, so that new believers can choose freely which form of baptism they would like to receive as they declare their faith. The two styles of baptism are used alternately on the first Sunday from one year to the next, in order to give equal weight and respect to both traditions of the Shantou area believers.

The six Shantou churches also share 14 choirs, which range from 30 to 100 voices each. A total of nearly 700 people, young and old alike, raise their voices in anthems of praise. Their rotating schedule means that larger and smaller churches alike have the opportunity to enjoy the music of each of these groups enhancing their worship of God. Rev. Hong stated that at special times these choirs also give of themselves, their time and their own money, in order to go to some of the outlying countryside meeting points and offer their music to those congregations as well.

Projects undertaken by the Shantou churches include using the volunteer services of retired Christian doctors to staff medical clinics held on Monday and Saturday mornings and the running of a kindergarten for children of believers whose work units do not provide one. There are about 150 children attending the kindergarten, ages ranging from 4-6, with one class for each age group.[735 words]

ANS Feature:

Conclusions Of CCC Fact-Finding Mission To Tibet

In recent months, media attention has been directed toward Tibet and the situation there, and statements have been issued from various groups representing a wide range of convictions as to how the Tibetan question should be properly viewed and handled. Given the multitude of opinions on this question, it proves ever more difficult to get to the heart of the matter and discover the facts about the situation in Tibet.

Out of concern for the people of Tibet and in the hope of finding out the facts about the situation there, the China Christian Council sent three representatives - Rev. Kan Baoping of the CCC, Mr. Mei Kangjun, a reporter for Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, and Mr. Ting Yenren, Associate General Secretary of the Amity Foundation - on a fact-finding mission at the beginning of August this year. Despite time and scheduling limitations, the group managed to meet with a whole host of Tibetan people from all walks of life. Below are the conclusions drawn by Mr. Ting as a result of these meetings and this visit.
Our visit to Tibet was very brief, but based on the limited exposure, we do have some observations which we would like to share:

First, most Tibetans see Tibet as part of China.

Ties with "inland" China, whether economic, political or cultural, could be seen everywhere. The phrase "our China" or "we Chinese" repeatedly came up during our meetings with Tibetans from all walks of life. Even in the Potala Palace, the lamas explained to us the pictures and sculptures that show the historical ties between the previous Dalai Lamas and the emperors in Beijing. One picture, I remember, even showed the meeting between an envoy from Tibet and the Manchu King in northeastern China before the latter took Beijing and started the Qing Dynasty. The meeting established a political alliance, and immediately after the founding of Qing, the new emperor made the Dalai Lama's "Yellow Sect" official and crushed other rival Buddhist sects in Tibet.

Tibet is and will remain an autonomous region of China. There are indeed frictions between Han and Tibetan people, mainly in Lhasa. The Hans tend to be more successful businessmen, craftsmen and workers, and Tibetans look at them in the same way rural farmers look at their city counterparts in "inland" China, or the way small town dwellers look at people from Shanghai or Hong Kong. These mixed, almost "love-hate", feelings towards Hans are difficult to describe, and our friends managed to confide them to us as we got to know them better. At present, 70 percent of the government officials in Tibet are Tibetan, but many highly technical positions are still held by Hans. Tibetan officials realize that this at least causes a problem with continuity since most Han officials are in Tibet only on a short-term basis. We sincerely hope that more and more Tibetan professionals, managers and skilled workers can be trained and can take charge in all posts.

We feel strongly that it is wrong to advocate "Tibetan independence" without considering the general well-being of over two million Tibetans. At present, the economy is rapidly developing with the help of the central government. We met some tourists who had crossed the border and gone into rural Nepal. According to them, life is visibly much better on the Tibetan side than it is across the border. Should Tibet go "independent" and cut off its ties with the central government, one of them observed, the economy of Tibet would slide back by decades. This would certainly be against the interests of the Tibetan people.

Second, for Tibetan common folk today, religious freedom is real and not just empty talk.

On the street, lamas chant sutras, women walk with prayer wheels in their hands, and pilgrims prostrate their way to temples. Inside the temples, devotees make offerings, add yak butter to lamps and wait in long lines to be blessed by a Living Buddha. These are daily scenes attracting no attention except that of tourists.

We visited the Sera Temple on a day on which there were very few tourists. The lamas briefed us as they led us into one room after another. I was with one young lama and he told me that temples in Tibet also served as schools of literacy education for the young lamas. I even had a look at the government-published primary school textbooks in Tibetan language and other booklets which he and his colleagues were using.

As we were walking outside, high altitude sickness made us too weak to climb the steps. A woman pilgrim teased us in Mandarin, and this started a conversation. She was recently retired from an office job in the city government and often came to worship with other older women in her family. According to her, many office workers were also Buddhists and they came on holidays. In answer to our questions, she said, "Religious freedom? Of course, we have complete freedom. I can come whenever I want to, morning or evening, today or tomorrow. In the past I was a serf, and we had nothing to offer when my family came."

With many others, she walked to one burner after another in the courtyard and threw a little dry grass, rice and crumbs of zanba (a kind of bread) on to each one of them. We asked her about the meaning. She said, "You young persons don't want to listen to an old woman. Wait until you are about my age."
It certainly appeared to be a very relaxed atmosphere. After she said something in Tibetan to her fellow pilgrims, we realized that we were being laughed at by all who were around.

This freedom, I should add, extends to other religions too. There are mosques for Muslims in Lhasa. There is a Catholic church in a city east of Lhasa, and there are Protestant Christians in Lhasa who wrote to the China Christian Council to purchase Bibles by mail. Christianity was brought over by the Han people.

Third, religion is being used for political ends by advocates of Tibetan independence.

For centuries in Tibet, Buddhist temples sided with the rich and powerful. It was only natural that feelings of antagonism grew among the most destitute and downtrodden. Today, the group around the Dalai Lama in India still uses Buddhism as a cover for its "independence movement." This only serves to justify and strengthen people's suspicion of religion. Politicizing religion for the ends of the few only alienates the masses of the people who would otherwise look at religion differently. We met government officials who took great pride in the depth and richness of Tibetan Buddhism and told us how early Buddhism taught about human evolution, how it describes the earth as round and how it predicts the coming of airplanes. However, they became tense as soon as the conversation touched upon the issues of "Tibetan independence" and "human rights."

"Religion is being used by those people to subvert us. They hate us if our people live a good life. How can we sit idly by without doing anything about it?" I was told this by a shepherd-turned-high-ranking Tibetan official who became very emotional, fingers shaking, when talking about how pamphlets, money and personnel has been sent secretly into Lhasa's monasteries from India.

Indeed, people are "doing something about it." Monks and nuns have organized Democratic Management Committees, which run monasteries and nunneries and look after all matters from making regulations on daily life to officiating the re-incarnation of Living Buddhas. One job of these committees is, through registration and certification, to make sure the senior monks who have secret ties with the Dalai Lama cut off these ties or, if they resist, to throw them out of the monasteries altogether. We may decry such excesses but, to many, this is a matter of dealing with political sedition and thus has nothing to do with religious repression. In the eyes of many Tibetans such actions are lenient in comparison to some of the things their own parents experienced and it would be fully justifiable if they do not want their children to suffer again.

With temples being turned into battlegrounds, it is hard to predict the final outcome in terms of the impact on Buddhism and on Tibetan culture. One thing that might happen is that people may walk away as they see temples as being too "this-worldly" to resemble what they perceive to be Buddhist. In the Han inhabited Chinese "inland", Buddhists have always been at peace with all around them, and they have been growing quietly and enjoying people's respect. With an exiled community and the support for it from the West, people do not see the same peacefulness in Tibet. A distinction should be made between social witness and the use of religion for political ends. The former meets the basic needs of those at the grassroots level while the latter does not.

Finally, as a more fundamental issue, we should all work towards reconciliation in Tibet, however remote this sounds to us today.

It is painful to see the world divided into the oppressor and the oppressed and, in old Tibet, those who owned and those who were owned. With this division, people have suspicion, mistrust and hatred. As time goes on, reconciliation is indeed happening in Tibet. We were told that since the 1980s, many exiles have returned and are now living in peace with their neighbours. However, on the whole, the pain in Tibet seemed too deep, the conflict too severe, and the memory too fresh. Furthermore, such militancy and antagonism are being constantly reinforced by the activities initiated from outside China in support of so-called "human rights" and "Tibetan independence."

With economic development, Tibet is also changing demographically. At the time of the Democratic Reform in 1959, the population in Lhasa was 35,000, including over 7,000 monks and nuns (and over 4,000 beggars). Today, the number of monks and nuns has
dropped to below 2,000. For most of Lhasa's residents, who work in various government institutions and factories, and for many workers, professionals, managers and their family members, they have more "human rights" than ever before, and they would never trade their life today for anything uncertain.

Of all the people we met, only one general manager of a cement factory wished the Dalai Lama to return and settle down peacefully. This, to him and to many of us, might be a good step towards reconciliation.

We hope that one day there will be a world where there is no estrangement, suspicion or hatred, and we hope that part of this world will be Tibet. To achieve this, we first of all need to be forgiving towards others ourselves. We need to come to understand the feelings of those who have committed excesses in the handling of religion. The present is only that which has been made by the past, and in the past Tibetan Buddhism was used by a brutal system of exploitation: over 90 percent of the people were illiterate, land-less, and subsisting under a theocracy that had control of over 90 percent of cultivated land and pastureland. To help with reconciliation today, therefore, the Dalai Lama could help by expressing accurate criticism of this past and could achieve much by apologizing to the masses of Tibetans who suffered under the old system. This should not be too difficult, since the Dalai Lama was really very young when the old system was overthrown and he therefore could not be held responsible. He became the representative of the past only by romanticizing the past and advocating its restoration - for these things he does bear responsibility. Romanticizing the past does no good to reconciliation. To many in Tibet, if we may borrow a Christian term, this is continuing to sin while at the same time asking for the forgiveness of the sinned against.

Our conclusions might have their bias since we had neither the time nor the connections to have interviews with so-called dissidents. However, I think that these conclusions are important because they are drawn from the daily life and attitude of Tibetan people themselves as we have witnessed it. They are especially important because when people outside China talk about James Hilton's "Shangri-La" and when they talk about the situation in Tibet today, they often, for various reasons, ignore the proportion of Tibetans who express the views we heard and have presented here, or else they treat such people as non-existent. There can be no greater bias than this.

ANS Feature:
Profile of a Local Church: Nantong, Jiangsu province

During the summer of this year, the Amity Foundation held an orientation program for teachers from all over the world who had come to China to teach English in rural colleges. The program was held in Nantong city, Jiangsu province. During the course of the summer, teachers were able to share in Sunday worship at Nantong city church and talk with Pastor Zhang Zhixiang there about the church's history and its situation today.

(ANS) In 1894 the first Christian missionary arrived in Nantong from Shanghai. Within 10 years, Nantong city had become a mission station and in 1907 a 1,000m² church had been built, along with church-run hospitals, schools and welfare institutes such as old people's and orphans' homes. By 1949, there were around 1,000 believers in Nantong city and the surrounding area. Most of the believers in the city belonged to the Disciples of Christ, while believers in the countryside mostly followed Methodist or Presbyterian traditions.

After Liberation the number of Christians fell sharply to only 200. With the beginning of the Three-Self Movement the denominations all came together in Nantong. The church building was closed during the Cultural Revolution but returned for use in worship after the Cultural Revolution ended. In September of 1988 a Church Affairs Management Committee was formed and the church was officially opened for worship at Christmas 1989. In October 1991 the area formed its own CC/TSPM committee. Today there are about 250 baptized believers.
who are members of Nantong city church and a total of around 300 people attend worship each Sunday.

Besides Sunday services, the church in Nantong holds Bible studies, choir rehearsals and Bible literacy classes. Communion services take place every two months, with Pastor Zhang going out to take Communion to those who cannot come to the church through sickness or ill-health. Baptisms take place once a year, with a short training course in the basics of the faith held for new believers before baptism takes place. There is no set time for the baptismal service and it occurs according to the situation and demand each year. This year 60 new believers were baptized in Nantong at Easter.

Nantong district has three church buildings, including the city church, and also 25 meeting points. The area as a whole has about 10,000 believers, which includes small groups of Seventh Day Adventists. In the summer months, the meeting points hold worship services on Monday and Wednesday mornings and also have Sunday services. There are only three ordained ministers for the entire Nantong area, Pastor Zhang in Nantong city and two other ministers in nearby Qidong county. As a result, most of the services at the country meeting points are led by local elders and church workers at the points themselves.

The church in Nantong is funded entirely by donations from believers and also rent from church property. This income then goes towards church activities and the upkeep of church buildings. Nantong church no longer has any formal welfare projects as it once did before 1949. Recently, the church has focused its work on promoting women's issues within the church and has organized a Women's Prayer Group to look into these issues.[540 words]

ANS Documentation:
Looking Ahead At Relations And Co-operation Between Hong Kong and Mainland Churches

The following is the text of the keynote address given by Rev. Wilson W. Chow, President of the China Graduate School of Theology (Hong Kong), at the 1997 Symposium on Chinese Church Affairs held in the border town of Shenzhen, Guangdong Province in April of this year.

The church in Hong Kong is facing 1997, a time of change which it has certainly never experienced before. Under the major premises contained in the concepts of "One Country, Two Systems", "A High Degree of Autonomy" and "Hong Kong People Governing Hong Kong", we are returning to the motherland and beginning a new stage of our history. We will have our identity defined, we will come to understand the similarities and differences between our "two systems" within our "one country", we will preserve our previous way of life, and we will take on the status and way of management of a Special Administrative Region. The clergy and believers within the church in Hong Kong all share a positive and enthusiastic attitude of welcoming this change. The situation on the mainland now and the new situation of Hong Kong after its return will both provide a good starting point from which to build relations and co-operation between mainland and Hong Kong churches.

Due to historical reasons, Hong Kong and mainland churches have passed through a long period of time where they have lacked any contacts or dealings and, by existing under "two systems", the churches in both places have moved in different directions, even though geographically they are very close. Therefore, if we want to build relations and co-operation then the first prerequisite is that we have to get to know and understand each other. For us, we need to get to know the Chinese church and have many visits and exchanges. We need to get to know the current situation of the Chinese church for ourselves. Many misunderstandings come from rumours and heresay, so "come and have a look" remains the best way to get to know the Chinese church. Even to this day, there are still quite a few believers abroad who think that there is no religious freedom within China's borders, that the church there has no Bibles and that it is under the government's
authority and control. In the U.S. I once saw a poster in a church printed by a certain organization and an offering box set by next to it. This publicity was calling on believers to donate, telling them that a donation of US$20 can deliver a Bible in to the hands of a Chinese Christian. They don't realize that by April of this year the China Christian Council had already published 18 million Bibles. We can use US$20 in timely, legal and appropriate ways in mainland China to buy 20 Bibles. Some people ask whether you have to submit sermons to the relevant authorities for checking and approval if you are asked to preach on the mainland. Others also ask if some parts of Scripture or some sermon themes are forbidden. As long as such questions arise then the best thing to do is to visit the Chinese church and get the answers for ourselves.

Secondly, we need to listen respectfully to the voices of the leaders and believers within the Chinese church, listening attentively to what they want to say to us. Some people, even though they have visited China, still harbour preconceived ideas and prejudices about it, and they only seek to confirm what they have heard gossiped and rumoured about China. Therefore, they deliberately seek out a few phenomena within the Chinese church which are not good or ideal, and then they write reams of articles about these and grossly exaggerate the facts. China is a vast place and the number of churches is enormous. All kinds of phenomena can appear in such a large place, and we admit that the church there isn't perfect. There are still many places where improvements need to be made, but we should certainly not take a few individual cases and then generalize them as common and widespread phenomena. We can go and ask about the things we don’t understand with an open mind and go and learn about the difficulties facing the Chinese church, getting to know the needs of the Chinese church. Therefore, listening to the voice of the Chinese church is extremely important. There are also some people who visit China and have a lot to say, telling the Chinese church that they should do this or that, that they should do things this way or that way, or else they start finding fault and criticizing. This is not at all appropriate. Let the Chinese church speak and tell us about its own situation and needs.

Thirdly, if we want to build relations and co-operation then we need to have a sincere and open attitude. Our relationship is one of seeing the other side as our friends. At the beginning of getting to know each other it seems strange, and there are a certain number of misgivings. But, as our contacts increase, we build friendship, confidence and care and then also slowly open up to each other. We can talk more and more, to the point where there is nothing we cannot talk about. This includes times when our viewpoints are not exactly the same and also includes disputes, but we can find a way to look for solutions to these and seek common ground whilst reserving our differences. This will not hurt our friendship and we can accept each other fully.

Such a relationship can develop because we have some dialogue on the situation of the Chinese church. This produces feelings - we recognize similarities and we are not unmoved by this, withdrawing our understanding or remaining indifferent. We are familiar with "One Country, Two Systems" but why don't we talk about "One Church, Two Systems", since this is only a reflection of reality? After July, we are churches within one country. Yet, because of many historical reasons, the church in our two places is not the same. The Hong Kong church has not experienced the same changes of the last 50 years which the mainland church has. Therefore, whilst each one of us preserves our own situation and traditions, we want to develop relations and co-operation within these "Two Systems". We are willing to have dialogue, which would subjectively make a good start to our hopes for this development.

Fourthly, even if we have good intentions, we still need the right conditions, the right moment. The needs of the church exist, the desire is there, but we still need to wait for the right time.

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We cannot develop relations and co-operation by imagining them out of thin air. It requires a facing of the facts. Based on the major premise of "One Country, Two Systems", we who live and work in Hong Kong need to operate according to the "Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region", otherwise we contravene the law. Of course, our church does not want to do anything against the law.

Article 148 of the Basic Law clearly states that, "Relations between non-governmental organizations and religious groups and their counterparts on the mainland should take place on the basis of the principles of mutual non-
subordination, mutual non-interference and mutual respect." This principle of "Three Mutualities" is not just limited to the church but applies to all other religious groups and NGOs, including those in the fields of education, science and technology, sport, health and medicine, labour, social work etc. Therefore, the church has no special rights but is also under no special restrictions, suffering no special discrimination and is not seen to be an exception of any kind.

The "Three Mutualities" principle is in keeping with the concept of "One Country, Two Systems" and upholds the interests of both the mainland and the Hong Kong sides, guaranteeing the rights and interests of both places. The mainland and Hong Kong churches each have their own identity and independent existence and neither is at all to be equated with the other one. Neither is at all a part of the other, and neither is owned by the other. The two are on a completely parallel and equal footing - there is no split into above and below, master and servant, higher and lower, first and second etc. This is the meaning of "mutual non-subordination". The mainland and Hong Kong churches each have their own sovereign right to manage themselves, steer themselves and not to be subject to any outside control. This is what is meant by "mutual non-interference". The mainland church and the Hong Kong church each has its own organizational framework, its own affairs, plans, strategies and working methods. Although the two are not the same, even to the point where some of the differences are very big indeed, the two sides still respect each other and do not criticize each other. This is the meaning of "mutual respect". By following the "Three Mutualities" principles, especially the principle of "mutual respect", we can show loving care for each other, support each other and cooperate with each other. This is the main thing to pay attention to when developing relations and cooperation with each other.

What I have said above is that we need to understand the current situation of the mainland Chinese church. This is fundamental and important. A lot of people doing evangelism in China have not faced up to this fact, and the reason many problems arise is because people who care for the Chinese church have lost sight of what the Chinese church has been doing all along by itself. Overseas Chinese Christians and foreign mission groups see the Chinese mainland as a vast mission field. From their point of view this way of looking at things is reasonable, since China has a population of more than 1.2 billion yet the proportion of those who are believers is still low, therefore the need for the Gospel is great. Quite a few people want to come to China to do missionary work and spread the Gospel. If they carry a heart of love for God and for the people and have pure motives then this can be understood. However, they need to clearly understand that God has built his church within the vast area of China and that there are already millions of Christians. God's work has already started in China, therefore these people should not plan and behave in a unilateral way as if the Chinese mainland had no Christians or no church of its own at all, as if everything had to be started from scratch and done by people from outside, as if their method were the best, the most correct and the most effective. At this point in time this concept of mission needs to be looked at critically and anew, and it is certainly a difficult concept to carry out in China because there are obvious objective problems. Even in other areas of the world this kind of unilateral missionary behaviour is questionable and needs to be re-examined. Traditional missionary work needs to have a certain number of preconditions met, for example, finance and personnel. Having money and people, you can then send workers out to other places. But, if that place already has a church, if it already has seminaries and evangelists and believers, then why don't we first of all build relations with these, seeking cooperation, discussing strategies together, and sharing experiences and resources? In this age of pluralism, we need to act according to the principle of "mutual respect" and think about our methods and mission strategies again.

If we receive invitations from the mainland church and, according to their arrangement, have the opportunity to go to the mainland to take part in work there, then the attitude we should hold is one of long-lasting contribution and working for the mainland church itself. We shouldn't be working primarily for our own selves or our own organizations, and we certainly shouldn't be engaging in our own affairs, setting up our own offices and schools rather like a chainstore setting up its own branches. We shouldn't be looking at putting up our own signboards on the Chinese mainland. We simply need to be clear about the fact that this is the work of the Chinese church and that we are only taking part in it. For this privilege and opportunity we thank God.
NEWSBRIEFS

Church Buildings: Believers from Xiwei village, Weitian township in Songxi county, Fujian province recently received government permission to buy a 30m² broadcasting station in the village to use as a church. After refurbishing, the church was opened in September last year, with 400 believers attending the dedication. *** Believers in the Putuo district of Zhoushan city, Zhejiang province, used to meet in private houses until September last year, when they bought and remodelled an old movie theatre for use as a church building. *** Qidong city in Jiangsu province saw the completion of its new Xishi church in December 1996, with a capacity to hold 1,000 believers. *** Nanjing county in Fujian province completed the construction of its new church building in December last year, replacing the former building which was constructed in 1890. *** Believers in Dengfeng city, Henan province, managed to acquire 1.7 mu (=0.1134 hectares) of land recently, including six small tiled houses for use as meeting points. A new three-storey church building was built on this land and the dedication service was held in November last year. *** The district of Xingcheng in Liaoning province saw four churches completed and dedicated in October and November of last year. *** Shuangcheng city in Heilongjiang province also saw four church buildings completed in the latter half of 1996. *** Believers in Dandong city, Liaoning province, held a dedication service for their new church, the Juhua mountain church, in December last year. Previously, believers had rented rooms to meet in but then bought 300m² of forested land in the city and completed a church building on the land within three months.

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Lutheran World Federation Assembly: Rev. Bao Jiayuan, Associate General Secretary of the China Christian Council and Mr. Chen Xida, Vice-Director of the Commission for Overseas Relations of the China Christian Council, were invited to address the 400 delegates at the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Hong Kong on July 11, 1997. The occasion was an open forum on the "Life and Witness of the Church in China." At the forum, Rev. Bao underlined that "The Chinese church is part of the church universal, and only in the context of fellowship with the church universal can selfhood be meaningful."

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Bible Class: Cheng'an county in the southern part of Hebei province has over 10,000 Christians and 108 meeting points. In recent years a lack of trained church workers and several incidences of heretical teaching have disturbed the normal activities of the church in the area. After extensive consultation with all the meeting points, the county CCC/TSPM council held its first Bible class at the end of autumn 1995. Students were chosen for the class through an entrance exam and had to have at least junior middle school education and a willingness to dedicate to themselves to the work of the church. The course lasted for two years and the first students graduated in June this year.
During the course, attention was paid to promoting the spiritual life of the students themselves. In recognition of the fact that Cheng'an is a farming community, the Bible class adopted a "both study and farm" approach, using the quiet winter and spring months to study and allowing students time out when necessary during the rest of the year so that they could help out in the fields during planting and harvesting times. Upon graduation the whole class returned to their individual home villages, being welcomed by their home meeting points and alleviating the shortage of pastoral workers in each place.

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Church Finances: The church in Guannan county, Jiangsu province, has taken a step toward getting its finances in order through the holding of a short course in finance and accounting for members of grassroots churches in the area. 350 accountants and those church members who deal with financial matters within the church gathered together from all the 178 registered meeting points within the county in September last year. The group was divided into four classes and each class received three days of instruction in accounting methods, professional ethics, and practical financial management. By incorporating morning and evening prayers in to the program, the students not only had their professional skills enhanced but also had the chance to foster their spiritual life. After the short course, the students were tested and all passed. At the same time, the county church issued meeting points with uniform standard bank account books, receipt books and uniform monthly balance sheets. This will facilitate the inspection of the finances of each church within the county.

Respect And Understanding Make For A Healthy Church

(ANS) An old city wall, numerous book shops, stores selling writing and painting implements - all these reflect the long history and once glorious past of Shuyang City in Northern Jiangsu. However, today Shuyang is a poor place and its former glory as a cultural centre has gone. The church in Shuyang does not share the city's long history or splendid past and is still struggling in many areas to build itself today. Recently Rev. Wang Weifan, Chen Yongtao and Chen Xun from the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary paid a visit to the church in Shuyang and discovered that many of the issues it faces are typical of those faced by most churches throughout China at this time. They reported on their visit in the September edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese Church.

Rev. Wang Weifan explains that in 1957, Shuyang was officially declared a "Religionless" county. The church went underground during the political upheavals of the fifties and sixties and only emerged again once political pressures were removed in the early 1980s. In 1980, there were only 800 believers in Shuyang but this figure has now exploded from 12,000 in 1993 to over 60,000 baptized believers today, around 4% of the total population of the county. The former head of the county United Front department told Rev. Wang that he does not think that this "explosion" in the number
of believers is due to miracle healings or the casting out of spirits, nor does he see faith as a refuge for the poor or a kind of superstition. Rather, people everywhere are seeking peace— in their spirits and in their relations with others. Faith in God offers them this peace, he explained.

Registration work began in the county in 1993 and so far 335 meeting points have been successfully registered, probably the highest number for any county in Jiangsu Province. Chen Yongtao stresses that one key to the smooth registration and running of the Shuyang church is the excellent relations it enjoys with local Religious Affairs Bureau. The local RAB understands its role as maintaining stability and making sure that all church activities take place within the boundaries of the law. Aside from this, RAB officials display respect for the church and do not interfere in the slightest with church affairs.

Chen cites an example of local RAB cadres’ sensitivity: After registration was complete, a few new, unregistered meeting points sprang up in 1996. The RAB did not order these sites to close but instead forged contacts with them. It was soon established that these sites were small family meeting points set up because the members were too old or too weak to walk to the nearest registered point far away. Therefore, the RAB allowed these points to remain open. This went a long way toward promoting trust between officials and the church in Shuyang.

Three denominational traditions are represented in the Shuyang church, with 65% of believers belonging to the True Jesus Church, 33% to the Presbyterian tradition and 2% to the Assemblies of God. Chen explains how in the past, the differences between the denominations were accentuated and disputes many. However, through patience and time, the different groups have become reconciled to each other and have realized the need to cooperate for the unity and the good of the church as a whole. One way this has been achieved is by drawing on people from all the different denominational backgrounds equally when selecting church leaders. As the Chairman of the local Three Self Committee pointed out: "I am a pastor to the whole county, not just a Presbyterian minister. I respect the traditions of my True Jesus Church and Assemblies of God brothers and sisters... (when speaking of reconciliation) we need to start with ourselves..." Respect between the denominations is also demonstrated in the areas of liturgy and worship. The church holds services according to the different denominational practices and on whichever days of the week each group holds sacred. Baptisms are conducted by sprinkling or by immersion according to each individual believer's request.

However, not all is sweetness and light in the Shuyang church. As Chen Xun points out, one major problem which Shuyang faces, along with most other churches, is that many believers have an incredibly poor grasp of the basic tenets of faith. The church in Shuyang has only two pastors, one of whom is already 87 years old and retired, plus only five elders and 51 evangelists to shoulder the pastoral burden for 60,000 Christians. Among the evangelists themselves, many are old, have little education and lack solid Bible knowledge themselves. Chen discovered that, as a
result, instruction is often lacking and it is easy for believers to become confused or misled when practising their faith. This is shown most pointedly in the fact that Shuyang has been a particular target for the so-called "Spirit-Spirit" sect. One of the founders of this sect was a head of the True Jesus Church in Shuyang and the sect proclaims, amongst other things, that the end of the world is coming and that one of its other founders is in fact a "second Jesus". The sect has spread widely in the area and done much damage by drawing away many believers from the true faith and causing chaos in the church.

Chen tells how the church has reacted to this threat by setting up local training classes for church workers. This is done on two different levels: longer one-month courses are run during the quieter months of the busy farming year. The teachers on these courses are mostly pastors within the county or from neighbouring counties, with elders running the church in their absence. On another level, short term seminar courses of 3-5 days duration are held each month. Specific topics are discussed according to believers' needs at any one time. These courses prove to be ideal for poor and busy farmers who cannot afford to attend the longer courses but who need help in, for example, understanding and countering the teachings of the Lingling sect. Both the longer and the shorter courses take place in the eight different church buildings within the county, and costs are kept to a minimum by making students responsible for their own needs during the courses.

The training courses have problems of their own, as seen in the lack of facilities for the students, with the dormitory at the central county church not even having beds. The low educational level of the participants also means that what they can take in and understand is limited. Nevertheless, Chen was pleased to note that the training courses have now been running for eight years and much has been achieved. Most of the church workers and evangelists in the county have now received training to some degree. The success of the courses can be seen in the increase in the number of evangelists, the improved content of the messages and sermons during worship, and the number of adherents to the "Spirit-Spirit" sect who have returned to the true faith through teaching received on the courses. The sect now has few adherents within the church now and its strength is diminished within the county.[1214 words]

Church Magazine Responds To Attacks On Former Church Leader

(ANS) Y.T.Wu (1893 - 1979) was a leading figure within the Chinese Church and the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) from its inauguration in the 1950s up to the Cultural Revolution. Last December, a book on the life and work of Mr. Wu, *Wu Yaozong: Three Studies*, was published by Professor Leung Ka-lun of the Research Centre on Christianity and Chinese Culture at the Alliance Bible Seminary, Hong Kong. In the September issue of *Tian Feng*, the magazine of the Chinese Church, the editors review the work by Professor Leung and question his approach to the life and work of Mr. Wu.
The editors draw attention to several important omissions in Professor Leung’s work, areas which Chinese Christians nevertheless view as important in any understanding of Y.T.Wu but which Professor Leung fails to address. These include acts of imperialist aggression against China and the use made of religion in carrying out these acts, the role Y.T.Wu played in appealing to Chinese Christians’ patriotism at a crucial time in their country’s history, and the question of how the Chinese church needed to realize the aims of being self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating during Mr. Wu’s time. “These questions are all questions of the Chinese Christian church. If the average believer in Hong Kong does not have a very deep understanding of these questions then that is understandable. However, Professor Leung has undertaken special research in to Mr. Wu and the Mainland church. That Professor Leung amazingly keeps silent about all of these questions without exception and yet still spends 214 pages in wilfully distorting the facts about Mr. Wu leads one to doubt his credibility as an academic,” write the editors of Tian Feng. They also point out that Professor Leung does not take in to consideration the church in China today, how it is following Y.T.Wu’s legacy in trying to govern itself, support itself and propagate itself well and, in the process, winning many people for the Lord.

In his work, Professor Leung is particularly critical of the fact that Y.T.Wu’s views after Liberation were not always the same as those he held before 1949. The Tian Feng editorial reminds readers that everybody’s thoughts and opinions develop and refine during the course of their lifetime and we should thus not be critical or surprised about something which affects us all. This was also recognized by Bishop K.H.Ting in his essay “Mr Y.T. Wu and His Ever-Reforming Thought”.

The editorial explains Y.T.Wu’s change of stance in that it was only during the Korean War that he came to understand the truly aggressive nature of imperialism and its use of religion. Mr. Wu felt grieved by this fact, and this is reflected in his later statements, sermons and essays. However in his study, Professor Leung appears to object to Mr Wu’s change of stance and his consequent criticism of imperialism during this period. He therefore attacks Mr Wu in his book as being a lackey of the government and betraying Christians at that time. Professor Leung concludes that “We are thus inclined to have reason to suspect Y.T.Wu's....religious sentiments and morality and the integrity of his character.”

Not only does Professor Leung attack Y.T.Wu but also his supporters: “I find it hard to imagine that those who praise Y.T.Wu as an honest person can themselves be honest people.” In saying such things, Leung extends his attack from Wu to virtually the whole of the Three-Self Movement. The editors of Tian Feng readily accept that people may disagree with Y.T.Wu’s point of view and his actions. However, they believe that to call in to question a person’s character and religious sentiment and to insult those who agree with him as being “dishonest” cannot be called research and certainly cannot be called theological research - it appears to them as really little more than name-calling and personal attack. [658 words]
(ANS) Within the Chinese church the saying is often heard "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." According to estimates, the church in China has at least 10 million believers yet only a total of around 1,000 pastors. This means that in China, one pastor is responsible for as many as 10,000 believers. Many people complain that the understanding of the faith amongst Chinese Christians is low, and yet in China many believers have never even seen a pastor let alone received instruction from one. The answer seems to be to train and ordain more ministers for service in the church. However, as Chun Shui from Nanjing points out in the September issue of Tian Feng, the magazine of the Chinese church, the problem is not so simple.

Chun tells of a believer born in to a Christian family and who felt a calling to serve the church when he was only 16 years old. The young man was a promising student attending a key local middle school. When his parents took their son to see their local pastor to discuss his calling, the pastor was very discouraging. He told the young man that attending seminary only leads to difficulties: there would be no protection from the state or guaranteed job for life, and his home parish couldn't support another church worker anyway. Therefore the pastor encouraged the young man to go to a regular university instead.

The young man asked the pastor to recommend him for seminary anyway, saying he would go to wherever he was needed after graduation. According to Chun, the pastor became annoyed at this, saying that he would not recommend a student to seminary if that student would then end up elsewhere and not benefit his home congregation.

In the end, the young man gave up his idea of studying theology and went to Xi'an Jiaotong University instead. Before he left, he visited his pastor again. Chun reports how the pastor told him how he himself had applied to university three times when he was young but had failed to be admitted. Therefore he had no choice but to study theology and become a pastor. "You have such talent, studying theology would only waste it," the pastor told the young man.

One woman believer who Chun knows had a good job and decent income but then felt called to give it up and take up church work full time. Again, when she approached her pastor for a recommendation to seminary, the pastor turned her down. There were three churches in her area and only one pastor and one evangelist to look after the needs of believers there. However, it soon became clear that the pastor was afraid to recommend this woman because she was obviously very talented and blessed with spiritual gifts, and he was afraid she might somehow surpass him once she graduated and returned to the parish. In the end, the pastor recommended her for seminary on the condition that she sign a contract promising not to return to the parish that sent her. This year she entered Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.
Chun goes on to tell of another young man who graduated from the Chinese department at a key university and had performed outstandingly in his work unit ever since, being voted a model worker every year. Then he too felt called to enter the church. He informed his work unit leaders and they were moved by his conviction. Soon he had the necessary clearance from eight different departments within his work unit so that he could go to seminary to study. He registered for the entrance exam to seminary but his church did not inform him of the date of the exam until a week after it was held.

Through these examples, Chun points out how difficult it can be for those who feel called to train for the church to actually enter seminary in China. Yet, as the author goes on to mention, even those who get in to seminary find that their problems really begin upon graduation.

Chun explains how teachers at seminaries work night and day to try and find places for their students as the day of their graduation approaches. Lecturers have no choice but to plead with pastors and churches to take their students, pulling strings and calling in favours. Even after all of this, it is heart-breaking for teachers to see students, who they have painstakingly trained for a church crying out for pastors, still hanging around the seminary long after their graduation because of no place to go.

The home church of one theological graduate did not want him back after his graduation, so he went to another parish and was welcomed there. However, on hearing this, his home church then went to his new parish and demanded the 30,000 yuan they had paid in study fees for him when he was in seminary.

Chun admits that the phenomenon she describes in Tian Feng are not common all over China and that many old pastors are indeed encouraging young people who feel called to dedicate themselves to the church. Nevertheless, the cases described are common enough to cause Chun to ask why in China, when "the harvest is ripe and the workers are few", does the church make it so difficult for those called to service to actually serve.[910 words]

**Historic Visit Between Lao and Chinese Churches**

(ANS) Throughout the histories of Laos and China there has never been any ties between the churches in the two countries. This lack of contact finally came to an end this year when two official representatives from the Lao church made a visit to the church in China between September 10th-18th.

Rev. Dr. Khamphone Kounthapanya, General Secretary of the Lao Evangelical Church, the largest Protestant body in Laos, and his associate, Rev. Polo Heuanglith, visited Nanjing and met with Dr. Wenzao Han, President of the China Christian Council and General Secretary of the Amity Foundation. Dr. Han introduced the two Lao visitors
to the situation of the church in China today and exchanged views on the church situations in their respective countries. They also met with other representatives from the China Christian Council and the Amity Foundation.

In their report on the visit, Rev. Dr. Kounthapanya and Rev. Heuanglith express their admiration for the way the church in China contributes "not only to the social development of Chinese society but also contributes politically to the defense and development of China." After visiting the Amity Printing Company in Nanjing, the Lao representatives expressed surprise that "other brethren continue to believe that their are no Bibles in China when we learn and see that millions of copies are printed and distributed by Amity each year."

Rev. Dr. Kounthapanya and Rev. Heuanglith noted the excitement felt by both themselves and their Chinese counterparts on this first contact between members of the two churches, and this strengthened their belief that "God is present everywhere". They felt that they learned a lot on the visit which would be useful to them in their own programs and work in Laos. [290 words]

ANS Feature:
Many Shortages, Yet Still The Church Grows In Gansu

Gansu Province lies in the north-western part of China on the upper reaches of the Yellow River and is mainly made up of rugged mountains and plateaus. During a recent visit to the provincial capital, Lanzhou, Dr. Don Snow of the Amity Foundation met with leaders of the church in Gansu and spoke with them about the current situation of the church in that province.

(ANS) Gansu province covers a vast area, over 454,000sq.km. Church officials estimate that there are at least 69,000 Christians within the province, though the actual number is undoubtedly higher than this figure. It is difficult to compile accurate statistics for the church in the province as most believers live and worship in remote areas of the countryside, often at meeting points which have not yet been registered. Currently there are 80 churches and 300 meeting points which have registered within the province. One indisputable fact is that the Gansu church is growing at a phenomenal rate, but providing for the needs of a growing church in one of China's remotest and poorest regions is far from easy.

Given the large number of Christians scattered all over the province, the Gansu church faces a chronic shortage of church workers and the facilities necessary to look after all its believers. There are only 19 ordained pastors within the province, only two of whom are under 50 and the others over 70. As a result of this situation, most of the work in the church is carried out by lay church workers and elders, and most of the Christian Council's work in Gansu is taken up with providing training for these church workers. Training courses usually last 4-6 weeks and make use of the special training materials published by the China Christian Council. Participants in the courses are required to have reached at least a Junior Middle School level of education, but in practice many of them have not even reached this level, with some having only had 4 years elementary education.

One of the major problems of providing enough ordained ministers for the church in Gansu is its lack of a training centre or Bible school of its own. The Gansu Christian Council has land for this but no building and they are also short of funds, trained staff and even books for such a school. Since 1979, 15 Gansu students have graduated from Chinese Protestant seminaries elsewhere in China but only 10 are still serving in the church in Gansu. There are five Gansu students studying in seminary at the moment.
As well as lacking church workers and its own seminary, the church in Gansu also suffers from a serious shortage of Bibles. The supply in the major cities is adequate but supply is poor in remote areas due to distribution and transportation problems, also because of chronic poverty and widespread illiteracy in these areas. The church is trying hard to solve this problem, with the provincial Christian Council receiving 2,000 free Bibles from the China Christian Council in 1995-96 to distribute to poorer areas and individuals also donating money to buy Bibles for these areas too, yet it is still far from enough.

With a lack of adequate teaching and leadership, parts of the church in Gansu have fallen victim to various sects and heresies and this is now a major problem. Seventh Day Adventist groups also pose a serious threat to the church and seem to compete with Christian councils on a local level for official recognition by the authorities.

Despite so many difficulties and setbacks, the church in Gansu continues to grow. New believers are joining the church all the time, and in July of this year the first Christian building in a Tibetan minority area in Gansu was dedicated. It is in Lin Tang prefecture and has a congregation of over 1,000. When asked to give reasons for this growth, church leaders explain that many people come to faith through the personal witness of believers throughout the province. Local people see the good deeds of Christians within their communities or hear the gospel from believers who visit them when they are sick or in trouble, and as a result come to faith themselves. Many non-Christians are drawn to services held at meeting points, and some become Christians through marriage. The faith of believers in the province is strong, but more practical help is needed from outside the province, especially in the form of trained workers, in order to build up the church, run it well and tackle its weaknesses. However, given the poverty in Gansu, it is difficult to attract such help. [782 words]

ANS Feature:
The Harvest is Plentiful, The Workers Few - A Portrait Of Nanping Church, Fujian Province

Working with a group of English teachers from the U.S. this summer in Nanping, Fujian province, Kim Dickie, English teacher with the Amity Foundation, had occasion to visit the church in the locality and learn about its history and current situation from the senior minister for the area, Pastor Sun Renfu.

(ANS) Christianity first came to Nanping city in Fujian province in 1866 with the arrival of Dr. Nathan Site, an American Methodist missionary. During the following years, 50 ministers and preachers helped set up 80 churches in the area and church membership grew to 4,000. As well as churches, the believers built hospitals, schools, and also set up a home for lepers as well as a social work society.

Activities within the Nanping church were halted after the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Worship resumed in the Nanping Gospel Church on December 21, 1980. Now the area has a total of 16 churches, four in the city and the other 12 in the surrounding countryside. Four denominational traditions are represented among these churches - Methodist, Little Flock, Seventh Day Adventist and the True Jesus Church. The church buildings and meeting points line the route of the railroad line which runs through the area. The whole district of Nanping is now served by only two ministers and three preachers who are responsible for the area's 7,000 Christians. As these church workers cannot reach all the meeting points every week, most of these are run by voluntary church workers. Since 1981 the church has held five volunteer training classes, with 80 volunteer leaders trained to date. However, as Pastor Sun points out, the biggest challenge facing the church in Nanping at the moment is the lack of help for all the different kinds of work which the church needs to do.

Within Nanping city, the old Gospel Church was originally built in 1903, covering an area of 360m² and able to hold 800 people. That building
was pulled down in January 1993 and work started on a new building in September of the same year. The new Nanping Gospel Church was completed in November 1994, covering an area of 640m² and rising several storeys with a capacity to hold 1,500 worshippers. The church contains meeting rooms, classrooms, prayer rooms, reception facilities and even a small memorial hall which charts the history of the church in Nanping. A closed-circuit TV system enables the main Sunday services to be relayed throughout various parts of the church building.

As well as a place for worship and church activities, the Gospel Church in Nanping city also houses a 12 storey apartment block, with rents from this accommodation being used to fund the running of the church and its activities.

Apart from Sunday services, the church holds various activities throughout the week - choir and hymn practises, Bible studies and Youth Fellowship meetings, as well as a spoken English class for young people which was started in 1995. Holy Communion is celebrated on the first Sunday of every month and baptismal services are held once a year. Over the period 1981-93, 3,000 new believers have been baptized in Nanping.

The church in Nanping engages in various programs within the local community. It runs a clinic and also a kindergarten open to around 140 children of local people. The local authorities have been so impressed by this kindergarten that they have asked the church to consider expanding it in to a full primary school. As the local community is peasant based, the church offers training in basic agricultural techniques and methods on its own farm, which was donated for church use by a former pastor when he became too old to continue working the land himself. On Sundays the church also opens its dining hall and offers free lunches to those Christians who have travelled from far away to attend Sunday worship. The church is also active in raising money and collecting clothes to help the poor and needy in the Nanping area, especially those people affected by various natural disasters such as flooding. Pastor Sun explained how the church has plans to set up a home for the elderly fairly soon.

Welfare work and poverty relief are not the only ways in which the Nanping church serves the local community. Pastor Sun was one of the first graduates from Jinling Theological Seminary in Nanjing and explained to the teachers how he was always puzzled during his studies whenever demon possession was mentioned in the Bible. However, since pastoring the church in Nanping, he has come across several cases of what he sees as possession which he has had to deal with and he now personally understands this phenomenon more. [797 words]

ANS Feature:
Is There A Chinese Theology?

In an attempt to introduce readers to some of the theological thinking and debates within the church in China, ANS will begin with this issue to feature a series of articles by theologians in the Chinese church. The following article is written by Mr. Ji Tai, Associate Dean of Studies and Lecturer of Old Testament and Homiletics at Nanjing Theological Seminary. It is reprinted here from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) publication China News Update.

We have often been asked by friends from abroad: "Is there a 'Chinese theology'?" It is not so easy to give a simple answer to this question. Some people compare us with the West and conclude that, since we do not have great theologians like Barth and Tillich who have written volumes of great theological books, we cannot claim to have our own theology. Others suggest that "Three-Self" should be our theology. Still others do not think it matters whether we have our own theology or not. Does the church in China have or need to have a theology of its own?

To answer these questions, we should first ask a basic question: What is theology? It seems every theologian has tried to give his/her own definition. Most lay Christians, including
some pastors, feel that theology is something lofty beyond their reach. Some people even fear that the study of theology would shake up their faith.

Basically, "theology" is the knowledge about God, our understanding of what God is, and ways for human beings to know God. Is our knowledge of God through the revelation of the scriptures, or logical thinking? Does it come with the tradition of the church, or personal, spiritual experiences? There are different angles from which we look at and do theology. Historically there have been various emphases in understanding theology. For example, the early church was more concerned about interpreting the basic Christian faith as a correction and defense against heresies. During the Middle Ages the leaning was toward metaphysics and philosophical reflection. Contemporary theology, however, is drawn closer and closer to social context and daily life. Therefore, to think that theology comes only from the philosopher's study is very one-sided. Although some theologians have very distinctive insights, they can only represent the thinking of one or a few individuals, like one's flowers being appreciated by only a limited number of people. Theology, if it is to have true meaning, must evolve from individuals and community, closely related to the faith and practice of individuals in community. Our knowledge of God not only needs rational thinking, but also spiritual experiences which is more fully expressed through Christian community. In our Chinese church many colleagues see theology as "the church in the process of reflection." (1) This is entirely right. On the one hand, this kind of reflection is a search of each generation to understand and interpret the Christian faith in its time. On the other hand it is the way to bring constructive or critical thought to the church as it lives out the Christian faith, so that it remains on the path of the gospel. There, for the church, theology is not to be taken lightly.

We can say that there have been many theological reflections in the Chinese church since it gained independence and selfhood. Such as: how do we perceive the truth, good and beauty found outside the church; spirituality and worldliness; the church local and universal; the meaning of the incarnation and resurrection ... These reflections have not been systematically published in great volumes, but instead have appeared in short essays, sermons, devotional literature and hymns. We may even say that these forms are characteristics of Chinese theology.

Yet from another angle, from the 1950s to the 1990s there exists in the Chinese church a prevalent thinking that "to despise rationality is equivalent to richness in one's spiritual life." (2) There is a tendency to "look down on and even deny all theological reflections." (3) A number of reasons have led to this kind of thinking. First of all, most Chinese Christians are evangelical or fundamentalistic in their faith. Based on traditional evangelical thinking, the attitude towards rational thinking has been essentially negative. It is understandable, that this is a reaction towards the 19th century extreme rationalism based on the assumed supremacy of science and scepticism towards the Bible as revelation. Secondly, Christianity in China has not been given a chance to develop in a stable environment. The "foreign religion" image brought on by the Opium Wars and Boxer Rebellion had no time to be corrected before the onslaught of the "non-Christian movement" of the 1920s. The late 1950s campaigns to destroy Christianity hardly ended before the beginning of the "Cultural Revolution." Another reason is that Chinese Christianity has not been given space for intellectual development. Though the time of "class struggle as principle" has long gone, those in the Christian community are still fearful and apprehensive. When confronted by theological questions, they are often evasive, and substitute simplistic, political cliche for theological thinking.

We think that this condition is abnormal, since our country has already gone through great changes in recent years. 1) If we look at other parts of the world, we will see that evangelicals have become more and more interested in theology. Their concerns are reaching out to society. Liberal theology has also gone through changes. 2) Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, the church in China has enjoyed nearly two decades of stability in a tolerant social environment where people have basically changed their perceptions and no longer view our faith as a "foreign religion." Religious policies have been gradually implemented and our country is growing more towards the rule of law. 3) In the last decade the social sciences have been emphasized, based on the premise that "practice is the sole criterion for testing truth." Among thoughtful people there
has been a lively intellectual atmosphere resulting in significant research and quests in all fields including religious research. Moreover, the party and government have begun to positively support the effort of Christian theological construction. In their speeches the leaders of the Religious Affairs Bureau under the State Council have made special points to encourage "the speedy construction of theological systems of thought with Chinese characteristics."(4) With all these advantages, what excuse does the Chinese church have to neglect its own theological task?

Today the church in China not only has the right conditions to be engaged in theological construction, it must do so out of necessity. The church is facing many problems today that need answers that are informed by theological reflection. Examples are: 1) How do we treat the Bible, and how do we understand the scriptures as God's revelation? What is the "essence" of the Bible? To what and to whom do its "words" point? What is considered real "spiritual understanding" of the Bible? 2) In the area of faith and morality: What are the ethical principles Christians can live by in our society? How do we view the issues of divorce, abortion and euthanasia? 3) In the area of church administration and church policy: How should a church be organized according to the Biblical teaching and tradition of the apostles? Is the "liang hui" ("Two organizations" referring to the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Movement) a church? What is its relationship with local congregations and meeting points? How should we look at denominationalism? What is the true meaning of "Christian unity?" 4) In the relationship between church and society, what kind of social organization is the church? What are its functions? What does it mean to be "light" and "salt" and what are the implications? 5) In church-state relations: What kind of relationship should exist between the church and the government? How do we interpret "giving Caesar those things which belong to Caesar, and to God those which belong to God?"

These questions and issues deserve great efforts on the part of theological teachers, pastors and lay Christians. We need to probe deeply, using our reasoning and developing our own theories systematically. This is the kind of theology that the Chinese church needs. Theology is not privately owned by a few theologians, but closely linked with the faith and practice of every Christian as an integral part of the whole Christian community. Together we try to learn God's will for our age and time. The Chinese church needs theology. The construction of Chinese theology needs the participation of every one of us.

Notes:


(2) Shen Zigao, "Reasoning and Spiritual Life," in the same volume, p.181

(3) K.H.Ting, "Preface," in the same volume, p.2

(4) Liu Shu-xing, "Raise High the Two Banners of Patriotism and Socialism, Firmly Walk on the Path of Three-Self." Tian Feng, February 1996, p.11

NEWSBRIEFS

Church Buildings: In December of last year, Fenxi County in Jiangxi Province completed work on its first church building. The county has 180 meeting points but until last year no church building. *** Meihou City in Jilin Province dedicated its church building in August 1996. The building is now the biggest church in the city, holding 1,800 people. *** Believers in Nanzheng County, Shaanxi Province held a rededication service for their church in December last year. The church building was seized during the Cultural Revolution and only returned to believers last year. *** Hengfeng County in Jiangxi Province completed its first church building since Liberation in January this
year, providing the county's more than 1,000 believers with a place to worship for the first time. *** The biggest church in Wenzhou District, Zhejiang Province was completed in January this year in Ru'an City and over 5,000 believers attended the dedication service there. *** Believers in Kaiyuan City, Yunnan Province have been forced to use an inadequate 20 sq.meter room to worship in for over the past ten years. In May 1996 the believers obtained a 180sq.meter brick building from the government which they refurbished and dedicated as their church in December last year.

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Ordinations: One pastor and one elder in Binyang County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in May this year *** One pastor in Changchun City and one pastor in Baishan City in Jilin Province in April this year.

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Overseas Visits:
*** Rev. Luo Zhenfang, Rev. Ji Tai and Rev. Kang Baoping of the Jinling Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing visited Hong Kong between March 7th - 9th to take part in the "Symposium on the Bible and Chinese Christian Life" at the Lutheran Theological Seminary there. Rev. Luo presented a paper on "The Bible's Use in a Developing Church" and Rev. Ji on "China's Current Way of Looking at the Bible".

*** China Christian Council President Dr Wenzao Han and CCC Associate General Secretary Rev. Bao Jiayuan attended a United Bible Societies meeting in Switzerland between June 1st - 4th and reported on the current situation of the church and of Bible distribution in China.

*** General Secretary of the Hunan Provincial CC/TSPM Yao Zengyi attended the annual conference of the Finnish Lutheran Missionary Society between June 6th - 28th and spoke on the current situation within the Chinese church and the Hunan church in particular.

*** Rev. Ji Tai attended the plenary session of the German Christian Church conference between June 16th - 22nd and talked about the life of the Chinese church today.

*** CCC General Secretary Rev. Su Deci attended the 1997 plenary meeting of the Friends of the Church in China in the United Kingdom and also a meeting of the United Reformed Church between July 3rd - 12th.

*** Dr. Wenzao Han, Rev. Bao Jiayuan and Chen Xida of Jinling Union Theological Seminary attended the 9th Lutheran World Federation Conference in Hong Kong between July 8th - 15th. Dr. Han extended greetings from the church in China at the opening session of the conference, and the group also introduced the current situation in the Chinese church at an "Open Forum on China". Dr. Han went on to Hawaii after the Conference to give lectures at the Senior Leaders' Seminar sponsored by the Haggai Institute.

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Overseas Visitors:

*** During his visit to China between January 6th - 12th as guest of the Chinese Association for Science and Technology, Dr. Cheong Keun Mo, Korean Christian Nuclear Scientist, gave a talk at Nanjing Jinling union Theological Seminary and led morning prayers there.

*** World Mission Society Financial Director Rev. Anthony Burnham led a delegation of five to visit churches in Shanghai, Changsha, Chengdu, Wenzhou and Nanjing from Jan. 23rd - Feb. 1st.

*** Mr John Gaghans of the Australian Bible Society visited Beijing and Nanjing Churches and the Amity Printing Company between April 1st - 9th.

*** Asia-Pacific Region Coordinator for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Rev. Insik Kim, led a delegation of 18 from the US Presbyterian Korean Church to visit church workers, pastors and minority groups in Shanghai, Shenyang, Yanji, Beijing and Nanjing in June.

*** General Secretary of the Council of Churches In Britain and Ireland, Dr. John Reardon, led a delegation of eight to visit Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing churches and seminars between May 7th - 15th.

*** A delegation of 25 from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) visited Nanjing, Hangzhou and Shanghai between May 8th - 14th, meeting with Bishop K.H.Ting and the newly-elected leadership of the CCC and TSPM.

*** A delegation of 12 people led by the director of East Gates Ministries International (EGMI) visited Nanjing, May 9th - 12th. They spoke with CCC President Dr. Wenzao Han, visited rural churches and the Amity Printing Company.

*** A delegation of 18 from the National Council of Churches in Korea attended the 3rd "Discussion and Exchange on the Situation in the Chinese and Korean Churches" in Nanjing, May 18th - 21st. The theme of the meeting was "A New Vision Of Cooperation In The Work Of The Chinese And Korean Churches As They Enter The 21st Century" After sharing opinions on topics of common concern, delegates visited churches in the northeast cities of Harbin, Shenyang and Dalian.

ANS Special Report:
How Many Christians Are There In China?

(ANS) As we have done every year since ANS was started, we are publishing an updated breakdown of provincial figures, giving estimates of how many Protestant Christians there are in China.

Our figures are compiled based on information from local and provincial Christian Councils as well as estimates by local pastors and church workers. These are estimates compiled solely by the editors of ANS and do not represent official China Christian Council figures for the number of Christians in China.

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It is difficult to define who should be counted as a Christian, as, due to a severe lack of ordained ministers, large numbers of long-term believers are not baptized. Our figures include both baptized Christians and what in China are called "seekers", people who have been attending church regularly for some time and who aspire to be baptized as soon as there is an opportunity.

As compared to our 1996 figures, the lower estimate of the total has gone up from just over 9 million last year to approaching 10 million this year. As we do not have low estimates for two provinces, one of which has a considerable Christian population, this total may actually be considerably higher.

In adding up the higher estimates for each province, it has to be kept in mind that there are no higher estimates for nine provinces. In these cases, the lower estimates were figured into the total.

Readers should be reminded that all figures quoted here are rough estimates. We give lower and higher estimates to provide a range within which the accurate number of Christians for each area and the country is probably to be found. However, we must stress that these estimates are conservative and represent a range only.

**How Many Christians Are There In China? (Figures updated September 1997)**

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<tr>
<th>Province/City</th>
<th>Lower Estimate</th>
<th>Higher Estimate</th>
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<td>Anhui</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
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<td>30,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fujian</td>
<td>640,000</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhejiang</td>
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<td>1,400,000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Totals**        | **9,859,000**  | **13,705,000**  |
Aka Manba
The Story of a Tibetan Monk and Doctor

"Aka" is the Tibetan term for "Buddhist monk". "Manba" means medicine man or doctor. Twenty-eight year old Jiamuyang Qingpai is an Aka in Qinghai Province, North Western China. From 1992 to 1994, he attended the village doctors' training course run by the AMITY FOUNDATION. Since then, he has become a village doctor, serving the medical needs of herdpeople on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. Treating patients is not his only occupation, however. He also worships at the temple and continues to perform his religious duties as an Aka. How does he combine these two roles? What does his village life look like? Find out in this video.

Jiamuyang Qingpai, the Tibetan monk and doctor featured in this film, is only one of the 8,014 village doctors who have so far been trained by the AMITY FOUNDATION, an independent Chinese voluntary organization created in 1985 by a handful of Chinese Christian leaders determined to serve the needs of the people in China.

With funding and encouragement from friends in China and overseas, both Christian and secular, individual and organizational, the AMITY FOUNDATION has come to play an increasingly important role in contributing to China's development in areas of education, health, rural development and social service. This 10-minute film also shows how AMITY has drawn people of different beliefs and different nationalities together to serve the needy and to work for the common good.

This VHS Videotape is available in English in both PAL and NTSC format
Price: HK$50 (for pick up) or US$10 (including airmail postage)
Please make checks payable to The Amity Foundation, Hong Kong, Ltd.

Order from : The Amity Foundation, 4 Jordan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Phone: (852)2723-8011  Fax: (852)2366-2769  e-mail: amityhk@hk.super.net

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Places Mentioned In This Issue Of ANS

1. Baishan
2. Beijing
3. Binyang
4. Changchun
5. Changsha
6. Cheng’an
7. Chengdu
8. Dandong
9. Dengfeng
10. Fenyi
11. Guannan
12. Guangzhou
13. Hengfeng
14. Hong Kong
15. Kaiyuan
16. Lintang
17. Melhekou
18. Nanjing (Jiangsu)
19. Nanjing (Fujian)
20. Nanping
21. Nantong
22. Nanzheng
23. Qidong
24. Ruī’ān
25. Shanghai
26. Shantou
27. Shenyang
28. Shuangcheng
29. Shuyang
30. Songxi
31. Urumqi
32. Wenzhou
33. Xingcheng
34. Yanji
35. Yuyao
36. Zhenyuan

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