Dear Reader,

"Both Buddhism and Christianity, the two major religions of this country, advocate love and compassion," Li Haibo, Editor in Chief of Beijing Review, writes in a recent opinion piece. Perhaps more surprising than his positive assessment of the two belief systems is the fact that Christianity is described as one of the two dominating religious forces on the mainland.

Officially, Buddhism, Daoism, Islam as well as Catholic and Protestant Christianity are recognized creeds, but syncretistic tendencies between Buddhism and Daoism often blur the boundaries between the two, creating a conglomerate of folk religious practices at the grassroots level. Accordingly, religious affiliation for China's "traditional" religions is notoriously hard to quantify, and when it comes to religious practice, it would probably be more accurate to speak of "Buddhist-Daoist folk religion" rather than Buddhism and Daoism as two separate religions. In this light, it is possible to look at Christianity as the second major religious force in China, given the fact that Islam in China is almost exclusively restricted to members of the Hui population and other ethnic minorities.

In Li's piece, however, the remark on the dominance of Buddhism and Christianity is really only an aside in a piece that is mostly concerned with the question of whether China needs religious education. Li's answer is a wary yes - a plea for moral education rather than a call for schools to "teach Genesis or Buddhist samsara", as he puts it. Still, coming from the influential and quasi-official Beijing Review, these are interesting observations. We reprint Li's commentary on p3.

China's folk religions have left their imprint on the country's festivals and customs, and never is this more apparent than at this time of the year as the country enters a new year according to the lunar calendar. For Christians, such occasions are riddled with the question of which customs and practices are permissible and which not. "Christians should have a non-opposing attitude towards those festivals that are harmless and not in contradiction with our basic faith," Sun Tianren concludes in his look at traditional Chinese ethics (p8).

With kind regards from the editorial desk,

Katrin Friedler
Church Leadership Visits Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union

(ANS) Established in 1915, Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union was set up by a number of churches belonging to different denominations, including Methodist and Baptist congregations as well as the Missionary Alliance. Over the past decades the union, which consists of individual churches that join the alliance, has grown to boast 306 member churches with 200,000 believers today. The non-denominational structure gives member churches free reign in their internal affairs and in return relies strongly on their support in the implementation of its programmes. Tian Feng No.277 reports about the 90th anniversary of the Union.

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Following an invitation by the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union, Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the China Christian Council, Rev. Deng Fucun, Vice Chairman of the National Three Self Patriotic Movement, and Ms. Chen Meiling, Acting Vice General Secretary of the CCC, participated in the Union's 90th anniversary celebrations. From November 11-20, 2005, the alliance celebrated its anniversary at the city's Convention and Exhibition Centre. Representatives from all major denominations were among the 700 honoured guests.

Archbishop Peter Kwong from the Anglican Province of Hong Kong and Macao and the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union's Honorary Board President, preached at the central worship service with the theme of "Thanksgiving". An 80-member-strong choir consisting of some of the Union's church workers gave beautiful testimony to God's grace that has blessed the alliance over the course of its history.

In his address, Rev. Pohng Gihn-San [Pang Jianxin], Chairman of the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union, highlighted the union's close cooperation with Hong Kong's mainstream churches, Gospel-related organizations and theological seminaries. He also reminded the audience of the enhanced cooperation with mainland churches that had followed the resurgence of religious life in mainland China after the Cultural Revolution. In the following months and years, the Union would strive to continue to play an important social role in a spirit of love for the church, for Hong Kong and the nation.

In her greeting delivered at the celebratory banquet, Rev. Cao Shengjie praised the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union as one of the most influential structures within the Hong Kong church world, and underlined the contributions it had made not only for the unity, spiritual growth and development of the church, but also for Hong Kong society as a whole.

Ties between the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union and mainland Chinese churches date back to the very beginning of Hong Kong-mainland church contacts, when a first delegation from the mainland visited Hong Kong in 1981. Since then, contacts have significantly expanded. The Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union has also contributed in numerous ways to church growth and social development on the mainland through support for church buildings, emergency relief, school-less children and many other social service projects. Churches on the
mainland are deeply appreciative of these testimonies of Christian love from their Hong Kong brothers and sisters. A congratulatory note sent on the occasion of the anniversary by Ye Xiaowen, Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, further underlined the close ties between mainland churches and the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union.

A host of activities under the theme of "God bless Hong Kong" marked the union's anniversary to the wider Hong Kong public, giving testimony to the association's aim of reaching out to the city's non-believers, and its hope of further contributing to Hong Kong society in the future so as to make the city into a truly blessed place.

Do We Need Religious Education?

(ANS) The following article first appeared in Beijing Review on January 12, 2006. In his "Snapshot" titled "Do We Need Religious Education?", Editor in Chief Li Haibo examines the relevance of religious education for contemporary Chinese society. China's rapid economic development and the social changes it has triggered have already brought about a general re-appreciation of religions and their role in building a morally healthy society. With his call for religious education, however, Li goes one step further. In particular, his commentary implicitly poses the question of the appropriate age to start religious education. Currently, religious education for children under 18 is officially frowned upon, although many parents and religious communities find a way around this restriction and introduce their children to faith life.

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Before the New Year, by an indoor swimming pool, I heard a retiree make remarks about the types of education to a dutiful middle-aged man to assist in enlightening the latter's teenage son. "There are four types of education," started the old man. "The first is family education. Second, school education. Third, society education. And the fourth? Take a guess. It's religious education!"

The retiree then went on to explain how necessary and important religious education is to this country. Other swimmers seemed to agree with his view. One nodded his head, the other responded, "You're absolutely right. Now the question is how." The old man said, "I don't bother to think about how. Where there is a need, there is a way."

If those guys had carried on the discussion, they would have found more terms to define and more questions to answer. For instance, what is religion? If I raise the question to 10 persons, I may get 10 different answers. In the long history of China, religion has never been the principal part of the culture, and there has never been a state religion, though the world's major religions have all found their respective versions on this soil for centuries.

Religion had once been regarded as something nonessential and even unwelcome in this country. During the 1960s, for example, it was on par with superstition, or labelled as an antiscience heresy. What had been frequently cited as the standard definition of religion was Karl Marx's famous remark that religion "is the opium of the people". One of my schoolteachers told me that China "doesn't need religion. It needs science and technology."

Marx's remark is scarcely heard these days, and many say they need both science and religion. They may not fully understand various religious doctrines. And I don't think they intend to build more cathedrals, monasteries, churches or mosques, and train more clergymen. They want religion simply because they regard it as a huge source of moral strength and a way to cope with what is known as grinding spiritual impoverishment.

When the Chinese say religious education is a must, they are unlikely to mean that schools should teach Genesis or Buddhist samsara or the latest concept of intelligent design. The education they want is an ethical one based on religious instructions. They try to employ religion as a beachhead to push back the jungle of something dishonest, vicious or
pestilential. With the injection of the religious elements into the Chinese secular society, they hope relationships among neighbours, colleagues, villagers and different groups will become more harmonious and amicable.

The present social setting is this. Against China's fast economic development, people's ethical quality as a whole seems to be stagnant and even on the decline. Money worship prevails, turning many into greedy and selfish persons buckled by profits. Moral landscape is polluted and part of society is saturated by prompting to degeneracy. Criminal offenses are on the rise. The younger generation is thought to be anaemic in social obligations. While good citizenship seems far from being dominating, this nation is rightly alarmed by the steady spread of egoism and corruption.

Two months ago Beijing residents were completely bowled over by the news that a teenage girl was beaten to death by a conductress on a bus. The conductress accused the schoolgirl of underpaying her fares, resulting in an argument. The woman then madly squeezed the girl's throat till she fell into a dead faint. That poor girl died in a local hospital later.

The tragedy serves as a dismaying reminder of what diminished signs of civility we don't want to see. It becomes even more prominent as the government and media are encouraging harmony among people. The incident also strongly supports an assessment by many Chinese that this fast-transforming society is short of compassion and love. And one of the remedies for healing that social illness is that China should introduce a religious education. Both Buddhism and Christianity, the two major religions of this country, advocate love and compassion.

That's worth a wary try. It is widely believed worldwide that religion may make people wise and virtuous. English physician and writer Thomas Fuller (1654-1734) held that "nature teaches us to love our friends, but religion [teaches us to love] our enemies." Indian spiritual leader Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948) once said, "It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion." Then it's logical to conclude that a person who is cultivated with religion may at least show his or her compassion and love to strangers. If Chinese residents are educated this way, there will be fewer dog-eating-dog tragedies or fratricides, like the bus incident mentioned above.

But a new question appears. If you want people to help and love each other, you don't have to write out an "exotic prescription" - foreign religious or ethical tenets - to cure Chinese moral diseases. Chinese culture is rich in standards and precepts with reference to virtues and demeanours. An old Chinese saying, for example, goes: "Love of the people and kindness to neighbouring countries - these are the treasures of a nation." And the virtue of respecting the old and caring for the young is almost as old as the Chinese culture itself.

So, what vexes us is not so much a moral decline as a crisis in conviction. There is no lack of moral criteria and codes of conduct in China, but numbers of people just don't believe in them, or they don't bother to follow these rules. Then, what causes the belief crisis? There might be sundry reasons for that. But an impotent education obviously accounts for the problem.

It seems we have a chicken-and-egg problem here. One may argue that the moral decline, the belief crisis and the inefficient education are all interacting as both cause and effect. But the point is that education is the key to the chain of problems. To clean and mend the contaminated moral landscape, a religious education may be necessary as a supplement to a comprehensive educational campaign that is imperative for China. From a long-term point of view, education will turn out to be the only sure means to turn all the citizens of the world into civilized Earth inhabitants.

2006.1/2.3

Children of Heaven, Citizens on Earth

(ANS) How should Christians understand their role as citizens? Is love for God compatible with allegiance to a nation? Christians throughout the centuries have asked and answered this question in many different ways. In Tian Feng No.278, Pu Jun from Sichuan Province reflects on this issue from a Chinese perspective.

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The Book of Acts reports two incidents involving imprisonment that Paul and his co-workers have to face. In the first instance, Paul (together with Silas) is incarcerated as a "troublemaker" after driving out an evil spirit that had possessed a slave girl. A second stint in prison follows after Paul has caused riots because his teaching defies traditional Jewish doctrine.

Acts 16, 16-40 and 21:27 have often been used to illustrate the strong faith with which Paul and his co-workers endure these episodes. We all know the story that is told in Acts 16. After he is thrown into prison, Paul and his fellow inmates pray and sing hymns when a strong earthquake shakes the building. Faced with the possibility to escape through the now open prison doors, Paul chooses to stay behind. The prison guard, afraid that his charges have escaped, is ready to kill himself when Paul steps in and assures him that the prisoners have not fled. Later on, Paul addresses the authorities in the following way: "We were not guilty of any crime, yet they whipped us in public - and we are Roman citizens! Then they threw us in prison. And now they want to send us away secretly? Not at all! The Roman officials themselves must come here and let us out." (Acts 16:37)

In this way, Paul affirms his status as a Roman citizen with all the rights that this entails, including his protection as a citizen under Roman law. In return, he is ready to perform certain citizen's duties, such as to observe state laws, to protect the national order, and to regulate personal incidents according to government procedures.

Within the church, Paul is known as a servant of Jesus Christ or as an apostle. As a member of society, he is known as a Jew, a Pharisee and a Roman citizen. Paul himself alludes to his different roles; when he describes himself as a Christian, he professes his faith, when he calls himself a Jew, he refers to his ethnicity, and so on. In both of the abovementioned instances of imprisonment, Paul appeals to the authorities with his status as a Roman citizen. Why would this be such a powerful argument? In the Roman Empire, people were divided into different classes, and free citizens, i.e. Roman citizens, enjoyed a position of relative power and liberty.

What does Paul's attitude have to say to us today? While Christians are "children of heaven" from a spiritual point of view, they also enjoy citizenship of a nation here on earth. Within the church, it is appropriate for us to use titles such as "pastor", "evangelist" etc. to underline our Christian identity, but as members of a nation with many non-Christians, we had better emphasize our identity as citizens. This will help us to establish a shared identity and mutual understanding with our fellow citizens. We certainly should not become overbearing with or disdainful towards our non-believing compatriots.

As members of society, Christians should be aware of their rights and obligations. If Paul had not known his rights as a Roman citizen, he would not have dared doubt the actions of the officials dealing with him, and would have had no way of protecting his basic rights and his dignity. And if he had been unaware of his duties as a Roman citizen, it would have been impossible for him to declare himself innocent in front of the king and his government officials. Precisely because Paul was a law-abiding and good citizen, it was possible for the authorities to say "...This man has not done anything for which he should die or be put in prison." (Acts 26:31). Today in
China, the rule of law is continually being strengthened, and Christians ought to be law-abiding and aware of important legislation.

Christians should obey those in power, meaning to serve, protect and build the nation represented by those in power, and should always consider the benefit of the general public. Yet we should also objectively assess the personal qualities and the level of governance of individual administrators. Mistakes in the implementation of policies should be pointed out in a friendly way. While Paul generally supported the state he lived in together with its legislation, he also made use of the legal framework to safeguard his own interests.

To be citizen of a certain nation and the implications that this has for our status is entirely dependent on the position of that country. In Paul's case, his dignity is tied to the emergence of the Roman Empire; his appeals would have carried much less weight if he had made them as a mere "Jew". Therefore, we need to support the building of our country in order to raise the overall status of Chinese citizens; a strong China will mean more dignity for the Chinese.

Reflecting on Paul's pronouncement "We are Romans" can help us in asserting our own status as Chinese. We do this not only to defend our own interests, but also to work for the advancement of our nation with a truly loving Christian attitude. Once we are able to appreciate the deep connotations of being a Chinese citizen and the dignity and value this status gives us, we will be able to say to the world "We are Christians!" - if we fully live up to our status as Chinese citizens by observing our rights and obligations. Let us give praise and thank God for making us into Chinese Christians! We are facing a huge responsibility, yet God has assured us that "... the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light." (Mt 11:30)

2006.1/2.4

**National Church Leadership Visits Grassroots Churches**

(ANS) Being an umbrella organization for China's more than 50,000 registered Protestant churches, the CCC covers a region the size of Europe, and staying in touch with developments in congregations all over the country is no easy task. *Tian Feng* No.277 reports on recent trips of the national church leadership to churches in different regions.

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The national TSPM sent a research team lead by Presbyter Ji Jianhong to Tianjin, Henan, and Hebei provinces from November 25 to December 6, 2005.

Following the overall aim of "building up the churches well according to the Three Self principles," the delegation focused in particular on the situation regarding theological reconstruction, spiritual life in local churches, the training of leaders, the development of social service ministries, and the idea of building harmonious churches.

The visits revealed that local churches have been successfully engaged in strengthening theological reconstruction, training volunteers, setting up administrative structures and promoting a united and harmonious church.
Meanwhile, difficulties and problems remain, such as heresies and infiltration. In these respects, local churches needed more guidance from the national TSPM/CCC, the delegation found.

In a second development, Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the CCC, visited churches in Guangdong, Zhejiang, Ningxia and Beijing in late November and early December. In Zhejiang and Guangdong, Cao spoke at meetings about theological reconstruction; in Ningxia, she attended the second provincial meeting of church leaders, and in Beijing, she witnessed the dedication of a new sanctuary for Beijing's Chaoyang Church.

On these occasions, Cao strived to encourage local church workers, introduced the nature of the national church leadership's overseas contacts, and talked about the relationship between theological reconstruction and building a harmonious society.

2006.1/2.5

"May God Bless The Churches in China"

(ANS) Invited by President Hu Jintao, U.S. President George W. Bush paid a state visit to the People's Republic of China from November 19 to 21, 2005. During his visit, Bush also attended a Sunday service in Beijing. In a press conference later that day, the American president showed himself impressed with the "really good sermon" and called the service "full of spirit".

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Early in the morning of November 20, President Bush, accompanied by his wife Laura, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, U.S. National Security Assistant Stephen Hadley, Rev. Louis Palau, and U.S. Ambassador Clark T. Randt Jr. and his wife, arrived at Gangwashi Church in Beijing's Xicheng District to attend Sunday service. Rev. Yu Xinli, an associate General Secretary of the CCC and President of Beijing Christian Council/TSPM, and Du Fengying, senior pastor of Gangwashi church, greeted them when they arrived.

Rev. Yu expressed his welcome to President Bush, who responded by saying how glad he was to come to the church. Later, President and Mrs. Bush signed their names with blessings in the guest book: "May God bless the Christians in China" and "May God's love and almighty power be with you". Rev. Yu presented the President and Mrs. Bush with a bi-lingual Bible and The New Hymnal published by the CCC/TSPM.

Assistant pastor Zhang Shuangliang hosted the ensuing worship service. He first introduced the guests to their fellow worshippers, who responded with welcoming applause. Senior pastor Du Fengying then preached on "Love never ends".

The service ended in an atmosphere of harmony. As the guests left, they shook hands with some believers standing along the passage and hugged a number of elderly believers.

President Bush also shook hands with the pianist and the choir director and suggested to have a picture taken with the pastors and the choir. "Laura and I want
to thank you very much for your hospitality," Bush said to the pastors. "Our friend, Luis Palau from America, is here as well. The spirit of the Lord is very strong inside your church – we thank you for carrying a message of love like you did."

**Culture Clash? How Christians Should View Tradition**

(ANS) Ever since the first missionaries set foot onto Chinese soil, the question of how Christianity would and should relate to Chinese culture has concerned church workers and believers alike. "One Christian more is one Chinese less," one saying went during missionary times. While much has changed since then and Chinese Christians today are encouraged to be active members of society, many new converts are confronted with the question of whether to continue observing traditional customs and mores. In issue No.277 of *Tian Feng*, Sun Tianren from Zhejiang Province examines the question for his fellow believers.

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" Tradition" usually refers to morals, rituals, customs, and arts that have been handed over to us through times and which carry cultural overtones. Chinese Christians usually make a distinction between "social tradition" and "church tradition" and face the question of how to deal with both.

At the core of our national tradition lie Confucian ethics with their emphasis on humanity, righteousness, ritual, trustworthiness and piety. According to surveys done among university students, these Confucian values have lost nothing of their relevance for contemporary students and do not elicit any dissent.

For us as Christians it is not difficult to discover that Christian ethical teachings are in line with these ideas. Therefore, Christians can embrace China's traditional ethics and strive to make them their own virtues.

A high regard for rites and rituals is typical of traditional Chinese culture. Formulated in Confucian classics such as the Book of Rites (*Liji*) is the conviction that proper observance of rituals lies at the basis of a harmonious and successful life, both for the individual and a nation as a whole. Rites and rituals are perceived to be guidelines towards proper and righteous behaviour. In the Bible, we also find an appreciation of rites; they are discussed in conjunction with decrees and regulations for religious and daily life. The Book of Leviticus is dedicated to rites and God's quest to lead human beings to ethical perfection through moral and spiritual cultivation; humans are expected to align their outer with their inner lives. In the New Testament, Jesus expresses his appreciation for rites at John's baptism "Let it be so for the present; it is right for us to do all that God requires." (Mt 3:15) and during his visit to the temple as a twelve-year old (Lk 2:42-43).

Worldwide, there are numerous ethnic groups and even more festivals; within the church, we celebrate Christmas and Easter amongst other traditional holidays. Therefore, Christians should have a non-opposing attitude towards those festivals that are harmless and not in contradiction with our basic faith. Mixing and mingling with other people on such festive occasions can even be an opportunity to talk about our faith and spread the Gospel, like Paul says: "Among the weak in faith I become weak like one of them, in order to win them. So I become all things to all men, that I
may save some of them by whatever means are possible." (1 Cor 9:22) Paul also says: "In conclusion, my brothers, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honourable. Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you." (Phil 4:8-9)

As Christians, we should respect the long and historic tradition of our country, yet we do not worship tradition, nor are we advocates of a return to all that is old and traditional. Looking at tradition, we should preserve a discerning view so as to judge historical traditions correctly and be able to make best use of them for our modern lives.

2006.1/2.7

In Christ, I am Not Alone Any More: A Young Believer's Testimony

(ANS) Testimonies like the one below can be heard in congregations all over China. Healing experiences account for a large number of conversions in the country, with up to 90% of rural converts claiming to have come to Christ through faith healing. Their experiences give testimony not only to the healing powers of Christian communities, but often are also a grim reminder of the lack of affordable and good quality healthcare in the countryside. In December's edition of Tian Feng, a young believer, Yan Lingxia from Anhui Province, recounts a healing experience she had shortly after becoming a Christian.

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I am originally from Chongqing, but in 1992 I followed my husband to Chuzhou in Anhui Province. Three years ago, my husband migrated to another province for work-related purposes, which means that most of the time I am alone taking care of our twin girls.

I became a believer in Christ in March 2005; in spiritual terms, I really am only an infant. Shortly afterwards, on 8 May 2005, I had a health emergency caused by gallstones. At that time, the brothers and sisters from church brought me to hospital. After a B scan, it was determined that I had numerous gallstones, and the doctor told me I needed immediate surgery. I was dumbstruck - I had become a believer only two months ago, how could something like this happen to me? My husband wouldn't be able to come back and I would have nobody to take care of me in hospital. I also was terribly frightened... But the sisters from church prayed incessantly with me and even took turns bringing food for me while I was in hospital.

The operation was set for 11 May 2005, and it was supposed to be performed with a full anaesthetic. In my case, there was a definite risk associated with the surgery because the health exam had revealed some irregularities. Still, the surgery was absolutely necessary because my gallstones were too big. When I signed the operation form, I felt like I was signing my own death certificate!

Afterwards, I called my mother in Chongqing. I did not dare tell her about my situation, but the thought of maybe speaking to her for the last time made me cry. Later on, I prayed to God: "Dear father in heaven, please lead me safely through this operation, the twins are only 11 years old and need their mother, I don't have any
relatives at my side at this point, I feel so helpless, please give me a brave heart so that I won't cry in front of the doctors and nurses..." Then, something wonderful happened: the doctor sent me home with some medicine, telling me the operation had to be postponed because of my weak health. I felt so grateful to God after returning home that night!

But in the weeks preceding the operation, I would still pick up my Bible and cry as soon as the twins had left for school. I was afraid that the operation might fail, and I was also concerned about the children not having anybody to take care of them while I would be in hospital. Then, some brothers and sisters from a small county town near Chuzhou invited me to come over. They had heard my story and wanted to see me. When I arrived, I was treated like a long-lost relative, they had prepared a huge meal. It was the first time I had to confront so many strangers!

After the meal, they all kneeled down and prayed for my health, asking God to lead me in grace, and asking that my gallstones would be dissolved with the help of the medicine that I was taking. Kneeling there and listening to their prayers, I was moved to tears. Although I had no relatives at my side, God had provided me with so many brothers and sisters that were concerned about me. In Christ, I was not alone any more, and God had made me into a blessed child that was being cared for.

After returning home from the county town, I felt truly uplifted and completely forgot that I was really still a sick person. My appetite improved greatly, my gallstones stopped hurting, and I was feeling so vigorous that I often rode my bike to visit friends and spread the Gospel.

When a month had passed, I went back to hospital for a health check. It was the same doctor who had examined me the month before, and when he saw me, he immediately said: "It would be unheard of for gallstones to dissolve so quickly, so be prepared for an operation." My biggest gallstone had been 21 millimetres long. I thought to myself, God says that he will heal us, God will save me! Indeed, the result of the examination was very good, all the smaller gallstones had already dissolved, and the doctor decided that I would not have to undergo an operation after all as long as I would continue to take the medicine.

Thanks be to God, whose love saved me! My children and I will praise God, whose boundless mercy we have experienced, throughout our lives! God cured my fear and helplessness and taught me that we can overcome any difficulties if we trust in God.

2006.1/2.8

Voice From Across The Straits: Dr. Yue Lei

(ANS) Tens of thousands of investors and businesspeople from Taiwan are active on the Chinese mainland, creating opportunities for interaction between Chinese from both sides of the Straits of Taiwan. In a recent series of portraits, Tian Feng has been introducing Christian individuals from Taiwan to its mainland audience. In Tian Feng No.277, journalist Qiu He reports on a conversation with Dr. Yue Lei, President of a Taiwanese semiconductor company.

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"From my youth in Shanghai, I, like my mother, had faith in the Lord. Later, my whole family moved to Taiwan." These years evidently left their mark, giving Dr. Yue many unforgettable memories. Nowadays he is preparing to establish integrated circuitry on the mainland.

"From elementary school to obtaining a PhD in Physics from Columbia University, everything went very smoothly for me, but I knew deep down that when life goes well, it is only through God's favour and guidance." Dr. Yue said. "Grace often means Christ being our enjoyment and provision; the Lord who knows our hearts. When I reflect on my personal affairs, I am aware that any goodness comes from Christ, and I freely offer up my heart. Whether I am researching natural science or making a career in pioneering science and technology, I should be like Jesus – full of grace and practical service."

On the relationship between science and religion, Dr. Yue pointed out that some world-renowned scholars are both highly accomplished scientists and devout Christians. A Christian's faith is like an artist's inspiration, showing that in the midst of everything, people are yearning to find things that are fixed by Christ and made peaceful by Christ. In fact, that is God's goodness and truth. Along with the rapid development of modern science, we are increasingly discovering that scientific research also has its limitations. Science and technology are unable to resolve all of life's problems, and certainly cannot replace religion.

Dr. Yue said that science depends on proofs and experiments, but science cannot replace religion. "When I was doing my PhD, I often found that the more deeply I investigated, the more I felt the wonder of God's creation." His experience reminded me of a winner of the Nobel Physics Prize – Professor Yang Zhenning. He was once moved to say that "many discoveries made in the course of scientific research are unimaginably beautiful natural structures. When we make these discoveries, it is a spine-tingling experience – there are so many unfathomable mysteries in these natural structures." How, then, are these "unimaginably beautiful structures" formed? I posed this question to Dr. Yue, who said "The key to making sense of such a structure is to consider it from a human standpoint. As people who enjoy God's grace, we believe grace will be extended to more peoples. A Christian scientist is not a theologian, but we must bear witness to the proof we can feel in our soul; our lives should be like that of Jesus, full of Grace and practical service. From this perspective, science and faith cannot be pitted against each other."

Nowadays, Dr. Yue is preparing to take his science and technology into mainland China. This endeavour does not only spring from his loyalty as a Chinese patriot, but also his conscience. As a Chinese with integrity, he absolutely refuses Taiwanese independence! Talking with him, I felt that he had a keen sense of responsibility to contribute to China's prosperity and success. In our conversation, Dr. Yue shows himself convinced that the Chinese integrated circuit business will in time catch up with its overseas competitors.

Turning back to matters of faith, Dr. Yue shared some more personal reflections about thanksgiving with me. For we thirst for God, and as we raise our head in yearning, our hearts are refreshed through God's grace...
Dr. Yue offered prayers of thanks, and asked that the Lord would favour and guide the timely reunification of China and Taiwan, and the church in mainland China. Indeed, a Chinese Christian needs this resolve: raise your head and look to God; whatever your circumstances, march forth undaunted.

2006.1/2.9

A Visit To Christians In Jieshou, Anhui Province

(ANS) Given their diverse ethnic makeup, historical development and geographic conditions, it is not surprising that Christian congregations can vary significantly in China, ranging from isolated Christian mountain tribes to sophisticated city congregations. In January's edition of Tian Feng, Wang Rongwei reports about a visit to churches in the Anhui city of Jieshou. "In December of 2005, I had the opportunity to visit churches and church leaders in Jieshou, Anhui Province. The three-day visit left me deeply impressed; the continuous growth of churches in Jieshou is a sign of how blessed these congregations are," the author concludes in Tian Feng issue No.277.

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Situated in northwestern Anhui, Jieshou is located on the plateau between the Yellow River and the Huai River and goes back thousands of years in history. In recent history, during the Sino-Japanese war, Jieshou evolved into an important trading centre through the influx of migrants, earning the town the nickname of "Little Shanghai" in the 1930s. Today, Jieshou continues to be an important marketplace, and the area around the city is an important producer of grain, cotton and oil.

Christianity reached a first peak in its local history during the Sino-Japanese war, when the number of migrant traders raised the figure of local Christians to around 400. The return of these merchants to their homelands as well as the ensuing turmoil during the civil war meant that the number of worshipping Christians fell to a few dozen in the 1940s.

Since the resurgence of religious life in the late 1970s, Christians in Jieshou have enjoyed the understanding and support of the local government. Over the course of the past two decades, the city's Three Self Movement has conducted a number of surveys among the local Christian population. A look at the corresponding figures reveals a continuous increase in the number of local Protestant Christians, rising from 2000 believers in 1980 and 18 meeting points to 25 churches and meeting points today. For the sake of administrative streamlining, a number of meeting points were merged into "activity points". At the same time, Three Self structures have been strengthened through the establishment of local Three Self groups.

Gospel Church in local Chengguan sees a wide range of activities every week. Besides the Sunday service, there are prayer meetings and Bible studies on weekdays. Two evangelists and one pastor are trained to preach. They are assisted by a team of 28 volunteers who take turns to come to the church on a daily basis to look after believers in need. All 25 meeting points and churches in the area form part of the Three Self network, and the respective administrative teams meet monthly to discuss existing problems in the congregations. Says Pastor Jiang: "It is very important to listen to different opinions and to negotiate how things should be done. If you do not know your co-workers feelings and fail to respect their opinions, you
lack long-term vision. No matter who you look at, we are only human and not God. Our work is divided into different aspects, but there is no distinction between high-powered jobs and menial tasks."

Apart from ministering to his local flock in Chengguan's Gospel Church, Pastor Jiang has to regularly visit outlying meeting points scattered over a vast territory to preach and celebrate communion in these rural congregations.

The smooth development of local congregations in Jieshou is also a fruit of the cooperative spirit that reigns among local church workers, as well as an effective system of administration and monitoring. "Especially the co-workers with a lot of responsibility have to accept being monitored by their fellow believers, by the church leadership in their local CCC/TSPM body, and by local government departments. Under such circumstances, only a harmonious disposition will avoid disorder, the falling apart of a church and its structures," explains Jiang.

ANS Feature

A Glimpse At Sichuan Theological Seminary

(ANS) The following information was given to a delegation of overseas visitors that visited Sichuan Theological Seminary in November 2005. As one of China's 18 Protestant seminaries and Bible schools, the seminary plays a leading role in the formation of the country's future church leaders, all the more since it is one of the few seminaries with a regional status. In its development, theological outlook and curriculum, it mirrors many of the other seminaries.

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Established in 1984, Sichuan Theological Seminary is one of China's regional seminaries and caters to students from Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces. The beginning was anything but easy; the first classes were held in the office of the Sichuan Christian Council, and the Chengdu YMCA was rented to serve as a dormitory for male students. Today, a seven-story comprehensive teaching building serves the seminary community, and facilities have been upgraded to include a computerized library and overhead projectors in the classrooms amongst other things.

The early years were also characterized by a lack of teaching staff as well as a shortage of suitable instruction materials. All these difficulties have been largely overcome today, a development that is due to joint efforts of various players, as well as support from a number of sources: Government support from the administration of religious affairs, support from the national and local church leadership, and the committed prayers and support from Christians both within China and overseas have all contributed to the seminary's improved situation today. This is also reflected in the institution's teaching corpus: After years of training, the seminary now boasts a team of 17 teachers, comprising ten full-time staff, two part-time teachers and another five guest teachers.

Based on a firm belief in the Bible as the foundation of Christian faith, life and work, the seminary also upholds the Nicene and Apostle's Creeds, the Three Self Principles, and the principle of mutual respect in faith regarding differences in liturgy and theological interpretation.

Aimed at training ministers for China's Southwest, the seminary strives for comprehensive academic, moral and spiritual education of its students. Candidates wishing to enter seminary must have been baptized and actively involved in their local church for at least a year. They are expected to love their country and love the church, be morally upright and feel called to serve the Chinese church. Prospective seminary students must
furthermore be under thirty years of age, come recommended by their local church, be senior high school graduates and pass a standardized entrance exam at the seminary.

For full-time students in the three-year degree programme, the curriculum consists of 70% religious studies and 30% general knowledge classes. Altogether, 36 subjects are covered over the course of three years. Besides, students do internships in local churches as a means to gather work experience.

In the twenty years since its establishment, 396 students have graduated in theology and an additional 31 students have taken Bible courses. In cooperation with Sichuan Christian Council, Sichuan Theological Seminary has also offered training courses for church volunteers over a number of years. Due to its geographical position, about one third of the seminary’s students come from an ethnic minority background such as Miao, Yi, Hani and so on. Many of the seminary's graduates have been ordained, and graduates from its various courses continue to make important contributions to church life in China's Southwest.

Over the years, the seminary has established friendly relations with churches and individuals abroad. Visits from overseas guests have included brothers and sisters from Europe, Asia, North America, as well as Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. In exchange, staff and students from the seminary have had opportunity to visit England, Germany, the U.S., and Canada. All these visits have contributed greatly to enhance the fellowship and friendship between Chinese and overseas Christians, exchange theological viewpoints and create a deeper understanding of Chinese religious policy outside of the country.

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2006.1/2.11

NEWSBRIEFS

International Fellowship. On 9 November 2005, at the invitation of the CCC/TSPM, a group of 56 overseas friends who had attended the twentieth anniversary celebration of the Amity Foundation visited the headquarters of the CCC/TSPM in Shanghai. In a spirit of Christian unity, the CCC/TSPM welcomed them with a buffet and a reception. Presbyter Ji Jianhong, Chairman of the TSPM, and Rev. Cao Shengjie, President of the CCC, introduced the main ministries of the churches in China to the foreign guests. Later, the guests were shown around the headquarters, the bookstore and Holy Trinity Church, which is still awaiting renovation.

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Water of Life. On 13 November 2005, an explosion happened at the PetroChina Jilin Petrochemical Company in China’s northeastern city of Haerbin, causing heavy pollution to the city's main water-supplying river. To ensure the safety of its citizens, the Haerbin city government stopped using water from Songhua River, thus leaving the city without water supply for four days. More than 200,000 Christians from over 400 churches and meeting points struggled alongside their fellow citizens to brave the difficulties caused by the water shortage. Several believers sent water and other supplies to their local churches, while others took care of the elderly in their homes, thus giving witness to their faith.

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Unshaken Faith. Churches in Jiujiang are facing the tremendous task of rebuilding sanctuaries and helping brothers and sisters return to their normal lives after a heavy earthquake shook the area on November 26, 2005, yet they are confident about
living up to the challenge. Right after the earthquake, staff from Jiangxi CC/TSPM visited local believers, offering encouragement and financial assistance to victims of the quake, which killed 13 people and left 700,000 persons temporarily homeless.

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Biblical Bluff. December's edition of Tian Feng warns all readers to be alert of a money-making scheme involving a fake "second volume" of the Bible and abusing the name of the China Christian Council. Claiming to have a second volume of Scripture published by the CCC on offer, the persons behind the scheme instruct potential buyers to transfer their payment to a specific bank account opened in the name of the "China Christian Council Publishing House". The CCC and Tian Feng had been alerted to the problem after scores of confused believers from all over the country contacted the magazine by telephone and mail to find out whether the offer was genuine.

Corrigendum

In "Big Is Beautiful: Amity Printing Press Breaks Ground For New Facilities" (see ANS 2005.11/12.1), we mistakenly reported that the UBS representative who spoke at the ground-breaking ceremony was Mr. John David. In fact, it was Mr. David Thorne, Asia Pacific Secretary for UBS, who spoke at the ceremony. We apologize for this error.

Obituary

As this edition of ANS is ready to go to print, news of the passing of Dr. Wenzao Han reaches us. Dr. Wenzao Han, 83, passed away in Nanjing on February 3, 2006. Dr. Han served as President of the China Christian Council from 1997 to 2002. From 1985 to 2003, he served with the Amity Foundation in the capacity of General Secretary, Executive Vice President and Vice President. He also served as Vice Chairperson of the Jiangsu Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference for more than 10 years. After his retirement, Dr. Han served as Chair of the Advisory Committee of the Protestant Churches in China since 2002. He is survived by his wife, two sons and three grandchildren. A memorial service was held at Nanjing's Mochou Church on February 9, 2006.

ANS will bring a full biography of Dr. Wenzao Han in the next issue.
1) Hong Kong
3) Chuzhou (Anhui)
5) Chengdu (Sichuan)
7) Haerbin (Heilongjiang)

2) Beijing
4) Jieshou (Anhui)
6) Shanghai
8) Jiujiang (Jiangxi)