Dear Reader,

following our extensive coverage of the Seventh National Chinese Christian Conference in the past issue, in this edition we try to offer you a look of what lies ahead of the church in the next five years. What are the pressing issues? And how will the new church leadership try to cope with them? For first answers to these questions, read our portrait and interview featuring Rev. Cao Shengjie, the new President of the CCC, on p2 and p3.

One of the questions to be addressed by the new church leadership will certainly be church administration and management. "Running the church well" has been advocated for a number of years now, and this formidable task is indeed central for the healthy development of the church. One recent incident in Chongqing highlighted how a single person can harm not only the victim concerned, but also damage the image of the whole church. A local TSPM-representative succeeded in abusing and imprisoning a female migrant worker for several years without being found out by church members or neighbours. You find our summary of this story on p6.

These are just a few highlights of this issue, which also carries news and views on pastoral theology, social work and more... Discover for yourself.

With kind regards from the editorial desk,

Katrin Frieder

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"I Never Left My Work At The Grassroots" : A Portrait Of Cao Shengjie

(ANS) Following the elections of the 7th National Christian Conference, Rev. Cao Shengjie is now President and Acting General Secretary of the China Christian Council (CCC). The following portrait was compiled through interviews Cao gave to Tian Feng and ANS shortly after her appointment.

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"I never left my work at the grassroots, and I would never have thought that one day I would take on this responsibility. I see it as a new calling from God. I want to commit myself anew before God and strive hard to do what I ought to do as well as possible."

These are the words of Cao after being elected. Actually, the road of preparation for her current job has indeed been long. Born into a Christian family, she started narrating Bible stories in Sunday school at the age of five. Later on, she enrolled in theological studies and graduated from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1953. Since then, she has worked in two Shanghai churches, one of them being Grace Church where she is involved in pastoral work to this day. Cao, who comes from an Anglican background, also used to be the secretary of Wu Yaozong from 1962 to 1966.

During the Cultural Revolution, she worked in a factory in Shanghai for eight years and also spent a short period in the countryside. In the 1970s, Rev. Cao was moved to the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, where she was involved in a number of research projects. Amongst other things, she participated in field research and contributed in an award-winning book, "The Problem Of Religion In The Socialist Period".

After the resurgence of church life in the late 1970s, Cao worked for the newly-established China Christian Council (1980), serving as an Associate General Secretary and a Vice President for ten years before ascending to her current position. During this decade, Cao has been engaged in a variety of projects. "In the past, I have worked in the production of a church hymnal and helped in publishing the sermons and essays of Bishop Shen Yifan. I was also involved in the drafting of church rules as a member of the commission on church rules, led by Rev. Peter Chai."

Cao particularly remembers the hymnal project: "When the churches were newly reopened after the Cultural Revolution, I undertook a project for producing a Chinese hymnal. In the past, each denomination had its own Chinese translation of traditional hymns. For example, there were eight translations of "Abide with me"! My goal then was to prepare a comprehensive hymnbook, a book that would include both hymns precious in the church tradition, and Chinese hymns. Today, one-fourth of the hymns in the compilation are Chinese hymns, half of which were composed in the 1980s. Hopefully this can contribute to the unity of the church." So far, more than 10 million copies of the hymnal have been sold all over China.
Cao stresses that it is also thanks to the help and support of her husband Xu Minghan that she is able to cope with her busy schedule. "He does most of the housework so I can commit more time to my church work." As an Associate Secretary of the National TSPM and Vice Principal of China Eastern Seminary, Xu Minghan is obviously quite busy himself.

Commenting on being the first woman to head the Chinese Protestant church, Cao says: "It's quite encouraging to have such a position. God has used women in China to serve the Church in many fields. Today, there are more than 400 women pastors (in addition of associate pastors), almost one-third of the total - a very promising percentage. Now I hope that my taking this position will be an encouragement for women colleagues. I have worked for 20 years in the CCC and I don't see any difference, being a woman."

Cao's own perception of women in the church has changed over the years: "After studying at the Ecumenical Center in Bossey in 1991, I became interested in feminist theology. That experience raised my gender consciousness and in 1993, I organized the Women's Commission of the CCC. During the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing, the CCC women's commission helped organize a women's forum, which introduced the lives of women in the Chinese church."

Regarding tasks facing the church, Cao specifically underscores the need to engage in theological reconstruction. In her words, this means to "expound the basic faith and Christian ethics in a way understandable to contemporary people, so that we can spread the gospel in an even better way, and lead to a healthy spiritual life for believers." Efforts at building theology must be supported by other measures such as fostering theological research in seminaries, and bringing the results of these efforts onto the pulpits. "In the past few years, I have been involved in efforts on theological reconstruction. We had a study on "self-propagation" even before the resolution on theological reconstruction at the Ji'nan Meeting in 1998. This had to do with the implementation of theological reconstruction - that is, how to integrate these efforts into sermons and church teachings. I worked with Elder Ji (now president of the national TSPM) in gathering more than one hundred pastors and preachers in Shanghai and Jiangsu Province to hold seminars on theological discussion."

The tasks and challenges the Chinese church is facing are manifold. Cao Shengjie has responded to her call hopeful and confident and hopes that the faithful will support her work with their prayers.

2002.7/8.2

"We Should Build On Rock, Not Sand": An Interview With Cao Shengjie

(ANS) Shortly after her appointment as the new President and Acting General Secretary of the CCC, Rev. Cao Shengjie gave the following assessment of the tasks and challenges lying ahead. The interview was conducted by Theresa Chong Cariño, coordinator of The Amity Foundation's Hong Kong Office.

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China has changed tremendously over the last 15 years. What are the most difficult challenges confronting the Chinese Church today? How will you overcome these?

I think the most difficult challenge is the mentality of people - how to catch up with the progress of the age and China’s opening up. In the church, people tend to be more conservative. The essence of faith will never change, but the practice has changed, historically speaking. We have to adapt to social change. Some misunderstand this as curtailing Christians and accepting the ideas of “others”.

One example of this is the issue of theological reconstruction. The aim of theological reconstruction is to run the church better - in the field of ideas.

Theological reconstruction is one priority in our work, because though the church is growing fast in quantity, its quality is lagging behind. We have to raise the overall spiritual quality, and also our capacity to run the church well. We should build on rock, not on sand. The Three Self should root itself in Chinese soil. There is a good opportunity now because the government just had a meeting last year on religious policy. [See ANS 11.1/2.1] We enjoy religious freedom. Now it is our responsibility to run the church well.

There is a gap between the goal and the actual situation. For example in the pulpits, sermons are sometimes very conservative. Often, they cause confrontation between believers and non-believers and breed intolerance and exclusiveness among Christians. This kind of theology can even cause family conflicts and it will damage the image of the Chinese Christian Church. The exclusion of non-believers or the separation between believers and non-believers is not the real understanding of Christianity, but unfortunately, some Christians believe this.

The difference between believers and non-believers is not the only question that needs to be solved. Sanctification - does it mean giving up daily life? How to be a good Christian? A good Christian should be a good citizen.

Another problem that poses a great challenge to us is the age structure. In the church, the old are very old. The young ones, the graduates, they do not have enough experience. The age-gap is quite obvious. How to run the church democratically? But still with a collective spirit? Some people still have feudal ideas and are hierarchical. In some grassroots churches, this has led to confrontations.

Finally, lay training and leadership training are also very important.

Can you share your ideas about overseas exchanges?

With China’s opening up, many Christians are visiting China. We hope to enlarge and develop fellowship with them, but it must be based on mutual respect. This is sensitive because China used to be a “mission field” and the church was controlled by mission boards - its resources, personnel and theology. The Chinese church was dependent. This was the unfortunate past. Now, based on the principle of the Three Self, we must have our own selfhood - not outside control. Every Christian should be a missionary in his or her own place.

With the opening up of China, some Christian groups, churches and
individuals outside, think they can come back as before, doing what they want to do. For example in northeast China, many Korean missionaries come under the cover of doing business or teaching. They then conduct illegal church gatherings. Some now join the registered churches, offering money and telling churches what to do. There are foreign groups that even demand exclusive relationships, or want to run seminaries or training classes of their own.

Some of these Christian evangelical groups organize home gatherings that are supported from outside, running illegal training projects and publications. They sometimes run into trouble, then shout persecution. They don't respect Chinese laws. They even determine to preach in certain churches, believing it is their privilege. Nowadays, it is getting complicated. They are joining legal churches and they try to influence the church "from the back", sometimes giving money to pastors to augment their salary and creating dependence. We should not change "self-support" to "others' support". I treasure Chinese self-support even though we are poor. Christians in the cities give help to those in the surrounding areas. For example, Shanghai churches always help when suburban churches are built. Once a year, one Sunday's offering from the whole city of Shanghai (which amounts to more than one million RMB) is given to China Eastern Seminary. Christians are very eager to make offerings. But now, outside groups' intentional offering become a temptation, damaging the Three-Self spirit.

Theological education overseas is one area where we would like to continue to cooperate. We have already sent students to Singapore, Europe and the USA, and we hope to send more in the future. In theological reconstruction we must have our own stand, but we also need to learn more of the theological fundamentals. In this respect, churches overseas can help. This means we will need language training. We would like to send more seminary students to USA and Europe, but language is a big problem. This summer, we are sending 19 theological faculty and those working in provincial church councils to the USA for two months' intensive English language training in San Francisco.

Can you say something about your recent participation in the "Religion and Peace" Conference in Indonesia sponsored by the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace?

I feel very strongly about the need to combat religious extremism. Religion should teach peace and tolerance because God is Love. In a sermon I recently preached, I talked about the disciples who went to Samaria. They were rejected there and in their anger, they wanted God to punish the Samaritans. But Jesus stressed kindness, compassion and tolerance. We are too often narrow-minded and very exclusive. We only love those who love Christ but hate those who don't. There is too much conflict in today's world. Why should religion be used to cause so much harm? We need love and tolerance, otherwise, there is no peace.
One Black Sheep That Harmed The Whole Flock

(ANS) In late March this year, Chongqing church circles were shocked by news of a scandal in their midst. Yi Hengming, head of the Three Self Patriotic Movement in Chongqing's Dianjiang county, had abused a female migrant worker, holding her captive for several years. In May's edition of Tian Feng, Wang Rongwei traces the history of this affair. Why was the imprisoned woman unnoticed until the day she managed to escape? How could someone like Yi ascend to the post of Three Self county head?

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The whole story came to light when a neighbour discovered Chen Ying [name changed], who had been missing for five years, wandering around her old area in a dishevelled and confused state. Her re-emergence then led to the arrest of Yi, with subsequent investigations into his relationship with her, but also the situation of the local church.

Pastors in Chongqing still recall the story of Yi's baptism, because "it was somewhat unusual." According to two pastors from Chongqing city, Yi travelled all the way from Dianjiang county to Chongqing to be baptized "because I want to become head of our local Three Self committee." Not only was Yi outspoken about his motivation to be baptized, but he also showed little familiarity with Christian beliefs and practices. In the counselling session intended to assess his maturity of faith, he claimed not to have time to read the Bible, and could not recite a single line from the Lord's Prayer, an assistant pastor of that time remembers. In spite of these flaws, Yi was finally baptized, following a suggestion from the head pastor not to be too strict on candidates for baptism.

In his registration form for the baptism, Yi declared himself to be a businessman, 45 years old and a Christian since 1989. Later on, it transpired that he had lied about his age in order to fulfil the requirements for assuming the TSPM post. Yi came to his church in 1991, becoming a member of the Three Self Committee in 1994 before being made head of the Dianjiang Three Self Movement a year later. In retrospect, his rise to power makes many local believers wonder whether Yi Hengming was really generally elected, or whether he resorted to other "strategic measures".

Yi Hengming became head of Dianjiang's Three Self Movement in 1995. When reelections for the different positions in the CC/TSPM committee were being held, the Chongqing municipal CC/TSPM committee strongly objected against Yi's reelection, pointing out his unsuitable character and bad reputation. However, Yi managed to stay in his position until the day of his arrest. Observers say he was particularly apt at deceiving people about his character and also maintained good relations with the local Religious Affairs Bureau.

Chen Ying's imprisonment by Yi Hengming started in 1997, when Yi rented a small corridor between two buildings. In this corridor he kept Chen Ying, who was nearly 40 years his junior. Before Yi rented the corridor, believers from Yi's church had already discovered that he had an "abnormally intimate relationship" with Chen (who was employing Chen in his shop) and reported this to the provincial church committee. The committee raised the issue with Yi's local Religious Affairs Bureau, and it was declared that Yi had to dismiss the girl and could no longer have her
working in his shop. Chen had also tried to run away from her captor several times, but each time Chen managed to trick her back. Following the order from the RAB to remove Chen from his shop, Yi finally resorted to imprisonment to maintain control over her.

During the five years of Chen's imprisonment and sexual abuse, neighbours used to wonder about the food Yi was bringing into the corridor. "I keep a big wolf hound," Yi used to reply.

Chen Ying, a girl who did not even finish first grade in primary school, now has to cope with the physical and mental effects of her imprisonment. The once delicate and pretty girl has lost all her girlish liveliness. She is also suffering from the effects of sunlight deprivation.

Yi Hengming did not only abuse Chen Ying, he also abused his power within the church by making decisions autocratically, violating church regulations and mismanaging church property. And, just as Chen Ying will be scarred by the Yi Hengming episode in her life, the local church will be marked by the impact of this scandal long after Yi's trial is over.

In their introductory note to the article, Tian Feng editors point out the existence of the church order issued by the Chinese Protestant church a few years ago. In spite of this, an extreme case of abuses such as this could take place, because persons close to Yi Hengming overlooked symptoms of unusual behaviour. It is the implementation of rules that needs to be improved, Tian Feng editors conclude, adding that church management and control must become more efficient. Furthermore, the church needs to strengthen its moral guidance over pastoral workers in order to avoid similar incidents in the future.

**2002.7/8.4**

**Shifting Values: How Pastoral Theology Can Adapt To Socialism**

(ANS) "A healthy pastoral theology [...] guarantees the existence and rejuvenation of the church." This is the basic assumption underlying Cher Xiaolong's reflections on the relationship between pastoral theology and socialism. In an article covered by July's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, Chen explores ways in which pastoral workers can adapt their thinking to China's socialist environment. It is not only the often propagated "adaptation of religion to socialism" that requires such a reconsideration of values. On a different note, the Chinese government has been promoting the idea of a "socialist spiritual civilization" for years. This concept is meant as a "spiritual complement" to China's rapid material development.

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Pastoral theology refers to pastoral workers and the work they do; it is a practical area of theology. Therefore, while all pastoral theology must be based on biblical truths, it also needs to adapt to the time and national situation it is meant for. In the context of China, this implies that pastoral theology needs to adapt to China's socialist environment.
 Accordingly, pastors and others engaged in pastoral work have to make sure that their theological thinking is suitable for China's situation. Specifically, this refers to the political views, values and morals upheld by church workers.

Chen continues with biblical examples to illustrate his idea of a strong faith combined with "correct, steadfast and enlightened political attitudes." Jesus Christ himself was born into a nation and took an interest in his people, its culture and religious traditions. "When he saw Jerusalem, he cried. This is patriotism under the conditions of the time," Chen quotes an interpretation of Scripture by Bishop K.H. Ting. Chen concludes that Jesus' political views were in line with his time. Therefore, the adaptation of evangelists' political views to socialism does not only correspond with biblical teachings, but is something necessary. Socialism has been appropriate for China's development. It has lifted many people out of poverty and achieved a life of dignity for them. Besides, to uphold socialism is also a rule in political life in China.

Pastoral workers face a double task: Being both children of the kingdom of God and Chinese citizens, they have to run the church well and engage in building China. The life of Chinese believers is centered around these two tasks, referred to as the "two C's" - Christ and China - by K.H. Ting. Accordingly, it is a natural and sensible thing for them to adapt their political views to socialism. Chinese Christians ought to protect Chinese sovereignty, national unity and everything linked to these values. In order to keep up with its socialist environment, pastoral theology must constantly renew itself.

Not only the political views upheld by pastoral workers, but also their values in a wider sense need to adapt to socialism. For example, they must cherish and protect God's creation, respect China's laws, welcome social progress and encourage believers to participate in building socialist China for the good of the people.

A point of special importance is the attitude towards money and material things. Many Chinese believers misunderstand the warnings of "mammonism" in the Bible as warnings against any kind of business activity or striving for wealth. However, Jesus himself worked as a carpenter and made a living from it. Contemporary Chinese believers should not be afraid of engaging in business activities, they should only be aware of the danger of adoring money instead of God.

Finally, pastoral workers in China need to adapt their morals to China's socialist environment. Christian faith does not change, but ethics and morals do evolve over the years. Pastoral workers must have morals based on the whole truth of the Bible, if they want to adapt to socialism. At the same time, as notions of law and legality gain ground in China, church workers ought to respect the country's basic law, government policies, laws and regulations. This will enable them to develop morals that suit China's socialist spiritual civilization.

2002.7/8.5

Shrinking Membership, Growing Challenges: A Look At Hong Kong Churches

(ANS) When Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule in July 1997, "One country, two systems" was declared the guiding principle for this political experiment. The situation of religions is illustrative of this principle. Unlike in the rest of China, the Falungong cult, for example, has not been banned in the Special Administrative Region [SAR]. Christians in the metropolis also follow rules different from those...
on the mainland. In the following article, Luk Fai [Lu Hui in Standard Chinese transliteration], reflects on the situation of Hong Kong churches. Luk, who contributed this piece to June’s edition of Tian Feng, is General Secretary of the Church of Christ in China based in Hong Kong.

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In the past five years since the handover, Hong Kong has been shaken by the upheavals of the 1997 Asian economic crisis, while at the same time facing the pressures of a general economic transformation. For the churches as well as the rest of Hong Kong society, this situation poses a number of challenges.

More than 1,200 churches serve the SAR’s Christians, 94 of these catering to foreign language congregations. Churches also run a number of seminars and other institutions related to theological training and evangelization. However, church life in Hong Kong goes beyond the spiritual level, and churches are involved in social services ranging from hospitals to schools and universities.

According to an April 2002 survey, there are 180,126 practising Christians in Hong Kong, who take part in worship services offered by 54 different denominations. This indicates a 7% decrease in believers compared to 1994. While part of this percentual shrinkage may be attributed to the general population growth in Hong Kong, another reason may be inefficient church work and the fact that Hong Kong are uncertain about directions for future development. Hong Kong churches need to search for a sense of direction, they need to share and cooperate if they are to grow and further develop.

From a quantitative point of view, Hong Kong churches are blessed with an adequate number of theological students. However, there are problems regarding the quality of the education provided. Of the 30 seminaries functioning in Hong Kong in 2001, one third had been established only recently, and many of these are run by individual churches. This is a sign of the pluralization of society. At the same time, the quality of degrees taken has declined. Finally, there is concern over the ability for pastoral workers to continue studying after their first or second theological degree. Do churches really provide the opportunities for pastoral workers to pursue further studies?

A challenge of a different nature is the widening gap between the rich and the poor in Hong Kong, and churches are now realizing that they need to spend more energy and money in supporting the weaker members of society.

Hong Kong churches try to cooperate ecumenically on social issues, transcending boundaries both within and outside of the Christian community. Recent activities included, for example, "Christians Care For The Poor" and "Churches Care For the Unemployed."

Hong Kong churches have been participating in the global ecumenical movement, though in different ways depending on the denominations concerned. A newly emerging question in the context of ecumenical cooperation is the problem of how to establish relations with churches on the Chinese mainland, and how to implement joint projects.

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Family care and counselling are increasingly important aspects of church work in Hong Kong. Family problems such as the break up of marriages and families cause a number of personal and social problems, and churches are trying to match their pastoral care to these new needs. The age structure of many congregations indirectly contributes to this situation: The church development of past years was to a large extent the result of churches' effective youth work. Now, the former youth have turned into middle-aged church members with families of their own who bring their family problems into the parishes.

Finally, work with young people constitutes a big challenge for churches in the SAR. Global trends and the youth culture they create leave churches with the dilemma of how to confront certain issues: churches cannot embrace any given trend, but if they set themselves too far apart from contemporary youth culture, young people will not be able to accept the church.

Xuchang Christians Run Rehabilitation Centre For Children

(ANS) When a physically or mentally handicapped baby is born, the task of raising the child can seem daunting even to the best-prepared of parents. In China, this situation is often aggravated by the fact that many of the parents concerned are poor and ill-educated themselves. Much of the financial and technical support available to handicapped people elsewhere is inaccessible in China. Fortunately, facilities and self-help networks for handicapped children and their relatives are slowly gaining ground. In May's edition of Tian Feng, the magazine of the China Christian Council, Wang Rongwei reports from a rehabilitation centre in Xuchang dedicated to children with special needs.

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"Raising handicapped children is a task that concerns not only the parents, but the whole of society." And, in spite of China's efforts to breed "eugenically superior" offspring, thousands of handicapped children are born in the country every year and pose a challenge to their parents and society at large. In response to this social need, the Christian Council of Xuchang in Henan Province decided to open a home for handicapped children.

The "True Virtue" Children's Home is run and supported by the Xuchang Christian Council. Rev. Wang Fuzeo, Vice President of the Henan Christian Council in charge of the home, explains its mission as "fostering and training these children in whatever way possible to reduce the developmental distance between them and their fully-abled peers."

Currently, the home hosts children aged between two and eleven. The home's capacities if fully developed allow up to 50 residents, but due to financial constraints there are only 20 children living in the home at this point.

Many children have shown significant progress after entering the home. So far, seven children have developed to the point of being able to attend normal schools, while other children have improved their communication and general life skills.

It is this achievement that provides satisfaction and motivation for the home's staff members, who on average are only 20 years old. "You have given my daughter and
our whole family a second life," one father thanked the home's personnel. Another parent remarked: "I would never have thought that my child would be able to stand up, let alone go to school... This home should have been opened years ago..."

**NEWSBRIEFS**

**Theological Education.** On March 16 and 17 of 2002, Shanghai churches held their traditional weekend in support of theological education. All donations from that weekend's services in Shanghai's more than 160 churches and meeting points went to support China Eastern Seminary, where the money will be used for student grants.

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**Protecting creation.** Members of Dongsheng church, E'erduosi City in Inner Mongolia organized a tree-planting activity, calling on believers to "Protect the environment, make the motherland green, and cherish God's creation." For twelve days in April, congregation members aged between 18 and 67 made numerous trips to the outskirts of town. Braving sand storms and the stony soil, they planted 800 trees altogether. "Through this activity dedicated to the glory of God and to the use of the people we have learned that as Christians of this new age, we have to shoulder the responsibilities of our times," concluded E'erduosi Christians.

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**Lay Training.** The CC/TSPM committee of Linyi City in Shandong held its fourth training course for lay church workers. 52 people participated in the two-month training course aimed at "training evangelists who will be able to fulfil believers' spiritual needs, who will consciously suppress sects and heresies, and who will actively seek the adaptation to socialism in order to achieve a healthy church growth."
Places Mentioned In This Issue Of ANS

1) Nanjing (Jiangsu)
2) Shanghai
3) Chongqing
4) Hong Kong
5) Xuchang (Henan)
6) E'erduosi (Inner Mongolia)
7) Linyi (Shandong)

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