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Special Focus:
Hangzhou and Shanghai Churches

A very old Chinese saying calls Hangzhou a “paradise on earth”, but life in the rapidly developing cities of Shanghai and Hangzhou reveal also some not-so-ideal elements. Read how Shanghai and Hangzhou city churches have responded to challenges raised by an ageing population and the constant influx of migrant workers, students and other seekers. Page 8-15

Mu'en Church, Shanghai
EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

We at ANS sincerely appreciate your interest in the ongoing development of theology, faith and thought within the Chinese church. This issue will introduce city churches in Shanghai and Hangzhou, two affluent cities in eastern China. In this issue's interview, Dr. Miikka Ruokanen reflects on theological education, theological reconstruction and the role of the Chinese church in church worldwide.

Through ANS’ articles, we wish to narrow the gap of understanding between Christians from the East and the West. With a view to presenting the contents of ANS in a more appealing format to the existing readership and also hoping to reach a still wider audience, we chose to revamp the appearance. The main feature of the updated design is that it contains photographs, so that you can see some of the actual faces and places of those mentioned. This issue is the third illustrated ANS, printed on recycled paper.

We would like to invite your comments about our new layout and design. What do you consider better or worse than before? All comments, through e-mail or by mail (see contact information on the right), will be seriously considered! Getting the news of new developments into your hands naturally entails production and postages costs, and therefore, we kindly remind you of the annual subscription fees.

Thank you for your ongoing interest and support to ANS!

With kind regards from the editorial desk,

Elisa Nousiainen
Dr. Miikka Ruokanen, Professor of Dogmatics (Systematic Theology) at the University of Helsinki, is a keen friend of China. He came to China for the first time in 1996. Since 1997, he has been lecturing at secular universities and theological seminaries. He shared his impressions about these past 10 years with the editor of ANS in January 2007.

"Since 1996, I have actually spent half of my time in China," asserts Dr. Ruokanen, who felt a strong attraction to China even in his school years. "I was assigned as a visiting professor at Renmin University (Beijing) in January 2000 and at Fudan University (Shanghai) in January 2004. I am the first western theology professor to have been appointed as a permanent visiting professor at any Chinese university. I lectured as a full-time teacher at these universities from 2000 to 2002, while my wife Li Jun (she is Shanghainese) and I resided in Beijing. I also taught for three months at the Yanjing Theological Seminary."

"My most impressive experience in China is the two years of teaching at the Jinling Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing, 2004-2006. I was totally absorbed by the life at Nanjing Seminary; these were the best years of my life so far! The Chinese church is a young, strongly growing church and it was a real privilege for me to be part of the development process of such a church."

"Chinese students of theology sincerely seek God's will in their lives and service, they are more on a heavenly realm than their western counterparts."

When describing his Chinese university students, Dr. Ruokanen comes up with a long list of favourable adjectives: conscientious and extremely diligent, polite and well-mannered, to mention a few. "Chinese students are simply model students, it is a joy to work with them. In addition to all these qualities, seminary students have a very strong Christian calling. For many western students of theology, studies are a path in their personal spiritual quest and help to answer the question of how faith helps to improve their quality of life. In China, on the contrary, students are extremely conscious of their calling and study with a view to serving their churches. Chinese students of theology sincerely seek God's will in their lives and service, they are more on a heavenly realm than their western counterparts."

At Nanjing Seminary, Dr. Ruokanen taught both undergraduate and postgraduate students. His courses included systematic theology, theology of worship and Latin on both levels, as well as research seminars for master's degree students. He supervised thesis writing and continues that responsibility through e-mail while in Finland. In western secular universities, faculties of theology are academic institutions where students study a variety of theological approaches.
whereas theological seminaries run by a church tend to be more conservative in their teaching. When asked how students responded to contents and methods of his teaching and how receptive they were to new approaches, Dr. Ruokanen replies:

"I did not find it difficult to teach students material that had not been part of their curriculum before. On the contrary, it was more complicated to find material students had access to. Some western theological works have been translated into Chinese and are available in the library, but sometimes students asked to see the original text because they could not understand the translation! My courses introduced the works of the leading western theologians who represent mainstream theological thinking. They included fairly extensive lecture notes which were translated into Chinese by my co-teachers. In addition, we studied Chinese material which is available, even including the Catechism of the Catholic Church in Chinese. In the theology of worship course, students became familiar with different church traditions and the ecumenical Lima Liturgy. Generally, students were very open to learn ecumenical approaches while still retaining their specific postdenominational Chinese characteristics."

"There is a lot of potential among the students at the Jinling Union Theological Seminary, but for developing the academic level of the seminary, exchange with universities, both domestic and international, would be beneficial", says Dr. Ruokanen. "For faculty development, which is being discussed at the Seminary these days, teachers would need to continue their studies on a doctoral level. For the time being, this is not possible in the field of theology in China. Academic discussion on religions is vivid and departments of religious studies exist in secular universities in China, but they do not focus on theology. Some faculty members have studied abroad, but after a period of 5-6 years, they risk becoming alienated from their home setting. Therefore, I would see distance learning or spending shorter periods of time abroad as possible solutions to this problem."

"Some faculty members have studied abroad, but after a period of 5-6 years, they risk becoming alienated from their home setting."

When comparing the two systems of theological education – university studies versus theological seminaries run by the church – Dr. Ruokanen sees advantages and disadvantages in both systems: "Theological seminaries run by the church have the advantage of being able to focus better on church needs. At Nanjing Seminary, students organise regular devotional activities, and in this way, they can put their studies into practice at the seminary. In Finland, students in theological faculties achieve academic competence, but their spiritual formation is underdeveloped during their studies."

"The Chinese church has years of experience in contextualising its theology into the socio-political context, but so-called theological inculturation is still in its initial stage."

During the past ten years, reconstruction of theological thinking has been a major issue in theological discussion within the Chinese church. Dr. Ruokanen expounds on the topic: "Basically, reconstruction of theological thinking is the Chinese way of doing contextual theology. The Chinese church has years of experience in contextualising its theology into the socio-political context, but so-called theological inculturation is still in its initial stage. Bishop Ting suggested that cultural studies were part of the curriculum in theological seminaries and I totally agree with him on that. China has a long cultural heritage. Pastors need to learn about their cultural background in addition to the Bible and theology."

Toward the end of the interview, Dr. Ruokanen outlined some of his observations about the church in China. "In western countries, a million people walk out of the church every year, while in China the same amount of people join the church every year. Chinese Christianity will have a lot to give to the church worldwide in the future. The Chinese church is also very modern because it is a postdenominational church. But strictly speaking, there is not any one church in China but different levels of Christian councils. One of the current challenges of the Chinese church is to develop its church identity or it may risk running into..."
Christian Faith and Chinese-Western Cultures

Zhuo Xinping, Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

As a system of faith, Christianity includes at least two major layers: the transcendent level of Christianity, expressing the believer’s search for ideals and ultimate concerns, and the level of church structure and social involvement, which is clearly influenced by socio-politics, economics, ideology and culture. The history of the propagation of Christianity in China is a complex construction of these two main layers, and worth analysing in depth.

The Christianity which entered China during the modern era was basically a “Western” religion. Thus, the dissemination of this system of faith was closely related to the cultural interaction between Chinese and Western cultures, involving also the political dynamic. This has affected the subsequent development of Christianity in China, and has complicated present-day evaluation of Christianity and the missionary movement in China.

With regard to politics, Protestantism came to the Chinese mainland against a backdrop of imperialist aggression and colonial expansion. Because of this, many missions and missionaries were condemned and criticised in Chinese popular opinion. In order to resume a dialogue between modern Western Christianity and contemporary China, there is a need for the Western church and its missionaries to acknowledge their past mistakes, and for the two parties to re-examine the relationship between Chinese and Western cultures in order to lay a foundation for Sino-Western cultural exchange.

Due to its links with Western missions and thus, with colonial expansion, the Chinese church has carried a connotation of toting a “foreign religion” and has been marginalised in the Chinese sociocultural environment. In the era of the May Fourth and Anti-Christian movements, two opposing camps were identified in Chinese people’s understanding and acceptance of Christianity: “Christianity has become both the religion most welcomed by Chinese people, and also the religion most resented by them. Many educated youth in China have already declared submission to Christ; at the same time, a group of the most educated are doing their best to eliminate Christianity from China.”

It was this kind of external assault which made the Chinese church consider breaking free from foreign control and launching the “Three Self Movement” to form an identity of its own. The development of an indigenous Chinese church towards “Three Self” was centered upon the principles of “loving the country and loving the church” from the very beginning. Chinese Christianity wanted to disentangle itself from Western socio-politics and its influence upon the church, and to emphasize its Chinese cultural identity.

This “Three-Self” movement became the identity of the Chinese church from the 1920s onwards, but not much progress was made until the arising of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement after 1949. In July 1950, the Chinese church issued the “The Ways of the Chinese Christian Church to Exert Efforts in the Construction of New China,” which became known as the Christian Manifesto [Three-Self Declaration]. In this declaration, the Chinese church emphasised vigilance against imperialism, a clear political stand and responsibility of Christians in the reconstruction of New China and the building of a Chinese church whose affairs are managed by the Chinese themselves. Subsequently, representatives from all Protestant churches and organizations also issued a United Declaration.

pointing out that the breaking off of all imperialistic connections and influences is the direction that should be energetically pursued by the church in China and all Christians in the world for the purity of the church.  

In contrasting the Chinese Christian “Three-Self” movement before and after Liberation, Wu Yaozong pointed out that these Christian renewal movements are consistent in meaning but differ in content and fundamental nature. Pre-Liberation China was a semi-feudal and semi-colonial China. Christian movements occurring under this social ideology, did not transcend the limits of this ideology. The post-1949 China had defeated imperialism and was a new China marching along the road to socialism. The goal of a Christian renewal under such new conditions was to transform Chinese Christianity into a religion with its own ideological, political, social, cultural and theological characteristics.

Despite these historical realities, the Christian missionary movement and colonialist expansion in China were not one and the same. It cannot be inferred that the connection between the two was necessitated by the faith or an inherent connection. Supposing such a rigid link will lead to a conclusion which negates the Christian faith itself, Christian mission, and also Chinese Christianity and its historical development. These conclusions are irrational and unacceptable.

As discussed above, Christianity incorporates an “other-worldly” nature in its spiritual pursuits and the primacy of its faith; this cannot be equated with the existence and expression of the church in society. When Christianity entered China through the Western church tradition, it did not lose its Christian truths or religious nature because of this “form”. The Chinese church must find its own truths and sources from within these Western models, "and through God's guidance rematch them with their own ethnic and national history and experience to forge an indigenous Chinese Christian doctrine.”

Admittedly, religion and politics are interconnected, but religion, including Christianity, cannot be equated with politics. Understood in this way, religion must return to its original purity and simplicity, and show forth its “religious qualities.” Thus, Christianity needs to rectify its relationship to history and politics, and showcase the foundations of its faith and origins of the church. Only in this way can its religious purity, its transcendental considerations and its sacred nature be preserved, and a firm foundation be laid for the Christian faith. Only then is it possible to talk about Christianity in positive terms, and value the tenets of its faith and the experience of its traditions.

Likewise, we cannot wholly negate the relationship and exchange between Sino-Western cultures and the Christian faith because of historical conflicts and the pain they have caused to the Chinese people. Christianity in modern China participated in imperialist cultural aggression and colonialist foreign expansion, but also to a great extent in dialogue, exchange and communication between Chinese and Western cultures. Without a doubt, “Christian culture” or “Western culture” should not, and cannot, replace “Chinese culture” and change Chinese society, but the positive contribution of “Christian culture” to Sino-Western cultural exchange can be objectively discerned. Additionally, while resisting “Western infiltration”, we should not adopt the extremist stance of being completely anti-foreign and cutting all ties with the West. Objectively speaking, Christianity itself and some missionaries and Chinese Christians consciously or unconsciously participated in the Chinese modernization process, advancing Chinese peoples’ pursuit of modernization with modern thoughts, knowledge, science and technology, and cultural and educational practices. Nor should Christian social service and medical and charity work be regarded solely as “imperialist cultural aggression”.

Even if Christian culture played an important part in the development and progression of the West, leading to the formation of ties between Christian culture and Western culture Christian culture is not the same as Western culture; this faith comes from Asia, and incorporates elements of eastern culture. When Christianity, despite its Western connotations, entered China, it “spread Western learning to the east, and eastern learning to the west”, enhancing Sino-Western cultural exchange, dialogue and communication. Christianity in China has a history, but the Chinese


Asian-European Meeting, is an informal process of dialogue and collaboration between 15 European and 10 Asian countries. The ASEM Interfaith Dialogue was first convened in Bali (Indonesia) in 2005 to foster mutual understanding and mutual respect among all faiths and religions, ultimately to actualize interfaith harmony within the international community. CCC/TSPM has also participated in the second ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in Cyprus in 2006 and preparatory working group meetings in Hungary before this year’s Nanjing meeting.

The point of “using history as a lesson” is to look to the future by reflecting on the past, and demonstrating the vision of surmounting, developing, rebuilding and blazing new trails. This should also be an important component of the construction of a “Chinese theology” today.

Deepening Interfaith Dialogue: Third Asian-European Interfaith Dialogue Held in China

On June 19-21, the Third ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, with the general theme Deepening Interfaith Dialogue for Peace, Development and Harmony, gathered together government officials, religious leaders and scholars from both Asia and Europe to the city of Nanjing. The participants discussed topics such as interfaith dialogue and globalization; interfaith dialogue and peace; interfaith dialogue and societal cohesion, and interfaith dialogue and cultural cooperation. Asian and European journalists held a parallel meeting on the role of the media in providing accurate and balanced reportage on religions. ASEM, Asian-European Meeting, is an informal process of dialogue and collaboration between 15 European and 10 Asian countries. The ASEM Interfaith Dialogue was first convened in Bali (Indonesia) in 2005 to foster mutual understanding and mutual respect among all faiths and religions, ultimately to actualize interfaith harmony within the international community. CCC/TSPM has also participated in the second ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in Cyprus in 2006 and preparatory working group meetings in Hungary before this year’s Nanjing meeting.
The ANS editorial team managed to catch Rev. Hua Yaozong for an interview in late January, which is a busy time of the year in Shanghai churches. Rev. Hua is a man with many hats: he is the chair of the Shanghai Christian Council, vice-chair of the national committee of the TSPM and executive chairman of the board of the Huadong Theological Seminary. Yet, his busyness at the time of the interview was not directly related with any of the positions mentioned above, but rather an annual “Spiritual Revival Meeting” which brings believers from all over greater Shanghai to the Mu’en Church.

Shanghai municipal Christian Council, housed in the premises of the Mu’en Church, is currently serving 164 churches which represent some 200,000 believers, as estimated by Rev. Hua Yaozong. "Last year, the number grew by 6,900 new baptised members, and 4-6 churches are built annually. Actually, more than half of Shanghai’s churches and meeting places were built within the past 20 years," Rev. Hua explains. On average, there is one pastor for every three churches, while other church staff members and elders amount to some 300 people. Volunteers make an important contribution to weekly activities by serving as ushers, cleaners, teachers; and some volunteers also preach.

Providing training for church personnel is one of the core duties of Christian Councils in general, and this is true in Shanghai, too: Rev. Hua Yaozong ranks training as the primary focus of the municipal CC. Volunteers’ roles have been recognised by lay training courses of different lengths. Those with less time on their hands can choose a training class of 5, 7 or 9 months while those with a more serious inclination can enrol in a 1- or 2-year course. All ordained pastors in Shanghai have formal training, but in order to keep up with the demands of increasingly heterogenic congregations, Shanghai CC has worked on developing new avenues of advanced education for pastors.

Reports on conferences attended by church personnel and academics have featured prominently in recent Tian Feng news. In Shanghai, the Christian Council and Fudan University have been collaborating to develop training for ordained pastors. The two bodies have designed a 2-year course to consolidate pastors’ academic knowledge. 44 pastors have already attended this course in the Graduate School of Religions at Fudan. Seminary graduates and ordained pastors can also enrol in a 2-year English course at Huadong Normal University.

The cost of the training course at Fudan University is RMB 10,000 per student, and good knowledge of English is an entry requirement, which is why this course remains a distant dream for the majority of pastors. Therefore, Shanghai CC has started offering short-term cultural training for pastors with only junior or senior middle school background.

Developing a common ecclesiology for all Shanghai churches is another measure that the Shanghai CC has taken to increase staff competence. Rev. Hua explains that the Chinese Church is a post-denominational church without any uniform system of church management. Even if some national rules exist, specifics are still needed for establishing church management structure, administering sacraments and recruiting church personnel. In Shanghai, it is a common practice that the person to be baptised can choose between immersion or sprinkling, but there are not yet clear guidelines on the contents or form of the baptismal classes.

As for recruitment of new staff and ordination of serving pastors, Shanghai CC has clear recommendations. Pastors need to have formal training to work in Shanghai churches and before ordination, they need to possess proven knowledge of Christian beliefs and adequate academic skills in addition to sound faith and character suitable for church service. Pastors in the pipeline for ordination need to submit an academic article, pass an oral examination and sit for an interview by the ordination committee. The decision for ordination needs to be received unanimously, which in Mu’en church means that a pastoral candidate for
ordination needs to pass the scrutiny of six people.

Despite all training programs and efforts to assist church personnel in their daily chores, Rev. Hua still regards the lack of human resources as the major problem in Shanghai churches. He reveals that although there are both seminary and university graduates currently serving congregations, due to low salaries and a heavy work load, university graduates often leave for more lucrative options.

The conservative thinking of the congregation is also a factor which can build pressure on pastors and hinder church development. Many believers’ focus on being “in, but not of this world” makes the gap between believers and non-believers difficult to bridge. “Even if the church is led by the Holy Spirit, human rules can make church management easier”, says Rev. Hua.

According to Rev. Hua, even though Shanghai Christians could still show more involvement in society, there are reasons to rejoice in what is being done. The Shanghai CC has helped the poor by running different social service programmes. This year’s June issue of ANS reported on the Shanghai Church Bazaar, an annual fundraising event to help the less-well-off in society. Furthermore, the Shanghai Christian Council has established a home for the elderly and a home for autistic children.

Then there are ministries performed at a distance: In Yunnan, Shanghai CC has funded programmes to build infrastructure in minority villages; in Guizhou and Inner Mongolia, it has contributed to building Hope Schools; it has donated funds for relief work, distributing free Bibles and building churches. This impressive and growing list witnesses to the Shanghai churches’ Christian commitment and sense of responsibility towards the needy in society.

An Annex of Grace and Light: Shanghai Home for the Elderly

Amidst the modernisation of China’s social welfare system, care for the sick and the elderly has become an issue of daily conversation in China. According to a recent report published on Chinagate’s website, every 100 people aged between 15 and 59 need to care for 28.1 people aged over 60. At the current growth rate of the “gray population,” the City of Shanghai needs some 10,000 additional beds in its homes for the elderly every year. Shanghai CC/TSPM committees established a home for the elderly in 1999 which the ANS editorial team visited in January, 2007.

An hour’s drive from central Shanghai in afternoon traffic, we arrive at the gate of the Home of Grace and Light. This home for the elderly is a six-storey building, constructed in 1999, two years later than Minhang Gospel church on the same site. It represents the response of Shanghai Christians to fellow believers’ need for a place of peaceful retirement. It can accommodate more than 100 retirees. Currently, there are about 90 permanent lodgers in the home. The average monthly cost amounts to 1,000 RMB, the fees adjusted according to residents’ financial situations. Initially, the Home of Grace and Light only accepted retired church staff and believers, but at present, it is open to wider circles.

We take a spacious lift, large enough for wheel chairs, to the top floor. As soon as we get out into the corridor, a tiny old woman greets us. She is obviously eager to keep us visitors all to herself and tell her life story but, to her disappointment, we cannot understand her dialect. Soon, we are

Minhang Gospel Church was built in 1997. In addition to the residents of the Home for the elderly, a congregation of some 1,500 people gathers there for Sunday fellowship. The church has no pastor; the current principal motor of church activities is Elder Wang Mingzhen, age 69.
GRASSROOTS

introduced to residents in three other rooms. A retired pastor and his wife occupy a double room with a balcony and a view over the courtyard. The purple coloured church, where this pastor still preaches every now and then, dominates the view. In another room, there is another happy couple who were wed by the retired pastor in the Home in 2004. The husband has learned to play the piano in the Home, and takes us to the meeting room at the end of the corridor for a performance. On the other side of the corridor, there lives a cheerful Mrs. Zhou in a single room. Mrs. Zhou told us that she truly enjoys the freedom at the Home. Life before retirement entailed a lot of hard work, but now she has time to dance and listen to her small transistor radio. She arrived here six months ago.

Discussion with the Head of the Home, Mrs. Sha Xiaomei, reveals that the personnel work long hours to assure creature comforts to the residents. As a former director in a factory, Mrs. Sha has experience in running large work units. Currently, there are 35 staff members, including maintenance workers and night guards. Those who are not professional carers but work with the seniors have attended government-run training courses to qualify for their jobs. There is a hospital ward for treating minor illnesses, while the serious cases are taken to a hospital nearby. A visiting doctor comes in to make regular medical check-ups.

Homes for the Elderly Getting Attention

Tian Feng, the magazine of the Protestant Churches in China, has published reports of church-run homes for the elderly in two consecutive issues. In southern Shanghai, Fengxian church established a Home with 100 beds in 1999; in the city of Wujiang (Jiangsu province), Shengze church is currently caring for 16 seniors (Tian Feng 2007.6, #11 and 2007.7, #1, respectively).

The management of homes for the elderly was also discussed in the eighth meeting on church-run social service projects convened by the national CCC/TSPM Social Ministry Department. In this meeting, more than 60 participants from all over China had an occasion to share experiences and listen to lectures on good management of old people’s homes given by experts and leaders from the Welfare Council of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui. Currently, there are more than 400 church-run homes in China providing care, education and support for seniors and their families. The meeting took place in the city of Fuzhou (Fujian province) in early May 2007. (Tian Feng 2007.7, #133)
Serving the Different Strata of Society

A very old Chinese saying calls the city of Hangzhou a “paradise on earth,” and another old saying claims that it is the best city in which to live. Today, the province of Zhejiang with Hangzhou as its capital ranks among the top five provinces in GDP per capita. It is traditionally known for silk, Longjing tea and its major tourist attraction, West Lake, while electromechanical industry and small scale business ventures are more recent developments. The ANS editorial team gained insights of Hangzhou from the church perspective in January 2007; the following is a synopsis of discussions with Hangzhou Christian Council staff, pastors and seminary teachers.

Hangzhou city has three churches, Gulou, Sicheng and Chongyi, serving different strata of city dwellers and bearing different architectural characteristics.

Drum Tower Church

Gulou church lies in one of the older districts of the city. This building is actually the third to bear the name of a historic Drum Tower (Gulou) dating back to the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). The first church building, built as early as 1885, was replaced by a Chinese palace style church in 1916, while the current Gulou church was constructed in 2004 on a new site. The church had to relocated for a new city development plan, but it still lies in the vicinity of Old Hangzhou and the historical site of the Drum Tower. Gulou church was the first church in Hangzhou to open after the Cultural Revolution.

Elder Li, who leads us through the church building is a dynamic lady possibly in her late 60’s. During our tour, she discloses that there are 3 full-time pastors and several part-time workers ministering to the congregation of mainly young and middle-aged people. Gulou church has taken the age profile of its members into account when designing church ministries. Generally speaking, drawing the demarcation line between the ‘youth’ and ‘adults’ in a church setting can be fairly flexible, and the term ‘youth’ may refer to anyone up to 40 years of age. Elder Li is more specific, however, telling that seekers classes after the monthly “Gospel meetings” are divided into groups according to their age, the dividing line being 35 years. The “over-60” crowd attend the first Sunday fellowship at 6.30 a.m.

The Evergreens at Sicheng Church

Sicheng church, located on a busy four-lane road, is the oldest of the currently standing city church buildings. It was built in 1927 to host a congregation of Presbyterians. At present, three Sunday fellowships bring together up to 2000 believers, mostly residents of the surrounding area. According to Pastor Huang, who has served the church since 1981, some 300 people are baptised every year, last year’s figure being 273. Central districts have altogether some 60,000 Christians, which accounts for about two thirds of the Christians in the entire city of Hangzhou.

Weekly meetings in Gulou and Sicheng churches include Bible study, student/youth fellowship and choir practices. In Sicheng church, the senior citizens also have their own club, called the “Evergreen Club”. Activities involve singing, sharing and preparation for various performances as well as trips to the supermarket. The oldest member of the club, Mrs. Tai, is 92 years old. The dancing and singing Hangzhou Evergreens – costumed in their colourful minority dresses – are also known beyond the bounds of their city: some years ago the club...
Grassroots

Pastor Huang Wenjun is eager to share about the services that Sicheng Church provides for the surrounding community. “Some years ago,” she beams, “Christians donated tea to help primary school students. Some doctors now offer free medical check-ups on our premises and people can even come to our church for a free hair cut.” Sicheng church also contributes to the Bible distribution ministry of the China Christian Council by acting as a distribution point: the inner courtyard of the church is packed with brown parcels containing Bibles. For years, these church walls have also offered a meeting place for the international fellowship of Hangzhou.

Pastor Huang is 78 years old but still going strong in her ministry. She became a Christian at the age of 15 and has many stories to tell about the history of church life in China. During the Cultural Revolution, Sicheng Church’s building was designated to house the Hangzhou Library, while pastors were assigned to secular duties elsewhere. Two pastors worked in the same thread factory as Huang Wenjun, who was not yet ordained at that time. Church activities were resumed in the early 1980’s; Pastor Huang’s ordination took place in 1992 in Beijing during the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference. According to ANS’ 1992 January issue, the event “was the largest and most broadly based Protestant gathering since [...] 1979”. Pastor Huang calls it the “Great Ordination”, since 45 pastors from fifteen different provinces were ordained at the same time; 43 of them were recent seminary graduates.

A Megachurch at the Commercial Heart of Hangzhou

The thanksgiving service for the Hangzhou megachurch, Chongyi, was held in May 2005 (see ANS 2005.5/6 A Place To Worship The One True God: Hangzhou’s New Church and ANS 2005.7/8 “God Has Blessed The Chinese Christian Church In Ways We Are Not Aware). The Chongyi church stands in the middle of a busy commercial district, where this massive grey stone tabernacle cannot go unnoticed. The main sanctuary seats a congregation of more than 5,000 people; some 8,000 attended the Christmas celebration.

This church, with modern architecture and modern equipment (The environmentally-friendly air-conditioning system is fuelled by natural gas.), attracts the young people and the migrant workers who both abound in the developed cities of eastern China. According to one of the ministers, Pastor Zhang, the form of Sunday fellowships is the same in all Hangzhou churches, but other activities are adjusted to meet the needs of the congregation. Last year, for example, Chongyi church organised a “Life Restoration” evening in addition to a traditional Christmas celebration. The programme was planned with a view to young professionals and intellectuals who struggle with pressures at work and a loss of inner peace. Young church members sang, gave testimonies and performed dramas highlighting Christian values in modern settings.

The senior pastor of this church is only 45 years old, and some 600 volunteers, mostly young, are involved in caring for the flock. Even though the church personnel are young and energetic and the volunteers numerous, Pastor Zhang concedes that providing adequate pastoral care is still a problem. He cites migrant workers as a group of people who would like to receive pastoral counselling and support after church services, but the human resources are insufficient. The numbers of

“In the past, the Gospel was for the old”
people attending the regular activities is impressive, if intimidating: There are 20 ‘small groups’ altogether; the weekly youth fellowship has an attendance of some 1,000 people, and, at the time of our visit, about 2,000 people were attending seekers’ classes. Pastor Zhang estimates that about 6 to 7 hundred of these seekers will be baptised. Meanwhile, in the training centre adjacent to the sanctuary, 600 people attend a 2-year Bible training course.

“In the past, the Gospel was for the old”, responds Pastor Zhang to the question why so many young people attend church services now. He sees the relationship of demand and supply between the youth and the church. “Young people seek the meaning of life in a society in transition. General attitudes towards the church have changed, so the youth are more open to come to church for solace from social pressures.

Churches have younger pastors and the proficiency of pastoral staff in churches has risen; in other words, the Church’s witness to society is stronger and more positive than in the past.”

Pastor Zhang himself is in his early 30’s and keen to serve his peers through his church ministry.

“Young people seek the meaning of life in a society in transition. General attitudes towards the church have changed, so the youth are more open to come to church for solace from social pressures.”
Social Service and the Church in Hangzhou: Be Light, Be Salt, Glorify God and Benefit the People

The city of Hangzhou has over 260,000 Christians and 593 church meeting points. The Chongyi Church, located at Hangzhou City Centre, was completed in May 2005 and is one of the largest in China. Below is an abridged version of an article describing the congregation’s involvement in social service that appeared in Tian Feng March 2007 issue #306.

The church emphasizes the need for Christians to have a broader perspective and to understand the meaning of service in building a harmonious society. In Hangzhou, we first need to solve the problems of the city’s development, and secondly, to contribute to the welfare of the elderly by proper running of homes for the aged. At present there are 128 people in the Christian Home for the Elderly in Hangzhou. In cooperation with the YMCA we are setting up an Elderly Care Service Centre, that provides a variety of services for under privileged groups. Thirdly, we are providing services in undeveloped and disaster stricken areas. The Hangzhou Christian Council has donated hundreds of thousands of yuan to road and water projects in mountain villages, especially those inhabited by minority nationalities. It has also contributed to relief work for victims of earthquakes, typhoons and tsunamis.

“As society develops, we find an increasing number of children suffering from autism.”

Joining hands with the YMCA and YWCA

The church in Hangzhou works with the YMCA and YWCA to develop joint ministries. These include an annual youth summer camp, Christmas worship services, church ministries, visitations to the elderly, medical check-up services for Christians, etc. There was special cooperation in setting up the Hangzhou Christian Elderly Care Service Centre, providing care and companionship to the elderly. This is an example of Christian witness based on biblical teachings as well as Chinese values that uphold love and respect for the elderly. It not only demonstrates true Christian spiritual values, but also the importance of community. The centre provides psychological counseling, on-site and home-care services. In the past two years the centre has provided services to four elderly and social welfare homes, three communities, and over 50 individuals, serving a total of 6,700 people. The church arranges for volunteers to pay regular visits to residents of social welfare and elderly homes, linking up with specialists to provide medical and health related counseling. Pastors and co-workers also pay visits, helping to lessen the feelings of loneliness. The involvement of young volunteers improves communication between young and old, teach them to love others and help them realize that “it is better to give than to receive”. Through this, they experience a renewal of life.

Rehabilitation Centre for Autistic Children

As society develops, we find an increasing number of children suffering from autism. The church in Zhejiang Province and the YMCA have made an effort, with the support of the national CCC/TSPM, to provide a basic rehabilitation training program. Using external and internal resources, a clinic for autistic children was opened called the Zhejiang Agape Autistic Children’s Rehabilitation Centre. The centre encourages everyone with the quote from scripture “Love will never end, only love will build up others.” There is a set time each week for devotions. Pastors and co-workers are invited to come and share. There is a prayer fellowship at the end of every workday. This enables the workers to serve all day long with cheerful faces, providing gentle comfort to the introverted lonely children as well as their anxious, helpless parents. Currently, the centre houses 15 teaching staff. Some are selected from kindergarten teachers while others are specially trained and go through on-site courses. Twenty-two autistic children, from three to seven years old, have been accepted into the centre and schooled since May of this year. The children undergo rehabilitation through a series of professionally run courses. They have made obvious improvements in different areas such as interpersonal skills, language communication, and have been stimulated to have an interest in the world around them.

Hangzhou YMCA offers different services

The Hangzhou YMCA believes that its mission is to serve and practices the four principles of “virtue, intelligence, physical fitness, and community.” Through its social services, it aims to reflect the Christian spirit, to be light and salt, preach the gospel in action, and bear good Christian witness. As early as 1995, the YMCA set
up the Hangzhou Amity Computer Training Centre, the first of its kind for the disabled. Through training and learning, they no longer felt depressed, and their faith was strengthened. After a few years, 1,500 disabled persons in the city completed computer training, enabling them to be employed or to set up their own businesses. As a result, the Amity Computer Training Centre is now recognized as an official training Centre by the provincial and city level Federation for the Disabled.

The YMCA offers the following recreational activities for the elderly: croquet, table tennis, taiji, kungfu, fitness and beauty classes. Its coaching team is made up of experienced and professional coaches and fitness trainers. In the last few years, 20,000 people have joined the many different sports activities organized each year. There are also different fellowship activities in areas such as fitness training, choir, dancing, English meetings for the elderly, Light & Salt Friendship Club, etc. These fellowships develop friendships and help expand the number of different social services.

Beyond its premises, the YMCA has established social services at six community centres and service points in the Hangzhou city district. Some examples are the University Road United Community Centre, libraries, painting studios, chat rooms, multi-function activity rooms, services for the elderly and the disabled, counseling for youth, psychological information services, gyms, etc. It has set up a youth volunteer network and friendship clubs for the elderly staffed by officers and volunteers. The centre is open to serve the almost 10,000 households in the whole community. This has been welcomed and affirmed by neighborhood committees and community members. For serving the minority nationalities in the community, 56 showcases of minority culture and customs have been set up and singing groups formed.

With our focus on hands-on social services, it is estimated that 8 million dollars in private donations have been collected in the last decade. Provincial media has given extensive coverage to our work. While in the past, we have had to rent premises to carry out social services, now we are being invited to set up service points by the city council indicating that our social service ministry has been widely recognized. At the same time, it also demonstrates how the social political environment is relaxing. Social organizations have been positively encouraged to participate. People in the community initially regarded us with skepticism. Now, our service is recognized and they all say, “Christians are really people with loving hearts!” We deeply know that God himself is working in all this.

The difference in the social service ministries offered by the church and the YMCA is that our motive is to witness to God’s love. We imitate Christ and we have the following four characteristics; Church – having a Christian character, Service – serving people in the community, Professionalism – catering to needs on a professional level, Adaptability – making an effort to change with the times, harmonize with society.

“We can be involved in solving problems arising from the rapid development of society such as unemployment, migration, gender and family issues and an aging population.”

The church and the YMCA, as Christian organizations, are faced with new opportunities and challenges, having much more room for action and creativity. We can be involved in solving problems arising from the rapid development of society such as unemployment, migration, gender and family issues and an aging population. We will continue to engage in social welfare activities like advocating environmental protection, aids prevention, educational assistance and assistance for the disabled, rehabilitation of autistic children. We will practice the Christian ideal of “Glorifying God, serving society and benefiting the people.” •
**News from Tian Feng**

**Newsbriefs**

**Overseas Exchange**

A China Christian Council delegation visited Fuller Theological Seminary in the US in early March. The delegation, led by Rev. Cao Shengjie, was invited to attend a symposium titled “Theological Education in China”. Over 100 church representatives and theologians from the US and Europe participated in the symposium (See [www.chineseprotestantchurch.org.cn/en/news/200705-302.htm](http://www.chineseprotestantchurch.org.cn/en/news/200705-302.htm)). In late February, Dr. Richarch Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, had visited CCC/TSPM headquarters in Shanghai.

A delegation of 12 Chinese pastors and members of the national CCC/TSPM staff visited German churches in May 2007. Hosted by the Evangelical Church in Germany, (EKD), the delegation toured in Hamburg, Berlin, Essen and Cologne visiting Christian mission and social welfare agencies, and churches (TF 2007.7 #14). See also the article on the CCC/TSPM website “CCC/TSPM Delegation visits Germany”.

Presbyter Ji Jianhong, the chair of the national TSPM, led a group of 10 Chinese pastors to visit Japan in April 19-26 by invitation of the National Christian Council in Japan. The Chinese delegation visited churches, hospitals and research institutes in religious studies in major Japanese cities including Osaka, Tokyo and Kobe. The visit was the 7th event in the Sino-Japanese exchange between churches since 198 when a Japanese delegation first paid a visit to China. This exchange aims at strengthening friendly relations between the church bodies in these two countries. (TF 2007.6 #311)

**Ecumenical Encounters**

Zhabei Church in Shangai organised an ecumenical worship and Taizé prayer meeting on June 10, 2007. On that Sunday, Catholic seminarians attended a protestant baptismal service and conducted the liturgy of the worship. A protestant pastor led the Taizé prayer meeting, while other protestant church staff, a Catholic priest and 30 Catholic seminarians assisted. Choirs from three different Zhabei congregations - Zhabei Protestant, Zhabei Catholic and True Jesus Fellowship - sung Taizé songs. (TF 2007.7. #313)

**Respect and Love – Highlights of AIDS Prevention Seminar**

The Social Service Department of the national CCC/TSPM committees held an AIDS Prevention Seminar at their Shanghai headquarters on April 3-7, 2007. Nearly 50 members of local CCC/TSPM councils from all over China came together to explore the role of the Chinese Church in the prevention of this disease. Representatives of the Chinese government and international organisations (WHO, World Relief, Hong Kong Aids Foundation) were invited to give lectures and lead seminars.

According to the UNAIDS report of December 2006, 39.5 million people in the world were infected by AIDS by the end of 2006. Among them, 4.3 million were new infections, and 2.9 million lost their lives because of AIDS. Due to ignorance and stigma, AIDS patients are discriminated against and therefore the HIV positive are afraid to reveal their illness. This may easily rouse feelings of resentment in them towards society. Other sources point out that AIDS is not a problem only of individuals, but affects families, communities, regions, in fact the entire society.

In China, HIV/AIDS has four trends: 1) It affects large areas 2) Both the incidence and the death rate are steadily increasing. 3) The disease spreads from high-risk groups to the general public. 4) Favourable conditions for the spreading of the disease generally exist. After being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, most of the patients suffer from stress and anxiety. They become marginalised, lacking means of financial subsistence and psychological support.

Through preventive HIV/AIDS education, church members can raise their awareness of the disease and alleviate discrimination against the HIV positive in their communities. They can help AIDS patients to satisfy their physical, mental and spiritual needs. Moreover, churches can enhance building healthy family ties and promote high moral values in the society. As Rev. Deng Fucun, the vice-chairman of the Chinese Christian Three Self Patriotic Movement Committee, pointed out in his opening speech, HIV/AIDS is not only the government’s responsibility, but the Church needs to follow the example of the Son of Man who came to serve the world, not to be served. (Tian Feng 2007.5 #309)
Talking about Listening and Caring: a Symposium on Pastoral Counseling

“As the gap between the first and the second generations in migrant families [having moved from rural to urban areas] widens, the tensions between them increase. The number of suicides goes up, reflecting the conflicts and disputes in family. The number of drug addicts and alcoholics has increased rapidly in the last decade. There is an increasing need to reduce the stigma of mental diseases.” This excerpt originates in Tian Feng, the magazine of the Protestant churches in China (June 2007, #309), setting out the wider context of a symposium on pastoral counseling convened in Shanghai in March, 2007. The following article is a summary of the Tian Feng’s report on the event, translated by Lucia Wah.

In modern church history, the role of pastoral care and counseling has expanded from the traditional biblical model of shepherding into a discipline utilising contemporary psychology. In the Chinese church, believers’ psychological needs have been recognised, and training for pastoral counseling is being developed. In Mid-March 2007, Professor Al Dueck, psychologist at Fuller Theology Seminary, five pastors from California churches and more than twenty pastors, ministers, psychologists and pastoral counselors from Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Guangdong gathered in the CCC/TSPM headquarters in Shanghai to attend a symposium on pastoral counseling. The programme consisted of lectures, workshops with games, hands-on counseling techniques, and group discussions.

“In his address, Professor Dueck introduced the participants to a pyramid-shaped model of pastoral counseling. This pyramid is built on God and the healing work of the Holy Spirit. The professional counselors form its top layers, while the congregation represents its base. Volunteer counselors occupy the space between the professional top and the congregation. Pastors are often busy carrying out their regular duties ranging from general congregational activities to marriage counseling and visits to the sick and elderly. Therefore, volunteers make up an extremely important layer in the structure of pastoral care because of their number and their involvement in fellow believers’ lives.

Professor Dueck emphasised the importance of communication in Christian counseling – in particular listening – which is easily overlooked for more material help. Professor Yang Yuchuan, a guest speaker from China Youth University for Political Sciences (Beijing) at the symposium, led interactive sessions of games and group work to draw attention to the necessity of teamwork in pastoral care. People involved in pastoral care may get overburdened; therefore they need to draw upon professional counselors for help with serious psychological problems.

In group discussions, the participants were asked to define a good pastor using animals as symbols. The groups came up with the following characteristics which pastors should have: lion’s power, sheep’s gentleness, dove’s sense of direction, eagle’s wings, monkey’s friendliness, pig’s simplicity, water buffalo’s yoke-bearing strength and wolf’s societal skills.

In his closing speech, Rev. Bao Jiayuan, the Head of the CCC/TSPM Training Department, stated that this symposium was the beginning of professional pastoral care in China. The Chinese church will need to look for methods which can be applied well to the Chinese context.

Read about the history of the Bible Ministry Exhibition in the US and in Germany at www.chineseprotestantchurch.org/english/ev.htm
Dear Editor,

Where we live, the children of rich families look for marriage partners when they reach the age of eighteen or nineteen, whereas the legal marriage age according to our government is between 20 to 22 years of age. So in this country, when couples are married before the legal age, it is known as ‘black marriage’; if they are married at the legal age and have an official marriage licence, it is called ‘red marriage’.

This phenomenon affects the young brothers and sisters in our churches. Some ministers firmly believe that those who have a black marriage are lacking a legal marriage licence, and therefore, they cannot have a church ceremony either. They argue that if the marriage is not even recognised on human grounds, how can it be recognised by God? Some ministers and deacons oppose this view saying that an early marriage can be recognised if the couple marries in God’s presence, with God as their witness even though the government does not approve of it. Also, some ministers’ children opt for ‘black marriages’ which many believers in our churches oppose. We are two sisters who decided to write and ask you for advice, hoping that you will give us a correct answer on this matter. This will enable our children’s future marriages to be holy and acceptable by God.

Thank you in advance. We look forward to your reply.

Two sisters from Fu Jian

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Dear Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for your letter telling us about two opposing views towards ‘black’ and ‘red’ marriages.

The book of Romans teaches us to be obedient to the authority that is over us, so, we must not use religious belief as an excuse to challenge our country’s laws. Every country has its own laws, and every citizen regardless of race, sex and religion must obey its laws without reservation. Only if a certain law betrays human conscience and religious freedom can people raise their objections for change through legal means. If an individual challenges the country’s law through illegal means then this is an act of ignorance without any sense of real understanding, and will result in the contrary effect. Therefore, the ministers who would not allow non-licensed couples to have their marriage ceremonies in churches, have the correct view and their insistence on this viewpoint is highly commendable. There is a Chinese saying: “the truth often lies in the hands of a few”. Therefore, do not underestimate the opinion of the minority. If the church has more people who insist on following the truth, we have no need to worry about the annihilation of the righteous.

According to the marriage law in our country, the marriage age for women is 20 and for men it is 22. This is not in conflict with human conscience, religious freedom or the righteousness of God. Therefore, we have no reason to oppose this law nor to set the law in opposition to God. Your letter mentions that many ministers and deacons accept that as long as God is the witness, then the marriage is valid. This is folly! We who believe in God must not take His name in vain.

Those ministers with ‘black marriage’ families have been wrong to condone their children’s marriages. We suggest that other members should not follow suit. They should obey the law of our country and must wait until the legal marriage age. The ministers need to acknowledge their mistake without using God’s name as their defence. Christian brothers and sisters also need to be tolerant of their mistake, allowing them an opportunity for correction. Those believers who oppose these ‘black marriage’ ministers need to think about what they are opposing. If the opposition is to stop these ministers serving God, this is not an opposition done out of truth, but out of flesh. If one holds the opinion that people who make mistakes cannot serve God, is there anyone...
who has never made a mistake at all? No, there isn’t! Those who truly repent can indeed continue to serve God. Only those who continue in their sins, unrepentant and self defensive, are not fit to serve God. Even if they remain in service, it will not be true service at all. For these people, Jesus said: “I never knew you, depart from me” (Matthew 7: 23).

It is inevitable that the earthly church commits mistakes and errors; it is important to remember that we have to support each other in love. We must not allow differences of opinions to divide us into small groups, leading us into contradictions and errors. This becomes a hindrance to the gospel. Let Love direct our sense of righteousness, and Truth lead us to an earnest love for God and His people.

Jin Wei
Continued from p. 4

'redenominationalism.' But at the moment, the Chinese church can be seen ecumenically as one of the most advanced churches.”

Dr. Miikka Ruokanen is open to employing new ways of collaboration with the Jinling Union Theological Seminary, and concludes: "It has been simply great to work for the Chinese church, to be a drop in this ocean which is rapidly expanding. I love China, the Chinese people and the Chinese church."

After this interview, Dr. Ruokanen had a chance to go back to teach at the Nanjing Seminary, from March to July, 2007.