

**Communicating the Good News in
China today: realistic expectations for
foreign believers**

by

Peter Stafford Anderson

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DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

Peter Stafford Anderson
12/06/06

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Peter S. Anderson

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SUMMARY

China is experiencing breath-taking economic development and social change, and the Chinese people are at a spiritual crossroads. This thesis looks at Christianity in China and asks, “Can foreign believers play any part in sharing the good news in mainland China today?” Laying the groundwork the thesis looks at the Marxist view of religion and outlines official religious policy. Some of the lessons of history are highlighted – from the Nestorians in the Tang dynasty, to Jesuits in the Ming and Qing and Protestants in the 19th and 20th centuries. The thesis looks at the Chinese Church (in all her forms) and there is also a detailed consideration of the role of Christian foreigners. The thesis considers the place of ordinary believers, both in Scripture and in the modern “tentmaker” movement, in building God’s Kingdom in a hostile world. The major philosophies that have shaped the Chinese worldview (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and Communism) are discussed before there is an examination of how various sectors in Chinese society view Christianity. This thesis aims to demonstrate that, with adequate spiritual, linguistic, and cultural preparation, and with appropriate strategies, foreign believers can indeed play a part, alongside the Chinese Church, in the task of gospel proclamation.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Issue to be addressed

The issue I hope to address in this thesis is: Can foreign believers (i.e. non-Chinese) and those collectively known as “overseas Chinese”, be involved in sharing the gospel in China today and if so how can they communicate the good news effectively?

1.2 China – a Nation None Can Ignore

China is, without question, the up and coming super-power on the world stage. Since the adoption of her “open door” policy in the early eighties China has begun to impact the world economically, politically and in many other ways. Yet while other communist governments, notably those in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, crumbled over a decade ago China’s communist leaders have held on to power. The Economist website dated August 19th 2005 puts it succinctly, “The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has governed China since 1949. Deng Xiaoping, who led the party - and therefore China - from 1978 to 1997, began a policy of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’, encouraging more economic openness and foreign trade. But the CCP retains an iron grip on politics: other parties are outlawed and criticisms are quickly suppressed.”

There is no sign the Chinese Communist Party intends to tolerate any political change or “opening” that might threaten their position and control. They have allowed some degree of “religious freedom”, as we will demonstrate in this thesis, but the reality remains – China is ruled by an atheistic regime that keeps a wary eye and a tight reign upon religious groups and activities. This “oversight” and control, of course, extends to foreign religious groups and individuals. China does not welcome missionaries.

However the story does not end here. There is a dilemma for China and there is one for Christians called to obey the Great Commission. China is increasingly open to the outside world. Hundreds of thousands of foreigners (students, diplomats, businessmen, technical experts, etc) live in China today. Millions of tourists visit China each year. They come from many nations. Amongst them are many Christians (from western nations, from Africa, from Latin America and from other Asian nations, such as Singapore) and many of these foreign Christians see themselves as called to China – called by God to be a witness for Him. China may welcome foreigners with their investment and with their expertise but she does not exactly welcome their political ideas or religious beliefs.

The world cannot ignore China and China cannot, and does not, ignore the rest of the world. China is the world's fastest growing large economy. It is the powerful new force on the global scene. Figures can boggle the mind especially when we are talking about China with her population of 1.3 billion. China has over 170 cities with over 1 million people. Several cities are close to or over 10 million. Beijing is said to now have almost 15 million, Shanghai officially is 13.5 but unofficially is closer to 20 million. China has 350 million mobile phones – incredible development when 20 years ago few even had a land line in the home. China makes 2/3 of the world's copiers, microwave ovens, DVD players, and shoes and toys. She is the world's largest producer of coal, steel and cement and the second largest consumer of energy. Her demand for oil has driven up the world price for crude to record levels. China supplies 80% of the goods sold in the world's largest corporation Wal Mart, which has revenues of 8 times those of Microsoft. In an article entitled China's Tech Revolution in IEEE's Spectrum Online author's Jean Kumagai and Marlowe Hood write, "The allure of the Chinese market has attracted nearly every multi-national on the planet. From fast food (KFC, McDonald's) and pharmaceuticals (Pfizer, Merck) to retailers (Carrefour, Wal-Mart) and automobiles (General Motors, Volkswagen), China is simply the world's hottest market, thanks to the newly awakened Chinese consumer. Little wonder, then, that foreign direct

investment hit a record \$66.5 billion last year, second only to the United States' \$121 billion.” Indeed it is impossible to ignore China.

This is true not only economically but also politically. China is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and increasingly uses her influence around the globe. It is not always easy for Western and other democratic nations, such as Japan, to work with Beijing. To illustrate this point it is worth quoting what the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, said in an interview with The New York Times on August 20, 2005 – “The relationship with China is just big and complicated, and it's got good parts and it's got not-so-good parts,” she said. “But what we are trying to stay focused on is the understanding that China is going to be influential in international politics one way or another. It's a major power, and it's going to be an even more major power.”

1.3 The Spiritual Challenge

1.3.1 Reaching the Unreached

On the spiritual front also China demands our attention. Despite a reported 70 million Christians there are countless millions who have yet to hear the name of Jesus. There are major “unreached people groups” such as the Uyghur (Moslem people in NW China), the Tibetans, and the Hui. In fact China has close to 500 distinct ethnic groups many of whom are without a viable indigenous church and without the Scriptures. Many of these “unreached people groups” have a very different worldview to the majority Han Chinese. I want to look at this in more depth in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

1.3.2 The Role of the Chinese Church

The responsibility and challenge of gospel proclamation in such a vast and religiously complex and politically sensitive nation lies primarily with the Chinese

Church. Despite great persecution this Church has grown – by any standards there has been a remarkable revival. With revival has come a vision for outreach and mission. The Chinese Church has a growing burden for both. In this thesis we want to look at the Chinese Church because whatever foreigners seek to do to help we must remain servants of and partners with God's people in China. It is the Chinese Church and Chinese believers that will always be the most important instruments in God's plan for the nation. Yet in His sovereign wisdom God still chooses to use and bless cross-cultural ministry to break new ground and open hard hearts.

1.4 The Role of Foreign Believers

It is a day of opportunity in China. The doors are open for foreign professionals (even Christian ones) to go and serve in a variety of fields. However how can we obey the Great Commission if China does not allow missionaries and restricts the “religious” activities of foreign believers? How can those called to China be better equipped to serve wisely and effectively? Do we need to learn Chinese – a long and hard path for anyone? How can we build cultural understanding? What factors shape the Chinese worldview? How do we communicate gospel truth in the context of China today? These are some of the questions we want to examine.

Such a study is of relevance not only to those who are called to go to China but is also very relevant for those in the many nations to which, over the past more than twenty years, hundreds of thousands of China's brightest and best have gone to study. The China Education Daily on February 28, 2005, reported that from 1978 some 814,884 Chinese students and scholars had travelled abroad to study. With China's recent economic growth more were being attracted back to China. The numbers of returnees increased to over 25,000 in 2004. However of all those going overseas to study less than a quarter have returned to China. Over half are still pursuing higher degrees while the rest have taken up permanent residence

overseas. There is today a wide open door to reach Chinese students and immigrants overseas. It is a strategic and fruitful field of ministry. The issues addressed in this thesis are relevant not only to foreigners serving in China but also to those at home who are seeking to reach out to the Chinese Diaspora.

1.5 Personal Reasons for Undertaking this Study

1.5.1 A Call to China

I have strong personal reasons for my choice of this topic. Having been called to China and the Chinese as a young ten-year-old boy, and having served in Asia for the past 29 years, the Chinese have become the people of my heart. During the years 1976-82 my late wife and I served with OMF in Taiwan. We began to study the Chinese language and worked amongst Chinese children and students, as well as engaged in church work.

1.5.2 Becoming involved with the Peoples Republic of China

In late 1982 OMF asked us to move to Hong Kong in order to serve as Coordinators of the newly established OMF China Program. It was my privilege in those days to work closely with people such as the late David Adeney, Tony Lambert and Ross Paterson - all recognized China experts. My first ever visit to the mainland was in April 1983 and since then I have visited countless times and travelled to every province. It has been my great joy to meet Christians all over this vast nation – including the famous Wang Ming-dao and his wife (both now with the Lord) and other leaders in both the official churches and the House Church movement.

1.5.3 New Directions

As early as 1984 I began to see firsthand that while China did not allow missionaries she did welcome foreign professionals, including Christian ones. It was then that the vision for placing hundreds, even thousands, of Christian professions in China was birthed in my own heart and in the hearts of colleagues in OMF. This led to the founding of the Friends of China Foundation (FOC) in 1986 and I was privileged to serve as FOC's first Executive Director. For a period we lived in China where my wife taught English in a university and I continued my work with FOC, as their China Director. FOC was set up as an NGO (non-governmental organization) and was involved largely in medical and educational work.

1.5.4 The Jian Hua Foundation

In 1991 during my sabbatical in London (while based at the Chinese Church in London) I was appointed by the Jian Hua Foundation (JHF), another HK based NGO, to succeed Dr Donald Dale as JHF's International Director. JHF had been founded in 1981, even earlier than FOC, and the International Board was made up entirely of Hong Kong and Overseas Chinese businessmen and academics. As ID of JHF, up until February 2004 when I handed over to my own successor, I travelled the length and breadth of China and became personally involved in many of JHF's exciting projects. JHF currently has well over 200 foreign professionals (called associates) from 23 nations serving in various projects in a variety of fields (from agriculture to medicine, from literacy to teaching English, from working with disabled children to running factories, from community development to disaster relief). JHF has work not only in the more developed east but also in less developed western parts including Tibet, Qinghai, Xinjiang and Yunnan. Many associates are teaching in universities in cities from Beijing to Xiamen, Kunming to Harbin, Shanghai to Urumqi – and many besides. Working with our expatriate

foreigners we have around 100 local staff – not only Han Chinese but also some from other ethnic groups (including Mongolians and Tibetans).

1.5.5 Working with officials in China

After leaving OMF and since working with NGOs such as FOC and JHF I became far more involved with government officials and departments. These included mayors and governors and also university leaders. We worked closely with government agencies such as the State Administration for Foreign Expert Affairs, and the Ministries (or provincial and local level departments) of Health, Education, and Civil Affairs. I believe strongly in the wisdom of working openly, with expertise and integrity, and yet in doing so without ever hiding the fact we are Christians.

1.6 Objectives and Methodology

My major aim in undertaking this study project is to better understand the worldview and background of Chinese people (including those from non-Han minority groups) and better equip myself for ministry to them. My secondary aim is to use the insights gained to articulate how I believe foreigners should prepare themselves to become more effective ambassadors for Christ in China today. The primary focus in this study is people from the Peoples' Republic of China (i.e. mainland China rather than those from Taiwan or the overseas Chinese).

In order to achieve these objectives I have consulted widely in terms of books, articles and audio and video materials, and in personal interviews (face to face or via email), and have drawn upon my own personal experience in Asia. I used a questionnaire (see Appendix 2) to gather information from PRC students, scholars, or recent immigrants in countries or territories such as New Zealand, Australia, the USA, UK, Germany, and Hong Kong. The questionnaire, which was distributed to believers only, was designed so as to solicit information about what Chinese

people think about Christianity - how the respondents initially saw Christianity, how they were introduced to the faith, what their main questions were before they believed, and how they have been helped to answer those questions. I received responses from 87 people - both male and female, from various parts of China and from a variety of age groupings. There is also a section in the questionnaire aimed at identifying the most typical views (of Christianity) of various sectors of Chinese society, namely: teenagers, students, urban professionals, urban labourers, rural or country people, ethnic minorities, and government officials & Party members.

In writing the thesis I have used a narrative approach as this best suits the subject matter.

1.7 Summary Purpose Statement

At this critical time in China's history her peoples (of various ethnic and religious backgrounds) are at a spiritual crossroads. History, politics, economics, secularization and modernization, religion, ethnicity and nationalism are all factors affecting how the Chinese view Christianity. Much is at stake. China is already a major world player at the start of the twenty first century but what spiritual direction will she take in the next ten to twenty years? Will China turn to Christ or away from Him? What role if any can be played by foreign Christians?

The hypothesis I hope to demonstrate in the thesis is: ***With adequate spiritual, linguistic, and cultural preparation and with appropriate strategies and resources foreign believers can become effective and winsome ambassadors of Christ in China.***

CHAPTER 2 CHINA'S RELIGIOUS POLICY

2.1 The Importance of Understanding Official Religious Policy

In any discussion of the role of foreign believers in China one has to bear in mind the religious policy of the ruling authorities. To be ignorant of the government's policy is to invite trouble. I have known personally several foreigners who at one time or another were questioned by the police regarding religious activities, either their own or those of others known to them. This has sometimes been a polite exchange without obvious threat but at other times it has been in the form of an interrogation. In some extreme cases it resulted in expulsion from the country. Even more tragic and extreme is the case of a Korean Christian worker known to me personally. He was reported to have been killed in a traffic accident in Beijing but there is strong evidence he was in fact murdered by the national security police. Far more common though are instances of the working visa of a teacher being terminated at the end of the semester. It is not always the university authorities themselves who make such a decision but it comes rather from the police. The teacher concerned is deemed to have crossed the boundaries of acceptable behaviour with regard to religious policy.

Most of the individuals known to me who experienced "run-ins" with the authorities were, I believe, aware of China's policy towards religion. They may have been unaware of the details of the various regulations pertaining to religious issues but at least they knew things were different in China. They knew they could not be as free as they might be in their own home country. Yet, in most cases, they were taken totally by surprise that the police regarded them as having broken the law. As will be demonstrated in this chapter the law affecting foreigners is anything but vague but its application is more often than not arbitrary. People can also get blamed for things they have not done or said. In some cases the police are simply looking for someone to accuse so as to fill a quota or to prove to their superiors that they are being diligent in rooting out "under-cover" religious workers.

In other cases, however, foreigners have knowingly done or said things that they themselves knew were unacceptable to the authorities. Their excuse might be that they should obey God rather than man. In chapter six of this thesis we will look more closely at this question.

Clearly the situation in China is not the same as in a Western or democratic nation where religious freedom is defined very differently and where one's religious beliefs and practices are not normally of concern to the state. This does not mean that teachers, for example, can use the classroom in Western nations to propagate their religious beliefs, especially in a State school.

On a much more serious level, where religious extremism leads to breaking the law and engaging in terrorist acts any nation will want to deal with the culprits, not least if they are foreigners. Following the July 2005 London bombings the British Prime Minister Tony Blair in his press conference of August 5th 2005 outlined new measures his government was putting in place to deport and exclude anyone felt to be “fostering hatred, advocating violence to further a person's beliefs, or justifying or validating such violence”. He also announced the government would order the closure of places of worship where clerics were “fomenting extremism” and would exclude from Britain any non-British citizens deemed unsuitable to preach.” Even the governments of democratic nations sometimes have to deal with religious issues and with “religious” foreigners. The clear difference between Britain and China in this regard is that the boundaries of what is regarded as acceptable (both for nationals and for foreigners) are very different and so is the extent to which the rule of law governs issues such as human rights and freedom of religion. China's religious policy is very different to what one would find in a democratic nation such as Great Britain, or South Africa.

It is very important then for any foreigner going to China, especially those who are Christians and called to serve longer-term, to be fully aware of China's religious policy.

2.2 The Marxist View of Religion

The Marxist view of religion has shaped the philosophic presuppositions underlying Chinese government policy towards religion. The theories of Karl Marx (1818-83), the German philosopher and writer, famous for his work *Das Kapital* (completed after his death by his close collaborator Friedrich Engels), underlie the Communist view of religion. Marx denounced religion as the enemy of progress:

Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is indeed man's self-consciousness and self-awareness as long as he has not found his feet in the universe.... Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion, as the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness.¹

Marxism, as later developed by Engels and Lenin in particular, has no room for God or religion. Man has no spirit, nor is there life after death. Religion is replaced by materialism. Marx and Engels were influenced by the philosophy of Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) the father of German Idealism. Based on Hegel's Dialectic (or process) of Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis, Marx and Engels propagated the view that political and historical events are the result of conflicting social forces (called "class struggle") caused by economic and historical factors playing out in a series of contradictions and their solutions. This is referred to as Dialectic Materialism (in Chinese: "*bianzheng weiwu zhuyi*", 唯物主义).

Marx saw religion as a tool used by the bourgeoisie (the capitalist and ruling classes) in a Capitalist society to oppress and exploit the proletariat (ordinary working masses). There is much in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) that expresses the views of Marx and Engels towards religion:

¹ Colin Brown quotes from this 1843 unpublished work in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* page 136.

The charges against Communism made from a religious, a philosophical and, generally, from an ideological standpoint, are not deserving of serious examination.

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conception, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?

What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class. ...

When the ancient world was in its last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the 18th century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie. The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge.

'Undoubtedly,' it will be said, 'religious, moral, philosophical, and juridical ideas have been modified in the course of historical development. But religion, morality, philosophy, political science, and law, constantly survived this change.'

There are, besides, eternal truths, such as Freedom, Justice, etc., that are common to all states of society. But Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all past historical experience.

The Communist Manifesto ends with the now famous words: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!"

Marx believed that society evolves in sudden dramatic movements from feudalism to capitalism, from capitalism to socialism, and from socialism to communism.

Charles Darwin (1809-82) was a contemporary of Marx and within a decade of the publishing of his famous work *The Origin of Species* in 1859 the theory of evolution had become accepted orthodoxy. Marx was deeply influenced by Darwin's work and commented, "Darwin's book is very important and serves me

as a basis in natural science for the struggle in history”.² Indeed many in Europe climbed on the bandwagon of evolution and agnosticism.

2.3 Marxism's Influence on Religious Policy in China

The situation in China, in which the Communist Party took root, was a very different world to that which pertained in Europe, the former Soviet block and later in Latin America.³ Nevertheless the roots of Marxism in the nineteenth century and its influence in the early part of the twentieth century heavily impacted Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It is important to understand this background.

Colin Brown (1969: 107) describes the nineteenth century as a century of ferment. In Europe he says it,

...was an age of belief and an age of unbelief. It witnessed unparalleled missionary expansion, and saw religious revivals in various quarters of the globe. The church pews of the western world were still filled with the ranks of the devout. But outside the churches there was no lack of strident voices assuring the faithful that they were deluding themselves.

Both Marx and Darwin were part of the philosophical and religious ferment in Europe in the nineteenth century. The humanism, skepticism, agnosticism and atheism of the age deeply impacted society both then and for generations to follow. Of course Christianity with its long history and its important institutions had already influenced and shaped European culture. Marx and others saw the ills of society and tended to blame religion and Christianity in particular. However these ills were not caused by Christianity but rather by the drift away from Christian truth and Christian values. Many Christians also were concerned about the evils and injustices in society. It was evangelicals who spoke out against the African slave

² Cf. R.E.D. Clark, *Darwin: Before and After*. Paternoster Press, 1948 pp 112f

³ See Mojzes, P. *Christian-Marxist Dialogue in Eastern Europe*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981 for details on the European experience.

trade, for example, and who also spoke out against the evil opium wars inflicted upon China. However society at large and in particular those in power in Britain and other European nations very often did not share that sense of righteousness and fair play, especially when it did not affect them directly. They were happy to turn a blind eye to injustice and exploitation both at home and abroad. It was these evils that people like Marx confronted, but from an atheistic and humanistic stand point.

In China on the other hand there was no strong institutionalized church and the world view of the Chinese people had been shaped by centuries of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism rather than by the Judeo-Christian faith. Christianity in China when the communists came to power was not seen as a powerful rival to the CCP but rather as the tool of imperialism and foreign oppression. Thus there was a kind of nationalistic edge to the way China's communist leaders were to deal with Christianity. For them dealing with Christianity was dealing with a foreign intrusion. Christianity was also not seen as strong enough (either in numbers or influence) to withstand the revolutionary zeal of the communists. Dr Philip Wickeri (1988) writes: "Christianity itself was more commonly understood in relation to questions of personal salvation, social service and gradual change. In contrast Marxism entered much later and became powerful as an ideology of revolution."

Mao Zedong became the towering figure in Chinese communism and when it suited him he ploughed a very different furrow to the Russians and other communist nations. He wanted to give communism in China a Chinese face, or, to use the phrase often heard today, he promoted "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (*zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi* 中国特色的社会主义).

2.3.1 The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) view of religion

David Adeney (1985: 115) in his excellent book *China: the Church's Long March* in his chapter on Government Religious Policy states:

“The government of China has not changed its view that religion is a harmful ‘opiate’ of the people, and that real leadership of the country itself must be in the hands of atheistic Marxists.”

After the Communists came to power in China in 1949, true to their basic philosophical beliefs, they moved to implement the policy of bringing all religion under state control. In line with Marxism they saw religion as superstition and as something that would eventually die out. The New Man of the New Society being inaugurated by Mao and the CCP would overcome all obstacles, and all old and backward practices, including religious superstition, would be wiped out. “The China of Chairman Mao was to be the ‘kingdom of man.’” (Ibid: 115) Mao stated that “Our god is none other than the masses of the Chinese people.”

In the course of the past fifty six years under CCP control China has been through many traumatic events and “movements” (*yun dong* 动) resulting in massive social upheaval. No “movement” came close to rivaling the disastrous so-called Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

In the fifties and then during the Cultural Revolution (that only ended with the death of Mao) the slogans and policies of the State reflected the radical communist dogma prevailing at the time. There was constant “struggle” (*dou zheng* 斗争) engineered by the State when the so-called capitalists (*zi ben jia* 本家) and the bourgeoisie (*zi chan jieji* 阶级) had to be exposed and overthrown by “the people” or the so-called working class or proletariat (*wu chan jieji* 无产阶级).

The right to private property was abolished, education came under the exclusive control of the State, and all religious organizations were also brought under State control.

Despite being so anti-religion, Marxism in China under Mao itself had many of the hallmarks of a fanatical religion. Writing in the *Australian Journal of Anthropology* Andrew Kipnis (2001) describes Mao's China as having "...its own imagination of heaven (communism), its own sacred texts (the heavily edited collected works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao), its own morality, and its own experience of the numinous (Mao worship)."

Kipnis, in referring to what Richard Madsen calls 'ceremonies of innocence and rituals of struggle', continues:

...the plenitude of Maoist political campaigns provided ample opportunities for the great majority of Chinese people to directly participate in the religious fervour. Moreover, like other fundamentalisms, Maoism imagined the need for complete control over both the mechanisms of state and the generation of knowledge, and demanded that all forms of knowing, from physics to history, from Buddhism to Islam, from chemistry to literature, and from medicine to education be controlled by the authoritative institutions it created. Interpretations that diverged from party orthodoxy were labelled 'superstition' or '(bourgeois or feudal) ideologies,' thereby consolidating Marxism's identity as the ultimate science. As with any science, communism needed some form of magic as its other.

2.3.2 The United Front Policy

All along a key element in China's Religious Policy has been what is called the United Front. The United Front, writes Adeney (1985: 117), "...involves winning over the majority of sectors of society to support or at least acquiesce in its policies, while reducing to an ineffective minority, isolating, neutralizing and ultimately destroying die-hard opposition." It is a classic carrot and stick approach – rewarding cooperation and punishing non-compliance.

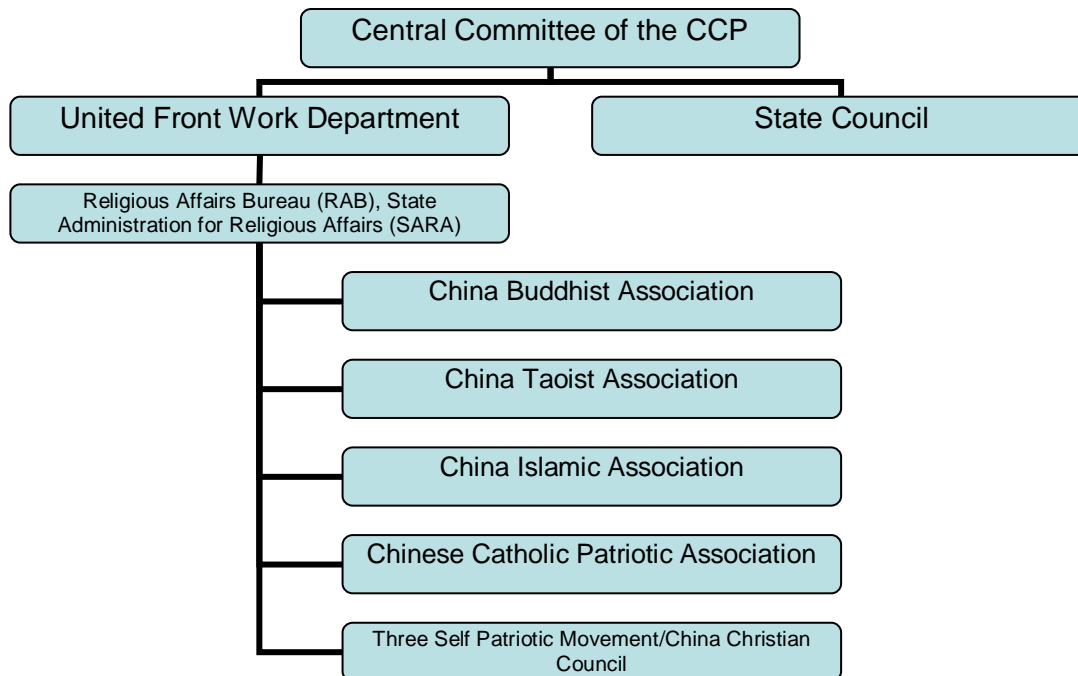
The United Front policy affected every area of society – including religious believers, women, youth, national minorities, and overseas Chinese. The United Front remains a vital part of CCP and government policy today. I remember in the eighties on one of my early visits to the northern city of Tianjin being struck by the

fact the Religious Affairs Bureau (now called the State Administration for Religious Affairs), the Minorities Affairs, the Overseas Chinese Affairs, and the Women's Federation were all housed in the same building – the headquarters of the United Front Work Department for the city.

In implementing its religious policy the CCP recognized just five official religions, namely Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestant Christianity. The name given to the Protestant organization was the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). In the context of Chinese religious policy, "three-self" refers to "self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating". It is part of a broader strategy to eliminate or at least to limit and control foreign influence in China's religious affairs.⁴

In China the word “patriotic” is *ai guo* (爱国), literally “love country”, but in reality in the view of the government this is often equated with “love and support the Party”, *ai dang* (爱党). The TSPM came directly under the jurisdiction of the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) which in turn came under the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party. This is still the situation today. See diagram below:

⁴ See various reports of Human Rights Watch e.g. Oct. 1997, 13.



It is worth noting that both the United Front Work Department and the RAB have offices at national, provincial, municipal and county levels throughout the country. Lambert comments (1991: 64) this provides “an effective network for control of religious activities. These offices are staffed by Party members and do not include religious believers.”

2.4 Changes in Emphasis and Implementation

Over the past 56 years there have been ups and downs in terms of the main thrust of the Party’s basic policy on religion. At times it has been extraordinarily ruthless and controlling, at other times relaxed and open, and at other times while appearing outwardly relaxed it has in fact been internally tight (the so called ‘*wai song nei jin*’ 外松内紧). In such a huge nation it is not surprising that while official policy at a central government level may be relatively clear the implementation of that policy has not been uniform. Interpretation and implementation have varied from place to place dependent partly upon the local situation and leadership at the time.

For the purpose of this thesis I am focussing particularly on how China sees Christianity (and the involvement of foreigners) rather than examining in detail the situation facing the other recognized religious groupings.

2.4.1 The first decade and a half

The period 1949-1966 was one of increasing control. Religious organizations were forced to sever ties with international religious organizations and to “purge their churches of ‘foreign imperialist influences.’” All churches were required to join up with the TSPM or else face forced closure. Church leaders who refused to join, such as the renowned Beijing pastor Wang Ming-dao, faced arrest, interrogation and long years of imprisonment. Others such as Watchman Nee, founder of the Little Flock, and of course countless other pastors and Christian workers, died in prison or in ‘reform through labour’ camps (see Cliff, 2001). By the end of the fifties only those churches approved by the government were permitted to remain open. Leaders in the TSPM had to be approved by the Party. It was later proved that some such leaders all along had been secret Party members.⁵

2.4.2 The Cultural Revolution

In 1966 China was plunged into the chaos and pain of the Cultural Revolution. It lasted an incredible ten years. During this darkest of periods even the TSPM became defunct, as did the United Front Work Department of the CCP. There was no point trying to unite various disparate elements of society such as religious believers or overseas Chinese. They were all seen as counter revolutionaries who needed to be eliminated. All churches (even the few remaining officially sanctioned ones) were closed. Persecution was at its fiercest.

⁵ For example: Li Chuwen, pastor of Shanghai’s International Community Church prior to the Cultural Revolution, later, in the early eighties, served as deputy of the Hong Kong branch of the New China News Agency (NCNA), the unofficial Chinese embassy during British rule.

2.4.3 The Deng Era

With the death of Mao in September 1976 and following the overthrow of the so-called Gang of Four (a group of extreme leftists led by Mao's widow Jiang Qing), all was to change. Mao's successor Hua Guo-feng quickly faded from the scene as Communist Party veteran Deng Xiao-ping grasped the reigns of power. All along Deng had opposed the ultra-leftist policies of Mao and the Gang of Four. With his Open Door policy and the so-called Four Modernizations (in industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defence) he inaugurated major political and economic reforms that were to lead to over twenty years of massive economic development and social change.

The more liberal period immediately following Deng's rise to supreme power within the CCP was called the "Beijing Spring" (1979-81). The new political climate under Deng saw much greater freedom for Christians. Some churches were allowed to re-open and many Christian leaders, including Wang Ming-dao, were released from prison. Wang had spent 23 years in prison and labour camp. He told me, when I was privileged to visit him and his wife in their tiny flat in Shanghai in 1984 that his imprisonment "was my honeymoon with Jesus". I met another pastor, Wang De-ren, who had endured 28 years in prison and labour camp. In his late seventies he was released and became one of the pastors in a re-opened TSPM church in the city of Qingdao – preaching to congregations of close to 2000.

The church, especially in the countryside, began to see explosive growth. Major "unofficial" house-church networks, quite unrelated to each other, began to develop in provinces such as Henan, Zhejiang and Anhui.

2.5 The Party's Response to the New Situation

The government quickly realised that new policies were needed to bring some sort of order to the situation. Adeney (1985: 124-5) comments, “....the church was supposed to have greatly shrunk, if not to have disappeared altogether, after a generation of socialist influence. The fact that the reverse has happened is a source of no little concern.”

The United Front and the TSPM which had become defunct during the Cultural Revolution were resuscitated. Tony Lambert (1991: 28) points out that: “....the great changes in religious policy in China in recent years are only a part of the much greater transformation of Chinese society which has been taking place....(E)conomic and foreign policy considerations, as well as political ones, loom large in many post-Mao official documents relating to religion.”

Lambert has a detailed and well documented description of this period and how it affected religious policy. During the ultra-left Mao period missionaries and foreign religious organizations were condemned as tools of imperialism. However the Open Door policy associated with the Deng era has led to more and more openness to the outside world.

Once the decision was taken to reactivate the patriotic religious organizations and grant a degree of religious toleration, the wider influences of the ‘open door’ policy have indirectly benefited the church. ...accessibility to the outside world has been a powerful influence towards the implementation of a more liberal religious policy. (Ibid: 33)

2.5.1 The Re-constituted TSPM

While the newly re-constituted TSPM was willing to entertain friendly relations with overseas Christians and churches it insisted they must respect Three Self principles and the independence of the Chinese Church. In an open letter addressed to believers in China the General Secretary of the TSPM attacked those who were hostile to the New China and “put their hands into our church life

in the name of ‘evangelism’ and ‘research’.”⁶ This comment was a poorly disguised swipe at groups in Hong Kong and elsewhere engaged in “smuggling” Bibles into China and at groups such as the Chinese Church Research Centre run by China scholar and theologian Jonathan Chao.

In November of the same year at the Third National Christian Conference of the TSPM Bishop Ding Guang-xun, head of the TSPM, gave a wide ranging speech in which he outlined the tasks of the re-constituted TSPM. For the purpose of this thesis I mention his third point only. He stated that the TSPM was opposed to ‘anti-China’ organizations abroad who ‘wantonly proclaim an “underground evangelism”’ and stated the TSPM was opposed to all illegal activities using religion as a cover. (Ding, 1980)

2.5.2 The Party and the TSPM

The close link between the Party and the TSPM is reflected in the TSPM’s Constitution. The TSPM Constitution has seen many versions but in the early 1980s Article 29 stated:

This committee is the anti-imperialist, patriotic association of Chinese Christians and it has the following objectives: Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the People’s Government, it shall unite all Christians in China, to foster the love for our country, to respect the law of the land, to hold fast the principles of self-government, self-support and self-determination, to safeguard the achievements of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, to assist the government in implementing the policy of religious freedom, to contribute positively toward the building up of a modernized and strong socialistic China with a high degree of democracy and a highly developed civilization, toward the return of Taiwan to the motherland and the realization of national unity, toward opposition to hegemonism and the maintenance of world peace.

Human Rights Watch quotes a TSPM official as saying that the TSPM was not established to control Christianity's development but to defend it against

⁶ TSPM Standing Committee General Secretary, Open Letter, Shanghai 1 March, 1980.

imperialist control. The present Constitution of the TSPM (2005) is less strident in tone (leaving out the phrase anti-imperialist) but in essence is little changed.

2.5.3 The China Christian Council (CCC)

The CCC is a parallel organization to the TSPM. It was set up in 1980. While the TSPM is clearly political and ensures Party policy is passed down to the churches and the 'religious masses', the CCC is more concerned with internal pastoral and practical church affairs. The CCC handles theological education, the publication of the Bible, hymn books and other Christian literature, the exchange of information among local churches, and the development of relations with overseas churches. The top leadership of both organizations has over the years been almost identical and until recently the national headquarters of both was in Nanjing. The present headquarters of the TSPM/CCC is in Shanghai.

In recent years, says Human Rights Watch report *China: State Control of Religion*,

Chinese officials appear to have promoted the importance of the China Christian Council at the expense of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, in part to assuage the historical antipathy of the Protestant community to the latter. Many believers suspect TSPM leaders of being atheistic, committed to promoting the party's interests rather than those of rank-and-file church members. In addition, believers resent the role the TSPM has played in persecuting congregations that have resisted registration.⁷

2.6 Document 19

Clearly much was happening in the early eighties in the religious arena in China. Part of the government's response was the promulgation of some very important policy. Undoubtedly the most important was the landmark "*Document 19 - The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question During our Country's Socialist Period*" issued by the Central Committee of the CCP in 1982. This was a

⁷ HRW Report October 1997, 13

thirty-page confidential circular that summarized official policy on religion. The document (CCP, 1982) stated that:

Strengthening Party leadership is the basic guarantee for dealing properly with religious questions. The Party's religious work is an important component part of the Party's United Front Work ... our Party committees at all levels must powerfully direct and organize all relevant departments.

Potter points out (2003: 13) the Document stated that there was to be “respect for and protection of the freedom of religious belief, pending such future time when religion itself will disappear.” Document 19 clearly expressed the Marxist view of religion but avoided the Marxist analogy of religion as an ‘opiate’ and also repudiated the use of force when dealing with religious believers. This would be counter-productive (“completely wrong and harmful”) it stated. The Party, says Document 19, must still “resolutely propagate atheism”. While believers were free to propagate belief in God inside the walls of approved church buildings they were forbidden to do so in society at large. They were not allowed to distribute religious literature that was not approved by the relevant government departments.

Document 19 restated that the CCP officially only recognized the five religions - Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. It excluded folk religions, superstition and cults from within the bounds of protection of the law and of the State. (MacInnes, 1989: 385-410)

Document 19 recognized that religious belief was a private matter but emphasized the freedom of citizens not to believe in religion - “Every citizen has the freedom to believe in religion, and the freedom not to believe in religion”, a statement that is also found in China's Constitution. The CCP all along has used propaganda to support atheism, and used its control over the education system to marginalize religious belief (Ibid: 411-19). Document 19 prohibited grants of “feudal privileges” to religious organizations and strictly limited their freedom to recruit, proselytize and raise funds. Policy related to the education of clergy and the

administration of religious organizations and buildings ensured that the leadership of religious organizations remained loyal to the Party, to socialism, and national and ethnic unity.

Document 19 prohibited Party members from believing in or participating in religion. As Chinese official Tomur Dawamat, a Uygur member of the National People's Congress, wrote in 1991,

The fact that citizens have freedom of religious belief does not mean that members of the Communist Party and the Communist Youth League have this freedom as well....They must uphold and publicize atheism and cannot believe in theism.⁸

Thus, while the early 1980s saw greater levels of freedom and liberalization in comparison to previous periods, the Party remained concerned primarily with enforcing social control and ensuring its own unrivalled leadership in the process of "socialist modernization".⁹

2.7 Other Developments in the Eighties and Nineties

2.7.1 The Open Door Brings Outside Influence

The eighties saw significant developments in terms of the TSPM and its relationship with overseas Christians, churches and organizations. In the early eighties, with the Open Door policy being emphasized, China began to welcome overseas expertise and investment and cultural and technical exchange. A number of significant organizations were formed by overseas Christians to respond to this growing welcome. They included the English teaching organizations English Language Institute, China (ELIC)¹⁰ founded by Ken Wendling; Educational Services Exchange with China (ESEC) also known now as Educational Services

⁸ Dawamat Prefaces *Textbook on Atheism*. FBIS-CHI-91-247, 24 December 1991.

⁹ See preamble to the 1982 Constitution of the PRC, Beijing: Law Publishers, 1986.

¹⁰ See website: www.elic.org

International (ESI) ¹¹, founded by Dr Danny Yu, an American Chinese; and the Jian Hua Foundation Limited 建 基金会 (JHF) ¹² founded by a group of Hong Kong based Christian businessmen and academics. The founding of these and other overseas or Hong Kong-based organizations was to have an indirect but nonetheless profound impact upon the TSPM.

This impact can be illustrated from the history of JHF, an organization with which I am particularly familiar having served as International Director for almost 14 years. The following background information is contained in a 63 page internally produced booklet entitled: *“Jian Hua Foundation Celebrates 20 years of service to the peoples of China”* which I researched and wrote in 2001:

JHF was incorporated in Hong Kong on 11th September 1981, but already by then JHF was making contacts in various provinces and being invited to send teams of doctors and teachers. ... The support of some high officials in Beijing also played an important part in helping JHF get established. This was particularly the case when the Foundation was asked to help raise funds for the building of headquarters for the *China International Cultural Exchange Centre* (ICEC) in Beijing. JHF was also asked to assist the ICEC in promoting international cultural exchanges. On December 12th 1981, in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Huang Zhe, the Head of the Ministry of Culture, and Wang Zhong-fang, the Vice Minister, together with JHF's Chairman Heili Lee signed two agreements regarding scholarly exchanges and the building of the ICEC headquarters. The project had the support of the State Council and China's senior leaders and land was set aside for the building, which was to include a state-of-the-art theatre, exhibition & conference rooms, and a hotel. JHF agreed, on a best effort basis, to help raise funds for this prestigious project.

JHF's founding directors were all Christians and their motivation to serve the “motherland” flowed out of their faith in Christ (not from political or financial motives). They clearly understood that while China did not allow outside interference in religious matters she did welcome the support of “patriotic” overseas Chinese (including Christians) who were willing to help in the development and “opening-up” of the country. However some religious leaders in China who did not fully appreciate JHF's

¹¹ See website: www.teachoverseas.org

¹² See website: www.jhf-hk.org

position openly criticized JHF in mid 1982. These criticisms seriously affected JHF's efforts to raise funds for the *International Cultural Exchange Centre*. However the matter was brought to the attention of the State Council and senior government leaders. JHF was vindicated and asked to continue its valuable work for China.

The religious leader who criticized JHF was in fact Bishop Ding Guang-xun, head of the TSPM. He and others in the TSPM were not happy that certain well known Christians in Hong Kong (namely, directors of JHF) were bi-passing the TSPM and becoming active in China without TSPM approval. As it turned out top Party leaders, on the Politburo and State Council no less, gave their support to JHF (albeit behind the scenes) and Bishop Ding had to make a hasty retreat.

2.7.2 The Founding of Amity Foundation

It was not long after the events just described that the TSPM (no doubt with the encouragement if not under the orders of the Party) formed the Amity Foundation (德基金会) ¹³ in 1985. Rather than criticize overseas and Hong Kong Christians the TSPM now sought to harness the good will and resources of overseas Christians and Church-based organizations for the support of Amity's projects and programmes. For the past twenty years Amity has been doing a significant work in China in education, social services and poverty alleviation.

A subsidiary of the Amity Foundation, Amity Press, was set up in 1987. This was, I believe, in part a belated response to Project Pearl ¹⁴ and other "Bible smuggling" operations from outside China. Until Amity Press started its work, Bibles were not available in China, except those "smuggled" in from outside. The fact the CCP was allowing Bibles to be printed inside the country was a propaganda coup no doubt aimed at under-cutting those who defended "Bible

¹³ See website: www.amityfoundation.org

¹⁴ See Aikman, 2003, pages 266-71 for an account of this daring covert operation on June 18, 1981, to deliver one million Bibles to Christians waiting on a beach in southern China.

smuggling” on the grounds that no Bibles were available in the country. To date Amity Press in Nanjing has printed over 44 million Bibles and New Testaments in Chinese¹⁵ and seven other national minority languages, and also publishes hymnals and other Christian books. Whatever the original motives may have been for setting up the Press, God in His sovereignty has greatly used Amity Press to bless His people in China.

2.7.3 New Legislation – Document No. 6

In his analysis of the regulation of religion in China since the reforms of Deng Xiao-ping, Potter (2003:14) outlines the main aspects of the important February 1991 CCP Central Committee/State Council’s “Document No. 6”. He points out that major unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang in 1988-89, together with the nation-wide crisis created by the 1989 student democracy movement, presented special challenges to the government and the Party. Potter writes, “Document No. 6 expressed the regime’s policy response that attempted to co-opt religious adherents while also repressing challenges to Party power.”

The authorities justified restrictions on religious activities in Tibet by claiming they were curbing pro-Tibetan independence and pro-Dalai Lama activities. In the far northwest area of Xinjiang it was to curb Muslim Uyghur separatists. They also wanted to clamp down upon the activities of Christians from places like Taiwan and Korea. At the time of the Tiananmen protests in 1989 and with the subsequent crackdown, when moderate General Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang was removed from office and hardliner Li Peng came to the fore, there were calls for strict enforcement of Party policy on the control of religion. When, however, new General Party Secretary (and later President) Jiang Zemin took over in the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre, he took a more relaxed view and called for a United Front approach. He wanted a more tolerant approach in managing religious organizations and policies that aided the continued reform and

¹⁵ Amity reports that the total number of full Bibles printed will reach 40,000,000 early in 2006.

opening up of the country. Religion “affects the broad mass of China’s billion people”, he said, and in order to enjoy “national stability, ethnic unity and the promotion of socialist culture” it was necessary to properly resolve religious issues.

Document No. 6 states: “Implementing administration of religious affairs is aimed at bringing religious activities within the bounds of law, regulation, and policy, but not to interfere with normal religious activities or the internal affairs of religious organizations.” There is lack of definition regarding what is meant by “normal activities”, which opens the door to abuse by unsympathetic officials.

Government policy obviously affects people on the ground, not least those cooperating with the government in terms of the State’s administrative apparatus for dealing with Christianity. It is worth noting that the TSPM and CCC have not always found it easy to work with the RAB. In April 1993, for example, an official publication of the China Christian Council accused the RAB of “meddling in church affairs, by controlling the numbers of baptisms and requiring special religious identity cards,” asserting that such practices “violate the spirit of the government’s religious policy and accused local authorities of extorting money from believers.”¹⁶

Document No. 6 did not differ in any significant way from Document 19 but, reflecting events of the time, stressed the need for religious believers to recognize Party leadership and work in the interests of society. It sought to limit proselytization, recruitment, fund-raising and other activities in support of organized religion. Document 6 warns against religion being used for the purpose of “infiltration” and “peaceful revolution” (*heping zhuanbian* 和平) and expressed grave concern over the proliferation of “illegal” and “subversive” religious activities, particularly non-government-sanctioned seminaries, nunneries, and Bible schools, and house church evangelism. The document called for a tightening of state control over such activities, and the prevention of overseas religious organizations engaging in evangelism in any form. The document states

¹⁶ Reported in News Network International: Special Edition, March 26, 1993

that “public security departments at all levels . . . must resolutely attack those counter-revolutionaries and others who make use of religion to carry out destructive activities.”¹⁷

Document 6 showed that despite calls for a more relaxed approach the Party remained highly sensitive about outside influences that might use religion as a cover for political activity. The CCP was not about to loosen its control over religious organizations.

2.7.4 Legislation relating to foreign nationals

In 1994 the State Council issued an important national law governing religious affairs relating to foreigners. It was called Documents 144. The document has thirteen articles (see Appendix 1). It gave approval for foreigners, who are believers and who enter China legally, to practice their faith. However it states that foreigners carrying out religious activities cannot bring any religious literature or other materials in excess of what they personally need, nor may they “recruit believers, form religious organizations, set up religious offices, establish places of religious activities, or found religious schools in China.” The document also requires overseas Chinese persons with foreign citizenships, and those from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, to abide by its regulations.

A further set of regulations relating to foreigners' religious activities was promulgated on 26 September 2000 by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA, the former RAB). The People's Daily newspaper reported¹⁸ on the signing of the new regulations by Ye Xiaowen, director of SARA saying, “The new

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch World Report 1992, New York, 1991

¹⁸ People's Daily English Edition, *China Details Rules on Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens in China*, Wednesday 27 September, 2000.

rules reinforced and improved the Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens within the Territory of the People's Republic of China adopted in 1994”.

The new code contained 22 articles and affirmed that “aliens may participate in religious activities at Buddhist monasteries, Taoist temples, mosques, churches lawfully registered within Chinese territory according to their own religious belief.” The September 26 code confirmed that foreigners, if invited by officially approved Chinese religious personnel, may conduct ceremonies such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and “may preach and expound the scripture at lawfully registered sites for religious activities”. There was also provision for them to be invited to teach at official seminaries. “Chinese national religious bodies may select religious personnel for study abroad and aliens may also study at Chinese religious institutions.” The new code fleshed out Document 144 and stressed the basic principle that all religious activity of foreigners in China needed to be pre-approved by official bodies and must only take place in association with officially approved churches. The impression given to some observers is that the September 26 code, despite enunciating certain encouraging freedoms, represents a further tightening of government controls on foreigners.

2.7.5 Another 1994 Document

Document 145 codified the management of premises for religious activities and tackled the issue of registration. Issued in January 1994, it aimed “to protect normal religious activities and to safeguard the legal rights of places for religious activity.” While the Document expanded the scope of legal church activity, permitting offerings and the selling of religious objects, it circumscribed activity by mandating that “management for these religious premises....require a permit which can be obtained by the religious organization through proper procedure according to government regulation.” Document 145, however, was unclear what

exactly constituted 'procedures and criteria' for the registration of places of worship.

A separate decree "Registration Procedures for Venues for Religious Activities," issued in May 1994, and also given the number 145, was intended to standardize requirements for religious registration, but article 2, subsection 4 stated that a religious group must have "professional clergy or persons who meet the requirements of the particular religious group conducting the religious services" to qualify for registration. This requirement is not easy for many of the house churches to meet as is another requirement, namely, that local government officials be consulted in the registration process. Local officials, required under Chinese law to be atheists, are often hostile toward Christianity.

2.8 The Problem of Distinguishing Pseudo from Genuine

Despite the efforts of the Party to control religion there was a continuation of religious revival in China through the 1990s. This revival is well documented and was particularly strong in provinces such as Henan, Zhejiang, Anhui and Shandong where large House Church networks, in some cases numbering in the millions, were operating totally outside of the TSPM structures.¹⁹ Some of the House Church networks ran their own "underground" Bible schools and training programmes and engaged in widespread evangelism. In the eyes of the government this was illegal as TSPM regulations only allow registered church workers to operate within their registered parish and city, certainly not beyond.

At the same time as the continuing growth of the Church (both official and unofficial varieties) there was a proliferation of sects (*xie jiao* 邪教). These include some, such as the Shouters and the so-called Three Ranks of Servants, who in

¹⁹ See David Aikman, *"Jesus in Beijing"*, Regnery, 2003; Jaime Florcruz *et al.*, "Inside China's search for its soul," *Time*, Vol 15, No. 14 4 Oct 1999, pp 68-72; Arthur Waldron, "Religious revivals in Communist China," *Orbis*, Vol 42, No. 2, Spring 1998, pp 232-332; Matt Forney, "God's country," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6 June, 1996, pp 46-48.

terms of basic doctrine hold to fairly orthodox Christian beliefs. The government and the TSPM, however, regard even the above two named groups as evil largely because they oppose the official church and tend to be highly secretive. They could be said to have certain cultic tendencies – such as highly revered and strong leadership structures. Other groups, such as Eastern Lightning, are clearly cults with activities that are of a demonic nature. Their teachings and practices are far from orthodox Christian. Tony Lambert has written in detail about both the genuine revival (with signs and wonders) and also about the growth of cults and sects in his book *China's Christian Millions – the Costly Revival*.

The government and Party face particular challenges in relating to followers of the Tibetan Buddhist religion and to the Muslim Uygurs of Xinjiang. However as Potter points out (2003: 28) “unregistered” Christian groups also “reflect a dynamic of resistance”. He continues,

While Christianity offers perhaps a more salient example of foreign influence, it has become increasingly sinicized through the inclusion of features of folk religion and traditional cultural forms, making its expression of resistance all the more threatening to the regime.²⁰

The Party has sought through both the RAB and through the police (Public Security Bureau, PSB) to crack down on unregistered house churches (even totally orthodox ones) and, of course, on secretive and illegal sects. Since 2000 there has also been a crackdown on the pseudo-Buddhist *qi gong* sect known as Falun Gong. This highly organized secretive cult which claims millions of followers is seen as a threat to Party control and to social order. No pseudo-Christian sect, apart from Eastern Lightning, has come anywhere near the Falun Gong in terms of causing concern to the authorities. Far from it, Christians in China, be they associated with the official churches or with the unregistered house churches,

²⁰ See also Stephan Feuchtwang, “Religion as resistance,” in Perry and Shelden, *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, pp 161-177 at p. 167.

have often had a name for being good citizens. Sadly, sometimes local officials do not know the difference between a cult and true biblical Christianity.

2.9 The Turn of the Century

In 1997 the State Council came out with a “White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief in China” ²¹ in which it was reiterated that “religion should be adapted to the society where it is prevalent” and that religions must “conduct their activities within the sphere prescribed by law and adapt to social and cultural progress.” There was nothing new or revolutionary in the White Paper but it is clear the government continued to struggle with balancing the demand for more religious freedom with its concern for keeping religious movements under control.

As the century drew to a close it was clear that despite the Marxist view that religion should slowly die out and despite all the attempts of the State to encourage its demise the opposite was happening. Lambert (1999: 162) has an interesting comment: “The nineteenth century saw the decay and fall of Confucianism as China’s guiding ideology. The twentieth century has seen the rapid rise and equally rapid decay of Marxism as its replacement.”

In December 2001 President Jiang Ze-min gave a conciliatory speech at the National Work Conference on Religious Affairs in which he admitted religion would be an integral part of Chinese society for a long time and that officials should refrain from using force to eliminate it. At the same conference however there were calls to maintain tight control over religion.

Around the same time a young and upcoming official, Pan Yue ²², suggested in an influential article that the Party drop its long-standing prohibition of religious figures joining the Party. Hong Kong’s Sing Tao Daily reported Pan Yue

²¹ “Freedom of religious belief in China”, in *White Papers of the Chinese Government*, 1996-99, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2000, pp 227-257 at pp 246-47.

²² Pan Yue is currently the Deputy Director of the State Environmental Protection Administration.

as saying that religion, “....has psychological, cultural and moral functions, as well as numerous uses, such as services and public welfare.” He called on the Party to “....abandon the policy of consistently suppressing and controlling religion and adopt [a policy] of unity and guidance and take advantage of the unifying power and appeal of religion to serve the CCP regime.”²³

Clearly there was debate in the CCP's ruling elite over the issue. There was talk of a new policy on religion being in the works. Despite the dramatic changes in China in the two decades following the start of the Deng era, Marxist theory remained the “doctrinal” basis of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). However the Party faced a dilemma – how to allow reform in the economic field without it raising expectations for reform in the political and religious fields and thereby, potentially at least, undermining the Party's hold on political power?

2.10 New Regulations on Religious Affairs

An article appeared in the People's Daily on Dec 19, 2004 following the formal promulgation of the new Regulations on Religious Affairs²⁴ which were to come into effect on March 1, 2005. It stated:

The new provisions are designed to deal with new situations and issues that have emerged in recent years with China's rapid socio-economic development. The drafting of the provisions has taken six full years, taking into account views and suggestions from people in law, religion and human rights.

With the Religious Affairs Provisions coming into effect, the earlier provisions issued by the State Council on the management of sites for religious activities in 1994 will simultaneously be abolished, whereas the provisions on foreign nationals' religious activities in China issued in the same year remain valid. Source: *Xinhua (New China News Agency)*

²³ Sing Tao Daily, Hong Kong, 26 December 2001.

²⁴ State Council, *Regulations of Religious Affairs*, promulgated November 30, 2004, effective March 1st, 2005 [中 人民共和国国 院令（第426号）,宗教事 条例, 2004年11月30, 2005年3月1日起施行], <http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2004/Dec/732346.htm>

Most commentators agree the new *Regulations on Religious Affairs* is the most comprehensive document on religious affairs since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Issued by the State Council, it addressed six areas in detail: general principles of religious freedom, expectations of religious organizations, places of worship, specifics for religious personnel, religious property and legal liabilities. Each area included sub-articles, a total of 48 in all.

The *Regulations* were welcomed by leaders in the TSPM and CCC who felt they showed acknowledgement by the government of the positive contributions that religious believers were making in an officially atheist state.

The *Regulations* bring together in one document the many previous laws on religious affairs. Diane Allen (Allen 2005) serving as China Program Associate with The United Methodist China Program writes:

Seen within a larger context of China's ongoing modernization, the Regulations are a positive step towards a rule of law. Whereas Document 19 guided Chinese Communist Party members' understanding of religion's role in a socialist society, it wasn't until twelve years later, in 1994, that the State Council would issue national laws governing religious affairs, called Documents 144 and 145....*Regulations on Religious Affairs*....is much more specific than any prior document on religious affairs, and attempts to incorporate and expand on previous State and Party measures that have been issued over the past 25 years.²⁵

In an article giving his analysis of the Regulations Dr Danny Yu, President of Christian Leadership Exchange, highlights Article 22 which provides for large-scale religious activities outside registered facilities or venues as long as prior approval is obtained.

Such provisions are new and without precedent. No regulations promulgated in the past sanctioned religious activities outside the boundaries of the designated religious

²⁵ Article on website of United Methodist Church, General Board of Global Ministries, www.gb-gm-umc.org posted May 13, 2005.

facilities. ... The provincial-level religious administration authorities must make a decision of approval or non-approval within 15 days. Under Article 22, massive religious functions held in stadiums like the Billy Graham Crusade in the West may be possible some day in China. (Yu, 2005).

China expert Dr Carol Lee Hamrin (2005) discusses the Regulations in the context of the wider climate of state-society relations:

Trends in religious affairs are part of a broader trajectory in state-society relations that might be called 'outgrowing socialism'. Following a pattern set by the economic reforms, the state still protects and gives special support to its monopoly institutions – what we might call state-organized institutions ("SOIs") to echo state-owned enterprises ("SOEs") – while allowing non-state civic institutions to spring up in order to meet demand. These smaller and weaker organizations nonetheless have greater vitality and flexibility and gradually put competitive pressure on the state agencies.

The rapid growth of the non-governmental organization (NGO) movement in China and the need for the State to recognize and legitimize NGOs parallels the situation in the religious field. Unregistered religious groups far outnumber those that are part of the "five official monopolies – the so-called 'patriotic' religious associations".

Hamrin states:

This is the comparative context for analyzing the new State Council regulations on religious affairs... Compared with the previous regulations, which focused on the registration and operation of religious sites, there is some improvement in both comprehensiveness and transparency. ... the regulations now provide the highest level (State Council) legitimization for existing practices such as large-scale or inter-provincial meetings, publication of religious materials circulated 'within religious circles', acceptance of donations from overseas, and provision of social services to the community.

Clearly it is an encouraging sign that the Chinese Communist Party now regards religious organizations much as it does other social organizations rather than as a special category threat to society. This is reflected in statements by the

China Christian Council to the effect that churches in China should be seen as being both spiritual and social organizations. As social organizations, churches should “abide by China’s constitution, laws, regulations, and policies and should foster social progress, national construction, and the cause of world peace.”²⁶

Hamrin points out that, “...the bad news is that all social organizations are still tightly restricted by intrusive state supervision, including strict quotas for those with national or provincial scope and restrictions about foreign ties.” She is here referring to the parallel new regulations for the registration of foundations and other social organizations that came into effect in 2004.²⁷ The new regulations on religious affairs, if anything, are more restrictive than those for NGOs and Foundations and require “independence and self-governance” and prohibit any “foreign domination.”

The clear contradiction between China’s welcome for foreign expertise and investment and her apparent paranoia about foreign influences in the social and religious fields reflects the dilemma faced by the Party. How far can economic reform and “opening” be matched by reform and opening in other spheres? Not surprisingly some observers see little change in the overall situation regarding the Party’s policy on religion. Daniel H. Bays, Professor of History and head of the Asian Studies Program at Calvin College, comments: “These regulations do not seem to constitute a ‘paradigm shift.’ Especially when at the same time on the broader stage major cases of persecution continue”.²⁸

Ms Mickey Spiegel of Human Rights Watch states,

²⁶ Church Order for Chinese Protestant Christian Churches, December 28, 1996, translation © 2001 M.E. Sharpe, Inc., from the Chinese text, 中国基督教教会 章 “*Zhongguo jidujiao jiaohui guizhang*,” 天风 Tianfeng (Heavenly Wind), No. 2 (1997).

²⁷ For more on the NGO law see my paper presented at a seminar during the ChinaSource China Consultation in Singapore in May 2004: Anderson, Peter, “*The role and future of NGOs in China*”. Published in ChinaSource China 20/20.

²⁸ Speaking at the Congressional-Executive Commission on China's New Regulations on Religious Affairs: A Paradigm Shift? Washington DC, 14 March 2005

The regulations that went into effect on March 1, 2005 do not appear to be a break with tradition, but an attempt to tighten the state's control, codify Party policies, and strengthen the bureaucracy established to enforce them. The aim is two-fold: stricter control, less arbitrariness.²⁹

Human Rights in China (HRIC), an NGO founded by Chinese scientists and scholars in March 1989, is also skeptical and stated, "the Chinese central government has again drafted a document not to protect, but to regulate all religious activities."³⁰

Tony Lambert (*OMF China Insight*, 2005) agrees that the new law was not expected to ease harsh suppression of "illegal" religious movements as the government has an underlying view that religion is a potent source of political and social instability. He writes:

In recent years, Islamic extremism, Tibetan Buddhist separatism, Roman Catholics loyal to the Vatican, unregistered Protestant house churches and the spread of various cults (such as Falungong and Eastern Lightning) have combined to make religion a serious headache to both central and local government.

Although Hamrin highlighted some improvements in the situation facing religious organizations, she and others also point out that the state alone has final say in defining key terms that were left vague such as "religious belief", or "normal" religious activities, or "state or public interests" or "foreign domination". While allowing the publication of religious materials the Regulations ban publications deemed harmful to society or to ethnic harmony, or to relations with other religions. Who will determine what violates the new regulations? Will certain Christian doctrines be regarded as offensive to non-

²⁹ Ibid, Congressional Commission, Washington DC, March 2005

³⁰ A detailed statement given by Human Rights in China (HRIC) at the Congressional Commission hearing, "China's New Regulations on Religious Affairs: A Paradigm Shift?" Washington DC, March 14, 2005.

believers and thereby construed as “harmful to the peaceful relationship between believers and non-believers?”

There is still no stated freedom to evangelize those under eighteen years of age, and there is no definition of what is meant by “religious extremism” (the new term for cults, terrorism, and separatism) and “foreign infiltration”. While citizens are free to believe in religion the state still actively promotes atheism and the media and the education system are strongly prejudiced against those with a religious faith. CCP members still have to avow atheism and the Ministry of Education has issued instructions to clamp down on religious activities on university campuses and has put a freeze on the opening of further religious study centres in the universities.

Some have pointed out that the *Regulations on Religious Affairs* is about religious affairs, not religious belief. The government, officially atheist, has little interest in what religious people actually believe, so long as those beliefs do not undermine or interfere with government policy and do not threaten government control. The success or otherwise of the *Regulations* will most likely depend on how they are interpreted and implemented at the grassroots level. This in turn will depend largely upon the local situation and the local leadership. Interpretation and implementation may be very different in different places. In Shanghai and parts of Fujian and Zhejiang, for example, where Christian presence is relatively strong things might be freer. On the other hand in Henan, where there are many “unregistered” house churches, or in Tibet or Xinjiang, where there are religious, ethnic, and political sensitivities, the authorities are more likely to keep a tight rein on religious activities.

2.11 The impact of China’s religious policy in the field of education

Pre-1949 many of China’s top universities and Colleges and many schools were church-affiliated or supported by overseas missions or by philanthropy.

Peking Union Medical College, Shanghai's St John's University, Shanxi University and West China Medical University are but a few well known examples founded over one hundred years ago.

Once the new rulers took over power, however, things were to be very different. The CCP all along has kept a tight control in the education field. Atheism and Marxist, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought are of course taught. In more recent years the writings of Deng Xiao-ping and now even the theories of recently retired President Jiang Zemin have also been required study, particularly in compulsory weekly political study classes. High Schools and Universities all have these classes but so do all government agencies and state owned enterprises.

During the Cultural Revolution formal education as we know it did not exist. Schools and universities were closed. Even basic education was replaced by various forms of propaganda – such as listening to political speeches, singing revolutionary songs, parading the streets, memorizing Mao's Little Red Book, etc. Students were “sent down to the countryside to learn from the peasants” or joined the Red Guards to “experience revolution”. In the fifties and sixties China's “intellectuals” (*zhishi fenzi*, 知识分子), meaning those with higher education, were often the brunt of brutal persecution, especially during the Cultural Revolution.

Since Deng Xiao-ping, to “be red” (i.e. Maoist) is no longer glorious but to “be expert” is. China has seen incredible progress in the field of education. Today there are close to 2000 universities and colleges in China many with a growing reputation for scholastic and technical excellence. More and more young people are eager to enter tertiary institutions. The Chinese News Agency Xinhua reported that 8.67 million students registered to take the nation-wide university entrance exams in June 2005, the largest number ever. Only one quarter, however, would be given places. Despite this the numbers of students in China's universities is increasingly every year. College and university enrolments hit a high of 5.04 million in 2005, more than four times the number in 1998. China now has the

largest student body in higher education institutions in the world, with 23 million students. In recent years it has also become easier for students to gain entry into university.³¹ The People's Daily for July 27, 2005 reported that China has trained over 110,000 PhDs and more than 820,000 Masters-level students since 1981.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is a huge agency responsible for ensuring all laws, regulations, and policies of the central government related to education are carried out. It is also in charge of development, coordination of initiatives, and in controlling and implementing education reform. In the past, leaders in the MOE were definitely political appointees loyal to the CCP. During the time of the student-led democracy movement in the late eighties there were frequent verbal clashes between student leaders and hardliners in the MOE who tried to show their loyalty to the Party-line. Spokesmen for the MOE were particularly vitriolic in their comments over state radio and television especially after Li Peng announced marshal law and up to and following the final crackdown on the student demonstrators that began late on the night of June 3, 1989.

Prior to 1989 there had been some liberalization in the educational sector. Less power was being given to the ubiquitous Party Secretaries and more was being given to academic deans and Principals in schools and universities across the nation. However following the Tiananmen massacre in June 1989 everything reverted to what it had all along been, namely, the Party Secretary was number one.

In the few years after Tiananmen there were moves by the education authorities to tighten up in the religious area as well. There was concern about the growing and widespread interest in Christianity amongst students in the universities. In December 1993, the MOE, at the time called the State Education Commission (SEC), forbade students observing Christmas, terming the celebration

³¹ See "Curb on Numbers Entering University", May 12, 2006, *South China Morning Post*.

a “Western cultural influence.” The SEC also forbade observation of Easter and all other Western holidays.³²

As part of her modernization and reform drive China has been working hard to bring her laws up to date. It is a mammoth task. The *Education Law (1995)*³³ was promulgated in March 1995 and came into effect on September 1, 1995. It is wide-ranging in scope and has a total of 84 articles. Of interest for the purpose of this thesis are the following articles:

Article 3. In developing the cause of socialist education, the State adheres to taking Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and the theory of Building socialism with Chinese characteristics as its guidelines and follows the basic principles defined in the Constitutions.

This illustrates the fact that the underlying Marxist philosophy of the State remains unchanged. It is the bedrock of the educational system – in theory at least.

Article 8. Educational activities shall conform to the State and public interests. The State separates education from religion. No organization or individual may make use of religion to conduct activities that interfere with the educational system of the State.

Clearly China wishes to continue to keep control of the education of its citizens especially in terms of values and political thought. Religion is to have no place. It is not exactly clear what it means to “make use of religion to conduct activities that interfere with the educational system” but what is clear from realities on the ground is that China is opposed to any organization or individual trying to influence students to become Christians.

³² *News Network International: Special Edition* (December 21, 1993): 2.

³³ The full English text of the Education Law 1995 can be seen on the worldwide web at: www.moe.edu.cn/english/laws_e.htm

Article 9. *Citizens of the People's Republic of China shall have the right and obligation to receive education. All citizens, regardless of ethnic group, race, sex, occupation, property status or religious belief, shall enjoy equal opportunities for education according to law.*

This is a legal safeguard against discrimination based on religion but in reality has seldom been adhered to. It is known that job related promotions for teachers or professors have been blocked solely on the basis of them being found to be Christians. According to the letter of the 1995 *Education Law*, however, this should not be the case. More and more university professors are becoming believers. Many of those returning from post-graduate study overseas are returning as believers. However there is understandable fear on the part of many about being open about their faith simply because of the discrimination and opposition that could result from such a disclosure.

Under Article 82 is the statement: *Regulations on education in religious schools shall be formulated by the State Council separately.* This, in the case of Christianity, refers to Bible Schools and Seminaries and these, to be legal, have to come under the TSPM/CCC. The 2005 *Regulations on Religious Affairs* addresses this issue (see Chan, 1995: 29, 30). Potter (2003: 20) states: "Religious education academies must implement CCP policy and submit to Party leadership, and their curricula, programmes and personnel are subject to approval by the Religious Affairs Bureau."

The Chinese government follows a strict policy of censorship of religious material though it has to be said that many books with wonderful evangelical and biblically orthodox content are being published both by the China Christian Council and by other publishers. I once purchased a book of Bible Stories in an airport book shop in China – it was in Chinese and absolutely true to the original Biblical accounts. Again, policy is one thing, actual practice is another.

It is clear, from the *Education Law*, that the authorities are strongly opposed to there being any religious influences in the schools and universities. They do not want the minds of the young being “poisoned” by religious superstitions. Not only is Marxism and atheism taken for granted, so is evolution. Science is seen as doing away with the need for the supernatural, and religious belief is seen as superstitious and unscientific. This is the climate in which all Chinese young people are being educated and in past generations this approach was even more strictly adhered to than is the case today.

In a very interesting article about the growth of the church in Anhui Province the writer, Wu Hai-tao, no doubt a Party member, makes the following suggestions as to how to curb the rapid growth in the numbers of believers:

We must first of all strengthen propaganda and education in the Marxist view of religion and the basic standpoint of the Party regarding religion and its basic policies. We must strengthen atheist propaganda and broaden our campaign to smash superstition. While fully implementing the Party's policy on freedom of religious belief, we must never ignore educating the masses in atheism and socialist ideology. We should in particular, train up the youth in the Marxist and scientific world-view. We must not ignore the large number of young people who have been added to the ranks of religious believers in recent years. We must strengthen the propaganda of science and culture to weaken the influence of religion.³⁴

It is no wonder that the authorities are extra vigilant when it comes to foreigners attempting to spread religion in the classroom or on university campuses, be they English teachers or professors in other fields of expertise.

New laws³⁵ have made it possible for a growing private sector in education. There have even been a number of private universities set up with foreign funding

³⁴ Article in *Zongjiao* 宗教 (Religion) 2000 edition (4th issue) published by the Religious Institute of Nanjing University.

³⁵ NB The 2002 Private Education Law and the March 1, 2003 regulations concerning joint venture institutions – “a double-edged sword, aiming both to promote and regulate private education”. See the *Program for Research on Private Higher Education*, University at Albany, NY. www.albany.edu/~prophe

and leadership, some of which have Church or Mission connections. One very successful venture is Yanbian University of Science & Technology (YUST)³⁶ in Yanji in Jilin Province not far from the border with North Korea. YUST was founded by a well known and respected Christian American Korean academic, Dr Chin Kyung Kim. However even in such an institution the government keeps a close watch and foreign staff and administrators are not allowed to proselytize.

2.12 Religious Policy and Foreigners

The CCP has traditionally linked Christianity with missionary work, foreign aggression and imperialism. In this regard China has a long memory that reaches back well over one hundred years to the Opium Wars (of 1839-1842 and 1857-1860) and the unequal treaties that followed China's humiliation at the hands of so-called Christian western nations. It was only with the forced opening of the "treaty ports" through so-called gunboat diplomacy that missionaries were able to enter China. Missionaries no matter how pure their motives and no matter how great their sacrifices unavoidably were tarred with the same brush as their politically or materially motivated compatriots. Foreign powers had little regard for China's long history and rich culture. They often flaunted their power and privilege.

Lambert expresses it well:

The nadir was reached, possibly, in 1900, when German propaganda at the time of the Boxer Rebellion and the siege of the foreign legations in Peking caricatured China as the 'Yellow Peril'. Many patriotic Chinese – not just communists – were rightly outraged by the high-handed actions of the West that continued well into the 20th century. (2002)

It is not surprising that when the communists took over China they were able to exploit the mistakes made by some missionaries over the previous hundred years. Party propaganda took things to extreme limits in attempting to

³⁶ See www.ybust.edu.cn

prove that missionaries had been exploiting the people and that they were simply tools of the imperialist foreign powers.

Some modern-day commentators have echoed the views of the Party. During a forum at the Lutheran World Federation General Assembly held in Hong Kong in July 1997, some delegates from Hong Kong and mainland China warned against foreign missionary activity. Tso Man-king, general secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council, blamed 19th missionary activity for causing Chinese to perceive Christianity as a "foreign religion", a "product of capitalism and imperialism and maybe militarism as well."³⁷ He said, "Because of this, Christianity has not been able to root itself in Chinese soil and culture"

Lambert (2002) writes: "Today the propaganda rings increasingly hollow, but it would be a grave mistake for us to forget the lessons of history."

The laws governing the activities of foreign believers are outlined in Document 144 and in the 26 September 2000 code already considered above. While all previous regulations and documents regarding religion in China have been superseded by the 2005 *Regulations*, the *Foreigner Religious Activities Administration Regulations*³⁸ continue to apply.

Foreign Affairs officials in universities or the police responsible for issuing visas and residence permits to foreign nationals often mention these regulations to individual foreigners. The two main points they seem concerned to communicate are that China: i) does not allow foreigners to engage in proselytizing and ii) does not approve of foreigners organizing religious activities with Chinese citizens. They are less concerned about what foreigners do either privately or with other foreigners.

³⁷ Ecumenical News International, July 14, 1997.

³⁸ State Council regulations on the management of religious activities of foreigners in the PRC, 31 January 1994 (国 院 于中 人民共和国境内外国人宗教活动管理 定)

In most cities there are foreign fellowships meeting. As long as they do not allow locals to attend there are few problems, though in some cases foreign fellowships have had to agree to meet in a TSPM church or other approved venue. This happened in 1996 in Shanghai where each of the two foreign groups meeting at the time in hotels was forced to disband. However after discussions, involving leading foreign businessmen and diplomats in the city, the authorities approved the inauguration of an afternoon service for foreigners at the TSPM International Community Church on Heng Shan Road. A TSPM pastor was required to give oversight (in practice all this involved was giving a 5 or 10 minute sermon) but otherwise the foreigners were free to run the service as they wished (including having their own speakers giving a longer sermon). Today this gathering has grown into two services with a total of well over a 1000 members³⁹ from over 50 nations. The Beijing International Christian Fellowship⁴⁰ is even bigger with around 2600 members. In other cities all across China groups of foreigners meet for worship. Larger joint gatherings or conferences have on occasion been restricted by the police even when formal permission has been sought beforehand but most regular Sunday gatherings are undisturbed. Attendance has to be with passport in hand (i.e. locals cannot normally attend).

Foreigners are free to attend services at official TSPM churches which are held in Chinese, of course. Active longer term involvement by foreigners in TSPM churches, other than simply attending, is not usually encouraged. There are many cases, however, of foreigners helping run English classes or English Bible studies in TSPM churches, and also helping in other ways. Article 3 of the religious activities regulations for foreigners does allow foreigners to preach in TSPM churches if they are officially invited to do so.

³⁹ See www.sccenglish.com for the website of the Shanghai Community Fellowship

⁴⁰ See www.bicf.org

It is common knowledge that China has a sophisticated system of surveillance of the Internet ⁴¹ and that they monitor emails and telephone conversations, not least those of foreigners. Foreigners are allowed to bring in Bibles and books, audio and video material of a religious nature but only sufficient for their own private use. This is clearly aimed at trying to stop foreigners bringing in large amounts of literature to distribute to Chinese. Previously there was only a prohibition concerning bringing in materials that endanger the public interest or society's morals. It could certainly be argued that this could not possibly apply to Bibles or any Christian literature. Pornography yes, but not God's Word! Now however, the "law" is much tighter – only sufficient for one's personal use is allowed. Bringing in more than that could lead to the material being subject to confiscation.

This chapter began making mention of certain foreigners who had been asked to leave China for "engaging in religious activities". This will be discussed later in this thesis but clearly it is important for foreign believers called to China to know what the law says and how it might be interpreted.

Given this historical background and given the Marxist view of religion it is not surprising that the government has sought to monitor and strictly control the religious activities of foreigners in China. In addition, the government tries to limit the contact between religious believers in China and their overseas counterparts (MacInnes, 1989: 61-70). China has accused evangelical Christians from the United States and Korea of interfering with China's "independence and autonomy in managing religious affairs, and building up anti-motherland, anti-government forces". ⁴²

2.13 China's attitude to "human rights" issues

⁴¹ For details see Xiao, Qiang. *"The Development and the State Control of the Chinese Internet"*- a written presentation before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, April 14, 2005. Qiang Xiao is director of the China Internet Project, at the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley.

⁴² Human Rights Watch/Asia, *China: State Control of Religion*, 1997, pp 33-36.

China has often been criticized by democratic and Western nations for her poor record on human rights. This complex topic will only be discussed briefly and in particular as it relates to the issue of religious policy. China is clearly not acting in accord with internationally accepted standards in her treatment of religious believers who do not fit in with official policy constraints. The widespread persecution of religious believers in China is extremely well documented. However China defends herself by saying that feeding, clothing and housing her 1.3 billion people is a far more important basic human right than is the right of free speech and democracy heralded by the West. China claims that economic development and stability is needed before there can be political reform.

Louise Arbour, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights visited China in late August 2005.⁴³ She was "*guardedly optimistic*" that China was making progress but did not accept China's claim that each nation should protect rights in its own way. She said, "There are international standards that have to be met. It is not appropriate to say: 'We are doing this our own way'." Earlier in the week at the Asia-Pacific human rights symposium held in Beijing, Chinese State Councillor and former Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan had said, "Every country should choose its own way to protect human rights according to its national situation."

Beijing has signed but is yet to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Arbour is reported to have urged Chinese leaders to improve laws relating to China's 're-education through labour' system, the death penalty and due process in trials. She, like many other foreign leaders before her, also raised the question of Beijing's repression of religion and China's treatment of Tibetans and Uygurs.

⁴³ See Reuters and CNN reports, www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/asiapcf/09/02/rights.china.reut. and also www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/hr4868 accessed 30 September, 2005.

2.14 Concluding Comments

The Communist regime, in many senses, has been following the practice of China's previous dynastic rulers - only to an extreme degree. So often in Chinese history the state used administrative control over religion in an attempt to guard the position and power of the ruling elite. Any religion that did not submit to the authority of the state was seen as a threat and treated accordingly. In today's inter-connected and inter-dependent world China is no longer able to ignore the rest of the world or even her own people. China's increasingly important position in the global economy as well as in the political scene has brought the world to China as well as China to the world. The Chinese government has introduced major reforms in many areas, not least in the economy. However the CCP is struggling to find ways to allow greater flexibility in regard to religious policy (and also human rights) while at the same time making sure she can firmly hold onto power. All countries to one degree or another have to deal with religious issues. Nations like Britain and the USA are implementing tougher laws to deal with extremist Islamic groups engaging in terrorism. There is no attempt to control or regulate religious organizations or believers. Religious groups may need to register for legal and tax purposes but not for political reasons. Even in countries like Germany, Norway, Finland, Greece, Denmark and the UK where there is a state church the government does not seek to control religious affairs as is the case in China.

Control of religion is a phenomenon commonly seen in dictatorial or communist states. China has come a long way from the dark days of the Cultural Revolution and at least recognizes the fact religion is here to stay and may even be able to play a useful role in society. However the CCP is reluctant to abandon its basic Marxist view (in theory at least if not in practice) and is wary of the potential for opposition arising through religious influences (from within China or from outside). Having seen the major part religion and religious believers played in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union the

Chinese Communist Party is unlikely to be in a hurry to make any major changes to its policy on religion.

CHAPTER 3 LEARNING FROM HISTORY

In any discussion of how to effectively share the Good News in China today it is important to remember the past. The more we understand the past and learn lessons (both good and bad) from the past the more effective we will be today. A book coming out of a major international conference held by the Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History and the Center for the Pacific Rim at the University of San Francisco in October 1999 was entitled “China and Christianity: Burdened past, Hopeful Future”. In an introductory paper Stephen Uhalley writes that the phrase “burdened past”

...refers to the problems that are part of the historical record, including disconcerting instances of disunity within Christianity...and of the unfortunate association at times of Christianity with Western Imperialism. Sometimes, it has been a consequence of Christians themselves not adequately living their faith.

On the other hand, some of the burden is attributable to cultural and ideological dispositions on the part of elites in China that have made life more difficult for Christians. Indeed, Christian achievements in China, in the light of all such burdens, are all the more impressive. (Uhalley Jr, 2001:5)

The worldwide Church, as well as the Chinese Church, can learn political, cultural, ecclesiastical, theological, and spiritual lessons from the past. Despite all the “burdens” of the past, there is a “hopeful future”. Without doubt it is local believers who have played the major role in gospel proclamation but very often in the various stages of the history of the Church in China foreigners have, in God’s strange wisdom, also played a significant part. The foreigner has often been a catalyst. In this chapter as we review the past we want to highlight timeless principles essential for true effectiveness in service.

3.1 The earliest contact with Christianity

It is usual to date the first entry of Christianity into China as linked to the Nestorian monk Alopen (*Aluoben*, if using the pinyin system of writing, 阿 本) who reached Chang'an (today's Xi'an) in 635 AD, not long after the start of the illustrious Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-906).

There is, however, most interesting research that argues for an even earlier Christian presence in China. Retired Nanjing Theological Seminary professor Wang Wei-fang has written fascinating articles (Wang, 2001:25-27; and Wang, 2003) that claim Christianity reached China as early as the first century A.D. during the Eastern Han dynasty, some 550 years before Alopen. Professor Wang has, I believe, come up with some extremely significant research. He bases his claims upon the discovery of an iron cross in Jiangxi province and a large number of Han dynasty stone carvings in Jiangsu, Shandong and Henan provinces. These carvings (including some on elaborate burial tombs) have clearly biblical themes (including creation and the Fall, the Christmas story, the Passover Lamb, five loaves and two fish, the Communion cup, etc.) as well as the symbol of the fish used by the early church. In style the carvings reflect both Chinese and Middle Eastern cultural elements. Professor Wang's work was reported in an article in *Christianity Today* on October 7, 2002 and can be accessed from their archives⁴⁴. Even more recently it was reported in the *China Daily*.⁴⁵

3. 2 The Nestorians

Even if Christianity did first come to China as early as the first century it was the coming of the Nestorians in the fifth century that made the first major impact for the gospel in the "Middle Kingdom". It is probably more correct to refer to the

⁴⁴ See <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/011/19.14.html>

See also Wu Liuhua, "Xuzhou Han Stone Carvings" (Beijing: November 2001)

⁴⁵ See http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-12/22/content_505587.htm accessed on 20/01/06.

Nestorians as missionaries of the Assyrian (or Syro-Oriental) Church (Witek, 2001: 13). The Assyrian Church was quite separate to the Church based in Rome, Constantinople or Alexandria. Historically it had close ties with the famous first century missionary church in Antioch. The name Nestorian came from Nestorius, Bishop of Antioch, who in AD 428 became the Patriarch of Constantinople. Following a major controversy, supposedly over Nestorius' views about the nature of Christ (clearly distinguishing His two natures, namely man and God), the highly acrimonious Council of Ephesus in 431 AD pronounced his views as heretical. The fact remains however that the Assyrian church was basically orthodox and evangelical in beliefs and had a heart for mission – leading them to take the gospel from Syria and Persia across central Asia to China. It would be misleading to call these missionaries Nestorians if this is taken to mean they represented a heretical sect of Christianity. Rather they represented the Assyrian Church. The Assyrian Church in terms of her history and influence has not received the attention she deserves, particularly in the West. In Chinese the Nestorian religion was called *jingjiao* (景教), meaning “the shining faith”.

The history and beliefs of the Nestorians are inscribed on the famous Nestorian Tablet (*Jingjiao beiwen* 景教碑文 Stele of the Luminous Religion), a two-ton block of stone some three metres high and one metre wide. This incredible historical artifact, which was only discovered in 1623 (buried in the ground), now stands in the Forest of Steles Museum in Xi'an. The beautifully carved text of this huge tablet contains mostly Chinese characters but also has some Persian script.⁴⁶ It begins with the words, “Let us praise the Lord that the [Christian] faith has been so popular in China”. It tells of the arrival of Alopen “bearing the sacred books, braving difficulties and dangers” and in addition to its outline of Christian worship practices, doctrines and ethics it also mentions the names of several Emperors who supported the Church. The names of 67 priests are recorded in both Persian and Chinese.

⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion of the Nestorian tablet see Martin Palmer, “*The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*”, (New York: Ballantine Wellspring, 2001).

Alopen was welcomed by the second Tang dynasty emperor Tai Zong (太宗皇帝 627-649 AD), who was a zealous advocate of learning and tolerant of religion (unlike his father before him). Tai Zong arranged for Alopen to be based in the imperial library in Chang'an while he worked on translating his holy books into Chinese. These presumably included parts of the Bible. They are also known to include the *Jesus Messiah Sutra* written by Alopen with the help of Chinese associates. In this first Christian book in Chinese, Alopen was at pains to explain that Christianity was not opposed to China's ancient traditions. He pointed out that loyalty to the state and filial piety shown to one's parents were also taught by Christians. This early Chinese Christian classic was not only an apology. It was an introduction to the Christian faith and told of the life of Jesus from His birth to His Passion. It "underlined that Christ was the Messiah for all men and women." (Witek, 2001:13) The emperor read it and was favourably impressed. A number of other Christian writings have been discovered along the ancient silk route in Gansu and Xinjiang. Many of these used Buddhist and Daoist terminology to present Christian truth. Some are believed to date back to Alopen's time. ⁴⁷

In 628, three years after Alopen arrived, an official edict stated the policy of religious tolerance and the first Christian church was built in Chang'an, funded by the emperor himself. Alopen was but one of another twenty-one officially recognized monks. For the next almost three hundred years Christianity flourished in the empire. Despite ups and downs with periods of pressure and even persecution, the Nestorian Christian presence in China was widespread and influential. ⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See P.Y. Saeki, *"The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China"*, 1951.

⁴⁸ (Aikman, 2003) pages 19-26 contains an excellent summary of the Nestorian period. (Lambert, 2004) *The Nestorians in Xinjiang* gives further excellent insights into the Nestorians in China. Lambert himself draws much from Li Jinxi's *Xinjiang Zongjiao Yennian Shi* (History of Religious Developments in Xinjiang), Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 2003.

With the demise, however, of the Tang dynasty the Nestorian Christian influence in China also went into sharp decline. Some western scholars have surmised that the Nestorians were virtually eliminated during the Song dynasty. Yet incredibly, three hundred years later during the Yuan Dynasty they were to experience something of a revival in their fortunes and influence.

3.2.1 Lessons to be learnt

What can we learn from the Nestorians in relation to communicating good news in China?

Theirs was no short-term flying visit. Travelling across central Asia and along the ancient silk route to China in those days was a journey of great danger taking many months, even years. Clearly Syrian-speaking Persians like Alopen must have put down deep roots in the Chinese language and culture. The wording of the Nestorian Tablet shows that the Church made an attempt to explain Christianity in a way that communicated to the philosophical mindset of the Chinese at the time. The Nestorians seemed to be good at contextualization. No doubt this was one reason for their success. In stressing loyalty to the state and filial piety (so important in Confucian thought) they were not seen as a threat to the ruling classes nor to social stability. Some evangelical scholars have, however, maintained that in adapting their teaching to Buddhist and Daoist concepts, the Nestorians “lost the uniqueness, and hence the transforming power, of the gospel.” (Chao, 1999: 11). They made the mistake, says Chao, of “uncritical adaptation”. He also states that the Nestorians failed to “develop a strong theological base from which they could critically understand the complexity of Chinese culture.” (Ibid)

The fact the Tang dynasty practiced religious tolerance afforded protection to the Nestorians as well as to Buddhists. One of the possible reasons, however, why Christianity itself declined with the demise of the dynasty was the fact it had

become too reliant upon the protection of the state. In addition the Nestorian leadership (monks and priests) seems to have been somewhat monastic and by and large did not root itself in the everyday lives of ordinary Chinese people. Possibly it was also still seen as a foreign religion. Buddhism on the other hand, though also a foreign import (from India), was able to gain a foothold in society and portray itself as authentically Chinese by absorbing and incorporating China's more ancient philosophies of Daoism and Confucianism. Islam, through trade and military conquest, was also in later centuries able to get a strong foothold in North-west China – a strong-arm form of persuasion. Despite its successes Nestorian Christianity had strong rivals.

3.3 Christianity during the Mongol period

After the collapse of the Tang dynasty China went through a period of chaos referred to as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907-979) followed by the Song dynasty (960-1279). Christianity was all but wiped out. Neo-Confucianism (synthesized Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism) became predominant. Towards the end of the Song dynasty there were many rebellions and foreign invasions and the Mongol empire began to expand and threaten China. This presented a new opportunity to the Christian church.

As already mentioned, despite its decline from former levels of influence in the empire during the Tang dynasty, Nestorian Christianity came to prominence once again during the Yuan dynasty (1261-1368) when the Mongols ruled China. Confucianism was no longer as dominant in a more religiously and culturally pluralistic climate.

The Mongols had become a major power controlling not only northern China (having seized Beijing in 1215) but large swathes of central Asia. By 1223 they had defeated Khorezm, the great Muslim power in central Asia and controlled much of Russia. Their ruthless armies even threatened Europe. The first leader of

the united Mongol tribes, Chingis Khan (or Ghengis Khan), and later his sons and grandsons slaughtered millions in their ruthless campaigns.

There was a lull in Mongolian expansionist activities with the death of Ogodei (son and successor of Chingis Khan) in 1241. Seeing both the threat to Europe of the Mongols as well as the Muslims, Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) took the opportunity afforded by the Mongol succession dispute to dispatch an envoy to the newly chosen Great Khan Guyuk. He sent Franciscan, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (1190-1252) who met with Guyuk in the Mongol capital Karakorum. He shared the Christian faith with Guyuk and asked him to desist from the persecution of Christians in his empire but in terms of trying to dampen the flames of Mongol military and territorial aggression his mission failed.

Guyuk himself died soon after (in 1248) and was succeeded as supreme Mongol leader by Kublai Khan (1215-1294)⁴⁹. About this time another envoy was sent from Europe to the Mongol court.

King Louis IX of France, while on a crusade to recover the Holy Land, sent the Dominican, André de Longjumeau in 1249 and then Franciscan, Guillaume de Ruysbroek in 1253 as envoys to the Mongol khan in an attempt to create a Mongol alliance with the Christian Franks against the Muslims. Neither envoy was successful in achieving such a goal. (Witek, 2001:14)

Ruysbroek also failed in his attempt to persuade Kublai Kahn to become a Christian, at least of the Roman Catholic variety.

In his extensive Journal Ruysbroek reported that there were many Nestorians Christians in the court and even amongst family members of the Great Khan. Sorkhaghtani, the Kublai Khan's mother was a devout Christian and the Khan would accompany his wife to chapel and would allow the Nestorian monks to

⁴⁹ Kublai Khan's name in Chinese was *Shi Zu Hubilie Shundi* 世祖忽必烈 帝. He made his capital in Beijing from 1279 to 1294 and is regarded as the first emperor of the Yuan dynasty.

say prayers for him – even though he was not a Christian himself. Ruysbroek reported that the Nestorian monks occupied an important place in the Imperial Court. He was not averse to strongly criticizing them. He wrote, "The Nestorians there know nothing...they have sacred books in Syriac, but they do not know the language so that they chant like those monks among us who do not know grammar. They are absolutely depraved."⁵⁰ Some things about the Nestorians did impress Ruysbroek, however, as he writes in Chapter 30 of his Journal, "On Easter Eve the Nestorians baptized in the most correct manner more than 60 people and there was great common joy among all Christians."

Tony Lambert in writing about the Nestorians in Xinjiang during the Yuan dynasty (2004: *China Insight*) comments that "the Nestorians may have been purer in their religious worship than medieval Catholics." He quotes from the "massive and scholarly work" of Li Jinxin⁵¹ in which Li gives ten distinctives of Nestorian Christianity as it differed from medieval Roman Catholic teaching:

- 1) As they did not believe Mary to be the "Mother of God" they did not worship her.
- 2) They did not use images in worship but kept the cross.
- 3) They did not believe in purgatory after death but allowed Christians to honor their ancestors.
- 4) They opposed transubstantiation but acknowledged that Christ was truly present in the Lord's Supper.
- 5) They had eight ranks of church government: metropolitan archbishop, archbishop, bishop (priest), assistant priest (deacon), acolyte, assistant acolyte and scripture reader. The last five grades were allowed to marry. In China even the metropolitans were allowed to marry.
- 6) Christians must keep their beards, shave their heads, not own slaves, not seek material wealth, and aid the poor.
- 7) They kept numerous fasts at Lent, Pentecost, the Annunciation of Gabriel, etc.
- 8) They prayed eight times a day.

⁵⁰ Quoted in "The Cross and the Lotus" www.keikyo.com accessed 05/10/05. Also referred to in Moffett, 1992:420.

⁵¹ Li, Jinxin, *History of Religious Developments in Xinjiang* (Xinjiang Zongjiao Yanbian Shi 新疆宗教演史), Urumqi: Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 2003.

9) The metropolitan had to be a vegetarian.

10) The metropolitans were elected by the churches. (Li, 2003:174-75)

Lambert comments that although “it would be anachronistic to read back into their practices the teachings of the Reformation and subsequent evangelicalism, it can be seen that on points 1-4, at least, they appear to have preserved New Testament simplicity better than the Roman Catholic or eastern Orthodox churches.”

Ruysbroek reported that though Nestorian monks were active amongst the people those Mongolian nobles claiming to be Christians were so in little more than name.

The famous Venetian traveller Marco Polo met Kublai Khan for the first time in 1266. By then Kublai Khan had moved his capital to Khanbaliq (Beijing) from where he ruled his vast empire stretching from the Euphrates River and the Black Sea in the west to China in the east. Marco Polo spent many years in the service of Kublai Khan. Merchants Nicolo and Maffeo Polo, father and uncle to Marco, later stunned Europe when in 1269 on their return from a visit to China they brought letters from the Khan asking the Pope for one hundred missionaries. Moffett (1992:445-446) records they were to be “wise men of learning in the Christian religion and doctrine” and should know “the seven arts and be fitted to teach people...that the Christian faith and religion is better than theirs and more true than other religions.” Kublai Khan promised that if these missionaries came he and his court would believe and join the church.

The fact that it took twenty five years before even one missionary was sent must rank this as one of the greatest missed opportunities in the history of Missions. Despite the fact the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church didn't send missionaries as requested the Nestorians, for all their compromise, did provide some sort of Christian witness in China. They were enjoying a season of favour in the Mongol court and even set up an archbishopric in 1275 in the capital

Khanbaliq (Beijing). In fact at the height of the Yuan dynasty they had churches in many important cities. These included Quanzhou (a major medieval port in the SE province of Fujian), Fuzhou, Chengdu (in the west in Sichuan), Taiyuan (in Shanxi in the north), Jinan, Loyang, Chang'an (Xi'an), Yangzhou (on the Yangtze River), Hangzhou, Canton (today's Guangzhou, in the very south), and Kunming (in the far south west). This shows an incredible breadth and spread of influence, though the Yuan dynasty that allowed them to flourish proved to be one of the shortest dynasties in Chinese history. A Chinese Nestorian, Rabban Sauma (of Turkic origin though from Beijing), actually travelled to Europe in 1287 and was received by both Edward I of England and Pope Nicholas IV (Aikman, 2003:25). Ironically he was trying to persuade "Christian" Europe to cooperate with the Mongols against the Muslims who by then were extending their influence and control not just in Persia but also in parts of central Asia.

In 1291, Oljeitu, the Mongol leader in Persia, who earlier had been baptized as a Christian, became a Muslim. Many others soon followed (Witek, 2001:16). Islam began to displace both Buddhism and Nestorian Christianity amongst the Uygur peoples living in the oases along the silk route north and south of the Taklimakan desert. An Arabic script was introduced replacing the Syrillic script introduced by the Nestorians. Despite their presence in both the capital and other major centres in China, the Nestorians were losing ground.

In China in the Mongol capital however the aging Kublai Khan was still favourable to Christianity. Pope Nicholas IV sent letters to the Great Khan with an envoy named Giovanni da Montecorvino. He travelled via India entering China through the port of Quanzhou and eventually reached Beijing in 1294 just after the death of the Grand Khan. He was nonetheless welcomed by the new emperor, Temur Khan (1294-1307)⁵². Montecorvino was resented by the Nestorians but he

⁵² The Mongol empire began to fragment into independent Khanates following the death of Kublai Khan. Temur Oljeitu (*Chengzong*, 承宗 穆耳) was the second emperor of the Yuan dynasty. He ruled in Beijing from 1294 to 1307. Beijing remained the capital of the Mongol Yuan dynasty till 1368 when the Ming dynasty was founded.

persevered and built a church in 1305 and is reported to have won 6000 converts. He also translated the New Testament and Psalms into the common language of the Mongols. The Pope “appointed him archbishop of Khanbaliq and patriarch of the East. For the next twenty years, the Chinese Mongol mission continued to flourish under his leadership.” (Ibid, 2001:16) Montecorvino persuaded the Öngüt Turk leader Prince George and many of his people to convert from their Nestorian Christian faith and join the Roman Catholic Church. Although the Franciscans’ main success was with the Uygur and Öngüt Turks in the north-west and north of the country, they did build churches in the capital Beijing and in Quanzhou and Xiamen (Amoy) in the south east and in Yangzhou on the Yangtze.

The Yuan dynasty was in decline and resentment of the Mongol rulers on the part of the Chinese was running high. Mongol control was increasingly fragile by 1360. In 1362 the Catholic bishop of Quanzhou was killed when the Chinese took control of the city. After leading a successful rebellion in 1368 a Chinese peasant and former Buddhist monk named Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋) became the first emperor of the new Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Once the strongly anti-foreign and pro-Buddhist Ming dynasty came to power all forms of Christianity were not only out of favour but ruthlessly suppressed.

3.3.1 Lessons to be learnt

The world was a very different place when the Mongols ruled China but there are lessons for us today. Though the Yuan dynasty was one of China’s shortest, it was a time of almost unprecedented opportunity for the gospel. However, marvellous opportunities were lost. There were jealousies and rivalries between the more established Nestorians and the newly arrived Catholics. Both groups had considerable influence in the corridors of power. The political clout and influence, of the Catholics in particular, was both a platform and a snare. The Franciscans seemed intent on establishing and building their own work regardless of what was already being done by the Nestorians. They became very obviously

associated with the Mongol rulers (and their allies the Uygur and Öngüt Turks), far more so than the Nestorians who also had a considerable following amongst Han Chinese. Despite the many positive aspects of Nestorian Christianity it seems true to say that in some cases, during the Yuan dynasty, they may also have been more concerned with court politics than godly living or evangelism, and they happily co-existed with Buddhism and Shamanism, as well as Islam. It was socially acceptable to be a Christian, not least when the powerful emperor Kublai Khan was so favourable. Many were Christians in little more than name.

Much of the leadership of the Nestorian Church was seen as foreign. This was even more the case with the Franciscans. The messengers of the gospel, despite all their hard work, did not always live according to the truth they professed nor did they, in general, engage deeply with the culture of the masses. Few had adequate language skills. The Church was not sufficiently grounded - either in the Word of God or in the soil of China. With the overthrow of the ruling regime, itself seen by the Chinese as foreign, Christianity (of whichever variety) also found itself out of favour.

In today's China, also a time of unprecedented opportunity, foreign workers need to avoid the pitfalls of arrogance (racial, national or religious), "kingdom building" (personal, denominational or agency), cultural insensitivity, poor language skills, an over-reliance upon "privilege" or political "*guanxi*"⁵³, and biblical or moral compromise.

3.4 Major Catholic advance – late Ming and early Qing

Despite being so anti-foreign the Ming dynasty opened itself to the outside world during the period 1405-1433 when the famous Admiral Zheng He (和) led a series of remarkable sea voyages in both the Pacific and Indian oceans. In 1433

⁵³ "*Guanxi*" (系) meaning "relationship" or "connections" is a concept that will be discussed in chapter four.

however the dynasty suddenly closed itself off from the outside world. It was barely half a century before the western nations (Portugal, Spain and later Britain) began their own sea explorations. Portuguese navigator Bartholomew Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1488. Christopher Columbus sailed on his famous voyage when he sighted America in 1492.

Aikman (2003:30) writes: "...it was the European Reformation of the sixteenth century, and the Roman Catholic response to it, the Counter-Reformation, that sparked a renewed European effort to bring Christianity to China. This time, the carriers of the religion were highly educated priests of the newly established arm of Roman Catholicism, the Society of Jesus." The missionaries of the Society of Jesus became known as the Jesuits.

The first important name to mention is that of Spaniard Jesuit Francis Xavier (1506-1552) who worked with remarkable success in various parts of Asia. He died just off the coast of China waiting for permission to enter. His life and work inspired many others. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) was one of them. He arrived in Macau to start learning Chinese in 1582 and was to become renowned for his scholarship and knowledge of the Chinese language and culture. Eventually in 1601 he was given permission to live in Beijing and in the nine years before his death he made an enormous impact for Christianity. He dressed like the respected Chinese scholar-gentry and was able to read and write the classics using impeccable spoken Chinese to explain the gospel to the educated classes. In 1603 he published his catechism, *Tianzhu shiye* (The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven 天主事), the introduction of which was a brilliant apologetic for the reasonableness of believing in God and in His revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. He explained the relationship of God to the world and used the terms *Shangdi* (God, 上帝) and *Tian* (Heaven, 天), which were familiar to the Chinese, as well as another term *Tianzhu* (Heavenly Lord, 天主). Ricci and other Jesuits, notably Giulio Aleni, wrote in ways that communicated with the educated literati who were so steeped in Confucianism. Other Jesuits said of Ricci that he "wanted to become

Chinese” and sought to impart Christianity as being in accord with the ethical principles of Confucian thinking. (Ibid, 2003:32) Witek (2001:17-20), himself a Jesuit, gives fascinating details about the content and approach in the writings of people like Ricci and Aleni. Aleni (1582-1649) wrote an influential work in 1628 entitled *Wanwu zhenyuan* (True Origin of All Things 万物真源) in which he argued that natural reason could point people to God.

Ricci was also a skilled clock maker, which gained him entry to the court and to the emperor himself. “Ricci and other intellectually gifted Jesuits who followed him sought to acquire influence in the imperial court through their various mechanical, mathematical, cartographical, and astronomical skills, as well as through some brilliant personal diplomacy.” (Aikman, 2003:31, 32)

Not surprisingly perhaps, the early Jesuits saw encouraging success with several thousand baptisms in Beijing alone. One of Ricci’s converts, Xu Guangqi (1562-1633) was appointed grand secretary to the emperor.

When the Ming dynasty fell in 1644 the Jesuits were able to continue to enjoy the favour of the new Qing dynasty rulers⁵⁴. Jesuits continued to be of influence in the court, some in astronomy and others using their linguistic and diplomatic skills to serve China. Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592-1666) not only served in the court as an astronomer, he also prepared apologetics for Chongzhen 崇 (1628-1644) the last Ming emperor. He argued strongly for the fact all things (*wanwu*, 万物) must have a beginning and were incapable of existing independently. By studying *wanwu* man could deduce there is a Creator (*zaowuzhe*, 造物者). Schall also wrote about the soul, religious belief, salvation, peace, civil law and divine law, and rulers. Facing the objection that some Christian teaching (such as not seeking vengeance and about loving one’s enemies) was impossible to follow, Schall argued that however unpalatable it may

⁵⁴ The Qing dynasty emperors were Manchu from north east China, rather than Han Chinese.

appear this teaching reflected the “correct instructions of the Lord of Heaven”. He spoke of Christianity as teaching universally applicable truth that could not be rejected simply because some mistakenly imagined it to be “the teaching of the West” (Dudink, 1998:856-865). Such teaching was of course opposed by some Confucian scholars who saw it as undermining traditional Chinese values. Some Confucian scholars also found it hard to accept the teaching that God became a man and then died on a criminal’s cross. Like some of the so-called “Cultural Christians” of today, they may have admired many aspects of Christianity and its teaching but they stumbled over some of the truths it proclaimed. At least the Jesuits brought the debate to the highest level and in general their scholarly credentials and integrity earned widespread respect.

Schall’s assistant and successor Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688) established a close relationship with the second Qing dynasty emperor Kangxi (康熙, 1662-1722) who reigned for sixty one years and was one of China’s most famous and successful emperors. Although he was never baptized nor did he ever confess his faith openly some of his poems strongly suggest he was a believer in Christ. Aikman (2003:33) quotes Kangxi’s poem “The Cross” which is both beautiful and powerful.

In 1692 the Edict of Toleration, prompted by Kangxi himself, explicitly stated Chinese were free to become Christians. Towards the end of Kangxi’s reign it is estimated there might have been as many as 300,000 Catholic Christians in China. This was a remarkable achievement on the part of the Jesuits and their Chinese congregants. It is sad that the so-called “rites controversy” soured relationships between the state and the Church in the later years of Kangxi’s reign which eventually led to a complete change in the fortunes of the Church.

The problem arose due to the actions of other Catholic orders, namely the Franciscans, the Dominicans, and the Augustinians, all of whom were jealous of the Jesuit’s success. They stressed the need to reach the ordinary people rather

than simply the literati and the ruling classes, not a problem in itself, but they also undermined the position of the Jesuits by strongly criticizing their stance on ancestor veneration. The Jesuits were far more accommodating of traditional Chinese beliefs and practices than were other Catholic orders. With the support of Kangxi the Jesuits maintained that certain rites of ancestor veneration were not to be seen as worshipping those ancestors but simply respecting them.

However the controversy was to prove more than theological. “In a 1715 papal bull, the pope explicitly criticized the Jesuits for compromising Gospel truth in their acquiescence to Chinese cultural traditions” (Aikman, 2003:34). The whole matter was handled highly insensitively by the Jesuit’s critics and by the envoys of the pope who showed little understanding of the Chinese language or culture. They highly offended the Chinese and the emperor and muddied the waters for everyone. Kangxi, by then near the end of his long reign, threatened to ban foreign Christian activity altogether.

It was his successor, Emperor Yong Zheng (雍正 1723-1735) who in the first year of his reign issued the “Edict of Expulsion and Confiscation” which led to widespread destruction and looting of churches and Christian schools throughout the empire. The Catholic work in China went into a steep decline. This was in part due to the persecution that broke out but some also argue it was due to the decline in the quality of the foreign missionaries coming to China. Kangxi himself towards the end of his life complained about the poor language skills of the foreign Christians serving in the court (Franke, 1967:57).

Christianity had largely to go underground for the state no longer welcomed the Church but saw it as a threat to the stability of society. Despite persecution and martyrdom on the part of some, including several foreign priests in the early part of the nineteenth century, an active remnant remained of the once strong and growing Catholic Church. It was to be the dawn of a fresh new initiative – by Protestants.

3.4.1 Lessons to be learnt from the Jesuits

The Jesuit experience in China has several clear parallels with the situation facing the Christian Church and foreign involvement in China today. The Jesuits were foreigners, largely from various European nations, seeking to impact a very different world to their own. The Chinese worldview, philosophical and religious background, was very different to that of the foreigners. The foreign messengers of the gospel needed to respect the Chinese culture and learn the language in order to win the respect of the people. They had to identify those bridges within the culture whereby they could communicate God's universal truth. They needed to come with the skills and technical know-how which China welcomed and they had to earn the trust of those in authority. They needed linguistic and personal skills in order to be able to communicate freely with those they came to serve. They needed a godly life that backed up the values and illustrated the truth they sought to communicate. People like Ricci, Aleni, Schall and Verbiest clearly were outstanding examples of effective communicators of the good news.

On the other hand there were many others who failed to live up to these high standards and who in fact undermined what the early Jesuits had done. They seemed more interested in building their own "kingdoms" than building the "Kingdom of God". Despite the fact all the various groups were also part of the Roman Catholic Church it seemed to make no difference. This competitive spirit is often seen today when denominations and agencies, despite being of like-mind and faith, take it upon themselves to duplicate or criticize what others are doing. Should we not rather seek ways of partnering and cooperating with others of like-mind?

The "rites controversy" was not simply about the theological issues being addressed, which in and of themselves may have been important, but reflected a clash of personalities and methodologies. The way it was handled reflected the

scourge of pride and insensitivity. The issuing of papal bulls demanding obedience and compliance did nothing to solve the situation. It merely exacerbated the situation and created far more serious problems. Those foreigners presenting ultimatums to the Chinese emperor in such an arrogant and insensitive manner would, to the Chinese, appear uncivilized and ignorant. Even if the pope claimed absolute authority in the Roman Catholic Church in the West and even if he was called “*jaohuang*” (教皇), literally “church emperor”, he could claim no such authority in the Middle Kingdom. No wonder Kangxi felt insulted, and no wonder the door for foreign workers to serve in China was closed. Chao sums it up well – “The Catholic failure during this period was probably not a failure of the Jesuits to understand theology, but of the Franciscans and Dominicans to understand Chinese culture, as well as a joint failure of both to see the unity of the Christian faith.” (1999: 14)

Today we need the same commitment as the Jesuits to cultural adaptation and sensitivity, to language acquisition and to professional excellence and integrity. We need the humble heart of a learner. We need to work in harmony with others and be willing to learn from others. We need to serve sacrificially and to live in holiness. We need to major on building relationships of trust with those we seek to serve.

3.5 The Protestant Missionary Movement of the 19th and 20th Centuries

The Great Awakening of the Eighteenth Century and the revivals associated with the preaching of John Wesley (1703-1791) and George Whitefield (1714-1770) brought a new passion for evangelism to the Christians of Great Britain and America. This resulted in a heightened sense of the need for the “propagation of the gospel” to the millions as yet in “heathen darkness”. William Carey who left England for India in 1792 is regarded as the father of modern Protestant missions. This was the year the Baptist Missionary Society was founded. Another milestone was the founding in 1795 of the London Missionary

Society (LMS). The Church Missionary Society (1799) and the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804) also had their spiritual roots in the Great Awakening.

3.5.1 The First Century of Protestant Endeavour

The story of Protestant missionary work in China begins in 1807 with the arrival of Robert Morrison (1782-1834) of the LMS. Morrison studied medicine, astronomy, and Chinese in London before sailing for China. As the Chinese empire was closed to foreigners Morrison got a job as a translator with the East India Company which was allowed by the Chinese government to carry on trade for certain months of the year from a base in the Pearl River Delta near Canton (Guangzhou) and the Portuguese trading enclave of Macau. Supporting himself through his job with the Company he also spent considerable time in translation work. In 1813 he completed a translation of the New Testament and later, working with colleague William Milne, completed a translation of the whole Bible in 1819. With Milne he founded the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca in 1818. Morrison's major academic work was a three-volume Chinese-English dictionary, and he also translated hymns and a prayer book and wrote many tracts and articles. Morrison accomplished much under extremely difficult circumstances. For one thing it was impossible to work freely inside China and any Chinese who cooperated with him did so at great danger to themselves. He baptized the first Protestant convert to Christianity in 1814. Another of his helpers, Liang Fa (梁 𨵿), was ordained in 1821 by Morrison as the first Chinese Protestant preacher. Liang Fa wrote a booklet, *The Benevolent Words to Advise the World* (*quan shi liang yan* 劝世良言), that he distributed to scholars coming to Guangzhou to take the civil service examinations.⁵⁵ Morrison claimed to have only seen a total of ten Chinese come to faith during his life of service. However the influence of his linguistic and translation work was enormous.

⁵⁵ One of these was Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全) who was greatly influenced by what he read. Sadly however Hong later became the leader of the Taiping Rebellion which raged in China between 1850 and 1864, leading to the deaths of over 20 million.

Morrison, like many other early workers who followed him, had little alternative other than to attach himself to trading companies such as the East India Company. Once the monopoly of the East India Company was broken another major trading company to come on the scene was Jardine Matheson. These companies sold opium grown in British-controlled India in exchange for tea, silk, and porcelain so much in demand in Europe. Karl Gützlaff (1801-1853) worked as a translator for Jardine Matheson. The missionaries themselves opposed the opium trade and wrote reports condemning it. Of course the Chinese government also detested the trade.

A famous Chinese official, Commissioner Lin Zexu (林 徐), bravely stood up against the British traders. He confiscated more than 20,000 bales of opium and had them destroyed, and he then blockaded the port from European ships. Lin wrote a letter to Queen Victoria announcing that China had introduced a strict policy against anyone bringing opium into China. He appealed to her to support this effort. However, it is doubtful the British monarch ever received this letter⁵⁶. British naval boats attacked the Chinese. It was the start of the First Opium War (1839-42) between Britain and the Qing Dynasty government of China.

There followed a Second Opium War (1856-60) and a whole host of what the Chinese rightly call “unequal treaties”. The iniquitous opium trade and the greed and aggression displayed by the Western powers has left a guilty verdict indelibly marked on the pages of history. It is no wonder these events, seemingly so long ago, are still referred to today by the Chinese. In a strongly-worded Chinese government commentary in 1997 truth is mixed with untruth and propaganda.

Following the Opium War of 1840 ...Western Protestantism and Catholicism were used by colonialism and imperialism as a tool for aggression against China, and a number of

⁵⁶ From Ssuyu Teng and John Fairbank, *China's Response to the West*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), repr. in Mark A. Kishlansky, ed., *Sources of World History*, Volume II, (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1995), pp. 266-69

Western missionaries played an inglorious part in this. They participated in the opium trade and in plotting the Opium War unleashed by Britain against China. ...Some missionaries strongly advocated resort to force by Western powers to make the Qing government open its coastal ports, saying that it was only war that could open China to Christianity, and directly participated in the British military activities to invade China. ...They directly took part in plotting and drafting unequal treaties, such as the Sino-British Treaty of Nanking of 1842, the Sino-American Treaty of Wanghea of 1844, the Sino-American and Sino-French treaties of Tientsin of 1858 and the Sino-French Convention of Peking of 1860.⁵⁷

Though Morrison and Gützlaff worked for the foreign trading companies they themselves were clearly unhappy with some of their trading practices, especially the trading in opium. At the time however they had no other way to get into China or even reside in places like Macau. Later missionaries caught up in the events of the First and Second Opium Wars spoke out strongly against their own governments. They benefited from the opening of the treaty ports and from other agreements that led to the relaxation of the restrictions on their movements. However they never condoned the strong arm tactics of the Western powers. Broomhall (1982:223, 4) quotes famous CMS missionary W.A. Russell:

[China] has been forced by Christian England, at the very point of the bayonet, to throw open her gates to the free and unrestricted introduction of opium, and to the reception of it on the part of her people...Christian England, her rulers and people generally, have really forced open the gates of Peking, and burned down the imperial palace, in order to secure legal access to all parts of China, as well for the merchant with his opium as for the missionary...

The CMS made “ceaseless protests in the *CM Intelligencer* against Britain’s high-handed policy in China, piling up ‘evidence of the iniquity of the trade and of the misery it was bringing upon China’.” (Ibid, 1982: 224) Many others, including

⁵⁷ From a paper published by the Information Service of the State Council in Beijing, entitled *Freedom of Religious Belief in China* (October 1997), Section IV, accessed on 11/10/05 from website: www.china.org.cn/e-white/Freedom

highly respected medical doctors and Fellows of the Royal Society, signed petitions opposing the opium trade.

Interestingly, Karl Marx wrote in a very different vein. In an article in the *New York Daily Tribune* for July 22, 1853 he wrote:

Whatever be the social causes, and whatever religious, dynastic, or national shape they may assume, that have brought about the chronic rebellions subsisting in China ..., the occasion of this outbreak has unquestionably been afforded by the English cannon forcing upon China that soporific drug called opium. Before the British arms the authority of the Manchu dynasty fell to pieces; the superstitious faith in the Eternity of the Celestial Empire broke down...It would seem as though history had first to make this whole people drunk before it could rouse them out of their hereditary stupidity...The Chinese, it is true, are no more likely to renounce the use of opium than are the Germans to forswear tobacco.'

It is indeed sad that the Chinese Communist Party has not spent more time getting the facts of the case, comparing the words and actions of missionaries who loved China with those of the father of Marxism, who seems from his words to have been more racist than comrade.

Following the First Opium War and the Treaty of Nanjing the treaty ports of Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Shanghai and Ningbo were opened and the Island of Hong Kong (at the time no more than a tiny fishing village) was ceded to Great Britain. There was now greater freedom for missionaries to reach the Chinese though, unavoidably, Christianity became associated, in the eyes of most Chinese, with Western imperialism and opium. It was not always easy to distinguish the long-nosed foreigner who was a merchant, with a purely monetary motive, from a long-nosed foreigner who was a missionary with a spiritual motive.

Despite the far from ideal political climate in which the gospel was being brought to the Chinese, the good news was at least being proclaimed. Some of the most effective communicators were Chinese converts themselves who often worked with their family and clan connections and did more in informal settings.

They often spoke of the superior power to protect and heal of the Creator God, as opposed to the gods of Buddhism and Daoism.

Gützlaff founded the Chinese Union (*Hanhui*, 会) in 1844 to recruit Chinese evangelists. Quite rightly, he felt missionaries alone would never reach China's 350 million on their own. Lutz (2001:183) writes,

Union membership expanded rapidly...as did the reported number of converts. As was soon revealed, the majority were charlatans interested only in employment and the Chinese Union disintegrated upon Gützlaff's death in 1851. A small number, however, remained true to their call; they were instrumental in founding viable Hakka Christian communities in Meizhou and southeast Guangdong and small Cantonese congregations in the Pearl delta region. (See also Lutz, 1996:269-291)

Others were to learn from Gützlaff's approach of emphasizing itineration and the use of Chinese co-workers. Notable among these were American Presbyterian John L. Nevius (1829-1873) and J. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905, 戴德生), founder of the China Inland Mission (CIM, *Nei Di Hui*, 内地会)⁵⁸ one of the most famous missionaries to China. Nevius served in Ningbo, Hangzhou and Shandong before moving to Korea. His ideas⁵⁹ deeply affected the Korean church and formed the basis of the "three self-principles"⁶⁰ as originally enunciated (i.e. before the TSPM re-interpreted them for their own purposes).

Hudson Taylor who started out in Shanghai and Ningbo made it his practice, rather like Ricci centuries before him, to live and dress like those he was seeking to reach. This meant he wore Chinese dress which, in those days of Qing dynasty rule, was very different to what was worn by Europeans and Americans. Taylor

⁵⁸ See Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century*, 1981-89, 7 vols. Taylor first came to China in 1858 under the Chinese Evangelization Society and in 1865 founded the CIM.

⁵⁹ Roland Allen (1868-1947), an Anglican who served briefly in China from 1895 until c 1903, became a strong advocate of Nevius' ideas. In 1912 he published his famous "*Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?*" in which he criticized missionary paternalism and lack of trusting the Holy Spirit to guide the national church.

⁶⁰ The Three Self Principles are: Self-governing, self-supporting, & self-propagating.

also stressed the importance of learning the language and identifying with the Chinese, and stressed the need to go inland rather than remaining in the treaty ports.

Following the Second Opium War China was opened up even more to the outside world. The needs of the Chinese people were communicated powerfully to the home supporters. Hudson Taylor's *China's Spiritual Need and Claims* as well as his speaking, and the speaking and writing of others, stirred up growing interest in both Britain and America. It was a period of growth in terms of missionaries, societies and funding.

The number of Protestant missionaries in China grew from around 189 in 1860 to well over 3,400 in 1905. The CIM, and later other missions too, recruited single women as well as men, many of them playing vital roles in Bible teaching, education and social services. By 1905 Chinese Protestants totalled about 250,000 and there were around 300 ordained Chinese ministers, and many more Chinese evangelists and Bible women.

While many missionaries worked in evangelism and "church planting" in both rural and major inland towns and cities, some were led into working with Chinese scholars. Through "translations of Western secular works, science demonstrations, Chinese language periodicals, and philanthropic projects....(t)hey hoped to persuade Chinese that Christianity was an essential component of a civilization with a long and respectable heritage" (Lutz, 2001:185). Those taking this approach included Gilbert Reid, Young J. Allen, Timothy Richard, and W.A.P. Martin.

Gilbert Reid (1857-1927) started out as a Presbyterian but later formed his own organization to reach the "higher classes" – government officials at various levels and local elite. His organization, later called the International Institute of China, was eventually recognized by both the Qing dynasty government and by

the new republican government. His organization influenced many leaders to be more favourable to the Christian faith.

Young J. Allen (1836-1907) was a missionary with the American Methodist Episcopal Church. He combined his preaching work with teaching English and science in a government school in Shanghai. He later got into journalism and became editor of a Chinese-language publication *Shanghai Xinbao* (上海信报 Shanghai Daily News) and then produced *Jiaohui Xinbao* (教会信报 Church News) which gave Christians and non-Christians access to all kinds of news and information. Later he changed the name of *Jiaohui Xinbao* to *Wanguo Gongbao* (万国公报 Globe Magazine) which was designed to reach a much broader secular readership. Ralph Covell states, "Allen creatively combined both religious and secular activity to bring the Christian faith to the Chinese."⁶¹

Timothy Richard (1845-1919, 李提摩太) was a Baptist missionary from Wales (Soothill, 1924). An admirer of Hudson Taylor and his approach, in his early career he also adopted Chinese dress. Working in the interior he became convinced the church must become self-supporting and felt itinerant preaching was best done by Chinese. Missionaries, he felt, should concentrate their efforts on key leaders in society such as the scholar-gentry and reformist officials. His work in famine relief work (in Hebei and Shanxi between 1876 and 1879) led him to believe missions should concentrate more on helping the religious and educated elite to see the benefits of science that Christianity could bring. He befriended Confucian and Buddhist scholars and sought to share the gospel with them. Some have criticized Richard saying in his later years he "no longer believed in the exclusive claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ." (Ling, 2000) This they deduce from his statements such as:

⁶¹ See section under Allen in Anderson, Gerald H., ed. *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans (pb edition), 1998, written by Ralph R. Covell.

I don't believe the Mohammedans are unchristian in their worship of one true God instead of idols. I don't believe that the high moral teaching of any religion is devilish and unchristian. Christianity has the power of assimilating all that is good in other religions. We come here to counteract their false teachings and to fill up what is wanting just as Christ came not to destroy but to fulfill.⁶²

However, in actual fact Richards never lost his commitment to the uniqueness of the gospel. Through his study of other religions, however, and his contact with Chinese religious scholars he became more effective in sharing the gospel with them. Through his prolific writing, teaching and translation work he introduced science, history and other branches of Western learning along with Christianity to some of China's brightest minds. From 1891, based at various periods in Beijing, Tianjin, and Jinan, he worked mainly in literary and educational work aimed at the Chinese intelligentsia. He helped found Shanxi Imperial University (now the University of Shanxi) in Taiyuan using the Boxer indemnity money, and served as the first Chancellor. He served as an advisor to both the emperor and later to the republican government, having been on personal terms with top Qing dynasty officials as well as founding father of the Republic Sun Yat-sen and warlord Yuan Shi-kai. Richard was awarded two of the highest awards in the empire (the rank of Mandarin and the Order of the Double Dragon). He played a long and crucial role in leading the influential Christian Literature Society. Richard was undoubtedly one of the most influential missionaries ever to serve in China.

W.A.P. Martin (1827-1916) was an American Presbyterian missionary who started out in Ningbo, one of the treaty ports. With outstanding language skills he was asked to be involved in the American delegation that participated in the Treaty of Tientsin, the second of the "unequal treaties" that opened the whole of the country to foreigners (missionaries included). He spent fifty-seven years in China, the bulk of it in Beijing where he became renowned in education, administration

⁶² Timothy Richard to Baynes, Shansi, May 18, 1894; quoted in Rita Therese Johnson (Sister M. Virinia Therese, MM.), *Timothy Richard's Theory of Christian Missions to the Non-Christian World*, Ph.D. dissertation, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York, 1966, pp. 70-71.

and translation work. In 1869 he was asked by the imperial government to be President of Tongwen Imperial College (Tong Wen Guan 同文官, fore-runner of what later became Beijing University) and served in this capacity for many years. He was also the editor of the *Peking Magazine* and advised the government on education and politics. He wrote several major works in both English and Chinese. One of his books in Chinese, *Tiantao Suyuan* (天道夙愿 Evidences of Christianity) was widely acclaimed as a classic and had a wide circulation. He also wrote *Tiantao Hechiao* (Christianity and other creeds) and a seven-volume work, *Kowu jumen* (Natural philosophy). He translated Henry Eaton's *Elements of International Law* into Chinese and wrote several English books of his own such as *A Cycle of Cathay* which ran to three editions.

Another very influential missionary scholar was James Legge (1815-97) of the LMS. He spent most of his missionary career in Hong Kong associated with the Anglo-Chinese College and the Congregational Church (now Union Church on Hong Kong Island). He translated the Chinese classics and later became professor of Chinese at Oxford University, a position he held for twenty years until his death.

Other missionaries were better known for their preaching and itinerating work. One towering figure in the LMS was Griffith John (1831-1912). Arriving in China in 1855 he travelled widely in the interior but from 1861 was based in Wuhan (Hubei province) a major city straddling the Yangtze River. He was a powerful preacher in both English and Chinese and always drew large crowds. He trained numerous Chinese evangelists and wrote many tracts and articles that were circulated widely. He spent 60 years in China and was awarded a Doctor of Divinity degree by the University of Edinburgh in recognition of his work. Griffith John was renowned for his love for the Chinese people.

The story of the Cambridge Seven⁶³ stands tall in the annals of the CIM. Leaving for China in 1885 this illustrious group included some of England's most celebrated sportsmen of the time – one being star cricketer C.T. Studd (1860-1931). Studd served in north China till 1894 when due to poor health he returned to England. He later went to Africa and founded the Heart of Africa Mission that eventually became WEC International. Dixon E. Hoste (1861-1946) also worked in Shanxi Province where he was a close colleague of converted Confucian scholar and former opium addict Xi Sheng-mo (1835-1896, Pastor Hsi, 席胜魔).⁶⁴ Xi played a major role in the CIM work in Shanxi and founded several opium refuges to help addicts break free from their addiction. In 1902 Hoste, who was early recognized as a godly and gifted administrator and leader, succeeded Hudson Taylor as General Director of the CIM, a position Hoste held until he retired in 1935. Stanley P. Smith (1861-1931) also served in Shanxi with Xi Sheng-mo and engaged in rural evangelism and training of evangelists. Another of the Cambridge Seven, William W. Cassels (1858-1925), served mostly in Sichuan province – including the 30 years he was Anglican bishop for western China, relating to both CIM and CMS work in the province.

The contribution of missionaries and missions to education was enormous. By 1906 there were over 2,500 Protestant schools with about 57,000 students. These included schools for girls, extremely innovative for the time. Many of those graduating from the women's schools and colleges became influential teachers and Bible women. "[T]he percentage of literacy among Christians rose well above that of the total population." (Lutz, 2001:185) This trend was to continue as the new century unfolded.

Medicine was another area where missionaries and missions were to make a massive contribution. As part of their preparation for China many missionaries

⁶³ A.J. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century, Book Six: Assault on the Nine* London: Hodder, 1988 contains a full and thrilling account of the Cambridge Seven. Another standard work is John Pollock's *The Cambridge Seven* (1955, 1996).

⁶⁴ See Mrs Howard Taylor, *Pastor Hsi: Confucian Scholar and Christian* (1900; revised 1949, 1989).

armed themselves with basic medical knowledge but some were to specialize in the medical field and opened clinics and even hospitals.

One of these was Englishman John K. Mackenzie (1850-1888) led to faith partly through the preaching of American evangelist D.L. Moody. Having studied medicine he joined the LMS and started his missionary career in Hankou (Wuhan) in 1875, working closely with Griffith John. While studying Chinese he also engaged in some medical work that included helping opium addicts. In 1878 he moved to Tianjin where, having saved the life of the Viceroy Li Hongzhang's wife, he received funding to build a hospital in which he trained many local doctors. He was a skilled surgeon and a true evangelist and built strong relationships with the local people. Sadly at the relatively young age of 38 he died from smallpox caught from a patient. (Anderson, 1998:425-6)

Another medical man was Thomas Cochrane (1866-1953) a Scotsman also brought to faith through the preaching of D.L. Moody. After training as a doctor he offered himself to the LMS stating he was willing to go "where the work was most abundant and the workers the fewest." They sent him to Chaoyang in Liaoning Province where he worked with great dedication. During the Boxer outbreak in 1900 his life was miraculously spared when a group of sword-wielding Boxers who were about to kill him recognized him as the doctor who had saved lives. His own life was spared. Within a year of the Boxer rebellion Cochrane was in Beijing where he renovated a horse stable close to the Forbidden City turning it into a clinic for beggars. In a remarkable chain of events, clearly in direct answer to prayer, his vision for an institution to train Chinese doctors was to come into reality. With the support of the notorious Empress Dowager Ci Xi (慈禧太后) he founded the famous Peking Union Medical College (PMUC)⁶⁵. Later from 1915 PMUC was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and became the foremost medical training institution in China.

⁶⁵ This incredible story is told in Margaret Aitchison's excellent book, *"The Doctor & the Dragon: A Pioneer in Old Peking"* published by Pickering, 1983.

Many leading hospitals and medical colleges around China, in virtually every major city, as well as in many smaller centres, were founded by missionary endeavour. George L. Mackay (1844-1901) was a pioneer Canadian Presbyterian missionary in Taiwan. Although he and his Chinese wife, Tui Chang Mia, engaged in fruitful evangelistic work amongst Taiwanese and also amongst some of Taiwan's aboriginal tribes, they also raised funds for building churches, schools and clinics. He founded what became the Taiwan Theological College. The famous Mackay Memorial Hospital in Taipei is named after him.

One of the CIM's most well-known hospitals was in Lanzhou, Gansu province. It was named after William W. Bordon (1887-1913) who never actually made it to China. After completing his studies at Yale University, Bordon went to Egypt to study Arabic, in order to better prepare himself for reaching the Muslims of China. While in Egypt he contracted spinal meningitis and died within weeks. He had previously given his vast family fortune to missionary work. A scribbled note found under his pillow had the words: "No Reserve! No Retreat! No Regrets!" The Bordon Memorial Hospital in Lanzhou, a city with a large Hui Muslim population, was a fitting memorial indeed.

Despite all that had been accomplished, towards the end of the nineteenth century there was evidence of growing opposition to Christian and foreign influence across China. This reached a peak in 1900 with the outbreak of the Boxer Uprising of 1900 when some 30,000 Chinese Christians and 200 foreign missionaries lost their lives. In order to protect foreigners an international expeditionary force occupied Beijing. The Qing dynasty was in its final years.

3.5.2 The Second Century of Protestant Endeavour

In 1911, with the founding of the Republic of China (*zhonghua minguo* 中 民 国), Western democracy replaced the Chinese imperial system. The

revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen was a Christian, and had been educated in Hawaii and Hong Kong. Many supporters of the revolution were Christians who had studied in Mission schools. Sun Yat-sen's famous Three Principles of the People (*san min zhu yi*, 三民主义, 民族, 民, 民生) included Christian values and promoted democracy.

Christianity enjoyed unprecedented popularity, with many seeing the link between modernization and western culture. It was always a danger to confuse western culture and Christianity – a danger both for foreigners and Chinese – but none could deny there was a connection between the two. By 1920 educational institutions founded by missionaries and funded by the church included 16 colleges, 400 high schools, 2,000 primary schools, and 400 hospitals. Some of these colleges have direct historical links with some of China's present-day universities such as Beijing University, St John's and Shanghai University, Suzhou University, Hangzhou University, Fujian Normal University, Nanjing University, West China University, and Shanxi University. By 1925 there were "about 250,000 pupils in Protestant primary and middle schools" (Lutz, 1971:161-2). The number of Protestant missionaries had surpassed 8,000 by 1925 and the estimated number of Chinese Christians (not including Catholics) was around 500,000. Christian organizations like the YMCA and YWCA became well established. At the same time, Chinese started to form autonomous churches quite outside the control and influence of the foreign-led missions and churches. This latter development was of course a positive one and very much in line with the policies of groups like the CIM that encouraged indigenization.

Despite all the positive growth, however, beginning in the 1920s there was a sharp rise in anti-Christian sentiment, mainly on the part of anti-imperialist nationalists. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 gave birth to anti-Christian movements among urban intellectuals, who criticized religion as anti-scientific and outdated. (Yip, 1980) The May 30 1925 Movement, which saw China-wide demonstrations after British troops killed student demonstrators in Shanghai,

involved anti-imperialist nationalism. At the time both the KMT (*Guo min dang*, 国民党) and the Communists were striving for political power. "...Marxism provided a new framework for interpreting world history. Christian missions and schools were condemned for cultural imperialism." (Lutz, 2001:190-1) Christians were criticized as being the "running dogs" of Western missionaries, who were, in turn, regarded as the "vanguard of imperialist capitalists". It was the kind of criticism that twenty five years later the Communists used in their propaganda while engaging in the harsh repression and persecution of Christians.

In terms of the missionary community, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, it was also evident that in addition to those with evangelical and conservative views there was a growing number who were theologically liberal and who were proponents of a purely "social gospel". This theological division, along with the growing number of mission groups and denominations, did mean that the unity and consensus that tended to characterize the first century of Protestant endeavour was increasingly hard to maintain.

The variety amongst Chinese Christians also increased. Many had received a good education and were beginning to make a contribution in all sorts of areas such as education, medicine, agriculture, law, journalism, and in government service as well as in the church. Some were liberal theologically while others were evangelical, many of the former holding positions in the Christian colleges or in the YMCA. One well-known evangelical was Ding Limei (1871-1936, 丁立美) from Shandong who served as a pastor before becoming the first travelling secretary of the Student Volunteer Movement in 1910. For well over ten years he travelled all over China holding popular evangelistic meetings in Christian schools and colleges.

Many Chinese Christian leaders were not happy with the fact that leadership and financial control in the missions and churches was still too often in the hands of foreign missionaries and administrators. There was a drive for greater

autonomy and more local leadership. Some of these Chinese Church leaders “became Chinese spokesmen in the National Christian Council, a liaison committee for Protestant churches, and the Church of Christ in China (CCC), established in 1927 to work toward independence and a post-denominational union of all Protestants in China”. (Lutz, 2001:189) Not all missions, including the Anglicans and Lutherans, joined the CCC. They preferred to further develop their own denominational work. Others like the China Inland Mission objected on theological grounds. The CIM “continued in what was basically a foreign-dominated structure at the top levels, but tried to promote sensitivity to and encouragement of Chinese Christians’ aspirations to responsibility and autonomy at the local level.” (Bays, 1995:309)

This was a period when several Chinese groups totally independent of foreign missions came into being. The China Christian Independent Church (*Zhongguo Yesujiao zilihui*, 中国基督教自立会) was an association which by 1920 had over 100 member churches - mostly urban middle class. The True Jesus Church (*Zhen Yesu jiaohui*, 真耶 教会), founded in 1917, was a pentecostal and exclusivist, mostly rural-based, group. (Ibid, 1995:310-1) Another group was the Jesus Family (*Yesu jiating*, 耶 家庭) found mostly in rural north and central China. It was founded in Shandong in the early 1920s by Jing Dianyong (Hunter, 2004:121). Jing and his wife were admirers of the CIM and were influenced by Miss Dillenbeck, an American Methodist missionary. The members of the Jesus Family lived and worked in community, and provided for those in need including the sick and destitute. It was a remarkable indigenous movement that modeled itself on the early Church and sent out teams to evangelize. By the 1940s it had grown to some 20,000 believers in over 100 locations.⁶⁶

An even more influential group was the Assembly Hall (*Ju hui suo*, 聚会所) or “Little Flock” (*Xiao qun*, 小群) led by Ni Tuo-sheng (倪柝声), known in the West

⁶⁶ See D. Vaughan Rees, *The ‘Jesus Family’ in Communist China*, Exeter: Paternoster, 1959.

as Watchman Nee⁶⁷ (1903-1972). Watchman Nee was a prolific writer and a powerful Bible teacher who set up “local assemblies” all over China and in many Chinese communities in south-east Asia. Ni was strongly influenced by a British CMS missionary Miss Barber and by Mr T Austin-Sparks of London, but he was staunchly independent. The Little Flock was a truly indigenous movement and claimed over 70,000 members, organized into some 700 assemblies. Ni was imprisoned in 1952 by the Communist government and remained in prison till his death twenty years later. Ni was a towering figure in the Chinese Church. Almost all his numerous books have been translated into English and many other languages, the most famous being *The Normal Christian Life*.

Other famous Chinese Christian leaders born around the turn of the century were Dr John Sung (1901-1944, Song Shang-jie, 宋尚节), Wang Mingdao (1900-1991, 王明道), and Andrew Gih (1901-1985 Ji Zhiwen, 志文).

Andrew Gih and John Sung were part of the “Bethel Evangelistic Band” (*Boteli budaotuan*, 伯特利布道团) which drew large crowds as they preached and sang in meetings all over China. Gih later formed the Evangelize China Fellowship (ECF) and opened a church in Shanghai. With the Communist take-over in 1949 he moved to Hong Kong. ECF spread to Taiwan and to six other countries in Southeast Asia as well as to the United States, establishing 375 churches and chapels, seven schools, and two seminaries⁶⁸.

John Sung studied in the USA obtaining a PhD in chemistry. He later returned to China at the call of God to preach the gospel. From the late 1920s into the early 1940s he preached to increasingly large crowds all over China and south-east Asia. Churches were revived and many tens of thousands were swept into the Kingdom. Healing miracles were often reported at his meetings. John

⁶⁷ A few biographies have been written about Watchman Nee, such as Angus Kinnear's *Against the Tide*, Kingsway, 1973. See also Leslie Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, OMF, 1973.

⁶⁸ See Donald E. MacInnis, *Gih, Andrew*, in Gerald H. Anderson edited, *Biographical Directory of Christian Missions*, 1998.

Sung was unconventional (in preaching style and content) and his ministry was entirely indigenous in nature. He was critical of lukewarm formalism, missionary control and liberal theology in the established churches. (Xi, 1999)

Wang Ming-dao was a fearless preacher and gifted Bible teacher who travelled widely in China during the 1920s and 1930s. He was pastor of a large church in Beijing, the Christian Tabernacle (北京基督徒会堂), built in 1937. During the Japanese occupation he rejected the efforts of the Japanese to get him to join an inter-church organization set up to garner support for the regime. He was to do the same in the 1950s when the Communist government wanted him to join the TSPM. Like John Sung and Watchman Nee, Wang Ming-dao was often critical of missionary control in the Chinese church and also opposed liberal theology. However he was never anti-missionary and was warmly respected by many missionaries, evangelicals in particular. After the Communists came to power he became a major target of the Party's United Front policy. Showing absolutely no willingness to join the TSPM he was finally arrested in 1954 and was to spend a total of twenty three years in prison and labour camp.⁶⁹

Most of the leaders of these independent groups had strong roots in mission-founded churches – Watchman Nee was the grandson of an American Mission Board (ABCFM) pastor in Fuzhou, John Sung was the son of a Methodist pastor, and Paul Wei of the True Jesus Church grew up in an LMS church. They all believed in the authority and inspiration of Scripture and used the Union version of 1919, a translation that came out of the efforts of the mainline denominations. There was, in fact, not as much separation as may be imagined between the Mission-founded churches and the more independent groups. Many of the

⁶⁹ There are several books about Wang Ming-dao. One in Chinese is by Stephen Wang 王新, who himself suffered in prison for many years, and is entitled 又四十年 *You Si Shi Nian*, Canada Gospel Publishing House, Scarborough, Dec 1997. An adapted version in English is called *The Long Road to Freedom: the Life Story of Wang Ming Dao*.

converts and members of the independent groups had come up through mission schools, student groups and even churches.

Having written about several well-known Chinese evangelists and church leaders it is worth mentioning some of the foreigners who served during this period. One was Canadian Presbyterian Jonathan Goforth (1859-1936) and his wife Rosalind (1864-1942). They began their missionary career in Henan in 1888 and narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Boxers in 1900. Goforth was inspired by news of the Welsh revival in 1904/5 and later he visited Korea where another revival was stirring. As he shared with churches and missionaries in Northeast China he was caught up in what came to be known as the “Manchurian revival” which revolutionized his own life and ministry. Goforth became well known throughout China for his preaching about revival and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, though he remained based in Manchuria. He wrote a number of books on revival, and his wife’s book *“Goforth of China”* first published in 1937, the year after his death, had many reprints.

Another missionary who was instrumental in stirring spiritual revival amongst both fellow missionaries and Chinese was Marie Monsen (1878-1962) of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission. For the first twenty years of her ministry in China she battled ill health and discouragement but she also began to pray for revival. From the mid-1920s God began to use Monsen’s preaching to bring conviction of sin and new life to her hearers. Remarkable things began to happen in churches, at conferences and in Bible Schools as she was invited to speak. This included meetings in Northeast China (Manchurian) and in Shandong where she ministered to other missionaries. The beginning of the Shandong revival has been traced to her visit in 1929 and it continued through the early 1930s. Crawford wrote about the revival saying, “...it was a work of deep faith, relying on the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. In the first revival meetings in Shantung there was very poor singing, no altar calls, no chance given for public confession, but only the pressing home of the quiet question, ‘Have you been born again?’” (Crawford, 1933)

Monsen was very quiet in her manner and none could accuse her of emotionalism. Although she spoke of the need for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spoke of her own experience in this regard she herself said she did not speak in tongues. There were reports of healings as a result of her ministry and the work of the Holy Spirit continued long after she had left. Valerie Griffiths writes,

The results of this ministry were practical and enduring. Once sin was acknowledged, restitution followed: what had been stolen was returned, or compensation given...Long-standing hostility between individuals was confessed and forgiven, even though this involved 'loss of face' in front of others. This particularly ran against Chinese culture, and non-Christians were astonished at what they saw. In some cases, leading men apologized to women for their behaviour. Women admitted infanticide and ill-treating their daughters-in-law. Husbands admitted treating their wives harshly, to the point of physical violence. The witness of changed lives spread blessing: ordinary church members formed evangelistic teams and went out to country villages with the message of forgiveness for those who repented. Whole churches were transformed. (Griffiths, 2004:262)

Monsen's ministry impacted many missionary groups including the Southern Baptists and Presbyterians, who traditionally were wary of, if not opposed to, teaching about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of "charismatic" gifts.

Marie Monsen had other helpers, one of whom was Danish missionary Anna Christensen, affiliated with the CIM. After Monsen retired in 1932 Christensen continued to minister widely across China right through to when she left China in 1950, after the communist take-over. She spent 35 years in China, two thirds of it as an itinerant evangelist ministering in at least nineteen provinces. Her ministry, like that of Monsen, impacted Chinese and missionary alike. In the thirties her ministry overlapped with and influenced the young Chinese preachers of the Bethel Evangelistic Band. On a visit to Yunnan in 1938 James Fraser and his wife Roxy travelled with her and like many others they too were deeply blessed by her ministry.

James O. Fraser (1886-1938) of the CIM was another missionary who experienced remarkable events in his ministry. Based largely in the far Southwest province of Yunnan, Fraser worked with the Lisu people, a Tibeto-Burmese national minority living in the mountains and deep river valleys of the border area between China and Burma. Fraser was a gifted musician and linguist but it was his emphasis on prayer that was the key to breakthrough amongst the Lisu, hitherto totally unreached. "By 1918, sparked by family evangelism carried on by the people themselves, 60,000 believers had been baptized. Fraser was known for his ability to organize the people into strong indigenous churches that became models for church-planting ventures..." (Anderson, 1998:224) Fraser was a man of prayer and always saw his success as divine action in answer to the prayers of faithful supporters back home. This truth is powerfully portrayed in the book *Mountain Rain* by Eileen Crossman, published by OMF in 1982.

Gladys Aylward (1902-1970) had little formal education but she had single-minded determination and a clear sense of call. Despite her apparent lack of qualifications, such that she was turned down by the CIM, she not only came to China (independently) but was to make a remarkable contribution. She learnt the local dialect and truly identified herself with the Chinese, so much so that she even became a Chinese citizen. She won the respect and favour of an official in Jincheng in Shanxi who appointed her an inspector to help enforce rules against the practice of foot-binding. During the chaos of the war years she sheltered many orphans and in an epic journey across the mountains led them to safety in Xi'an, in the neighbouring province of Shaanxi. This was vividly, if somewhat romantically, portrayed in the 1959 film starring Ingrid Bergman, *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*. Gladys Aylward was later to continue her work with children in Taiwan.

A trio of CIM ladies who became well-known for their epic journeys in the Gobi and along the silk route through the Gansu panhandle to Xinjiang was sisters Francesca (1871-1961) and Eva French (1869-1961) and Mildred Cable (1877-

1952)⁷⁰. They were prolific writers, and Mildred in particular was a popular speaker (back in England). The trio stirred great interest and concern for the peoples of Northwest China and Xinjiang. They were evangelists at heart sharing the good news wherever they travelled and also selling Gospels and Bibles. On one trip they reported visiting 2700 homes, conducting 665 meetings and distributing thousands of pieces of literature (Benson, 2001). Wearing Chinese clothes and being women they were able to meet with Muslim women and be invited into homes in a way impossible for any male missionary. One of the many books authored by Mildred and Francesca was a biography about fellow CIM missionary George W. Hunter (1861-1946) (Cable, 1948) who worked amongst Muslim peoples in Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai before moving to Xinjiang. Based in Urumqi he travelled all over Xinjiang sharing the gospel with individuals and distributing evangelistic booklets and portions of Scripture which he had translated (into Uyghur, Kazak and Khalkha Mongolian). He helped the Swedish Mission in Kashgar⁷¹ as well as Russian Baptists living in Gulja (present day Yili).⁷² Response in the Northwest was never very encouraging. Hunter and his CIM colleague Percy C. Mather (1884-1933) claimed they had only seen 19 converts by 1927 after working together in Xinjiang for more than twelve years.

The devastation of the First World War shattered any utopian optimism in the West and was followed by the economic hardships of the Great Depression. This affected missions in China with fewer recruits and less financial support for schools and hospitals. These difficulties, however, further encouraged the process of indigenization. Countering this healthy development, liberal theology made further inroads adversely affecting some denominations, and there was a growing

⁷⁰ (Griffiths, 2004) tells the stories of many amazing women missionaries who served in China, including Mildred Cable and the French sisters (see in particular pages 184-243).

⁷¹ The Swedish Mission in Kashgar began in 1892 and by the 1930s had a flourishing work – running homes for destitute children, schools, a printing press, hospitals and churches. In 1938 however serious unrest and opposition from a local warlord forced the closure of their work. The churches were destroyed, over 100 local male believers were killed and the women forced to marry Muslim men.

⁷² A brief overview of Hunter's life is given in Gerald H. Anderson ed, *The Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions, Grand Rapids, Wm B. Eerdmans*, 1998, p 311-2, section written by Ralph Covell.

gap between urban and rural churches. “Even though three-fourths of the population lived in rural China, Protestant missions and social service programs were oriented toward urban China.” (Lutz, 2001:191)

The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and later their occupation of large swathes of China and south-east Asia brought more hardships. There were the ravages of war and the plight of refugees. Some colleges and universities as well as missionaries evacuated to places like Sichuan. Most Chinese, of course, had no choice but to remain under Japanese occupation. Some Christian colleges, as well as missionaries, remained in the eastern areas controlled by the Japanese. Many missionaries were able to claim neutrality and used this to protect Chinese flocking onto mission compounds. This was to change once Japan attacked America at Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Foreigners were either evacuated or found themselves interned by the Japanese.

One of those interned was the famous champion sprinter Eric H. Liddell (1902-1945) who won gold at the 1924 Paris Olympics. Known as the “Flying Scotsman”, his story is told in the Oscar winning movie *Chariots of Fire*. Liddell was born in Tianjin (of missionary parents), and in 1925 he returned to Tianjin with the LMS where he taught in the Anglo-Chinese Christian College. Along with 1,500 others (including the children from the CIM’s Chefoo School for missionary children) he was interned by the Japanese in Weixian concentration camp, near Weifang in Shandong. His godly life was an inspiration to all who knew him. Liddell died in the concentration camp barely six months before the war ended (Anderson, 1998:400).

With so many missionaries out of action during the war with Japan the “...Chinese were left to carry on and once again the Chinese Protestant church moved toward independence, union, and Chinese control”. (Brook, 1996: 317-37) No sooner had the war ended and the churches and missions sought to re-establish their work than civil war broke out between the Nationalist government of

the KMT and the Communists. It was in this climate of uncertainty and growing chaos that the new China Inter Varsity movement flourished amongst students. In his book *God Reigns in China*, Leslie T. Lyall (1905-1996) of the CIM described a student conference held in Nanjing in 1947:

Those were days the likes of which would never be repeated...Several hundred students gathered representing every university in China, the majority of them aflame with their first love for Christ. Others were comparative veterans, having been converted during the war and some having attended the only previous evangelical student conference in Chongqing in 1945.

Another CIM missionary working with students was David H. Adeney (1911-1994, *Ai De-li*, 艾得理) (Armitage, 1993). Adeney worked for several years in rural Henan and then after the war he returned to China with his wife Ruth and was involved with students, basing himself mainly in Nanjing. Adeney and Calvin Chao (*Zhao Junying*, 君影), leader of China Inter Varsity, were amongst those attending the inaugural meeting of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) held in Boston, USA, in 1947. Calvin Chao left China when the Communists came to power but remained active in Southeast Asia.⁷³ After having to leave China, Adeney returned to work with students in the USA and served as director of the fourth Urbana Mission Convention of Inter Varsity held in 1954. He then worked in Southeast Asia and saw the start of a number of IFES-related student movements. He founded the Discipleship Training Centre in Singapore and never lost his passion for the Church in China. David Adeney founded the Pray for China Fellowship that later developed into the monthly prayer report of OMF, now called Global Chinese Ministries. Adeney prayed personally every day for a long list of his former friends and students in China – not knowing how they were doing during the dark years of the Fifties and then the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Arthur F. Glasser writes of David Adeney, “Greatly loved, especially by Asian students, he embodied all the best characteristics of the twentieth

⁷³ After leaving China, Calvin Chao served with CNEC (now Partners International) and he also served as the first Principal of Singapore Bible College which was set up in 1952.

century Western missionary.” Adeney’s life and his passion for China inspired many, both Chinese and non-Chinese. It was my privilege to work very closely with Dr Adeney (or “David” as he preferred to be called) during the eighties and into the nineties.

The Communists defeated the KMT in the brutal civil war and on October 1, 1949 Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the Peoples’ Republic of China in Beijing. A new era was beginning. The Chinese Protestant Church could no longer be accused of being run or controlled by foreigners, and in any case, by 1951 all missionaries had been finally expelled from China. Some more liberal Christians, such as Wu Yaozong (1893-1979, 吴耀宗), were happy to cooperate with the new leaders and endorsed their socialist views. However thousands of Chinese pastors and Christian leaders and hundreds of thousands of Chinese believers were soon to be engulfed by the fires of persecution.

3.5.3 Lessons to be learnt from the Protestant Missionary Movement

What are some of the lessons that can be learnt from the first one hundred and fifty years of Protestant missions in China?

1. Politics – a mine-field of sensitivities

From the earliest days when Morrison first tried to enter the Chinese empire with the gospel politics complicated everything – both Chinese politics and western politics. The Qing dynasty was politically closed to the outside world and did not want western trade or religion. The heavy-handed, unscrupulous activities of Western powers trying to force China open also made it difficult for fellow westerners who came with the Bible. The association of missionaries with opium traders and “gunboat diplomacy” muddied the waters for messengers of the gospel. The Opium Wars and “unequal treaties” may have led to more freedom for missionary work but they left a deep wound in the Chinese psyche. Sometimes it

was their own governments which made things difficult for the missionary, and sometimes the actions and attitudes of other foreigners adversely affected relationships with the Chinese. Christianity in the minds of some will always be associated with foreign aggression and imperialism. The Boxer period in 1900 saw an explosion of violent opposition to foreign influence in China. Christians and missionaries took the brunt of this fury simply because they were more exposed.

In the early years of the new republic following the overthrow of the Qing dynasty Christianity enjoyed much favour and influence. However the political tides and nationalistic movements in the 1920s brought the Church and missions under renewed attack. During the thirties with general chaos, political struggle and economic hardship missionaries and the Church again paid a high price. The trauma of the Japanese occupation was followed by civil war. At times the political climate favoured the spreading of the good news (uncertainty and suffering can soften hard hearts) but never was there not some cost involved in being a follower of Jesus Christ. This was to become even more the case once the Communists came to power in 1949.

Political events affect the Church, if not directly then indirectly. Foreign involvement always complicates the equation and even when not wanting to become embroiled in politics the foreigner often cannot avoid it. Political sensitivities are avoidable. What is needed however is great wisdom to know how to react and how not to react. We need to be those who “understand the times” and those who “have the mind of Christ”.

2. Cultural sensitivity and good language skills – building bridges to the heart

There can be no place for racial, national or cultural pride. Those who made the greatest impact were those who respected and loved the Chinese. In an age when western culture and the gospel were all too easily confused, not least in the

minds of western missionaries themselves, cultural insensitivity was often a problem. When the foreigner came across as arrogant and superior the Chinese, with their long history and rich culture, would not be impressed. No wonder they often regarded foreigners as “uncivilized barbarians”. When however the foreigner sought to be a humble learner and a servant, deep and lasting relationships were developed between them and the people they sought to serve. Loving sacrifice always communicated with the heart.

Fluency in the language was also an essential ingredient in effectiveness with the people. Many of those who attained a high degree of fluency were both respected in society and loved in the Church. They were able to communicate God’s truth in the language of the heart and with appropriate cultural understanding. It helped break down the barrier of Christianity being seen as something foreign. Missionaries like Griffith John were fluent in Chinese and great crowds would come to listen to him preach. Many of the individuals highlighted in this chapter had fluent Chinese – people like Hudson Taylor, Timothy Richard, and W.A.P. Martin. Not all missionaries were brilliant orators like Griffith John but they were there for the long-term and continued to improve the level of their language (through study and practice) and their ability to communicate the truth. The CIM always stressed the importance of language acquisition and many of its workers became fluent in both standard Chinese and local dialects. Language learning has never been an easy task and always demanded many years of hard, dedicated study.

Even some workers who died young and did not have time to learn the language to any degree of fluency left a legacy that was remembered. One of many examples is that of Dr Emil Fischbacher (1903-1933) who for a brief two years served in Xinjiang mostly learning the language before being called in to use his medical skills. While helping the wounded and dying during vicious fighting in a siege of Urumqi in 1933, both Fischbacher and his senior colleague Percy Mather

contracted either typhus or typhoid and died within three days of each other. Over seventy years later their graves are still known and cared for by local believers.

There are countless other cases of foreigners held in loving esteem for their sacrificial service. Two such examples have recently been reported by OMF⁷⁴ - the first being Eric Liddell of *Chariots of Fire* fame who died in the Japanese internment camp in Weixian (Shandong). During a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of the liberation from Japanese occupation a wreath was laid at a memorial marking his grave by Chinese officials, old friends, and fellow inmates of the camp. The other case, reported by OMF, relates to J.O. Fraser, missionary to the Lisu of Yunnan. A memorial to Fraser stands on the outskirts of Baoshan city and another in the Lisu Autonomous County of Weixi in Northwestern Yunnan. The latter is inscribed in Lisu, Chinese and English: "IN LOVING MEMORY. JAMES O FRASER 1888-1938. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News. WITH DEEPEST LOVE REMEMBER YOU ALWAYS – THE LISU CHURCH." Truly, long term commitment, love and good language skills are a way to the mind and the heart.

3. Reaching the elite and powerful – a strategy for changing the nation

The strategic nature of reaching the educated classes and those who hold positions of influence and authority in society is clearly illustrated in the experience of the Protestant missionary movement in China. Christian schools, colleges and hospitals not only made an enormous contribution to modernization and development of China as a nation but provided a legitimate and effective platform for sharing Christ with the Chinese. Education, medical work and social services were never a substitute for grassroots evangelism and the establishing of churches but they strongly supported and helped facilitate the witness of the Church. In "The Missionary Memorandum" dated July 14th, 1869 a group of

⁷⁴ Global Chinese Ministries, "Missionaries honoured in China today", OMF International November 2005.

missionaries responded to criticisms of missionary endeavour made by Sir Rutherford Alcock, the chief British representative in Beijing at the time.

You have conveyed the impression to H.M. government that Protestant missionaries make no attempt to reach the ruling class in China ...We assert ... on the other hand that this is *not* a fact ... Nearly a hundred works on science, medicine, history, geography, law, and miscellaneous subjects, have been published in China by Protestant missionaries ... in a style so acceptable to the learned class, that men belonging to this class, when acting as Governors and Viceroys, have reprinted at their own expense not a few of them ... The object has been to inform the minds of the Chinese, so as to remove their prejudices, to induce them to think with candour, and thus pave the way for presenting Christianity to their attention. (Broomhall, 1885:460-1)

In succeeding years the contribution of missionaries to science, education, medicine, and social service mushroomed – as has been illustrated in this chapter. Some extremely influential Chinese were reaching for Christ – including senior officials in the Qing dynasty court and later in the republican government. Sun Yat-sen himself was a believer and Madam Chiang Kai-shek, wife of the leader of the Nationalist KMT, was also a committed Christian. Her husband himself claimed to have made a commitment to Christ. In the one hundred and fifty years of Protestant missionary endeavour in China many in positions of influence and power were touched by the gospel. The Protestant contribution to Chinese society deeply influenced the nation for good. Even after more than fifty years under communist rule when everything related to missionary work was, at one time or another, attacked this legacy is not forgotten. It cannot be wiped from history.

Of course very few missionaries were spiritual giants. Some became disillusioned as is pointed out by Jonathan Spence, Professor of Chinese History at Yale. Peter Parker (1804-1888) was a pioneer in medical missions in China and during two decades of medical work in China is reputed to have treated more than 50,000 patients. However he, apparently, led almost no one to faith in Christ. Towards the end of his otherwise illustrious life he is said to have been “incontinently angered by those he had meant to love” (Spence, 1969:56). Clearly

more was needed than hard work and professional skill. However, where foreign Christians have served with skill, integrity, and dedication, in whatever field of expertise, they have left a fragrance that has helped dispel long-held prejudices and opposition to the gospel.

4. Reaching ordinary people, addressing real needs - at the heart of Christianity

While some were called to reach those in positions of influence others felt called to focus their efforts on meeting the needs of ordinary citizens. It was this concern for the masses that led many missionaries to travel inland away from the relative comfort and safety of the treaty ports. In this chapter we have mentioned several who made contributions in meeting the needs of society through alleviating poverty and caring for opium addicts, through bringing education and medical services, providing for orphans, and engaging in disaster relief. It is interesting to me how so little has changed. Of course China in the first decade of the twenty-first century is a very different nation to what it was two hundred or even fifty years ago – politically and economically. What has not changed however is the need for messengers of the good news to care for the needs of people - showing by their actions the love of Christ. In today's China, where missionaries are not allowed, many faith-based NGOs are engaging in many similar "mercy-ministries" today – working with the poor, with drug addicts, in medical services, in education, with orphans, with the disabled, in development and emergency relief. It is the Christian response to the needs of the whole person.

5. Evangelism and establishing churches – a primary concern.

Griffith John knew perfectly well that many missionaries were men and women of great education and influence but he wrote,

...it must be confessed that some of the best missionaries are men of whom the noisy world hears least ... the man who is to be found in season and out of season

superintending his churches, schools, and Bible classes, preaching and teaching in the chapels, the streets, the tea-gardens, and other places of public resort; travelling among the surrounding towns and villages, everywhere dispensing the bread of life to perishing men...This is the true Apostolic succession, the missionary *par excellence*, the kind of man that Christ most needs at the present time...The one class of missionaries have left behind them books of more or less value; the other class have left behind them churches of living men and women.⁷⁵

It is interesting to note that many of the areas where Protestant missions worked hardest and longest in grass-roots evangelism are today the very places where the church is strongest – places like Henan, Anhui, Zhejiang, and Shandong. The city where CIMer David Adeney lived in Henan in the 1930s and from where he did itinerant evangelism, a place called Fangcheng, was forty or fifty years later to become the centre of one of China's major house church networks - country-wide numbering in the millions. There has to be a connection in God's economy between the prayerful sowing in tears fifty years ago with the abundant harvest of today.

Whether or not foreigners can and should focus on what is popularly called "church planting" today is another question and will be looked at later in this thesis. However a heart burning with a desire to see people find Christ and to see His church established is surely a prerequisite for anyone seeking to effectively communicate the good news today. The methods and strategy used in the process of communicating are a separate question.

6. Indigenization and national leadership – to be celebrated

If anything this was an area where Mission agencies and denominational churches acted too slowly. From the earliest days, however, there were those, such as Gütslaff, who did see the strategic need of training and releasing Chinese workers for ministry. Hudson Taylor and the CIM agreed, as did Griffith John of the

⁷⁵ Quoted in Thompson, R. Wardlaw: *Griffith John*, pp 267-8.

LMS. Lutz makes an extremely important point, “The history of Protestant Christianity in China was more than the story of heroic efforts by Western missionaries and resistance by Chinese, for Chinese Christians themselves had played a crucial role in propagating and interpreting Christianity”. (2001:180) The work of Xi Sheng-mo in Shanxi clearly illustrates this. J.Campbell Gibson (1849-1919) of the English Presbyterian Mission wrote about the importance of having Chinese assistants helping with preaching. “(T)he native speaker supporting and enforcing Christian teaching with a wealth of local knowledge and native experience which no missionary can possess, carries more weight with a native audience.” (Hood, 1986:181) Lutz comments: “Despite the virtual absence of individualized Chinese associates in mission correspondence, the Protestant mission was in reality a Sino-foreign enterprise.” (2001:180)

Despite this it is obvious not all Chinese believers felt the missions were sufficiently trusting when it came to encouraging local leadership or in letting go of the purse strings. It is perhaps not surprising that many of the Chinese most powerfully used in the building and expansion of God’s Kingdom in China in the twentieth century did so outside of the traditional missions – these included Wang Ming-dao, John Sung and Watchman Nee. While not opposed to the work of their western missionary friends they were often critical of certain aspects of their work. They were opposed to foreign control and also lamented the influence of western liberal theology that by the 1920s was already adversely affecting the life of certain sections of the church in China.

There is a clear lesson for today. Those who seek to bring good news today must look for ways to partner with and empower local colleagues. It is the locals who will do a far more effective job. They understand the language and the culture far better than the foreigner. Given the tools and the opportunity they will only enhance the work, taking it to new levels.

7. Liberal theology and narrow “fundamentalism” – twin dangers.

The Edinburgh Conference of 1910 led by Dr John R. Mott brought together representatives from many nations and denominations under the slogan, "The Evangelization of the World in This Generation." "Most participants seemed to take for granted that the Great Commission of Christ (Matthew 28:19) was the only basis needed for the missionary enterprise ... the missionary obligation was considered a self-evident axiom to be obeyed, not to be questioned." (Anderson, 1961:5) However other conferences were to follow and at the Jerusalem Conference of 1928 the influence of secularism, liberal theology and the emergent "social gospel movement" was all too evident. Bishop Stephen Neill, who was an evangelical leader active in the World Council of Churches, regarded the conference as "the nadir of the modern missionary movement". He gave as his reason: "This was the moment at which liberal theology exercised its most fatal influence on missionary thinking, the lowest valley out of which the missionary movement has ever since been trying to make its way." (Neill, 1957:151, 2)

Liberal theology, with its undermining of trust in the authority of the Bible and its questioning of many aspects of orthodox Christian faith, including the supernatural and the lost state of man, seriously eroded the spiritual life in some of the historic denominations in the "sending countries". Formerly strongly evangelical movements (like the LMS) began to decline in the first half of the twentieth century. The denominational training institutions in the "sending" nations were turning out men and women with far less passion for evangelism and far less confidence in the Word of God. Neill in referring to the influence of liberal theology in China says:

Christianity was presented much more as a program of social and political reform than as a religion of redemption. But the concepts of liberal Christianity proved in the end less dynamic than those of Marxist Communism...The liberal interpretation of the Bible, from which both the prophetic and eschatological dimensions were almost wholly absent ... produced a widespread lack of interest in theology, an almost total lack of

the sense of worship, and an almost total lack of understanding of the nature of the church. (Ibid, 1957)

Those influenced by liberal theology became more concerned for a purely “social gospel” and were critical of those engaging in more “narrow”, as they saw it, evangelism. There was an increasingly serious divide between evangelical groups (including the CIM and other newer missions like the Christian & Missionary Alliance and the Assemblies of God) and those linked to the traditional denominations. A Presbyterian missionary expressed great concern in 1921 about the fact that most of the missionaries then going out to China under his mission board were going out to teach in Christian schools, rather than to carry on evangelistic work. “As I become acquainted with them,” he wrote, “I discover why it is that they are coming out to teach rather than to preach. They have nothing to preach.”⁷⁶ Liberal theology, by questioning the authority of the Bible, tended to dampen evangelical zeal and encourage a more humanistic approach to social and political issues. Groups like the YMCA began to be influenced by this approach to Christianity. It was an environment in which communist sympathizers like Wu Yao-zong (吴耀宗) could feel at home.

Those, on the other hand, who so stressed evangelism that they disregarded the needs of the whole person surely did not reflect true biblical Christianity either. Often, misleadingly I believe, called “fundamentalists”⁷⁷ those with this narrow approach were more interested in “saving souls” than in transforming lives. Biblically speaking there should be no conflict between the two. People are a complex whole and have a range of needs. The Bible teaches us to avoid the hypocrisy of ignoring the physical needs of those we seek to bless spiritually.⁷⁸ A truly converted individual will surely reflect that change in their life and relationships, and thereby begin to change society around.

⁷⁶ This was mentioned by Harold Laird in an address to students, *Christ, the Lord of Missions*, at the 1948 Urbana Missions Convention. See www.urbana.org/_articles.cfm?Category=16 as accessed 18/01/06.

⁷⁷ See J.I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, Eerdmans, 1988.

⁷⁸ James 2:14-16

The lesson in all this is the importance of holding to the historic faith (or else we lose our message and our authority) but also the need to face the challenges of ministering to the whole person, as Jesus did (or else we lose our relevance). It is not a case of either or. Evangelicals are these days far more aware of the need for this “holistic” approach and many of the most effective faith-based NGOs serving in China today are evangelical. Not all foreign agencies and denominations working with the TSPM and Amity Foundation would regard themselves as evangelical but many are.

8. Vision for God’s Kingdom – avoiding petty “kingdom building”

In the first century of Protestant missionary work in China there was a clear attempt to work together as much as possible and to follow agreed “comity arrangements” in the placement of workers. Thus the CIM agreed to send all their Anglican missionaries to Sichuan where the Anglican CMS was working. It was an arrangement that worked well. Baptists and Presbyterians and others discussed their respective plans and sought to avoid overlap in their efforts. There were several nation-wide missionary conferences involving all societies and denominations. This sort of cooperation between missions began to break down in the twentieth century as the number and type of groups multiplied. Unity was not so easy to achieve and rivalry was not uncommon. The multiplication of denominations was an unfortunate importation into China and became a stumbling block for both Chinese believers and even more so for those outside the church. Not only was the unity of the Body of Christ compromised but it led to wastage of resources and overlap of effort.

Building of our own kingdoms rather than God’s Kingdom is no less a danger today. I once asked a foreign English teacher in a remote city in China what his main prayer request was, to which he replied: “My wife and I are praying that we will have a team of colleagues to work with us in this city.” This request

surprised me as I knew there were two other fine Christian couples and two singles teaching or studying in the very same College – and all of them were great friends and colleagues already. Seeing my confusion my friend explained, “I mean others from my organization.” There was pressure on this teacher from his “sending organization” to form a team of their own people, regardless of the team God had already put together in that place. It is all too easy to be so focused on our own agendas that we fail to see far bigger God’s plan. I have also seen the blessing that comes when organizations of like-mind cooperate together and share resources in order to reach common “Kingdom” objectives.

9. A godly life – Spirit-filled, prayerful, loving

There is no doubt that missionaries like Griffith John and Hudson Taylor were deeply spiritual and godly men. Broomhall records of Hudson Taylor’s ministry whilst back in Britain during 1883, that:

Leading Christians were asking Hudson Taylor to expound Scripture to them. Yet it was not so much what he said as the presence of God in the meetings that drew them. ...it was not oratory or about the CIM, but with ‘beautiful, gentle, loving simplicity’ that Hudson Taylor spoke, ‘always bringing us to God first’, before talking about China or anything else – ‘always so glad to say a good word for others, for other missions and Christian enterprises’ (Broomhall, 1988:325)

Broomhall goes on to record the words of solicitor William Sharp, one of the new CIM London Council members, who said of Taylor,

His restful spirit and simplicity of faith were all-inspiring; his entrance into any assembly was to make those present conscious of a peculiar atmosphere of spiritual power. When in Council, with some difficult subject...to which our united wisdom brought no apparent way out, he would...call us to go to our knees, confessing to God our inability and want of understanding, and asking Him in the fewest and simplest of words to show us His will. (Ibid, 1988:326)

No missionary was perfect, of course. At times some, sadly, were anything but an example of winsome Christian-living. Sometimes missionaries harboured a subconscious sense of moral superiority which led to pride and paternalistic attitudes. Those showing pride, anger or impatience would lose any credibility they might have had with those they had come to serve. At times all of us can become dry in our Christian experience and unfruitful in our service. There is the call to a closer walk with God and to a life filled with the Holy Spirit. Missionaries like Marie Monsen and Jonathan Goforth called their fellow missionaries and also the Chinese to seek personal and national revival. There were many other lesser-known foreign workers who God also used to revive His people, and of course He used none more than John Sung, Wang Ming-dao and Watchman Nee. It is the same today – for it is “‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.”⁷⁹

Love and godliness, shown even in the midst of trial and rejection, so often melted stubborn prejudice and opposition. In 1895 following a series of bloody incidents including the massacre of eleven CMS missionaries, mostly women, in Fujian, Timothy Richard had the fearsome task of representing all the foreign missionaries in China in bringing a petition to Beijing appealing for a more favourable policy towards Christianity. He met with Prince Kong, brother of the late emperor Xian Feng (咸丰) and possibly more powerful than the Empress Ci Xi herself. Prince Kong showed obvious disdain for Richard but after speaking harshly about Christians he finally gave Richard the chance to speak. Richard did so with great politeness, in fluent Chinese of course, but also with forthright honesty and boldness, suggesting that Prince Kong had not been given the facts. As soon as Prince Kong had left, Li Hong-cao, one of the Emperor’s tutors and a leading official came over and thanked Richard for speaking so frankly to the Prince. “None of us would have dared to contradict the Prince as you did, but as you had a request to make, and put it in so respectful a manner before him, he could not possibly be offended. Your visit here will do good.” (Soothill, 1924:213)

⁷⁹ Zech 4:6

By his wise words and godly life Richard certainly paved the way for a more favourable response to the gospel at the highest levels in the nation.

I have already referred to J.O. Fraser in his work amongst the Lisu. His commitment to intercessory prayer, both his own prayers and the prayers of his supporters, led to a remarkable people movement. There are lessons here for all who seek to effectively communicate the good news cross-culturally.

David Adeney is another missionary who exemplified the Christ-like life of zeal, humility and prayerfulness. No wonder God used him in many remarkable ways to touch the lives of countless people in China and around the world. The biography of his life (Armitage, 1993) has the subtitle “Ordinary man, Extraordinary Mission”. Having known and worked with David Adeney, however, I regard him as anything but an ordinary man. He was in fact a remarkable man. I remember being in Beijing with him on his very last trip to China (in 1992). We met with several of his friends, some of whom he had known back in the forties when they were students. Those gathered had a memorable evening of fellowship and reminiscing. To end off the evening they asked Mr Adeney to pray. He prayed in Chinese. It was passionate and moving. He prayed for those there and he prayed for China. When he finished there was not one dry eye in the room. We had been in the presence of God.

As we seek to be His witnesses in China today we need to remember that spiritual work can only be done with spiritual gifts and graces. The “arm of flesh will fail” us. Missionaries are no longer welcomed in China but foreign Christian professionals, technicians, teachers, medical personnel, businessmen, diplomats and students are able to live and work there. May we take to heart the lessons from the past as we seek to become more effective communicators of the good news.

CHAPTER 4 THE CHURCH IN CHINA TODAY

In any discussion of how to effectively share the Good News in China today it is essential to remember the role of the Chinese Church. It is Chinese believers themselves who are the primary instruments in God's hands for building His kingdom. Daniel Bays (2003:196) rightly says, "The majority of Chinese Christians were converted by other Chinese, not by foreign missionaries, even before 1949, and that is overwhelmingly true today". God, in His inscrutable wisdom, has in the past seen fit to use foreign believers in building His Kingdom in China. At times they may have played a crucial role, as when Alopen brought the gospel to the Tang dynasty capital, or when CIM missionaries pressed inland to where none had gone before, or when Swedish missionaries planted the church in Kashgar amongst the Uygurs, or when J.O. Fraser first brought Christ to the Lisu in Yunnan and Burma. God did use missionaries in many areas of ministry to build His Church, but His primary instrument in evangelizing China was and still is the Chinese Church.

4.1 A New Situation: the Chinese Church and Mao

When the Communists came to power in 1949 there were an estimated one million baptized Protestant believers, 13,000 Chinese pastors and church workers, 19,500 churches and chapels, 48 seminaries, 21 Bible Colleges, 262 Christian hospitals and 180 Christian universities and colleges, as well as 6,200 missionaries from 110 mission societies.⁸⁰ Catholic believers were estimated to number 3 million in 1949. Even though the Chinese Protestant church had made significant progress toward being self-supporting and self-governing the Church was still seen by the CCP as foreign dominated. With the new regime quickly moving to enforce its control it became clear that any missionaries who remained in China would jeopardize the safety and well-being of Chinese believers. By 1951

⁸⁰ These figures are given in non-published training material prepared by OMF for the China Awareness Seminars but based on well documented statistics.

the “*Reluctant Exodus*”⁸¹ of all missionaries from China was virtually complete and by 1952 all mission-related institutions (church schools and hospitals) had been taken over by the government or closed. Even independent churches, such as the True Jesus Church and the Little Flock, found themselves under pressure to join the official Three Self Patriotic Movement. By the mid fifties most church leaders had either joined the TSPM or found themselves in prison or labour camp. Watchman Nee was arrested in 1952, the Jesus Family was disbanded in 1953 and Wang Ming-dao was imprisoned in 1955. The well-known Bible teacher, author, and Principal of the Spiritual Life Bible College (*Ling Xiu Xue Yuan*, 灵修学院) in Shanghai, Jia Yu-ming (1880-1964, 贾玉明), joined the TSPM when he was promised the TSPM would publish his Bible commentaries and make them available for believers. He was made Vice Chairman of the TSPM under Wu Yao-zong. Sadly, the TSPM never did publish his books. It had been a ploy to get his support. Already an old man, there was little he could do to resist and even the College was closed. Many of his students refused to join the TSPM and were arrested.

Struggle meetings soon were the order of the day with Christians often being the brunt of government sponsored criticism and even persecution. It was the start of a very long and dark tunnel for the Church. In 1957 Mao invited the free expression of ideas in the “Let One Hundred Flowers Blossom” campaign (*bai hua qi-fang*, 百花齐放) only to crack down on the outpouring of criticism that occurred. This was known as the Anti-Rightist campaign (*fan you yun dong*, 反右运动) when many, including ordinary Christians, were imprisoned, sent to labour camp or exiled to remote provinces. By the late fifties there were hardly any churches that remained open and organizations like the YMCA, which had been infiltrated by the Party even before 1949, became little more than tools of the government. Christians, and other religious believers, along with landowners, the

⁸¹ See Thompson, Phyllis, *The Reluctant Exodus*, Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979.

educated professional classes, and the business elite found themselves part of the “five evil types” (*heiwulei*, 黑五类)⁸². The worst was yet to come.

Millions starved in China following the introduction of the commune system and the disastrous Great Leap Forward (*da yue jin*, 大跃进) – which ranks as one of Mao's major blunders in the economic realm. The Great Cultural Revolution (*wenhua da geming*, 文化大革命) which broke out in 1966 plunged the nation into ten years of chaos and tragedy. All remaining churches were closed and even government-approved religious leaders were attacked. Bibles and other books were publicly burned. During this period the official religious policy of the CCP was to wipe out religion. It was part of the “Four Olds”⁸³ that Mao called on the “red guards” to “smash to pieces”.

In 1972 two churches were allowed to open in Beijing (one Catholic and one Protestant) but only for the use of the foreign diplomatic community. The visit of US president Nixon took place in 1972 but by then Mao was an old and increasingly senile man. The radical “Gang of Four” (*si ren bang*, 四人帮), including Mao's wife Jiang Qing (江青), were very much in control and waiting to take ultimate power when the dictator finally died. This happened in September 1976, but Mao had appointed Hua Guo-feng (华国锋) as his successor and the Gang of Four were arrested and the Cultural Revolution officially declared to be at an end.

By 1978 long-standing Party veteran Deng Xiao-ping (邓小平), who himself had been purged by Mao, re-emerged and replaced Hua as supreme leader of the CCP. With the reformist policies of Deng, a new climate of openness, which has been called the “Beijing Spring”, soon became evident.

⁸² Included were landlords (*di zhu*, 地主), rich peasants (*fu nong*, 富农), counter revolutionaries (*fan geming*, 反革命), bad elements (*huai fenzi*, 坏分子), and rightists (*you pai*, 右派).

⁸³ The “Four Olds” included “old ideas”, “old culture”, “old customs”, and “old habits”.

Up until the end of the Cultural Revolution there was little or no sign that the church had survived the two and a half decades of rigid control and ruthless suppression. What began to unfold in the late seventies and early eighties, however, was to amaze all observers. The Church had not only survived but it had grown, and grown significantly. With the relative new-found freedom in the nation there was an explosion of the growth of Christianity in both city and country-side (Zhao, 1997:228-48). There were still no churches open (except the two for foreigners in Beijing) and all the growth was in independent “house churches”. This situation, there is little doubt, led the authorities to re-activate the TSPM in 1979 in an attempt to bring religious activities under some sort of control (MacInnes, 1989:32-34). It was a policy of controlling religion rather than wiping it out, as had been the case during the Cultural Revolution. In order implement this policy they allowed churches to re-open in most major cities beginning in 1979 and progressively through the eighties. No sooner was a “new” church opened (usually one of the larger existing church buildings) than it was packed to the galleries. Meanwhile the explosion of life in the so-called “house churches” in the country-side continued, despite a growing attempt on the part of the authorities to restrict the activities of unregistered groups.

One scholar has commented: “More than was realized at the time, Christianity in all its variety had taken root in China and possessed the strength and techniques to survive decades of hostility and/or persecution.” (Lutz, 2001:192-3) I believe this comment while true is an over-simplification and even misleading. It implies that the present growth of the Church in China over the past twenty five years since 1980 is, however unexpected, the natural outcome of the church having taken root in the soil of China. That it did take root is obviously true but there is far more to the story than the resilience of the human spirit or the development of survival techniques. It is the result of God’s sovereign intervention. It has been the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in preserving and reviving His people, and in opening the hearts of China’s millions to spiritual truth, despite decades of atheistic propaganda. The seed that was sown in tears has borne

abundant fruit. In fact, the church may have grown 30-fold since 1965, when on the eve of the Cultural Revolution the number of Christians may have been even less than in 1949 when the communists came to power. No wonder many speak of the miracle of the Chinese Church or *“The Resurrection of the Chinese Church”*, to use the title of Tony Lambert’s book. It is something God alone could have accomplished.

During the 1980s China continued to open herself to the outside world and major reforms were introduced in sectors such as agriculture. There was a dramatic growth of private enterprise as controls in the economic field were relaxed. This led to the start of two decades of spectacular economic growth, which continues today. Political reform and reform in religious and social areas has been far slower. Despite on-going reports of repression and the arrest of house church leaders, the church has continued to flourish – both in the unofficial sector and in the official registered sector.

4.2 Major Streams in the Chinese Church

It is over-simplifying things to divide the church into just two sectors, the registered and the unregistered churches. Sadly not only has the Chinese church been polarized somewhat by this two-fold division but overseas Christians in looking at the church in China have also very easily been tempted to take sides. Especially in the 1980s, but to an extent still today, the TSPM top leadership has been seen by many, both outside and inside China, as politically compromised. Evangelicals would tend to think this way, with good reason, and would also tend to sympathize with the millions of so-called “house church” Christians outside the TSPM, who naturally have suffered the brunt of repression by the state. Best sellers such as *The Heavenly Man* by Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway, telling the dramatic story of Christians in the house churches, have had massive circulation (Yun, 2002). Some evangelicals, on the other hand, have been in danger of writing

off or ignoring the fact God is also very much at work in the TSPM churches, in the seminaries, and through Amity Press -

...dismissing the officially recognized Protestant bodies as 'atheistic government-controlled churches' and portraying the 'house churches' as the sole repositories of authentic Christianity, and even as exemplars to complacent Western Protestants, a 'voice to the Church in the West,' as the title of one popular book put it. (Dunch, 2001:197) ⁸⁴

Going to the opposite extreme, some overseas believers, in particular, have been such strong advocates of the TSPM and the official church that they have failed to give adequate credence to the incredible growth of the church outside the TSPM ambit ⁸⁵. Some of these observers come from more liberal churches and denominations that have established links with the TSPM/CCC and Amity but others can certainly be classified as from strongly evangelical churches and organizations.

It is, I believe, very important to try to be balanced and avoid taking sides. One of the most reliable foreign observers of the Church scene in China over the past more than twenty five years is Tony Lambert of OMF. Lambert's book *"China's Christian Millions: the Costly Revival"* shows clear scholarship and gives a balanced and highly readable account from an evangelical view point (1999). He shows clearly how God is at work in both the registered TSPM churches and in the unregistered churches, and points out the weaknesses in both as well their strengths. Lambert has also written much about the growth of pseudo-Christian sects and cults – a major problem in China today (Lambert, 1998). Another more recent book by former Beijing Bureau Chief of Time Magazine, David Aikman, *"Jesus in Beijing"* is a breath-taking look at the growth and widespread influence of

⁸⁴ For example, Glanzer, Perry L. 'International Persecution of Christians', report dated March 1, 1998, at <http://www.family.org/cforum/research/papers/a0001409.html>; Wallis, Arthur. *China Miracle: A Voice to the Church in the West*. Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1985

⁸⁵ For example, Stursberg, Peter, *The Golden Hope*, Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1987, p 229; Towery, Britt E., Jr., *The Churches of China: Taking Root Downward, Bearing Fruit Upward*, Waco, TX: Baylor University, 1990, pp 46-47.

Christianity in China today (Aikman, 2003). Aikman describes in graphic detail the growth of the house church movement and the growing impact of Christianity nation-wide – so much so that the authorities had the book translated into Chinese and held special meetings with relevant religious and law enforcement agencies to discuss it. Aikman points out that China's population of 1.3 billion has multiplied by two and a half times since 1949, when it was around 500 million. In the same period, the number of Christians in China has grown twenty-fold. He writes:

...at the present rate of growth in the number of Christians in the countryside, in the cities, and especially within China's social and cultural establishment, it is possible that Christians will constitute 20 to 30 percent of China's population within three decades. (Ibid, 2003:285)

The more one is exposed to this dynamic church, of whatever variety, the more one is humbled by what God has done and continues to do. Tony Lambert comments, "...in China, zealous and costly adherence to the biblical gospel has resulted in what is probably the greatest revival and church growth in church history." (Lambert, 2002:6)

Despite the tremendous growth of the church in China, in both registered and unregistered churches, the situation is far from simple and straightforward. Don Snow who works with Amity Foundation agrees:

When Western media write about the Protestant church situation in China, there is a strong tendency to assume that Chinese Christians fall into one or the other of two distinct and divided camps. One camp is variously referred to as "Three-Self churches," Christian Council churches, registered churches, official churches, or even government churches. The other camp is referred to as unregistered churches, house churches, or underground churches. (Snow, 2003)

Snow goes on to say he recognizes at least five categories of Christian groups in China, namely:

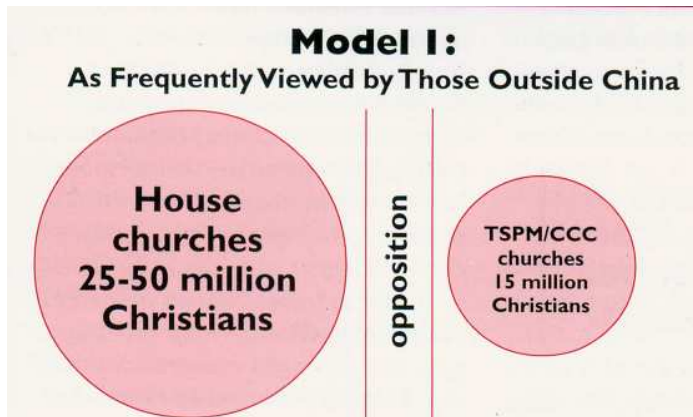
1. Churches associated with the Three Self Patriotic Movement/China Christian Council (TSPM/CCC).
2. Meeting points related to the TSPM/CCC
3. “Semi-denominations” – by which he means groups such as the Seventh-Day Adventists, Methodists, the Little Flock, True Jesus Church, or Jesus Family, which meet either on their own or as part of the wider body.
4. (Defiantly) unregistered groups – by which he means those groups which for personal and theological reasons refuse to register under the TSPM.
5. Rural Christian groups

Bays comments,

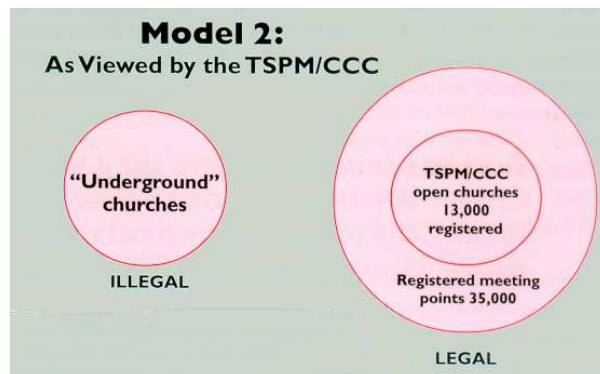
...the Protestant bifurcation between TSPM-related churches and autonomous communities is not well-defined. In some areas there is contact, cooperation, and individuals active in both. And the theological beliefs of TSPM and non-TSPM groups overlap a great deal. Why then the continuing importance of the distinction between registered and autonomous, TSPM and house churches? The answer lies partly in the role of the state. (Bays, 2003:185, 186).

Dunch refers to three main strands in the Chinese church grouped “in terms of three historical points of origin; the mission-founded churches, the indigenous Chinese Protestant movements of the early twentieth century, and the new Protestant movements that have emerged in the PRC since the 1970s.” (2001:197)

Tony Lambert has produced a helpful analysis of the situation (Lambert, 2002:5) in which he describes three models. The first model (as frequently viewed by those outside China) sees the house churches, with anything from 25 to 50 million Christians, as totally separate from the TSPM/CCC churches, with 15 million Christians, and the two groups in opposition. He rejects this model as too simplistic and ignoring “the wide diversity within the church”.

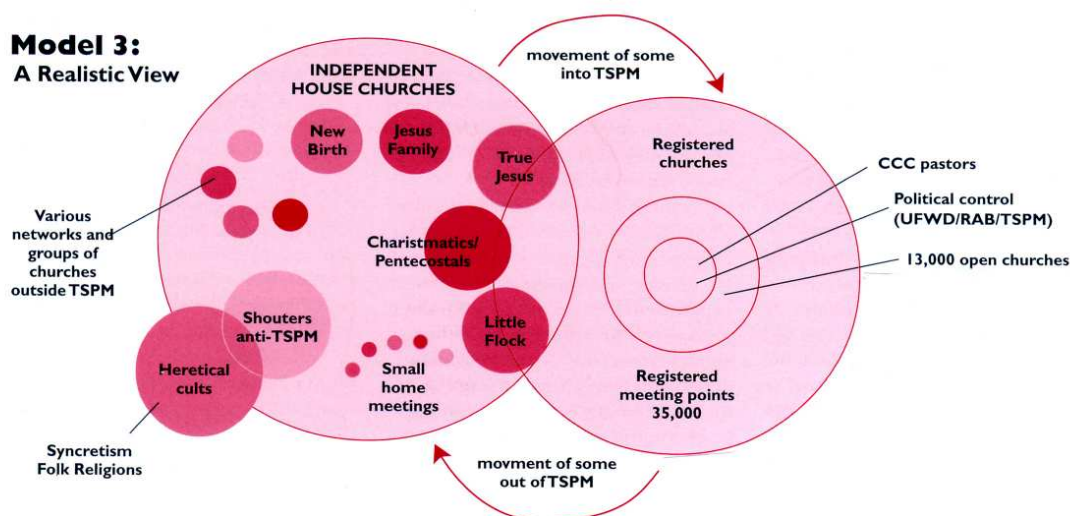


The second model (as viewed by the TSPM/CCC) regards the TSPM/CCC churches and meeting points as registered and therefore “legal” whereas the house churches are regarded as illegal and underground, often controlled by overseas “anti-China” elements. This model too, says Lambert, ignores reality.



Lambert’s third model, which he calls a realistic view, is far more complex. It sees the house churches and the TSPM/CCC churches as two overlapping circles with movement between the two. Indeed many believers are involved in both. Some house churches seek to get registered directly with the Religious Affairs Bureau, quite apart from the TSPM/CCC. Within the house church movement are some major independent groupings or networks and also some small isolated fellowships. Some groups have links with former denominations or indigenous movements, such as the Little Flock, and they may be represented in both house churches and in local TSPM churches. On the fringes of the house church movement are heretical cults. Lambert notes the political control at the

heart of the TSPM but believes “the core majority of both CCC churches and house-churches is evangelical.”



Bearing in mind the fact that the church-scene in China is diverse, complicated and changing we want to look more in depth at the major groupings. We hope to lay the ground work for a consideration, in the next chapter of this thesis, of the role, if any, that can be played by foreign and “overseas Chinese” believers.

4.3 TSPM/CCC Related Churches and Organizations

Since the early eighties the TSPM/CCC has enjoyed substantial freedom to develop within the guidelines and according to the policy laid down by the government organs responsible for religious affairs. Though a national organization, government regulations still place restrictions upon TSPM churches. The “three designates” (*san ge zhi ding*, 三个指定) policy, introduced as early as September 1982 (following the landmark Document 19 of March, 1982), only allowed approved pastors to operate in approved places (church buildings) in their local parish. This ruled out both public activities outside approved venues and also itinerant preaching. Despite these and other restrictions the churches enjoyed and used the wonderful new freedoms that they did have.

By the end of 1981, within a year of the first TSPM churches re-opening, the TSPM reported there were 80 officially-approved churches open. That same year the Nanjing Theological Seminary opened with 49 students. According to the Amity News Service website of the China Christian Council ⁸⁶ by 2004 there were 32,000 registered churches, 16,000 registered meeting points, 2600 ordained clergy (600 of whom are women), and over 18 million Christians associated with the TSPM/CCC. A recent detailed analysis (Lambert, 2005) of these figures and other official reports, province by province, indicates that a more accurate figure for the number of Christians in TSPM churches is 21.2 million. Lambert points out that this figure only includes baptized communicants over 18 years of age. Young people and children under the age of 18 “are still, officially, discouraged from joining a church.”

Despite Lambert’s findings, it is nonetheless encouraging that, after many years of under-stating the numbers of Christians,⁸⁷ the official religious organs such as the TSPM are recognizing that there are very many more believers than they ever admitted before. It gives more reason, for one thing, to pressure the government to allow more churches to open. This is in fact happening and all over the country more churches (sometimes old renovated buildings and sometimes altogether new buildings) are being opened every month, and some of the registered meeting points are becoming churches in their own right. Most of China’s cities have one or more TSPM church – still grossly inadequate for the number of Christians wishing to attend.

Despite the fact there are 1,200 students being trained in 20 TSPM seminaries in various parts of China, there is a huge shortage of trained clergy. Lambert quotes TSPM figures stating that the ration of registered pastors to

⁸⁶ Amity News Service’s excellent website www.amitynewsservice.org has lots of information on TSPM/CCC churches and seminaries. This information was accessed on Nov 10, 2005.

⁸⁷ A 1993 study by Hunter and Chan concluded that the “official” figure given at the time of about five million Protestants was far too low, with 20 million closer to reality. (Hunter, 2004:66-71). More recent Chinese government estimates put the total number of Protestants at between 25 and 35 million (Yamamori, 2001:xiv).

Christians is 1 to 10,000 in Jiangsu Province, 1 to 50,000 in Henan, and 1 to 60,000 in Anhui (Ibid, 2002:4). What is encouraging is the fact most of these students are highly motivated and staunchly evangelical. I have visited a few of the seminaries, including the oldest and largest, Jinling Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing,⁸⁸ and been most impressed by the quality of the students. In Nanjing for example, despite the pressure put on the students by the promotion of so-called “Chinese theological reconstruction”⁸⁹ being advocated by Bishop Ding Guangxun (K.H. Ting), President of the Seminary, most students are far more interested in growing in their knowledge of the Scriptures and in their spiritual life. The top echelons of the TSPM/CCC hierarchy are clearly more politically-minded and theologically liberal than the bulk of the students in the seminaries and also the pastors in TSPM churches. Aikman tells the fascinating story of Ji Tai, a former professor and associate dean of Nanjing Seminary. Professor Ji was much loved by rural Christians and by his students. He openly criticized Bishop Ding’s reconstruction theology in 1998 but his expulsion from the Seminary only came in June 2000 when it was discovered he was also helping teach in an “underground seminary” in Shanghai (Aikman, 2003:129-132).

The TSPM/CCC also runs lay training courses and publishes Bibles and Christian literature, which can be purchased in any TSPM church. The United Bible Societies around the world have been giving strong support for the excellent work of the Amity Press in Nanjing both in terms of funding and in terms of technical personnel. In recent years, either directly or through the Amity Foundation, TSPM churches have been able to get involved in social work including poverty alleviation, drug rehabilitation, AIDS prevention, and working with the elderly, the disabled and with orphans.

⁸⁸ See www.amitynewsservice.org/page.php?page=1236 , as accessed 7 November 2005, for a detailed write-up about the seminary.

⁸⁹ See *Chinese Theological Review*, No. 14 (2000) which includes translations of presentations by top TSPM leaders at a conference in 1998 which were published in 1999 in the *Jinling Theological Review* (*Jinling shenxuezhì*, 金陵神学志) from the Nanjing seminary.

Snow rightly points out that the TSPM “is also burdened to some extent by the legacy of excesses from the 1950s, and its officially recognized status involves it in a relationship with the government which also at times gives rise to accusations of inappropriate government influence.” (Snow, 2003) Nonetheless the official church in China today faces unprecedented, even if limited, opportunities to be a witness and to serve people in need.

4.4 The House Churches

Even during the dark days of the Cultural Revolution, in the early 1970s, particularly in the rural areas but also in some cities, simultaneously and spontaneously believers began meeting together in small groups (Zhao, 1997:228-46). Some developed into larger movements with low-key but dynamic and dedicated leaders, many of them itinerant evangelists. Many of the leaders had come to faith prior to 1949 and had links to either mission-founded or independent churches. Others however were newer converts with no such links. This is the origin of the present-day “house church” movement.

Some observers rightly point out that the term “house church” can be misleading. While most independent groups meeting in cities do meet in homes this is not necessarily the case in the country-side where some gatherings number in the hundreds. For special events, such as baptisms or a teaching conference, there may be thousands gathered. In some instances groups have even built their own church buildings. The other term that can be misleading is “underground churches” for while many do, of necessity, meet in secrecy, others are relatively high profile, and certainly are known to the police. One extremely well-known “house church” attended by up to 3000 each week is led by Pastor Samuel Lam (Lin Xian-gao, 林献羔) in Guangzhou⁹⁰. I have visited Pastor Lam and he showed me around the three-story building in use at the time – every floor packed for

⁹⁰ See Anderson, Ken. *Bold as a Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lamb and the Underground Church of China*, Zondervan, 1991.

services, using closed-circuit TV to relay the preaching, even to the basement. Pastor Lam has often been interrogated, even arrested, but he is anything but “underground”.

In chapter five of their book, *Protestantism in Contemporary China*, A Hunter and K Chan give a description of these new movements (Hunter, 2004). Ross Paterson (Paterson, 2004), founder of the Chinese Church Support Ministries, has also written extensively about the house church movement, and David Aikman in *Jesus in Beijing* gives graphic detail about the various house church networks, their leaders and their “underground” seminaries for training workers (Aikman, 2003:47-133).

One of the most graphic sources of information about the Church in China, and in particular the house churches, is to be found in a video series entitled *The Cross - Jesus in China* (十字架 - 耶 在中国) produced by China Soul for Christ Foundation (神州 播协会)⁹¹ which came out in 2003. This mammoth project, which took three years to complete, has been condensed into four hours of gripping and historically priceless documentary. The first hour (episode one), entitled “*The Spring of Life*”, tells the stories of a broad spectrum of people in China today who have come to faith – including farmers, students, officials, former criminals, orphans, actors, writers, scientists, and business people. The second episode, entitled “*Seeds of Blood*”, covers the history of those who have suffered for their faith from the Boxer Rebellion but particularly focuses on the past fifty years telling the stories of Wang Ming-dao, John Sung, Watchman Nee, Allen Yuan (袁相忱), Samuel Lamb, Moses Xie (模善), Yang Xinfei (楊心斐), and an evangelist in Yinchuan, Ningxia, called Epaphras (川以巴弗). The third episode, “*The Bitter Cup*”, tells the stories of the younger generation of evangelists and preachers since the Cultural Revolution and shows graphic footage of the house churches today. The final video, entitled “*The Canaan Hymns*”, focuses on the

⁹¹ See www.chinasoul.com

amazing story of a farm girl, Zhang Xiao Min (小敏), who had to drop out of high school. Xiao Min had no musical training yet she has been anointed by God to write over one thousand hymns widely sung today in Chinese churches all across China and around the world.

Both Aikman's book *"Jesus in Beijing"* and the video series *"The Cross – Jesus in China"* caused something of a backlash in China. House church leaders were put under increased pressure and indeed some were arrested. It is not known, however, if each arrest was directly related to the book or the videos. Those concerned knew of the dangers before agreeing to be interviewed. Indeed some said they were very happy for the information to be shared so as to tell the story and bring glory to God. Aikman did try to be careful not to disclose names or locations where these were not already known and where doing so might compromise individuals or ministries. However it has to be said that some, including at least one foreigner known to me and mentioned in the book, were not happy that their names were revealed.

Some of the unregistered "house churches" are opposed to the TSPM and the whole process of registration. They fear government interference and do not want to be hindered in their preaching and itinerating work. They believe there should be strict separation of church and state. Some object on theological grounds, seeing the top hierarchy of the TSPM as liberal and not even Christian. Personal experience also affects some, particularly older house church leaders, many of whom in the past suffered at the hands of the TSPM. It is easier to forgive than it is to trust former persecutors. It is hard for some to put past hurts and wrongs behind and move on. Yet it is also true that many house churches, seeing the changes bringing new opportunities, would register if they could, and as long as they did not thereby compromise their work. Even when they can't register they sometimes find ways to cooperate with the local TSPM/CCC churches, if the latter are sympathetic. I have seen this cooperation in action with great mutual benefit –

for example with youth from the house churches meeting in a TSPM church being trained by their own leader alongside the local TSPM pastor.

Some of the networks in the independent house church movement, which has been largely rural-based, are very large, numbering in the millions with work in several provinces. Three major groupings originated in Henan Province – namely, the Fangcheng Fellowship (方城教会), founded by Li Tianen (李天恩) and for many years led by Zhang Rongliang (张荣亮); Tanghe (also known as the China Gospel Fellowship) in which Feng Jianguo (冯建国) was an early leader; and the Born Again Movement (*Chongsheng pai* 重生派), also known as the Word of Life Movement, formerly led by the well-known Peter Xu (Xu Yongze, 徐永). Peter Xu is now based in the USA. The Born Again Movement at one stage was labeled by the TSPM as a cult, which they called the “Weepers”. This accusation may have originated from the fact the group has a strong emphasis on a definite experience of conversion, which is often accompanied by the confession of sins with tears. It is hard to justify calling such beliefs and practices cultic! Xu once claimed the organization had over 3,500 congregations and had sent evangelists to more than twenty of China’s provinces (Lambert, 1991:93, 151).⁹² Other major groupings developed in Anhui Province and in Zhejiang (especially in the area of Wenzhou). Wenzhou is often referred to as the “Jerusalem of China” and as many as 10 percent of the population may be Christians.

Bearing in mind that there is obviously some overlap between the registered and unregistered Christian groups, there is also little question that the number of Christians associated with China’s unregistered “house churches” is very much larger than is the number attending TSPM/CCC churches. Bays observes that:

...much Church growth in the last two decades has been in the countryside, where it is difficult to count any group with accuracy; and a certain number, perhaps more than

⁹² See also *China Study Journal* 12:2 1997: 52-53.

half, of Protestant believers are in autonomous Christian communities (“house churches”, as opposed to congregations registered with the TSPM). Some of these communities are quite large, numbering in the hundreds or thousands. (2003:185)

If the numbers game is difficult when working with official TSPM statistics, when it comes to the unregistered groups it is more like guess-work. Reliable statistics are nigh impossible to come by. Undoubtedly some of the figures being quoted overseas, such as 100 or even 130 million believers, are grossly exaggerated. Writing in 1999 Lambert was open to accept the figure of 50 million (including both TSPM and non-TSPM Christians) but regarded as pure speculation estimates that claimed “there are 90 or even over 100 million Protestant believers in China.” Lambert said such claims “have to be firmly rejected in the absence of any hard evidence.” (Lambert, 1999:195) More recently, however, Lambert has accepted that there could be as many as 50 million Christians associated with the house church movement alone (Lambert, 2002) which when added to his careful analysis of the TSPM figures puts the total for both house church and TSPM Christians at over 72 million.

The major house church networks are clearly evangelical and orthodox in faith. All stress the need for personal conversion and a life of commitment to follow Christ. Many are influenced by Pentecostal beliefs and practices, seeing charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues, healing or prophecy as operational today just as they were in the Acts of the Apostles. Most see the need for the autonomy of the local congregation. (Bays, 1996:307-316) A joint confession of faith drafted in November 1998 by four leaders representing the networks in Henan and Anhui is thoroughly biblical and evangelical (Lambert, 1998:8).⁹³ This historic statement was signed by Shen Yi-Ping, of the China Evangelistic Fellowship, Zhang Rongliang, of Fangcheng, Cheng Xianqi, of the Church in Fuyang in Anhui, and Wang Chunlu representing another house church network. The joint statement deals with the Bible, the Trinity, Christ, Salvation, the Holy

⁹³ See also *China News and Church Report*, December 21, 1998.

Spirit, the Church, and the Last Things. Aikman has an English translation of the Chinese text in an appendix to his book *Jesus in Beijing*. Lambert also has the full text in his book *China's Christian Millions* and also has an excellent analysis of the document. He states,

This confession represents the mainstream of the house church movement in China. In its view of the Bible, the Trinity, and the work of Christ, it stands firmly in the tradition of historic evangelicalism. However, it has a uniquely Chinese flavour, too. Various doctrinal positions which might be regarded as opposed to each other in the West are here joined in a synthesis. For example, the statement affirming the perseverance of the saints reflects historic Reformation teaching; on the other hand, denying the cessation of miracles or gifts of the Holy Spirit is similar to charismatic teaching in the West. (Lambert, 1999:60-64)

The house church leaders also issued statements concerning their attitude towards the government, the government's religious policy, the TSPM, and persecution. They appealed for a stop to persecution against the house churches.

There is no doubt that there is on-going and in many cases severe persecution of unregistered groups. Many house church leaders have been repeatedly arrested and their activities kept under surveillance. Zhang Rongliang, for example, is currently in prison with little news of his whereabouts or his state of health. The question of religious persecution in China is certainly high on the agenda of many Western governments in their discussions with China over human rights issues. Groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch China regularly report on the situation as does groups like China Aid, founded by mainland Chinese now living in the USA⁹⁴. It is part of the paradox of modern-day China that while on the one hand there is new-found freedom and openness, with TSPM churches packed and Bibles being printed, on the other hand evangelical leaders and even ordinary believers in the house churches can find themselves hounded as criminals and thrown into prison.

⁹⁴ See www.chinaaid.org and www.hrw.org/asia/china

4.5 Other Streams

Also part of the picture today is the increasing number of campus fellowships led, in many cases, by returning Chinese scholars and professors who have studied overseas where they came to faith in Christ. Many feel unable to join the TSPM churches, partly due to fear of compromising their academic appointments or due to feeling out of place or not having their needs met.

Related somewhat to the movement on China's campuses is the growth of urban house churches, comprised of young intellectuals and professionals, some of whom are returnees from overseas. Many of these young professionals were first attracted to Christianity due to the witness of a foreign Christian teacher or were reaching when they studied overseas. "One well-informed urban Chinese Christian leader estimates that seventy percent of the members of these new churches were led to Christ by foreign teachers." (Peterson, 2004:12) Of necessity they meet in smaller clusters in homes and only occasionally in larger groups. What appeals to them about such smaller home gatherings is the fact they receive more relevant and intellectually stimulating teaching, and there is a far deeper level of social interaction, fellowship and practical support than could be found in a larger group. The danger associated with being part of something not registered with the government is more than off-set by the freedom it gives and the avoidance of public identification with the TSPM Church, which for some (not least university professors, TV producers, business executives, government administrators, and possibly even Party members) can be highly sensitive.

In 2001 the Director of Christian Culture Studies at the People's University (*Renmin daxue*, 人民大学) in Beijing conducted a survey of religious opinions among students. He found 3.6 percent of students said they were Christians while 60 percent said they were interested in Christianity. This is a phenomenon widespread on China's campuses. It is believed there are now active groups of

Christian students on many of China's university campuses. This is an exciting development, unheard of just a few years ago. Tony Lambert recently stated, "There is great hunger among students and intellectuals in Shanghai where two-thirds of the 60+ universities now have Christian fellowships among students and faculty, according to a friend of mine who has been working among them for nearly 20 years."⁹⁵

Yet another urban phenomenon is the growth of shop-front churches. While regular commercial activities are being carried on in the front of the shop, others meet in back rooms or upstairs for worship, Bible study or training. In some cases, known to me personally, wealthy entrepreneurs who have come to faith have begun churches in their homes or factory premises. I was once privileged to speak in one such gathering to about seventy eager new believers and seekers. Few, if any of them, had any connection with either the TSPM or local house churches. This same businessman runs retreats for other wealthy entrepreneurs and their wives so that they can meet in a relaxed atmosphere and learn about God. Many have come to faith as a result.

Another very different group of people with little education and little money are being reached in the cities. They are part of the flood of rural people moving to the cities or industrial areas, such as the Pearl River delta in southern Guangdong, to find work in factories or on China's ubiquitous construction sites. The leaders of the house church networks are very concerned to find ways to help their young people not only cope with the temptations and stresses of urban life but want to help them form into fellowships where they can continue to grow in their faith and reach out to others. It is not easy and many are getting lost in the crowd. However in some areas factories owned by believers, or whose owners are sympathetic, are able to host small meetings and organize social activities for these young people where they can find fellowship and a place to serve.

⁹⁵ Personal communication with author, 13 October, 2005.

Bays puts it very well when he points out that the history of Protestant Christianity in China is “more than the story of heroic efforts by Western missionaries and resistance by Chinese, for Chinese Christians themselves had played a crucial role in propagating and interpreting Christianity.” (Bays, 2003:180) This has never been truer than during the past fifty six years under Communist rule. Today on any Sunday in China, even if counting only those attending the open “official” churches, there are more people in church than in the whole of Europe.⁹⁶

4.6 The Growth of Cults and Sects

The picture is not all rosy. China has not only seen a revival of orthodox Christianity. It has also seen a revival of syncretistic Chinese folk religion. This is especially the case in the country-side where ignorance and superstition are fertile ground for charismatic leaders recruiting a following of people looking for “spiritual” experiences beyond the purely material world. Lambert has written extensively about the growth of heretical and syncretistic sects which he says are “flourishing, spawned in the weird twilight zone between authentic Christian faith and traditional Chinese folk religion.” (1999) Some of these quasi-Christian sects are extremely dangerous⁹⁷. The Disciples (*mentuhui*, 徒会) and the “Established King” are two cults that flourished in the country-side in the 1980s and 1990s. One of the most notorious in recent years has been Lightening from the East (*dongfang shandian* 方) which has a woman Messiah and tries to infiltrate orthodox house churches and subvert their leaders. In 2002 they kidnapped thirty-four leaders of the Tanghe house church network in Henan. Lightening from the East is known to

⁹⁶ See Mark Noll, “*The globalization of Christianity: a report*” unpublished, 2001, p. 2. – a summary of papers and discussions at a conference of the Currents in World Christianity Project held at the University of Pretoria, SA, 3-7 July 2001.

⁹⁷ See four articles in *China Study Journal* Vol. 13, No. 3 (1998), pp 6-32. Tony Lambert, “Modern sects and cults in China,” pp. 6-9; Lu Yunfeng, “*Report on an investigation into the illegal organization, the ‘Disciples sect’*,” pp. 9-16; Luo Weihong, “*The facts about the activities of the heterodox sect ‘The established king’*,” pp. 17-21; and Zhong Guofa, “*A survey of newly emerged religious sects in the republican era*,” pp. 22-32.

resort to extreme violence as well as seduction and blackmail, and has caused widespread harm to the house churches (Aikman, 2003:240-244).

Lambert points out that “ill-taught Christians can easily be drawn into cultic activities.” He adds “ironically, the explosive growth of evangelical Christianity in China can lead to the growth of cults because of insufficient pastors and teachers.” (1999) “Home-grown” cults have been far more effective than “imported cults” such as Mormonism, the Baha’i religion and the Jehovah Witnesses – small comfort of course for any corruption of the truth hinders the growth of the Kingdom. The TSPM and the house-churches are both aware of the problem. The China Christian Council published an expose of most of the major cults in 1996 entitled *Uphold the Truth: Resist Heresy*. House-church leaders have also given teaching to counter the heresies of the various cults. Outside agencies (such as OMF) have also produced helpful materials to better inform Chinese believers.

The government itself has been trying to crack down on “cults and evil sects”, none more brutally than the pseudo-Buddhist qigong sect known as the Falun Gong. In an article about religion in Anhui Province written by Wu Haitao, a student at Nanjing University, and published in the journal *Zongjiao* (Religion) in 2000 (4th Issue), the writer commented:

...we must resolutely attack all kinds of cults. In recent years north-west Anhui has seen the growth not only of several major religions but also several cult organisations such as The Established King, The Shouters, Lingling, The Omnipotent God, etc. Party, government and Public Security organs have adopted a policy of pulling them up by the roots as soon as they have been uncovered. In the last three years the rapid growth of cults has been suppressed. The Established King network has been totally destroyed. The ‘Changshou Religion’ and the ‘Total Scope Church’⁹⁸ have stopped their activities. Other organisations have been forced into a ‘state of shock’.

⁹⁸ “Changshou” refers to Witness Lee, or Li Changshou, founder of the Shouters sect; and “Total Scope Church” is another name for the orthodox Born Again Movement.

Sadly, the government has not always distinguished between orthodox house church groups and heretical cults. It is also an open question as to whether ruthless suppression of such groups is the answer. Clearly if China held firmly to the rule of law then criminal activities could be dealt with under the even hand of the law. However the hand of the law in China is anything but even.

In March 2004 I met Xu Shuang-fu⁹⁹ the leader of a group labeled by the TSPM and the government as a cult – the *Three Grades of Servants* (*sanban puren* 三班仆人). It was totally unexpected. Some local believers in a city I was visiting invited me and an overseas Chinese businessman friend to a meal to meet, they said, the senior leader of their group. They certainly did *not* call themselves by the name *Three Grades of Servants*. Their beliefs seemed orthodox evangelical. They claimed to have a huge following, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, in various parts of the country. The leader was rather unusual and “other worldly” (most of the time he was quoting Scripture in his heavy Henan accent). He was certainly revered by his associates. From what I learned the group was very secretive and also controlling of its members – both typically cultic tendencies. How much this is the result of the environment in which they operate and how much it is because they really are cultic in belief is, to me, an open question. A few weeks after our unexpected meeting, I heard that the leader we met, Brother Xu, was arrested in another part of China. I had no idea, when I met him, that he was a wanted man!

4.7 China’s “Cultural” Christians

A long article in *The Economist* (on 23 April 2005) highlighted the fact that Christianity is attracting large numbers of China’s intellectuals and scholars:

⁹⁹ See Joseph Kahn, “*Violence Taints Religion’s Solace for China’s Poor*”, New York Times, Nov 25, 2004 - a strongly critical article about Xu and the Three Grades of Servants which uses information supplied by official sources. A more balanced report by human rights organization China Aid can be accessed on www.chinaaid.org/english/stories/3.htm

Most striking in recent years has been the spread of Christianity among urban intellectuals and business people. A Chinese academic (and Party member) says that in the past five years especially, Christianity has flourished on university campuses. Most universities, he says, have several clandestine Christian fellowships' comprising students, graduates and teachers who meet regularly to read the Bible and discuss their faith.

The Economist article continues:

...Some say it denotes a crisis of faith over the failings of communist ideology. China's conversion to capitalism has prompted a search for values that might help counter the negative side-effects of this transformation such as corruption. But, if so, why not turn to faiths with a much longer history in China, such as Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism? These religions are also enjoying a revival. But Christianity appeals particularly to intellectuals because it is the faith most deeply rooted in the countries that well-educated Chinese most envy - principally America.

Professor Li of Beijing Peoples' University is quoted in the article as saying, 'Some people have begun to think that the birth of capitalism and modern science in the West is not entirely unrelated to Christianity.'

Since China began opening up in the 1980s, for some of the reasons mentioned by the article in *The Economist*, there have been more and more Chinese scholars researching Christianity – historians, philosophers, social scientists, and even some in the natural sciences. Some have been fascinated by the influence of Christianity in the West especially in the areas of political and economic development. Some have seen the powerful impact of Christianity upon moral and social issues.

The term "cultural Christians", first use by Bishop Ding of the TSPM, was coined to describe these scholars, who, while impressed by Christianity, did not join the church, with which they found it hard to identify. In China too, due to the political situation, Chinese academics wanting to explore the Bible or Christianity

could only do so in the name of “cultural studies.” Thus a significant number of Chinese intellectuals outside of the Chinese church have been engaged in the serious study of Christian philosophy, history and theology. Many have called for the acceptance of Christian values, and some have even come to a personal faith (Zhuo, 2001:283-300).

One of the earliest “cultural Christians” was Liu Xiaofeng, who began writing in the 1980s and now lives in Hong Kong. More recent writings by Liu include “*Sociological Comments on the Phenomenon of ‘Cultural’ Christians*” (1991), and “*Chinese Christian Theology in the Modern Context of Languages*” (1995). Several other intellectuals, some of whom are now overseas, have become very knowledgeable about Christianity and have published a host of books and articles. For example: Gao Shining and He Guanghu (eds.), *Jidujiao wenhua yu xiandaihua* (*Christianity and Modernization*), Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Publishing House, 1996; Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu (eds.) *Jidujiao wenhua pinglun* (*Christian Culture Review*), No. 6, Guiyang: Guizhou Peoples Publishing House, 1997; He Guanghu and Xu Zhiwei (eds.) *Duihua: Rushidao yu Jidujiao* (*Dialogues Between Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity*), Beijing: 社会科学文献出版社 Social Science Literature Publishing Company, 1998; Yuan Zhiming et al., *Soul Searching: Chinese Intellectuals on Faith and Society*, Wheaton, IL: China Horizon, 1997, more recently re-published by P & R Publishers, 2000.

Zhuo points out (2001:291) that, according to Liu Xiaofeng, the phrase “Cultural Christians” should not be taken as referring to all those engaged in research on the history and culture of Christianity in universities and academic institutions in China, but rather as referring just to those academics who have professed faith personally. (Liu Xiaofeng, *Logos and Pneuma*, Chinese Journal of Theology 2 Spring 1995) When they began their studies they were not baptized Christians. They were only “implicit Christians” or “pre-Christians” but later having believed and been baptized they became “explicit Christians.”

Zhuo points out that using Liu's definition there would not be many "Cultural Christians" in China but if one is referring to scholars from the mainland studying Christianity (SMSCs) who though sympathetic to the gospel are not yet baptized, then there are very many indeed. (Ibid, 2001:293) However those classified as SMSCs normally prefer to be seen as objective and neutral in their research and wish to remain outside the church. Due to China's political climate, to be open about their faith may in fact lessen their ability to function in the university context and might lessen their influence considerably. Zhuo however is very positive about the contribution of both "Cultural Christians" and SMSCs in bringing about a more open attitude towards Christianity in China both amongst ordinary people and also in government circles. "The phenomenon", say Zhuo, "helps the enculturation and contextualization of Christianity in Chinese culture" and has "given impetus to the transformation and indigenization of Christianity in China, namely, from a *Christianity in China* to a real *Chinese Christianity*." (2001:299).

4.8 A brief look at China's "unreached"

Having considered the amazing growth of Christianity in China some may want to ask "is there still a need for widespread gospel proclamation today?" The answer, I believe, is an unequivocal "yes"! In the Chinese context numbers are always large, but this is simply because we are talking about one fifth of the world's population – 1.3 billion people! Even if there are 72 million Christians in China this leaves another 1.228 billion who are *not* Christians – and many of these have never heard the good news.

Over ninety percent of China's people are Han Chinese and there is a strong church amongst the Han, as we have seen, planted in the soil of China and beginning to impact Chinese culture. Nonetheless massive cities with millions of people have but a handful of open churches and information about Christianity is hard to come by. There is no freedom, as one understands it in most democratic

nations, for the open and free proclamation of the gospel. Some rural areas in provinces such as Henan, Anhui, Shandong, Jiangsu, Fujian and Zhejiang do have significant numbers of Christians. However other provinces, such as Hunan, Hebei, Jiangxi, Sichuan, Shanxi, and Liaoning, are far less evangelized. In China's large cities too, Christian witness is very patchy. China is currently 36 percent urban but the ratio urban to rural is expected to be 50/50 by 2020. A city like Shanghai has a strong Christian presence with a relatively high number of TSPM churches – 131 registered churches and meeting points (about 23 of which are large churches holding eight hundred or more). In a city of over 16 million, of course, this is but a drop in the ocean. However far worse off is a city like Tianjin with over 10 million people and only 5 TSPM churches open. The official TSPM figure for the number of Christians in Tianjin is less than 20,000. Lambert comments, this “is a shocking reminder that many large Chinese cities are less than one per cent Protestant Christian. Tianjin is one of the least evangelised large cities in the world, even allowing for house churches.” (Lambert, 2005)

Then there are the 100 million people belonging to national minorities – people groups such as the Zhuang in Guangxi (numbering 17 million), the Tibetans of Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu, western Sichuan and northwest Yunnan (numbering 5 million), the Uygurs of Xinjiang (numbering perhaps 10 million), the Mongolians of Inner Mongolia and other provinces (numbering 5 million), the Hui Muslims (numbering about 9 million), the Yi of Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou (numbering close to 7 million), and many other groups – all still largely unreached.

4.9 The Chinese Church and the Great Commission

The Chinese Church has long had a vision for mission – it goes back at least to the Jesus Family in the 1920s. Events in China have not made it easy for missionaries to be sent out overseas but certainly there have been those in the Church who have had a vision for the Great Commission and for widespread gospel proclamation. Even before the communist take-over in 1949 some Chinese

believers moved west - as preachers, teachers, businessmen or craftsmen – seeking to take the gospel with them. In September 1991 I met an old Chinese couple in the largely Tibetan town of Kangding. Kangding is now in western Sichuan but originally was the border town between Sichuan and the old Tibet. The couple I met was responsible for the Church in Kangding having originally moved there in the 1940s for the purpose of witnessing to Tibetans. In more recent years the house church movement has sent out hundreds and even thousands of evangelists to China's southwest, west and northwestern areas, and there are reports of workers being sent also to Burma and Pakistan.

A lot of attention has been given in recent years to the “Back to Jerusalem Movement” within the Chinese Church, especially since the publication of *The Heavenly Man*, by Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway. The vision involves the sending out of Chinese Christian missionaries all the way back to the Middle East and Israel, from where the gospel first came. The Back to Jerusalem Movement (sometimes referred to as BTJ) is controversial to say the least. There has been sad and destructive criticism by some who feel that the BTJ vision has been hijacked by a small group of Chinese, no longer inside China, and their Western backers, neither of whom represent the broader house church movement inside China. This view, I personally believe, is a harsh and unfair attack on the integrity of fellow believers¹⁰⁰. Nonetheless serious questions have been asked about some of the claims being made and the activities undertaken in the name of BTJ. The fact is, however, that BTJ is not a recent phenomenon nor is it the vision of an extreme fringe. It lies close to the heart of the Chinese Church and has done so for many generations, albeit lying dormant until more recent years. CIM missionary and later accomplished author Phyllis Thompson while in Chongqing in the late 1940s wrote in a personal prayer letter:

The thing that has impressed me most has been the strange, unaccountable urge of a number of different Chinese groups of Christians to press forward in faith, taking the

¹⁰⁰ See Paul Hattaway's lengthy defense in “An Open Letter Regarding ‘The Heavenly Man’” on www.asiaharvest.org accessed on 10/11/2005.

gospel towards the west. I know of at least five different groups, quite unconnected with each other, who have left their homes in east China and gone forth, leaving practically everything behind them, to the west. Some are in Sikang [western Sichuan], some in Kansu [Gansu], some right away in the great northwestern province of Sinkiang [Xinjiang] or Chinese Turkestan. It seems like a movement of the Spirit which is irresistible. The striking thing is that they are disconnected, and in most cases seem to know nothing about each other. Yet all are convinced that the Lord is sending them to the western borders to preach the gospel, and they are going with a strong sense of urgency of the shortness of the time, and the imminence of the Lord's return.¹⁰¹

The vision for a movement taking the gospel back across the silk route to China's far northwest and then on through central Asia and "back to Jerusalem" began in the 1930s. Pastor Mark Ma, Vice Principal of the North West Bible Institute in Fengxiang, Shaanxi Province, founded the Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band.¹⁰² The name in Chinese (*bianchuan fuyin tuan*, 遍福音) does not mention "Jerusalem" but literally translated is "Everywhere Preach the Gospel Band". Missionaries gave it the title "Back to Jerusalem Band" based on the clear stated aims of what was a totally indigenous movement. Several of Pastor Ma's students did move out to the west, both to serve among Chinese and also among other national minorities such as the Tibetans and the Uygurs. I was privileged to meet Pastor Ma in the mid-1980s in Chongqing. In his seventies at the time, he was serving as a pastor in the Pottery Lane (*Ciqi Jie*) TSPM Church, having been released from prison some years earlier. One of his students, back in the thirties, was Mecca Zhao who caught the "back to Jerusalem" vision and eventually travelled to a remote part of Qinghai Province to bring the gospel to Muslims and Tibetans. Another group intent on sending workers was the Northwest Spiritual Movement. The leader of one of their teams was Simon Zhao who ended up in Kashgar (and spent an incredible 45 years in prison or labour camp for his faith). House church leaders from the Born Again Movement in Henan when on a visit to Xinjiang persuaded him to return with them to Henan to

¹⁰¹ OMF Archives, Prayer Letter of Miss Phyllis Thompson, March 3, 1949, Chongqing.

¹⁰² For detail on the history of the Back to Jerusalem Movement see OMF's *China Insight* (written by Tony Lambert) for March/April 2003 and November/December 2003, and also (Aikman, 2003:193-205).

share his story. His testimony made a deep impact on the churches in the few years before his death in December, 2001.

The controversy associated with the present BTJ movement relates to claims made by some that 100,000 Chinese missionaries are being prepared for work in Muslim nations. Most observers and indeed house church leaders themselves do not believe such claims are realistic. Certainly hundreds are being trained in house church Bible Schools and seminaries and many are taking English and Arabic as part of their training. There is also the fear expressed that all the publicity outside China may prove counter-productive. It has drawn unhelpful attention to those workers who have been sent out. Already Muslim governments are taking measures against Chinese, such as businessmen from Wenzhou (some of whom are undoubtedly Christians), to keep out any suspected of having a religious agenda.

There is a most informative and detailed website ¹⁰³ which states: “Our aim is to inform and challenge Christians around the world to prayer and involvement with the Chinese Church as they take the Gospel to the Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu nations of the world.” This is a worthy aim and it is certainly encouraging to see the evidence of a growing commitment to missions on the part of the Chinese Church, particularly in the house church movement. The concern of some, however, is that insufficient sensitivity is being exercised and that the vast sums of money being raised outside China to support the BTJ vision may not be wisely spent.

In an unpublished paper ¹⁰⁴ entitled “*Back To Jerusalem: Observations and Recommendations*”, Dr Mai Wei Zhen reports on discussions he held with leaders

¹⁰³ See www.backtojerusalem.com for a wealth of information on the history of BTJ and also on various efforts being undertaken today.

¹⁰⁴ This paper was presented at a consultation on the topic of the BTJ Movement held in Hong Kong in 2004 organized by ChinaSource of Fullerton, California.

in several of the house church networks in China. His observations, in my own words, included:

1. The Chinese have a genuine vision for missions.
2. While concerned about the exaggeration of numbers involved and about the use of money raised outside China, house church leaders do nevertheless strongly own the vision.
3. They welcome the support and help of the West and hope disillusionment with exaggerated reports about the movement do not lead to disillusionment with the movement as a whole.
4. They warn about the harm money can bring to the church in China if not handled wisely. It should not be used in an attempt to buy influence or to control nor should it be given without careful and clear accountability.

Mai Wei Zhen recommends increased dialogue with mainland house church leaders. Those from outside, foreigners or overseas Chinese, need to offer their help in humility and with sensitivity to real needs. The house church leaders stated they welcomed help in strategizing and in practical planning and training. They saw the need for help with language and vocational training, training in cross-cultural ministry, and in Islamic studies. The leaders shared how workers had been sent out to places such as Xinjiang but many had returned with little or no success – their preparation had been far from adequate. I myself spoke with a house church leader in 2004 who told me of one worker sent to Xinjiang with only enough money to support himself for a few months. In order to support himself longer term he looked around for a business platform. He noticed that none of the meat sellers in the town, south of Kashgar, sold pork. With an army base nearby with many Han Chinese soldiers he realised he could find a ready market, and so he started selling pork and soon made a lot of money. However, the Muslim Uygurs, who he had come to reach for Christ, avoided him as the most “unclean” person in town. Muslims, of course, do not eat pork!

The Chinese Church, just like the Church in other nations, has much to learn about how to effectively communicate good news in another culture. Even within China's borders there are numerous cultures and languages and many "unreached people groups". However there is a spiritual and human-resource depth in the Chinese Church that places her in an ideal position to become a major player in the on-going task of world evangelization in the twenty first century. I recently received news about a young Chinese student who several years ago found Christ while a student in Inner Mongolia. He later came to share the BTJ vision and moved to Xinjiang to get further exposure to Muslim peoples and culture. This young man was with a group of 43 others who just happened to be in Pakistani Kashmir when the devastating earthquake struck in October 2005. He reported some incredible miracles as they helped in the rescue effort and shared their love and their faith with some of the locals caught up in the tragedy. These Chinese young people were in Pakistan because they believed passionately that they should be His witnesses "to the ends of the earth".

4.10 Concluding Remarks

China is a very different country in the first decade of the twenty first century to what it was fifty six years ago when the missionaries had to leave. Despite having been ruled by the atheistic Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for over half a century the people of China are more open to spiritual truth than ever before. The Chinese Church has not only survived the onslaught, it has come through far stronger than it ever was. The Chinese church, of whatever stream, is bearing witness to Christ despite the still hostile social and political environment. There is huge spiritual need in this vast nation and in other nations bordering China. The challenges facing the Chinese Church are formidable – but exciting.

Having looked at the Chinese Church we want, in the next chapter, to ask the question what, if any, is the role of foreign and overseas Chinese believers

today? How do they and how should they relate to the Chinese Church? Are they a help or a hindrance or both?

CHAPTER 5 THE ROLE OF FOREIGN CHRISTIANS

In examining whether or not foreign believers, and ‘overseas Chinese’, can be involved in effective sharing of the gospel in China today, it is necessary to look at the situation facing expatriates visiting or living in China. We will then examine how foreign believers can most effectively share the good news, before looking at the relationship between foreign Christians and the Chinese Church.

5.1 China’s welcome

China’s incredible economic development is inextricably linked to her opening to the outside world. China’s athletes and her students, and now her businessmen and even tourists are travelling overseas to a host of nations. Going in the opposite direction, into China, are tourists, diplomats, students, teachers and “foreign experts” as well as businessmen. The number of expatriates living in China’s major cities has risen every year since the early 1980s. Currently there are over 100,000 foreigners working in China, according to the *People’s Daily*¹⁰⁵. Over 33,000 of these are in Shanghai. If on top of this one counts spouses and children and also foreign students the number of expatriates in China may well be close to 300,000. These numbers do not include Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan. With the foreigners and their investment have come Japanese fashion and music, Korean TV soaps, German and Japanese cars, American hamburgers and Wal-Mart, and Italian pizza. The list is endless. I can remember in 1983 having a hard time finding a Coke in Beijing. Finally I did manage to buy one in the Beijing Hotel. Now they are on every street corner, almost. In Beijing alone there are more than one hundred MacDonald’s restaurants and over forty Starbucks. China’s major cities are increasingly cosmopolitan and “First World”. I mention these things just to make the point that, at least in China’s major cities, it is not at all strange to see foreigners.

¹⁰⁵ See *People’s Daily Online* for Jan 7, 2005 at www.english.people.com.cn

Almost twenty years ago, in 1986, a German serving as manager in the Wuhan Diesel Engine Factory in Hubei province was granted the rare privilege of permanent residence. However since August 2004 foreigners, in certain sought-after fields of expertise, have been able to apply for Permanent Residence Permits¹⁰⁶ which makes for easier travel both within and also into and out of China. Very few foreigners had previously been able to obtain visa-free entry and the right of permanent residence. This “green card” or ID, valid for up to ten years, means the foreigner need not obtain exit or entry visas and is free to reside almost anywhere in China. By October 2004, according to the China Daily report mentioned earlier, more than 3,000 foreigners had been granted permanent residence and an additional 230,000 foreigners living in China had long-term residence permits valid for up to five years. Foreigners can now visit almost anywhere in China, using any mode of transport they wish at the same price as locals, and they can choose to reside almost anywhere they like, including living in Chinese homes, and they can buy and own property. This change reflects a huge change from before and also reflects the recognition by China of the role that foreigners have had and still do have in China’s modern development.

5.1.1 An evolving situation

During most of the first thirty years of the communist period foreigners were *not* welcome, unless they were regarded as supportive of the communist rulers and thus useful to the regime. People like Canadian doctor Norman Bethune¹⁰⁷, New Zealander, Rewi Alley¹⁰⁸, and American author Edgar Snow, come to mind. Each, in their own way, has been hailed as a true comrade and friend of China,

¹⁰⁶ Report in *China Daily* for October 5, 2004.

¹⁰⁷ The name Norman Bethune (1890-1939), or at least his Chinese name Bai Qiu-en 白求恩, is known to all mainland Chinese. A surgeon, he served with the Chinese communist Eighth Army during the war with Japan. Mao wrote a poem about him following his untimely death. He even has a statue in his honour in China. Bethune was a member of the Canadian Communist Party.

¹⁰⁸ See the New Zealand China Friendship Society (founded by Alley) for a short biographical outline of Alley's long and remarkable life, some 60 years of which he spent in China. <http://www.nzchinasociety.org.nz/rewi.html> accessed November, 2005. His Chinese name was *Lu-yi Ai-li* 路易艾黎. He knew Mao Zedong personally and was a member of the CCP.

with stamps issued in their memory and books and articles written about them. However in general China was closed to foreigners, never more so than during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). During this xenophobic period Chinese could find themselves in serious trouble even for having a relative overseas let alone for having foreign friends or contacts¹⁰⁹. Despite the 1972 visit of Richard Nixon and the slight thawing in relations with western nations during that period, life was very different for foreigners living in China during the seventies compared to what it is today. In those days, other than diplomats, there were not many foreign residents, and having meaningful contact with locals was nigh impossible. A friend of mine from New Zealand had the rare privilege of being chosen to study Chinese in China in the late 1970s. It was a government to government programme and having contact with locals other than those involved in the programme was not easy.

One of the things that changed with the ending of the Cultural Revolution and bringing in by Deng Xiao-ping of his open-door policy was a new openness towards foreigners. Despite the now friendly welcome accorded to “foreign friends”, however, they still faced various restrictions.

In the early 1980s there were still signs up in various places (I saw them in places as far apart as Beijing and Xiamen) stating “Foreigners No Entry”. China began to welcome groups of tourists but many parts of the country were still off-limits to foreigners. As late as January 1984 for my first visit to the southeast port city of Xiamen I needed a special travel permit. Later that year Xiamen was proclaimed a special economic zone and was opened to foreign visitors. Today it is a garden city with thousands of foreign-owned or joint-venture businesses. In the mid eighties, a former CIM missionary who travelled by train between Guiyang and Kunming hoped to stop off in Anshun in Guizhou province where he had served before the revolution. He was not allowed to remain in the town or even to visit the old church building. Now today, Anshun, small by China’s standards, is

¹⁰⁹ See *Life & Death in Shanghai*, by Nien Cheng, Penguin Books, 1986, pages 41-3.

not only on the busy tourist route to the famous Huangguoshu waterfalls but welcomes foreign investors and businessmen. During the mid-eighties more and more cities all over the country were opened to foreigners. Month by month the list of open cities grew longer and longer. No longer could China be described, as it had been in the seventies, as an “isolated, mysterious country”. No longer need foreigners be accompanied everywhere by Chinese “guides”.

In the 1980s foreign visitors to China had to use foreign exchange certificates (called FEC, *waihuijuan* 外 卷) which were exchanged for foreign currency when entering China or at special Bank of China outlets in hotels. Foreigners were not issued with regular Chinese money, or RMB (*Renminbi*, 人民币). Special stores catered for foreigners using FEC (or “funny money”, as some called it) and foreigners could only stay at approved hotels or university guest houses. Yet foreigners often needed RMB, when eating out or buying things in the market, for example. Not all Chinese traders wanted or could use FEC. Only FEC could be used to obtain foreign currency. Needless to say a roaring black market money-changing trade developed around hotels. The black market RMB to US dollar rate was much more favourable than the official bank FEC to dollar exchange rate. The “funny money” system was finally dropped in January 1994. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief!

Another sometimes annoying aspect of the way foreigners were treated in the eighties was the fact they were often charged more (sometimes *far* more) than locals – for accommodation, for entry tickets (to parks, museums, etc.), for train and plane tickets, and for airport tax. The common excuse was, “well, foreigners are richer than Chinese”.

Through the eighties and into the nineties, however, the restrictions and inconsistencies were gradually reduced as China's reform and opening-up policy extended ever wider.

5.1.2 Tourists

The tourism sector in China has grown significantly every year since 1980 with brief downturns only following events such as the Beijing massacre in 1989 and the SARS outbreak in 2003. Some fear the present bird flu scare may discourage tourism if it becomes a serious problem in China. Despite the ups and downs, tourists in their millions flock to China every year. The China Travel Service website¹¹⁰, quotes the Xinhua News for Jan. 21, 2005 as reporting China had:

...109.04 million tourists in 2004, breaking the 100 million mark for the first time. This earned foreign exchange revenue up to US\$25.74 billion, according to statistics released by the National Bureau of Statistics and the China National Tourism Administration on Thursday. The inbound tourists mainly came from the 16 countries of Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia, the United States, the Philippines, Malaysia, Mongolia, Singapore, United Kingdom, Thailand, Australia, Canada, Germany, Indonesia, India and France.

In actual fact at least half of these entries were made by Hong Kong Chinese but even when Hong Kong residents are not counted, China still receives more tourists than any European nation, including Italy. China is eager to welcome tourists and they come - from all over the world.

5.1.3 “Foreign Experts”, teachers, students, businessmen and investors

From the early eighties China began to welcome “foreign experts” and foreign teachers to serve in China longer term. The government actively encouraged cultural, technical and scientific exchange with foreign countries. The Foreign Experts Bureau (国家外国 家局) now called the State Administration for

¹¹⁰ China Travel Service website www.chinatour.com accessed November 15, 2005

Foreign Expert Affairs (SAFEA)¹¹¹, which sets policy and standards, was set up in Beijing working closely with provincial foreign affairs offices and with educational and other relevant government departments. In 1994 regulations were introduced requiring overseas organizations recruiting foreign experts and teachers for China to register with SAFEA. Each year SAFEA holds an annual conference when approved organizations or those seeking registration are required to submit a formal report of their activities. In more recent years these conferences have been combined with a far larger International Personnel Exchange Fair held in Nanjing attended by several thousand delegates, including foreign and local representatives of universities, industry and commerce.

Each year in China there are hundreds of thousands of so-called “foreign experts” serving in a wide range of specialties, and coming from many nations. While some only come for a few weeks of consulting work, others stay for a year or several years.

Businessmen and women are coming to China from all over the world. Some have described China as the world’s factory. Most major multi-nationals now have extensive involvement in China. A large number are Chinese from Hong Kong or “overseas Chinese” (*hua qiao*,) from countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, and the Philippines are involved in business related ventures. There are also many from other Asian nations such as Japan and Korea. Businessmen as well as “experts” and teachers also come from all English speaking western nations as well as from Israel, Europe, Russia, and the central Asian republics. Ties with central and South American nations, such as Mexico and Brazil, are growing as they are with some countries in Africa, in particular with South Africa. Other African nations, in particular Nigeria, have more and more business ties with China. The same is true of nations such as India, Pakistan and Turkey. Many foreign businessmen come to source cheap Chinese textiles and

¹¹¹ SAFEA’s website is: www.safea.gov.cn

electronic goods but China is also eager to deal with major suppliers of oil, minerals and other raw materials to help fuel her industry.

Richer developed nations are pouring billions into China by way of investment. “Morgan Stanley reports that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and foreign consumers are investing as much as one billion US dollars per week in China.” (Law, 2005:9) Foreign investment in China played a major role in helping kick-start China’s economic growth beginning in the early and mid eighties.

Large numbers of foreign students study in China’s universities. African students have been coming for many years, usually for a year or two of intensive Chinese before taking up engineering, agriculture or medicine. Students come from every country imaginable to study Mandarin Chinese (or Putonghua, 普通). Of China’s over 2000 universities and colleges at least 300 of them have foreign students enrolled. In addition there are a growing number of joint venture and private language schools teaching Mandarin Chinese, mostly in the north in cities like Beijing and Tianjin, but there are also such schools in other cities, like Xi’an and Kunming. Certain universities offer courses in languages such as Tibetan, Uygur, and Mongolian. A report on the BBC for January 9, 2006 entitled “Foreigners Flock to Learn Chinese” stated: “In 2004, a record 110,844 students from 178 countries had enrolled at Chinese universities, according to the official Chinese newswire *Xin Hua*. That was a 43% increase on 2003.”

One could say, the world is in China – particularly in the major cities. Beijing has diplomats from almost every nation represented at the United Nations – the only exceptions being those that maintain relations with Taiwan.

5.2 The scope and impact of foreign involvement in China today

Foreign involvement in China has been seen as a vital component in her open door and modernization policy. The contribution of “foreign experts” in the

fields of education, science and technology, agriculture and medicine has been huge. The same is true when considering the role of foreign businessmen and investors.

Despite the welcome for “foreign experts”, however, SAFEA is aiming to better monitor the quality of these experts. The South China Morning Post for March 3, 2005 reported on the speech made by the director of SAFEA, Wan Xueyuan:

...the Regulatory Laws on Foreign Experts Working in China were being reviewed ... The [new] regulations would include a comprehensive assessment and selection programme to ensure ‘only top-notch talent was hired.’ He noted that about 200,000 foreign workers were recruited to work on the mainland every year, but there had been no relevant laws to monitor the practice.

The above may sound like China is trying to limit the number of teachers and “foreign experts” she accepts. However it is, I believe, simply a case of trying to ensure standards are maintained. The need for such overseas talent is enormous. For example, not only do all China’s universities and colleges welcome foreign language teachers and other specialists, so do many primary, middle and high schools. Major cities in the more developed east of the country may have the luxury of choosing between several well-qualified applicants for a particular teaching position but many other institutions in more remote places are crying out for foreign teachers.

5.2.1 The “Christian” foreigner

Amongst the thousands of foreign experts and teachers, businessmen and students living in China are large numbers of Christians. One writer comments:

...since the opening of China in 1979, a great number of Western Protestant groups (as well as Chinese groups based outside the People’s Republic) have attempted to conduct missionary work of some nature in China. ... [They include] a wide array of parachurch agencies, single congregations, and individual religious entrepreneurs.

Some operate relatively openly and in a genuine service role, such as the groups which supply English teachers and other “foreign experts” to Chinese educational institutions. Others try to work directly with the autonomous churches, and not always on very sound missiological principles. (Dunch, 2001:202)

While some individuals, overseas churches and parachurch organizations have tried to establish a work in China without adequate preparation or attention to missiological principles, it is also true that in general the contribution of foreign professionals who are Christians is much appreciated by the Chinese. David Aikman writes about the influence of foreign English teachers in China:

The open secret is that these teachers are not just *ordinary* teachers of English; they are often serious and committed Christians and are vocal about their faith. This often annoys the Public Security Bureau officials monitoring the foreign presence across Chinese campuses. But over the years China's higher education system has learned to appreciate the quality of the Christian teachers. They behave well, they don't get drunk, they don't flirt with the local girls, they don't have romantic relationships even with other foreigners, they are diligent, and they don't complain a lot.... Almost every urban young Christian I met in China had come to the Christian faith through a foreign, English-speaking teacher. (Aikman, 2003:278-279)

Aikman is absolutely right. I too could give numerous examples of individuals, from taxi drivers to farmers, from university professors to government officials, from shop owners to students, who have been strongly influenced in their journey to faith by the witness (often unspoken) of foreign teachers, students or businessmen. This “witness” has not only impacted individuals, it has also made a favourable impression upon the government.

Aikman mentions one of the SAFEA registered organizations, English Language Institute, China (ELIC), founded by Ken Wendling. ELIC has sent many thousands of teachers to China since its founding in the early eighties. It is the largest such organization sending English teachers. There are

several other similar organizations including the one with which I have been affiliated, the Jian Hua Foundation (JHF).

I was told by a reliable source of an incident that occurred at an in-house conference organized by SAFEA for Provincial Education Foreign Affairs officials in 2004. One of the most senior officials in SAFEA told the delegates that SAFEA was aware of the fact two thirds of the organizations sending “foreign experts” and teachers to China were faith-based agencies. Despite their religious agendas, he said SAFEA was not overly concerned as it was possible to monitor their activities and ensure they did not overstep the boundaries of the government’s religious policy. This senior official went on to recommend that universities and Provincial Foreign Affairs offices needing teachers should make recruiting from these faith-based agencies their first priority. He gave as his reasons: the excellent quality of the teachers provided, their generally exemplary lives, and the fact they did not mind going to difficult, less developed places and seldom complained about their conditions. All round they were easier to work with and did a better job. This is high praise indeed from such a senior official in SAFEA.

The Foreign Affairs director in one university told me that over several years his university hired English teachers from a certain faith-based agency registered with SAFEA. In interacting with the teachers sent by this organization and in dealing with the leaders of the organization he had become more and more impressed with the Christianity they professed. He compared these teachers with other foreigners teaching on the campus who had no Christian commitment. The Christian teachers were so different. They had a peace and poise and simple goodness which attracted him. After almost seven years of observation and intellectual enquiry this official came to faith in Christ. We met at a SAFEA conference when, in private conversation, he told me his story. By then he had become a strong and committed believer and so had his wife. The other organization was not always able to supply teachers and he hoped we might be

able to help out in future. He was not merely trying to recruit English and Japanese teachers or other “foreign experts” for his university, he clearly preferred Christian ones. This story is by no means unusual.

I have heard the same sort of appreciation expressed by officials for the work done by Christians in other fields of expertise – in industry, agriculture, social work and in healthcare. On various occasions, not only have SAFEA officials but also provincial, prefecture and county officials, university presidents, city mayors, and also ordinary citizens have praised the work being done by professionals sent by organizations such as JHF.

A group of farmers in Shanxi province once told me in glowing terms of how they benefited from the regular visits and expert hands-on advice of one of our agricultural experts. They could not remember ever having had a visit from a government agricultural expert but Marc, our associate, came to help and advise them every week or two.

In a fairly remote part of Qinghai province officials from the local prefecture hospital once gave me a welcome fit only for an important dignitary. I was accorded the best of Tibetan and Chinese hospitality and honour. Why? The reason was simple. They wanted to express to JHF their gratitude for the contribution of our medical team of doctors in their hospital and district and wanted us to continue the partnership begun. Our team included a Namibian specialist in emergency medicine and a general practitioner, of Chinese decent, from the UK, as well as nursing educators and a colleague with experience in hospital administration.

5.3 Welcome tempered by apprehension

In such a huge country with such a long and complicated history it should not be a surprise to discover that not everyone welcomes foreigners. For one thing

there are “nice” foreigners and “not-so-nice”, even downright “bad”, foreigners. For another, while many Chinese welcome contact with the outside world there are also some who do not. Even in the government and in the CCP, while there are those who enthusiastically embrace modernization, there are also those who feel threatened by the winds of change blowing in society. They see any talk of liberalization, especially in the political arena, as potentially undermining the grip on power of the Party itself. Their sensitivity to foreign criticism was illustrated recently following a speech made by US President George W. Bush¹¹² who said, “We encourage China to continue down the road of reform and openness,” adding his view that China's economic reforms should be followed by increased political and religious freedom. Mr Bush said:

...As China reforms its economy its leaders are finding that once the door to freedom is opened even a crack, it cannot be closed. As the people of China grow in prosperity, their demands for political freedom will grow as well. ...the people of China want more freedom to express themselves, to worship without state control, to print Bibles and other sacred texts without fear of punishment.

The response of China’s Foreign Minister, Li Zhao-xing, to President Bush’s speech reflected Chinese sensitivities. He responded, “We have to work hard and not pay attention to those people who talk about this or that, trying to shake our conviction, especially when it comes to our love of the motherland.”

China, as was pointed out in chapter two of this thesis, is extremely sensitive about implied criticism by western nations of its record on human rights and the slow pace of political reform. Any criticism of the CCP and its policies is regarded as disloyalty to the “motherland”. Love for the country is equated with love for the Communist Party. So while none in the Party would disparage the economic reforms which have led to a booming economy, rising standards of living and growing influence in the world, quite a few in the Party are fearful of where the

¹¹² President Bush was speaking on November 16, 2005, in Japan during a brief Asian tour and Chinese Foreign Minister Li’s comments were made to reporters during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings in South Korea.

reform road is leading China in social and political terms. President Bush may regard political reform and democracy as good for China, and I would agree, but the Party elite, who enjoy their power and privilege, understandably perhaps, see such reform as a huge threat.

There is no question that the two most sensitive areas where China does not want foreigners to interfere are *politics* and *religion*. President Bush's remarks touched on both these areas. The Chinese see criticism of their political system as "interference in internal affairs". It is an attempt to undermine the Party's philosophy and power. The question of religion is tied up in the equation for not only in China's history has religion been a powerful force in society (sometimes a violent force as during the Taiping Rebellion in the mid nineteenth century) but also in political movements in other nations. China is well aware of the role religion (specifically Christianity) played in the fall of communism in nations like Poland, Romania, the former Czechoslovakia, and the former USSR. The collapse of communism in these nations in the late eighties and early nineties sent shock waves through the CCP. Christopher Marsh of Baylor University writes:

The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe worried Chinese leaders greatly, and forced them to come to grips with the fact that, rather than representing the future of the world, socialism was in crisis. ...As one Communist regime in Eastern Europe after another fell in the fall of 1989, leaders in Beijing watched with amazement and fear. ...Once the Ceausescu regime was toppled in late December, however, fear turned to panic. (Marsh, 2006:105)

Marsh quotes former US National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, who was in Beijing when the Ceausescu regime collapsed in Romania, as saying: "I believe the Chinese leaders panicked."¹¹³ Marsh continues,

"...the CCP's religious policy is perhaps the policy area where the impact of events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is most clear, with many internal policies and

¹¹³ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), pp. 566.

official reports stating explicitly that China must “manage” correctly religious affairs if it is to avoid the sort of the collapse that occurred in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. (Ibid, 2003:113/4)

Given these sensitivities it is not surprising that China has a large and active security apparatus, and this “unseen” arm of the state keeps a close watch on foreigners and outside organizations active in China. A report in the *South China Morning Post* for August 2, 2005 was headed “*Be On Lookout for Spies, Public Told*”. The report quoted Chinese counter-espionage officials as warning China’s public and also government cadres “to be on the alert for overseas agents spying in China.” The *SCMP* quoted Guo Wen, a director in the Beijing Bureau of State Security, as saying that overseas intelligence bodies were using “diplomats, journalists, businesspeople, visiting scholars and tourists to steal information under the guise of media interviews, trade co-operation, friendly exchange and sightseeing.”

There is little question China keeps a close watch on the activities of foreigners. Surveillance, these days at least, is usually sophisticated and unobtrusive. Not only is use made of an extensive human network but electronic monitoring and listening devices are increasingly hi-tech. I could quote numerous examples of foreigners having their telephones bugged and their private mail checked. These days that surveillance extends to emails and the Internet. The censors are helped by sophisticated technology to pick up on sensitive words or phrases (especially religious or political ones) so little is secret in China today. Of course if anyone is particularly suspect their every word, action, and movement and as well every local contact would be monitored. And it is not only communications in major languages, such as English, German or Japanese, that can be monitored. There are specialists in a host of languages. A friend who worked in the Norwegian embassy in Beijing several years ago told me there was no question China’s surveillance network had people monitoring communications in Norwegian.

One young English teacher known to me was kept under tight surveillance for nine months, without being aware of it all. When he was finally brought in for questioning it was evident that his interrogators had detailed accounts of everything he had said on the phone as well as in conversation with locals. Of course they also knew what he had said, by way of political comment, in the classroom. He may have been unwise in some things he had said (he was sometimes rather outspoken) but he was in fact totally innocent. They wanted him to admit he was an undercover missionary, a charge he vehemently denied. He gladly confessed he was a Christian but refused to accept he had come under false pretences or was engaging in religious or political activities inconsistent with his position as a teacher. He was let off but it was a nasty experience nonetheless. Other foreigners known to me, accused of these same charges, have been asked to leave the country.

5.4 The Christian “foreign expert” and “Caesar”

As indicated earlier, and despite the security network just referred to, Christian professionals and “faith-based” organizations serving in China have over the years built up a solid reputation for reliability and excellence. The quality of the teachers, their life-style and their hard work and professionalism, has won them much praise. The purpose statement of the Jian Hua Foundation includes the phrase - “serving her peoples with compassion, integrity and expertise.” When these qualities of compassion, integrity and expertise have been displayed in the life and work of a foreign Christian professional in China they have made a deep and lasting impression.

Despite, however, the good will on the part of the Chinese towards most Christian expatriates serving in China and despite the good reputations built up by many overseas agencies sending professionals to China, there are certain limits to what is acceptable behaviour. Even a “Christian” Foreign Affairs director, like the one I mentioned above, would not be able to condone unwise or overt Christian

activities on the part of foreign teachers. It is one thing to live a consistent Christian life and to be a dedicated teacher but it is quite another thing to use the classroom as a pulpit or to be involved in overt religious work. China's religious policy clearly states that foreigners should not engage in proselytizing or in religious activities. What do the authorities actually mean?

5.4.1 What is meant by proselytizing?

The word proselytize in Chinese is usually translated as *zongjiao xuanchuan* (宗教宣), literally “religious propaganda”. The Chinese know all about propaganda. In fact they can smell it a mile off. In the past it certainly had a connotation of compulsion. People had no choice – even if inwardly they disagreed they would have to toe the line. There is still a major government department in charge of Propaganda – responsible for propagating and ensuring official government policy is adhered to. So the term “religious propaganda” or “to proselytize” carries with it a sense of forcing agreement in religious beliefs – something in itself very negative in China where religion is regarded as superstition to begin with.

Based on discussions I've had with various officials, including some in SAFEA, I believe they usually mean by proselytizing - forcing people to believe or deliberately trying to convert Chinese by deceit, allurement or pressure. According to this definition of proselytizing, I fully agree with the Chinese authorities that it is something we must avoid. I can see no biblical mandate for trying to trick people or force them to believe. In fact the very opposite is the case. As the Apostle Paul says “Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”¹¹⁴ Christians are not in the business of deceiving, cajoling, bribing or forcing anyone. Those building their own kingdoms or programmes may be tempted to

¹¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:2

hold out ungodly incentives, such as a scholarship to study overseas, in an attempt to win over a local, but this kind of action is, I believe, reprehensible.

Of course any true Christian would wish for others to be able to hear the good news and have the chance to respond to God's offer of new life in Christ. But in sharing our faith with others it is simply a case of "one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread."¹¹⁵ Or to use the words of the lepers outside the city gate when they discovered the siege of Samaria had been miraculously lifted - "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves."¹¹⁶

Several years ago while discussing this topic with an official in SAFEA, I readily agreed that I did not believe in forcing anyone to believe but I went on to say, "Of course I would want everyone to know the good news, even Deng Xiaoping." The supreme leader was still alive at that time. By including him I was including the official with whom I was chatting.

Christians do naturally desire that others also have the chance to know about the gospel. However our role is not to *produce* fruit, it is simply to *bear* fruit. It is the Holy Spirit who produces the fruit. Our role is not to twist arms but simply to be a witness of what we have seen and heard and experienced – "you will be my witnesses"¹¹⁷. "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."¹¹⁸ The picture here is one of an ambassador, a royal representative. The ambassador certainly has nothing to hide nor is he or she ashamed of the one they represent – not normally anyway. We do not have to prove anything or fight about anything. We are simply a spokesman. God issues His loving and earnest invitation through us but the response, or lack thereof, is actually not our

¹¹⁵ Quotation from Sri Lankan Christian leader, D.T. Niles.

¹¹⁶ 2 Kings 7:9

¹¹⁷ Acts 1:8

¹¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:20

responsibility. This does not mean we are not concerned to do a good job. We want to be effective representatives even in a hostile or difficult situation.

The often tough nature of the ambassador's assignment comes out in another passage:

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.¹¹⁹

The Apostle Paul instructs the young Timothy to “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction”.¹²⁰ This shows that the task of sharing good news may not be easy, nor is it a short-term project. It involves being ready at any time, and demands careful, hard and patient effort.

Another profound principle taught by Jesus Himself is beautifully expressed in Matthew: “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”¹²¹ Sharing good news is basically letting the light shine. There need be no fuss and no noise – just a lighted lamp, fuelled by oil or electricity, shining in the darkness.

¹¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

¹²⁰ 2 Timothy 4:2

¹²¹ Matthew 5:14,15

Another relevant Scripture showing the importance of a non-confrontational and gentle approach comes in the words of the Apostle Peter: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”¹²²

Often in China foreign Christian professionals have been assured, “If people ask you if you believe in God, you are free to answer them.” And I have been asked by many, many people from governors to peasants, from students to surgeons, just that question and I have reveled in the joy of telling them as much as they would like to know. Never have I felt I was breaking the law regarding proselytizing, nor have I ever tried to force people to believe.

5.4.2 What is meant by “religious activities”?

Religious activities (*zongjiao huodong*, 宗教活动) are things like preaching, teaching the Bible, baptizing, church planting, distributing Christian literature, organizing religious cell groups, etc. This is a more serious problem for if foreign Christian teachers and other professionals cannot engage in any of these kinds of activities, what can they do? How can we obey the Great Commission if we can’t engage in any of these activities?

As already outlined in this thesis, China does allow foreigners to meet together for worship and other religious activities as long as no local Chinese are involved. There are expatriate fellowships in most major cities in China. Some even have district Bible Study groups, marriage enrichment seminars, camps, youth programmes, and engage in some social service projects and in raising funds for relief work. Some have run the Alpha Course. Nicky Gumbel himself, founder of Alpha in London, led a very successful Alpha Course in Shanghai in December 2004, sponsored by the Shanghai International Christian Fellowship.

¹²² 1 Peter 3:15

Not all foreign fellowships, by any means, are registered or officially approved. The authorities however usually turn a blind eye as long as only foreigners are involved. If such activities are undertaken with the approval of and under the cover of official religious bodies such as the TSPM/CCC then the authorities do not seem to mind.

However when foreigners involve locals in specifically religious activities the authorities certainly *do* mind. They see this as flouting the law. Clearly for a foreigner to invite Chinese students to a group Bible study, or to baptize local people in a bath-tub (or in the sea or in a lake), or to distribute Bibles and other Christian literature – all of which has been and is being done – is, strictly speaking, breaking of the law.

For a teacher to use the classroom to promote Christianity is also unacceptable. For example, one teacher I know was teaching a class on American culture and western customs. When she came to teach about Easter she asked her university authorities if she could show a video to illustrate the background to the festival. The authorities gave their verbal approval. Unwisely perhaps, this teacher then showed the whole of the Jesus video in her class. A few relevant clips might have been better. All seemed fine though until one of her students excitedly told her mother, who happened to be a Party member and local official, about what she had seen. The next day the police came to the university to investigate. The university authorities denied they had given permission for the showing of the video. Nothing was in writing. The teacher was not directly confronted but her visa was not extended at the end of the semester and she had to leave China. She had crossed the line as regards what was acceptable in the classroom.

I recounted this incident at a conference in Canada and someone spoke up and said, “If a teacher had shown the Jesus video in class in a public school in Canada they would have been terminated right away, not at the end of the semester.” This helps put things in better perspective. While there are many

restrictions on foreigners in China, there is also a lot more tolerance than one sometimes encounters in the West. It is also true that in some parts of China things are a lot less sensitive than where the “Jesus video” incident took place. I have known of foreign Christian teachers being asked to teach a semester-long course on “The Bible as Literature”. In at least one case I know the class proved so popular that for each occasion the lecture theatre was packed with far more than just those registered for the class. And it was all officially approved.

We have considered what the Chinese authorities mean by proselytizing and engaging in religious activities. We have considered how foreign Christian professionals might be faithful to their calling and to the Great Commission while at the same time respecting and obeying the laws of the country in which they serve.

5.4.3 Professional Integrity

Part of being faithful to our calling, I believe, is maintaining professional integrity. Tennant writing in *Christianity Today*¹²³ mentions a letter to *TESOL Matters* by Julian Edgar that stated: “taking on educational responsibilities under false pretences is utterly repellent.” Edge says language teachers should “restrict the purpose of our teaching to facilitating the life purposes of our students.” He argues that accusations of linguistic and cultural imperialism are justified when directed against “people overtly engaged in TESOL¹²⁴ with the covert purpose of exporting their moral and/or religious certainties to the rest of the world.” (Edge, 1996:23) This is a view from an academic who obviously does not hold to an evangelical Christian position. He is not alone for many non-Christian anthropologists, secular development workers, journalists and government officials regard all foreign Christians serving in China as “undercover missionaries” trying

¹²³ Tennant, A. (2002) *The Ultimate Language Lesson*: Teaching English may well be the 21st century's most promising way to take the Good News to the world [posted on *Christianity Today* website, 12 June 2002, accessed November, 2005]

¹²⁴ TESOL is an acronym standing for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

to impose their religious values and beliefs onto others. One wonders if Christians are the only ones with an agenda!

A highly recommended book on teaching English by Don Snow of Amity Foundation is entitled “*English Teaching as Christian Mission*.” Snow distinguishes two main approaches to English teaching by ‘Christian English teachers’ (CET). The one approach is seeing English teaching as a way to evangelize: it is teaching English *for* missionary purposes. Snow sees this approach as creating a gap between one’s stated purpose and one’s real purpose, “and whenever a gap develops between this stated agenda and a second Christian agenda being pursued by a CET, the issue of integrity becomes problematic. ... the more CETs mislead others as to their true intentions in accepting a teaching position, the more their integrity is compromised and the luster of their witness tarnished” (Snow, 2001:70, 71).

The other approach, highlighted by Snow, is more service orientated. This approach “promotes good English teaching as a means to that goal rather than merely using English as a means of access.” (Pennycock, 2003:19) Snow “argues that by showing themselves to be willing to learn other languages and cultures, by teaching well and conducting themselves as good Christians, by helping students and working with compassion, and by teaching English in order to help people meet their needs, Christian English teachers (CETs) can show the love of God through their work as English teachers.” (Ibid, 2003) Snow states:

...English teaching can and should be much more than an opportunity to gain access to closed nations for evangelistic purposes, or a form of social work only incidentally carried out by Christians. It can be an opportunity to bear witness, to minister, to serve the disadvantaged... English teaching can be more than a secular job that serves as a means to other ends – English teaching itself becomes a form of Christian mission. (Snow, 2001:176-7)

Snow believes, "CETs can and should be open and forthright about their faith in class as the occasion arises" (Ibid, p 81) and affirms that "the quality of CETs' teaching work is the primary vehicle through which they share the love of God with their students, and also the strongest and clearest statements they make about what a Christian should be like" (Ibid, p 65).

A prominent evangelical academic involved in TESOL training, Mary Shepard Wong, director of the Azusa Pacific University TESOL program in Los Angeles, is quoted in the *Christianity Today* article by Tennant. Wong agrees wholeheartedly with Snow and stresses that the English teacher's best witness is his or her professionalism. "A teacher can do the most by being diligent, by preparing lessons, by listening to what the students' needs are," she says. Dr Wong encourages her students to openly tell their supervisors, "I am a Christian, but I will not evangelize in the classroom because I believe it's unethical." (Tennant, 2002) Wong also writes, "I believe that Christian teachers demonstrate the love of Christ through the excellence of their teaching, the dedication to their students, and the integrity of their lives and their life's work."¹²⁵

Nepal, a poor and under-developed nation with around 80% Hindu, is very different to China. In one aspect, however, there is a clear similarity. Although the Nepali government welcomes the services of the professionals sent by the United Mission to Nepal they strictly forbid foreigners to proselytize. Thomas Hale, a medical doctor to Nepal has written:

Some may ask why we have come to Nepal if not to 'proselytize' or 'Christianize' the country. Our reason for coming, besides the fact that God has called us here, is to communicate the love of God to the Nepali people through our service and through our lives. ...There is no pressure, no enticement, no ulterior motive, no effort to undermine the many wonderful aspects of their own culture, which we not only admire but from which we have learned and profited. Rather we seek to work among the Nepalis as friends and equals, contributing our professional skills where needed and involving ourselves as much

¹²⁵ Mary Shepard Wong, *Running to Win*, from China Contours Archive, sent by email to writer.

as possible in their natural aspirations. During the course of all this, it is natural for us to share with them, as occasions arise, our hearts' deepest feelings. They can take Christ or leave Him; we shall serve them regardless. (1986:12)

What Hale writes of those called to serve in Nepal is equally applicable to those serving in China. It applies to any type of professional service, be it medical work or teaching English or community development. Professor Allan Seaman of Wheaton College in Chicago in writing about the Christian English teacher believes that English teaching "allows the ministers of incarnation to become part of the culture in a way that makes sense for a foreigner." (Seaman, 1998:22) Despite the language and cultural barriers faced by an English teacher, Seaman believes,

The foreign English teacher has a role within the society which is often more easily understood by nationals than the traditional missionary or anthropologist who may appear to have no clear place in the social structure and no visible means of financial support.¹²⁶

Professional integrity shows itself not only in the openness and transparency with which we serve. It shows itself in the quality of our service and in the level to which we identify with the real needs of those we serve. We may be foreigners but we come openly and without having to be ashamed or secretive in any way.

5.4.3 Some more case studies

1. Two Teachers

In a university in the southeast of China there were two Christian English teachers on the same campus. One teacher used Mark's Gospel to teach conversational English & was often "preachy" in class. The other teacher was more "professional" & hardly mentioned his faith, though his Christian values and lifestyle were clear enough to both his students and to others in the community.

¹²⁶ Personal email communication with Professor Seaman dated 1 December 2005.

On various occasions, particularly at Christmas and Easter, he did make comments, particularly when asked, about his personal views in regard to his faith, but he never took liberties to say more than was perfectly natural in the context. While always very low key he was not secretive.

The question to ask is – which of the two teachers was more effective in communicating the good news?

The first teacher was so openly Christian that the authorities actually warned the students about him. While this might have made some more interested and curious than otherwise, for most it was a deterrent. His approach to sharing his beliefs was so overt that they saw it as “propaganda”. Chinese students are usually quite eager to practice their English with their teacher outside of class time but in this case the students tended to hold back. Many students however visited the second teacher without any such fear. Several in whom a genuine interest had been stirred sought him out to talk privately and he was able to share his faith more openly with them and answer their questions.

At the end of the school year, the first teacher’s contract was not renewed, while the second teacher had his extended for a second year. It would not be right to infer the first teacher was totally ineffective. His good life and friendly nature did make an impression. He was totally genuine in everything he did. The second teacher, however, in the longer run, made a deeper impact and was able to stay on longer term at the university, building on relationships. In terms of teaching English he was of course more professional and this also left a good impression.

2. The Bible Incident

The second case study concerns a teacher who was part of a team of Christian teachers sent by a faith-based organization with a good record and standing in China. His team was teaching in a university in the northeast. He was enthusiastic and excited about being in China and found the students very open

and eager to learn. Being young himself, he easily related to his students both inside and outside the classroom. One day in class he spoke quite openly about the Bible, and happened to ask if the students would like a copy. Of course they all said yes. He managed to get a supply for them, which a few days later he handed out in the classroom – one for each student. Was this a wise thing to do?

Sadly, it was not! The very same day as the Bibles were handed out the authorities heard about it and demanded the Bibles be collected from the students. The students were severely reprimanded. How was the fact Bibles were handed out discovered so soon? The student monitor (for there usually is one in each class) had reported the whole incident, probably in the first instance to the Party Secretary in the Foreign Languages department¹²⁷. Of course the Party Secretary, who saw this action as flouting rules on proselytizing and engaging in religious activities, could over-rule the department head if there had been any question. The Public Security Bureau (PSB) also became involved, though, as is usual in such cases, they kept in the background. Unbeknown to the teacher who handed out the Bibles in the first place, within the space of twenty four hours there had been frenetic activity involving the department, the Party apparatus, the PSB and the students. The department head had the unpleasant task of calling in the team leader of the foreign organization's group of teachers to explain the situation. He told how the teacher concerned had handed out Bibles in class and that he would now have to leave the university, and in fact leave China. Unless the teacher was dismissed from the team the whole programme would have to be terminated.

It was a huge shock, not only to the team leader but also to the teacher and the rest of their team. Having little idea of all that had happened as a result of his “innocent” and “generous” action in handing out Bibles in class the teacher could only think it was his team mates, and in particular the leader, who lacked a desire to share the good news with students hungry to learn about God. Why were they

¹²⁷ Not only does a university have a President's Office, they also have an office for the Communist Party, and the Party Secretary usually has more power than the President.

so afraid to stand up for the Lord and bravely share His Word with the students? The team leader tried to explain that sadly he had no choice other than to ask the teacher to leave. It is a pity the teacher was not humble enough to admit that what he had done was inappropriate. Had he apologized to the authorities explaining he had acted in ignorance of the rules, maybe they would have found a way to smooth things over.

I happened to meet this teacher in Hong Kong a few days after he had left the mainland. He was still very upset with his team leader. I am afraid he did not get much sympathy from me either, though one had to respect his zeal and his desire to share the good news. I believe the organization to which he had been affiliated tightened their orientation and clarified do's and don'ts for their teachers following this incident.

In some instances the Bible has been used in English teaching situations and particularly in western literature studies. In some cases a university department has even given approval for each student to be given a Bible. China is a huge country and anything can happen. Sometimes the "climate" is very relaxed but at other times it is extremely tight. One needs great wisdom and sensitivity. In the case I have outlined, the actions of the teacher, at that particular time and in that particular university, resulted in his expulsion and nearly closed the whole programme down.

There are appropriate ways to make Bibles and Christian literature available without causing the problems highlighted in the case mentioned above. Handing out Bibles in class is clearly not wise, unless it is the text of an approved lesson series. However when the foreigner has developed a trusting relationship with a local friend and that friend requests a Bible, it is usually possible to give them one – or even safer, perhaps, to loan it for as long as they desire to keep it. The same can be done with other books and booklets and CDs. There are many excellent resources, in Chinese, addressing a wide range of issues. The key is not

to hand such material out to strangers, nor to push it onto people, such as one's students or local work colleagues. One can mention these materials and even show them to those seeking truth or those interested in or struggling with some issue. However, generally speaking, one should leave it up to the person concerned to ask if they can borrow the item - to read or listen to or watch, as the case may be. If they are really interested they almost certainly will ask.

3. “My gift is evangelism”

The next case study is set in China's far northwest in Xinjiang. Xinjiang is a particularly sensitive part of China with political, ethnic and religious factors creating a volatile mix. The authorities certainly do not want foreigners causing extra problems by upsetting the Muslim Uygur¹²⁸ people or getting involved in sensitive political issues related to Uygur separatism.

Steve (not his real name) was teaching English in a college in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang. He had a special burden for the Uygurs and had spent three or four years learning both Chinese and Uygur before taking up his teaching post. The college where he was teaching had students and faculty from all of Xinjiang's ethnic groups, including of course Han Chinese and Uygur. It was a great place to be. However Steve was feeling dissatisfied - “I feel that my gift is evangelism and I am unable to use it teaching English,” he confided in me one day when I was visiting him & his wife. “I would rather be out in the bazaar chatting to the locals or out on the street making contacts and handing out literature, discreetly of course. What can I do?”

I reminded Steve that if he did what he was suggesting the Public Security Bureau would soon be on his tail. It would certainly be most suspicious for a teacher, who speaks Uygur, to spend an unusual amount of time in the bazaar. I told him his gift of evangelism would not be wasted if he focussed his efforts on his

¹²⁸ An alternative spelling is Uighur, and the Chinese is *wei wu er zu* 吾尔族.

campus and gave himself to his teaching and to his students. I said, “Be the best teacher you can be and I am sure God will use you greatly.”

My encouragement to Steve that day perhaps simply underscored what he already knew in his heart. He did focus on his teaching and his students. He prepared well and taught enthusiastically. He and his wife opened their home, and took every opportunity to enter into the life of the College and into their student’s lives. It did not surprise me that for the next five or six years Steve was welcomed back each year to teach on the same campus. He became “famous”, as many foreigners do after such a long time, and when he and his family eventually left Xinjiang (for family reasons) there was a special farewell when many tears were shed. The college presented them with a wonderful video of their life and work on the campus. Over the years Steve and his wife were used by God to lead many students (including Uygurs) to Christ and to disciple them. They were always low-key and natural in the way they shared their faith and avoided overt activities that would have upset the authorities. I believe Steve’s gift of evangelism was well used, and without breaking any of China’s laws relating to proselytizing and engaging in “religious activities”.

Those going to China to serve in their profession should, like Steve, see their job as the legitimate vehicle for their life and service and not as the excuse for it. They should not see the job and their witness as two separate concerns but as part of an integrated whole. They should be committed to their profession and they should seek to express their commitment to Christ through their work.

4. “Frank the Baptizer”

Frank (not his real name) was studying Chinese in southeast China. He was a most gifted and charismatic personality and made friends easily. He was popular with both teachers and local students on the campus, as well as by other foreigners studying Chinese with him. No one could say anything negative about Frank. He studied hard and made impressive progress with his Chinese. He

enjoyed playing basketball and engaging in other activities with local students. He made lots of friends and was a great witness. Chinese students opened up to him.

Frank was extremely circumspect when it came to relating to female students. He led some male students to faith and spent time discipling them. He encouraged them to be baptized. However, they all had a problem. None of them, Frank included, had any contact with the TSPM church and for Frank to be involved in the local house churches would also not have been very wise – after all he was a long-nosed foreigner and would have stood out too easily. Frank suggested that he baptize his three friends in the sea. There was a popular beach close to the campus. They decided to have the baptisms unobtrusively a little away from where most would be swimming. No one would know what they were up to. The baptisms seemed to go well. Frank felt he was obeying the Great Commission in baptizing those he had led to faith.

Several months passed. Frank was still studying Chinese on the campus. Sadly, one of those he had baptized seemed to draw back from following the Lord. In order to show his loyalty to the Party, possibly in order to get a better job, he went to the authorities and reported the baptisms. All of a sudden the university foreign affairs office faced a major dilemma. The PSB had come to investigate the report. Frank was called in to answer for his alleged actions – baptizing Chinese students in the sea. The charges were serious and Frank could have been expelled from China. He confessed that indeed he had baptized some students but that they had made the choice freely without any pressure from him. The PSB wanted Frank to reveal the names of all his Chinese student friends and contacts and also the names of any local Christians he knew. He politely refused saying he would have to ask their permission first. The situation got nasty and the whole language study programme of which Frank was a part, involving thirty six other foreign Christian students studying Chinese, seemed in danger of being closed down at the insistence of the PSB. There were just too many local students apparently being influenced by this group of foreigners, Frank included. But most

serious was the fact some had been engaging in clearly religious activities, such as baptizing students, and this was totally unacceptable.

Surprisingly, at this point, the university Chinese department spoke up for Frank, at considerable risk to themselves. They insisted Frank was an exemplary student – in fact the best they had known. He was “more Lei Feng than Lei Feng” – a reference to a model communist hero known to everyone in China. They agreed to keep a close eye on him and to make sure nothing like this happened again. What turned the tide in favour of Frank, at least in human terms, was the fact right at the time this all blew up, but in no way related, serious student demonstrations were taking place on the campus. The authorities found that all of a sudden they had even more serious concerns on their hands. The incident with Frank was quietly dropped.

Over ten years later Frank is still in China and has continued to make a deep impression wherever he has gone. However, I believe, he has found other ways to encourage his Chinese friends to get baptized.

It is seldom necessary for a foreigner to be the one baptizing, even if their Chinese friends would like them to officiate. It is probably much better for local believers, either in the house churches or in the TSPM, to do the baptizing. To make the necessary introductions may take time, and may require great wisdom, but in the long run this would be a much better plan. The Chinese believers would be in a better position to judge if the baptismal candidate was ready for the step and whether or not they fully understood what they were doing. It would also more closely connect the young believer to the local body of Christ which is far healthier and more biblical. On top of this the foreigner could not be accused of engaging in religious activities.

5.5 A look at methodology

If public preaching (on the street or in the classroom or in a factory), handing out Bibles and other Christian literature, baptizing locals, etc. are not acceptable activities for foreigners then what is acceptable and what is appropriate?

5.5.1 Life-style and friendship evangelism

The most effective way of sharing good news in China today, I believe, is by being totally natural. It is not about methods but rather about life-style.

I once asked a fine young Chinese brother, who had the English name Fred, how he came to faith. He told me it was through his foreign friend, John¹²⁹ – not through anything John had said (not at first anyway) but through his actions. Fred told me there had been three separate instances that were particularly significant. The first was when he and John each bought a container of yogurt to eat. When the two arrived back at John's flat, John unexpectedly produced his empty yogurt container and casually threw it in the bin. Fred was taken aback for he couldn't remember what he had done with his empty container. He had simply tossed it somewhere in the street.

The second incident that made Fred think was when foreign friend John noticed a piece of wood, which happened to have a nasty nail sticking out of it, lying in the pathway. John took the trouble to knock the nail flat with his heel and kicked the piece of wood out the pathway.

The third incident was when Fred and John came across a distraught child and rather than ignore the little one John squatted down and comforted the child. These three incidents so struck Fred that he blurted out, "John, why are you so different?" Fred had to explain what he meant for John had no idea about what he

¹²⁹ Not his real name. These events occurred in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, in the mid 1990s.

was referring to. He had been totally unaware of how these three incidents had affected Fred. John confessed he hadn't consciously been trying to be good or considerate of others. On reflection though, he admitted that his being a Christian did affect the way he reacted to people and situations. Fred wanted to know more and John was then happy to share something of his faith with his Chinese friend. Fred is now a fruitful witness in his own right.

Whether one is a student or an English teacher, a businessman or a lawyer, a consultant or a diplomat, it is how we relate to others in everyday life that makes the difference. It is so often those unguarded moments, those unexpected opportunities, which are part of daily life, that enhance or sometimes, sadly, detract from our witness. The foreign believer working in China, none more so than those teaching, has countless opportunities to communicate biblical truth & Christian values, without ever needing to "preach". You don't need a pulpit to communicate good news effectively in China.

The language teacher often deals with topics in class that lend themselves to the sharing of truth - for example, when discussing inter-personal relationships, sex and marriage, fashion, money, ambition, and making career choices. The teacher can even refer sometimes to what "the Bible says" without preaching. The foreign teacher is not of course pushing western values, which are often corrupt and far from Christian. Indeed one can often be positive about many aspects of Chinese culture. Biblical truth applies to all cultures. All cultures recognize that certain values (such as respect, honesty, kindness, generosity, etc.) are good while others (such as anger, racism, pride, lust, dishonesty, etc.) are harmful.

There is a wide range of excellent videos and music CDs that can be used to communicate the good news, both directly and indirectly. One is much freer in the private of one's own home to show videos and listen to music with interested friends who one can trust. Even in the classroom, however, there are creative ways to use these tools. One teacher gave extremely popular lectures based on

the movie “The Titanic”. Another gave a series of lectures based on Francis Schaeffer’s “How Then Should We Live?” video series. “Chariots of Fire” is another popular and useful movie, as is the even older “Ben Hur”. When my late wife taught oral English in China she found her students loved some of the songs of Cliff Richard and other popular artists. Not only did they enjoy the music but they entered into some deep discussions about feelings, emotions and situations that are part of life. The words of the songs were not overtly Christian but did speak to the heart. It was not only a good way to learn English but to learn about life. The same is true for those teaching literature or poetry – such study very often sparks discussion of some of life’s big questions.

Christmas, Easter, and American Thanksgiving are other times when many natural opportunities present themselves. Chinese are far more open, than the average non-believing westerner, about discussing the true meaning of these festivals. Christmas is more and more commercialized in China but even so it is a great time for sharing with Chinese friends, colleagues, and students about the good news. Incredibly in recent years even the Messiah has been performed publicly in China at Christmas. “The first performance, in 2001, was organized and sponsored by the conductor, himself a Christian. Word of the performance in the Forbidden City Concert hall was primarily by word of mouth. In 2002 the churches became involved, printing and distributing posters...” (Danielson, 2003:3) Not only in Beijing but in other cities as well it has been possible to perform the Messiah around Christmas time. Christmas provides many wonderful opportunities for foreigners to share with their Chinese friends and invite them to their homes. One of JHF’s longest serving “foreign experts”, Harvey Taylor, has produced an English-teaching video series featuring all the western festivals, called “Special Day, Special Ways”. The videos were produced in Beijing and the set, with accompanying work books, is on sale throughout China in secular book stores.

Building genuine friendship, whether or not those we befriend show spiritual interest, is part of our witness in the world. An open home can open hearts.

Chinese love eating together – having friends round for a meal, or going out together for a meal, provides natural openings for meaningful sharing. Those studying or teaching on a campus can often play sports (badminton, volleyball, basketball, football, etc) with local young people. Shopping is another favourite past-time with some, or going on outings to parks or scenic attractions. The lunar Chinese New Year is a time of the year when visiting the homes of Chinese friends is particularly meaningful. Chinese New Year is usually towards the end of January or in early February. Teachers and language students are often invited to travel with Chinese students to visit their homes and experience the fun and excitement of this major Chinese festival. My late wife and I once visited the home of one of our students in a rural part of southern Fujian – a Hakka-speaking area. It was an unforgettable experience and gave us wonderful rapport with our student and also with her whole family.

Many of the above natural settings, mentioned in relation to language teachers, would also apply to other professions and working situations.

5.5.2 Discipleship

One of the most important aspects of the Great Commission is “making disciples”. I am convinced this is one of the most important aspects of ministry in which foreigners can be involved today, and without breaking any of China’s regulations regarding religious activities.

How does one disciple? It is easy to talk about but not as easy to do, for it takes commitment and discipline.

One of the most effective disciplers I ever observed in China was Ed (not his real name). Ed began as a full-time student, studying Chinese in a university in southern China. Ed made many friends on campus, meeting students in the cafeteria, on the beach or playing basketball. All along he was learning his

Chinese but also making friends. As friendships developed and his friends expressed an interest in Christianity, Ed would share more. Some became Christians. Ed met with these new believers individually once a week for half an hour. The time and place varied but Ed usually wrote out a passage of Scripture (initially in English but later, as his Chinese improved he did it in Chinese) and then he went through it with his friend. Ed and his friend would sit quietly under a tree on campus during the “*xiuxi*” or rest time after lunch, or whenever was suitable.

If someone walking by seemed overly curious Ed would simply talk in English, as if coaching his friend, and then go back to the passage once the person was out of earshot. He asked questions. “What is the basic teaching of this passage?” “What does this verse tell us about God?” “Is there an example to follow or an error to avoid?” He taught his friend how to read and study a simple passage of Scripture. Each week they had a Scripture verse that they memorized for the following week. Then Ed would ask, “What are your special concerns for prayer?” It was just twenty minutes or half an hour of life changing interaction each week.

“In the coming week you do the same with another friend,” Ed encouraged his student friend, “but don’t mention me.” So Ed’s “disciples” disciplined others too – just as Paul encouraged Timothy - “the things you have heard me say....entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”¹³⁰

Ed never disciplined girls as he felt this could lead to misunderstanding, on their part, and would open him, as a man, to temptation. A great example! As with Frank “the baptizer”, mentioned earlier, Ed stayed in China for many years. He later married, finished a PhD in a Chinese university and has worked in a major company for many years. Still working in business he and his wife are committed

¹³⁰ 2 Timothy 2:2

to discipling individuals and couples - low-key, unobtrusive, powerfully effective communicators of the good news.

Discipling is essential for young untaught believers. Many have had little if any contact with the Church or local Christians before they come to faith. It is critical that they be given the tools and trained how to grow in their faith. Ideally they should be introduced to other local believers with whom they can begin to fellowship and serve. It is not healthy for them to be dependent upon a foreign friend, who may move on after a few years anyway. Without discipling many simply slip back and, sadly, do not grow in their faith and commitment to Christ. A few even get snatched away by one of the cults.

5.5.3 Practical service in society.

Those foreign professionals serving in medical, social service or development projects also have natural opportunities to build relationships with those to whom they minister.

Foreign believers doing emergency relief or implementing development programs can often not only bring practical help to those in great physical need but can, without strings attached, offer much more. Hearts are touched and lives changed. In 1998 during a relief effort following a snow disaster in Qinghai province, JHF was able to deliver 53 truck loads of food and medical supplies to the disaster area. At one of the distributions some Tibetan Buddhist monks asked our team of helpers if they were doing these “good works in order to earn merit” – a very Buddhist way of looking at acts of mercy. Our team, some of whom spoke both Chinese and Amdo Tibetan, replied that they were Christians and did not believe in doing good deeds in order to earn merit. Good deeds were rather a response of gratitude to God for the unmerited favour He has already shown us sinners. Having received so much from God, it was only right to help those in need,

especially as we had the means, through the generosity of others, to deliver the aid.

Another relief project, in which I was privileged to participate, was in the Kashgar area of Xinjiang – about as far west as one can go in China. Following an earthquake in February 2003 we delivered flour and cooking oil to over 20,000 people in the quake area and also helped rebuild 211 homes. Those most affected by the quake were extremely poor Uygur farmers living on the edge of the Taklimakan Desert¹³¹. Despite being Muslims the people were very open to us and deeply grateful for the aid. I will never forget sharing with one older couple and their daughter the fact the heavenly Father had not forgotten them and loved them. These dear people listened with tears in their eyes as my colleague, who speaks fluent Uygur, translated what I said into their language.

Similarly a project helping disabled children in Tianjin has opened many hearts amongst the parents and the community. Through the love shown to her and her autistic child one young parent came from shame and despair to faith. Before long she was sharing with other parents her own testimony. Now she is working full-time in the programme. A city official who himself had an autistic child heard about the programme and enrolled his son. He has become one of the programme's strongest advocates.

The Chinese media itself has highlighted some of the social service and “mercy ministry” being carried on by foreign professionals. A few years ago a well-known Hong Kong TV station (Pearl) produced a programme on the family-sized children's homes run by JHF in Lijiang, Yunnan province. Aired on prime-time, the story of the Rainbow Homes of Hope, focusing on one of the Finnish lady workers and some of the children in her home, was shown on both English and Chinese channels. It proved so popular that it was repeated. The local TV station in Lijiang is also keeping an on-going record of the stories of these children as they grow up.

¹³¹ Full report in *Jian Hua Foundation Newsletter*, Hong Kong, June 2003.

More recently something of the work of a German girl, Marga, serving in an orphanage in Liaoning province was shown widely on Chinese TV. One of the children she has adopted needed spinal surgery and the drama of this event involving a foreigner caught the eye of both the local and the national networks¹³². Marga reported:

They chose to show the moment when Isaiah was taken to surgery for the second time. I was asked by the reporter, "What would you say to your son now if you could?" I looked into the camera and said, "Isaiah, I love you, I'll be waiting for you to come back. Don't worry!" As I spoke my eyes filled with tears, which I had to wipe off with a tissue.¹³³

Not surprisingly, people watching the programme were deeply moved. The thought of a foreigner having such love for a disabled Chinese orphan is a testimony not needing words.

There is an expanding range of opportunities for foreign Christians to be involved in social service projects – with children, orphans, the disabled, the poor, the unemployed, and the old-aged. In everyday life and in the everyday work place one is able to demonstrate the love of Christ by actions and often there is opportunity to speak of Him also. More will be said in the section on the NGO movement.

5.5.4 Language learning, cultural adaptation and godliness

For the foreigner seeking to be an effective communicator of good news it is hard to over emphasize the importance of learning the local language and understanding the local culture. This is why some organizations, such as JHF and Friends of China, recommend that their longer-term appointees, including those

¹³² This story was reported on Liaoning, Jiangsu and CCTV (China Central TV) during November and December, 2005.

¹³³ Personal email correspondence 20/11/05.

wanting to teach English or Japanese, spend an initial year or two in full-time language study. I have known English teachers who regretted the fact they never set aside a year or two to study Chinese full-time. The longer a foreigner lives in China without the language the more they tend to feel handicapped. They learn to survive in the culture but they can never get much beyond basic communication and are unable to really get close to the locals. Language is often the key to the heart. Language also is inseparable from culture and the deeper our cultural sensitivity the better – certainly in terms of getting close to people. One experienced tentmaker has said, "...nothing is more critical for enhancing our long-term viability and effectiveness in ministry than our fluency in the language. Language fluency and cultural sensitivity are keys to becoming an insider with our adopted people." (Lai, 2005:125)

China being a land of many people groups, it is also true that those called to one or other of China's national minorities are going to need to learn about their culture and language as well as that of the majority Han Chinese culture and language. One doesn't become linguistically and culturally effective overnight. This is even more the case if having to think in terms of trying to learn both Chinese *and* another language such as Tibetan or Uygur or Kazak. Patrick Lai states,

Where you need to learn both the trade language and heart language, research shows that the heart language is more important for evangelism and discipleship, and the trade language is more important for doing business. In reality, you should learn both, but the heart language is the primary objective and should be learned first. (Ibid, 2005:129, 130)

Despite what Lai says, I believe, in China it is hard to go wrong if one learns the national language first, namely Mandarin Chinese (or Putonghua or *Hanyu*, 普通话,). It is certainly easier to deal with officials. All educated citizens throughout China, of whatever ethnic origin and background, learn Mandarin at school. I had the interesting experience once of finding it easier to communicate with a group of Tibetan young people in Mandarin than did my colleague who spoke Tibetan. His problem was that while he spoke fluent Lhasa Tibetan, the

students spoke only Amdo Tibetan, and the two are very different. If, however, he had spoken fluent Amdo I have little doubt the students would have been very quick to open up to him.

As Lai points out, it is true that to really minister to the heart one has to use the heart language of the people, and this needs to be seen as a priority at some stage. It may be sufficient to get basic Chinese before moving into a second language if that second language is indeed going to be the main vehicle of communication on the job. Thus for someone working in community development or agriculture with Amdo Tibetans in Qinghai it would be highly desirable for them to aim for fluent Amdo. The same would apply for someone working amongst Uygur people in Kashgar. They would get very much closer to the people by speaking fluent Uygur than if they used polished Beijing-accented Mandarin. Language, of whichever variety, communicates most powerfully when it is the heart language of the person to whom one is talking.

Having said all the above, it is still true that love communicates far more powerfully than even polished language skills. I like to call it the love factor in language learning. The table below illustrates this point:

LEVEL OF LANGUAGE	AMOUNT OF LOVE	REACTION OF THE PEOPLE
Poor	Little	"Foreign devil." Almost no communication
Excellent	Little	"I'm impressed with his/her language, but they seem so proud, so aloof." Respect but keep a distance.
Poor	Lots of love	"That foreigner is such a kind, attractive person. I

		wish I could get to know him/her better.” Real communication but can only go so far.
Excellent	Lots of love	“I don’t think of him/her as a foreigner, most of the time. They are one with us.” No barriers to communication.

I have no empirical evidence for what I have put in this graph and I have only given the extremes of poor and excellent (in terms of language ability) and little and lots (in terms of love). However I believe it illustrates what I have repeatedly observed over almost thirty years working with the Chinese, namely that love is the essential ingredient in reaching anyone’s heart

For effective cross-cultural communication to take place love is essential and good language skills highly desirable. Understanding the culture is another important ingredient. Even Asians and overseas Chinese find China a challenge at times. They may look similar and may even have a lot in common culturally and linguistically but there is still a significant gap, and lots to learn. Of course, sharing one’s faith in another culture can be a huge challenge for not only is language a factor, there is also the question of differing worldviews and philosophies.

The sub-cultures amongst the Han Chinese majority are, I believe, as varied as the cultures of Europe. Sichuanese are different from Shanghainese – not only in language; and northerners are different to southerners. In addition to the Han, there are the minority people groups in China. In Xinjiang one needs to have an understanding of both the Uygur people and also of the influence of Islam in their culture and history. Working amongst the Tibetans or Mongolians or the Tu one needs to have an understanding of the teachings and the influence of Tibetan

Buddhism. Working in Lijiang in northwest Yunnan one needs to understand something of the influence of the Dongba religion and shamanism in the culture of the Naxi people. These are just a few examples. We will discuss this more fully in our final chapter.

All too often as foreigners we can be culturally insensitive and thereby less effective in communicating the good news. If we are not understanding of local culture, or if we lack flexibility or come across as arrogant or proud we simply perpetuate the negative stereotype of the rude, insensitive, and ignorant foreigner.

We need to build bridges of understanding and we need to reach out in practical love to those amongst whom we serve. It is all too easy to fail in building such bridges even with our local colleagues or neighbours. Foreign English teachers sometimes need to work at relating to the local Chinese teachers of English in their own department. They usually live in different buildings, receive different salaries, and use different textbooks. Sometimes the foreign teachers and the local Chinese teachers hardly see each other. I read of one case where a foreign teacher tried to change all this. She organized weekly meetings between the foreign teachers and the local Chinese English teachers. The foreigners, all of whom were also studying Chinese, asked the Chinese teachers for their comments on their English textbooks and their lesson plans. They started observing each other's classes and giving each other feedback. The experiment had an unexpected result - several of the Chinese teachers became Christians and started praying, together with the foreign teachers, for their students.

There is also a need for this kind of bridge building and communication in other types of work, not least where we are working with local counterparts in projects. Witness is not simply about introducing people to a vertical relationship with God, it is also about how we relate horizontally with others. The gospel, by bringing us into relationship with God, changes our hearts, which in turn changes

our attitudes to others and also changes our relationships, our society and our environment.

Our words should not be divorced from our actions and our lives. Holiness of life is an intensely practical matter. It affects our attitudes and our affections. Foreigners already stand out from the crowd and as Christians we are certainly being watched. If we are lustful or sexually immoral, if we are not strictly honest, if we lose our temper or become selfish and demanding – our testimony will take a nose dive. Our words will count for little. We will communicate but it will be negative communication.

5.6 The Foreign Businessman and Communication of Good News

As already mentioned China has been referred to as “the world’s factory” (*shijiede gongchang*, 世界的工厂) and not only is China exporting to the world but the world is coming to China – for business. Most of the world’s multi-national corporations have operations in China. For some, China has become their major operation base. There are some 1 million Taiwanese businessmen in China and hundreds of thousands from Japan, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and many other Asian nations. Tens of thousands of businessmen and women travel from Hong Kong each day into China - by land, sea or air. This is quite apart from the tens of thousands of Hong Kong business people resident in the mainland. On China’s northeast and northwest borders the business traffic with Russia and central Asian nations, like Kazakhstan, is booming. The expatriate business community from Europe, North America and Australasia is also huge – and growing. Business people are also coming in increasing numbers from India, Africa and South America. Those expatriates who are longer term residents locate mostly in the major cities.

It is no surprise that there are Christians among the foreign business people flocking to China. Some have come with a specific calling to serve God through

their business. They are thinking long term and in some cases making significant investments of skill, technology and finance – aiming to do good business while at the same time being a witness for Christ. In China corruption is sadly endemic. Cutting corners, poor quality work or materials, deceit, bribes, money and sex are, all too often, part of the unseemly side of business. In theory at least most companies (both foreign and Chinese owned) know that high ethical standards and reliability make for good business. However, human nature being what it is, in the cut-throat competition of China today, many businessmen are tempted to take short-cuts for personal gain. In such a climate of compromise, the Christian who holds to biblical standards of behaviour and practise faces many challenges.

Doing business is not always easy in China – there are cultural, linguistic, political, ethical, administrative and logistical hurdles that can trip up the very best of businessmen. Some of those seeking to serve God through their business ventures are drawn to areas where logistically speaking building a successful business can be a huge challenge – places that are remote and less developed with poor communications and less infrastructure. One friend started a business in northern Xinjiang many thousands of miles from his main markets and in an area hardly open to foreigners – yet he was committed to the local people and wanted to be there despite the hardships and limitations. He survived several years, despite battling corruption and many bureaucratic nightmares. His business hardly ever broke even but as money was not his only concern he had no regrets.

Others I know have been far more successful in financial and business terms and certainly no less fruitful for the Kingdom. One friend was head of the China operation of a well-known multi-national before he founded his own company, which he likes to regard as a “Great Commission” company. In other words, while unashamedly committed to doing real business and making money, this was not his only bottom line. The company is involved in consulting and in manufacturing and has built up a considerable expertise across China and runs several profitable hi-tech operations, employing thousands of local and expatriate

workers. Some of these operations are managed by the company on behalf of overseas investors (some being publicly traded American companies), with total investments running into many millions of US dollars. They have built up a good reputation with the government - by bringing benefits to the local economy through their export earnings and through providing good jobs for local people. They have built into their management structures a system to ensure that the demands of running a profitable business do not overshadow their primary purpose of serving the interests of the Kingdom of God.

As mentioned above, there are large numbers of Taiwanese businessmen in China. Few are Christians but those who are often stand out in terms of the way they do business. Some known to me personally have been in real estate and golf course development, others are in the leather and shoe business. One Taiwanese Christian businessman sold his multi-million dollar semiconductor company in Taiwan and moved to China. He started a semiconductor company in Shanghai that now has over 3,000 employees. In 2002, he told Business Week Online, "The Lord wants us to come to China to share God's love with the Chinese people." In recent years he has been running a church that meets using his company premises – all with official permission.

One young American businessman first came to China with his wife and little family in the mid eighties. After two years of language study John (not his real name) started a foreign-owned company with five local employees and about US\$10,000 in capital. He made mistakes and struggled financially for a few years, but eventually he found his niche and developed a real expertise in a particular manufacturing line. Today his business employs 360 local workers and exports US\$3,000,000 worth of goods bringing US\$400,000 in profits. Perhaps more significant have been the lessons John has learnt – such as the significance of integrity, prayer, helping the poor, and building a caring community in the company. He has intentionally employed beggars and handicapped people showing them equal respect and teaching them the needed skills to do the job. John and his wife

have experienced “spiritual warfare” and have been committed to intercessory prayer, covering each of their workers with prayer on a daily basis. I will never forget walking through the factory with John and his Personnel Manager (a local Christian brother). While showing me around they also took time to pray (quietly and as if simply discussing things together) for each group of workers in the different sections of the production line. No wonder most of the workers in their factory have over the years come to faith in Christ. John and the company really care for their workers and their families. They treat them well, pay decent salaries and expect good work and loyalty in return. And they get it.

Some years ago John started a branch operation in a poor town further inland. They brought people into the mother factory in the main city for three months of training. Most of these workers became Christians and when they went back to the branch factory they began to meet for prayer, worship and teaching. Some months later the local police (PSB) came round and asked to speak to the local manager, also a believer. They asked him if any of the factory workers were Christians. He replied that he thought some were indeed Christians, but obviously he was nervous about what the police had in mind. They then said, “You know it is illegal for people to meet for religious services without approval from the relevant authorities!” He nodded. The apprehension he was feeling must have shown on his face. The police hurried to reassure him, “Don’t worry, we have gone ahead and registered the meeting for you so that you can continue without any problem.”

The police and the local community had seen the economic and social benefit derived from this branch factory in their poor town and wanted to do everything to encourage the company to stay. As my friend told me, with his usual sense of humour, “It must be the first church planted by the PSB in China!”

Apart from the daily filling of orders for clients, both overseas and in China, workers in the factory are helping in other initiatives spearheaded by John and his wife. These include helping in a local orphanage and starting a work amongst

disabled children. Some of the factory workers have been sent for specialized training in working with disabled children. Here is a business venture that believes in serving the community.

Micro-finance or Micro-enterprise Development (or MED) is another creative type of business venture that helps meet the needs of the community while aiming to make a profit that can be ploughed back into expansion. MED programmes, which usually are aimed to help poor people, are relatively new in China having begun only in the late 1990s. Various overseas governments and aid agencies have been involved in projects in places such as Yunnan, Sichuan, and Qinghai. They include the Ford Foundation (with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), GTZ a German agency, Australia's AusAID, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Canada's CIDA, and UNICEF.¹³⁴ Some of the most efficient and sustainable MED programmes, however, have been run by faith-based agencies such as Hope International. Hope/China (called Xiwang in Chinese)¹³⁵ was established in 2000 in the city of Zhangjiakou, Hebei province. Today they employ 40 local staff and work in 10 other locations in northern China. They have made close to 7000 loans and have a loan repayment rate of 99%, which is remarkable by MED standards.

The China director of Hope/China is an American with excellent Chinese and a passionate commitment to excellence and "best practices". Despite earlier government reservations, due largely to the fact the people running the programme were Christians, the success of the loan programme in terms of poverty alleviation is there for all to see. It is no wonder that this programme is a model of what MED can achieve, even on a small scale. Families once unable to break out of their poverty are enabled to make a new start. It is a holistic approach. Through personal interaction with their clients Hope/China staff members are also able to bring love and hope at a deeper level than just the monetary.

¹³⁴ See for example, *Livestock and livelihoods: escaping poverty in rural China* AusAID 2005 report on <http://www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au/globaled/go/pid/110> accessed 25/11/05.

¹³⁵ See <http://hopeinternational.org/pages/index.php> accessed 25/11/05.

A recent report by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization focuses on Business as Mission. It states:

Holistic mission attempts to bring all aspects of life and godliness into an organic biblical whole. This includes God's concerns for such business related issues as economic development, employment and unemployment, economic justice and the use and distribution of natural and creative resources among the human family.
(Mats Tunehag, 2005)

The Lausanne report has an excellent summary of the biblical teaching regarding business and market place witness. It states that “business conducted in accord with biblical principles of stewardship offers numerous opportunities to glorify God.” (Ibid, 2005) It highlights that business:

- a) Restores dignity and empowers people and communities;
- b) Provides the context for discipleship and modeling Christian values;
- c) Can promote environmental stewardship;
- d) Is able to reinforce peace and community;
- e) Is able to strengthen the Church;
- f) Facilitates going to all peoples, even hostile or closed communities.

The report quotes Henry Ford as saying, “A business that only makes money is a poor business”. Clearly the Christian in business in China (or anywhere) should have a ‘multiple bottom line’ – which includes financial, social, spiritual and environmental aspects. “Business is about relationships in the context of everyday life. The business itself provides many ways to bless individuals, communities and nations” (Bergstedt, 2004).

There are many different types of business venture in which Christians are involved in China. Many serve in multi-nationals or wholly foreign-owned ventures that are purely secular. Others work in Chinese or Sino-foreign joint-venture companies. Probably only a minority of the foreigners in business in China work in

specifically “Great Commission” or “Kingdom-focused” companies, which are committed to holistic witness and which have a ‘multiple bottom line’. Nonetheless wherever the Christian works, he or she can be a winsome witness for Christ, through the quality of their work and inter-personal relationships, and through their home.

A female expatriate environmental engineer working in a Chinese company in southern China has built up good friendships with many of her colleagues. She commented recently in an email,

The one engineer ... doesn't want to share his knowledge and certainly doesn't want to work with a foreign woman! He is somewhat difficult to work with. Apart from that, my other colleagues are great, though none speak English so I am totally immersed in Chinese all day.¹³⁶

In some senses being a businessman, or woman, in China is no different to being one anywhere else. Nonetheless, living in China, with its particular political and cultural setting, does present a host of new challenges.

5.7 The NGO Movement

Having discussed business in relation to foreigners communicating good news, we now want to consider the not-for-profit sector. In a paper I wrote in 2004 for ChinaSource 20/20 in-house journal I briefly outlined the origin of the NGO (or non-governmental organization) movement before describing the rise of the movement in China.

World Vision and OXFAM began their activities in China in the 1980s, but since the 1990s China has been made much more aware of the importance of the NGO movement. ...One very significant quasi-governmental non-profit organization, the China Charities Federation (CCF), was set up in the early nineties largely due to efforts of the well known former head of the Ministry of Civil Affairs and former Politburo member, Mr Yan Ming-fu. CCF has done very impressive work all over China, especially in disaster relief, and many groups

¹³⁶ Personal email communication with writer, 28/11/05.

such as Jian Hua Foundation, Salvation Army and World Vision have worked closely with them in relief programs. By the end of 2003, there were some 230,000 registered NGOs in China and at least another one million unregistered ones. (Anderson, 2004)

China is increasingly aware of the importance of the not-for-profit sector in delivering a range of services to society that the government finds it difficult to deliver. China recognizes the importance and value of NGOs, both local and foreign, and is aware of the need for the sector to be properly regulated and to be financially accountable. One major quasi-state charity, Project Hope, part of the China Youth Development Foundation (founded in 1985 by the Communist Youth League) “pioneered domestic fund raising for poor students nationwide”. (Hamrin, 2002:2) Project Hope raised funds from the Chinese public to help build thousands of poor country schools. By the late 1990s, however, Project Hope began to get a bad name for financial mismanagement which came to a head in 2002. This may be part of the background to a request that came from the China Charities Federation to a well-known US faith-based charitable trust, the Maclellan Foundation, to help develop a training programme for Chinese NGOs to raise the level of leadership, governance, accountability and fund raising.¹³⁷

In Hamrin’s article she refers to Amity Foundation which while originally focused on recruiting English teachers for colleges in eastern China “now also has departments for rural development, social welfare, medical and health work...” (2002:2) Hamrin goes on to highlight other Chinese NGOs with a Christian connection as well as several foreign faith-based groups. She includes groups, such as the Mennonites, which cooperate with Amity, and also the Jian Hua Foundation (JHF), CEDAR Fund¹³⁸, the Salvation Army, World Vision, Evergreen, and Gansu Inc¹³⁹. The latter is “a US nonprofit that brings ophthalmologists to teach and perform cataract surgery for poor villagers, choosing a different county

¹³⁷ See ChinaSource article *Non-Profits in China*, by Thomas H. McCallie, June 2005.

¹³⁸ CEDAR Fund is based in Hong Kong. See <http://www.cedarfund.org>

¹³⁹ See <http://www.gansuinc.org>

hospital base each summer”. (Ibid, 2002:4) Gansu Inc has expanded their work to include Xinjiang as well as Gansu province.

Another remarkable faith-based NGO that has been recognized for its contribution to China, particularly in the southwestern province of Yunnan, is Project Grace founded by US medical doctor, Rob Cheeley.¹⁴⁰ Their projects include: medical training, community development, working with the deaf, caring for leprosy-affected, agriculture, water and sanitation, poverty alleviation, HIV/AIDS prevention, counseling services, etc. Many of those being helped by Project Grace staff, who come from several nations as well as from China itself, are from one or other of China's national minority people groups – including Yi, Lisu, Dai, Bai, and Tibetan. The Christian ethos of Project Grace is well known and they also try to involve local Christians in their work wherever this is possible. Dr Cheeley writes,

Openly and honestly stating to our governmental partners (as well as to the people we are assisting) that we are Christians who care for the poor because Christ loves them and with financial resources supplied by Christian foundations and donors has built trust and friendship between ourselves and local officials. (Cheeley, 2002:13)

The excellent work of Project Grace as well as the trust the organization has built with the Chinese has given it many open doors for service. They have not been without problems, however. Certain sections of the government became nervous of the growing size and influence of the organization. Some unwise “religious” activities on the part of some associated with the organization sparked a full scale behind the scenes investigation during 2003 by the National Security branch of the government. As a result Project Grace was advised to split into several smaller units which it has now done, a division based on location and type of work. There is still however a clear overall unity between the separate local

¹⁴⁰ Dr Cheeley, on behalf of Project Grace, was awarded the China Friendship Award in 2000. This is the highest governmental honour China bestows on non-Chinese citizens.

entities. The fact they were not thrown out is testimony, I believe, to both the value of their work and also to the wisdom of their transparent approach.

Foreign as well as local non-profit organizations (NPOs) and NGOs are playing an increasingly important role in China, especially as the government is reducing its involvement in and funding for social programmes. Brent Fulton, president of ChinaSource, refers to the “incarnational approach” whereby Chinese Christians, often in partnership with foreign believers, show the love of Christ to:

...orphans, people with disabilities, the poor, and those seeking access to educational opportunities. Now AIDS victims, the unemployed, families in crisis, abused women and China's burgeoning migrant population are emerging as segments of the society in particular need of Christian love and compassion. (Fulton, 2002:16)

5.8 Serving the Church in China

Andrew Kaiser, a colleague of mine in the Jian Hua Foundation, has been serving for several years in a secondment arrangement with an NGO called Evergreen Service ¹⁴¹ in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. Evergreen is in the favoured position of having both a good relationship with the local government and a close and special relationship with the local TSPM/CCC. The local TSPM church has some outstanding evangelical pastors who strongly support the educational, medical, social and agricultural work being done by Evergreen. Kaiser, with this positive experience colouring his view point, writes about some of the creative ways foreign believers can be involved in their local TSPM Church. He admits that “China's unique regulatory structure puts limitations on what foreign Chinese Christian unity might look like” but adds, “...these restrictions need not be as limiting as they at first appear.” (Kaiser, 2005:4)

¹⁴¹ Evergreen Service website is www.evergreenchina.org and their Chinese name is: *Shanxi Yong-Qing zixun fuwu zhongxin* 山西永清咨 服 中心

While foreigners cannot serve as pastors or leaders in Chinese Churches there is a wide range of activities in which they can participate when invited to do so by the local leaders in a registered TSPM church. These include: attending church worship services and prayer meetings, teaching English, helping in vacation Bible schools programmes, singing in the choir, playing musical instruments, being involved in choral and instrumental instruction, training Sunday School teachers, leading or participating in marriage and family seminars, speaking at youth retreats, giving financial support, preaching, serving as a volunteer in social activities undertaken by the church (such as helping the poor, the disabled, the elderly, orphans, etc.), and even joining work teams of volunteers helping clean the church building and premises. This is quite an impressive list.

Kaiser gives an illustration of one foreign fellowship in north China that chose to identify closely with the local TSPM church by asking permission to use one of their classrooms for the foreigner's weekly worship gathering. They also asked the local TSPM pastor to lead their monthly communion service, with the foreign group providing translation. I am aware of foreign fellowships meeting in TSPM churches in several cities across China - for example in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Kunming, Taiyuan, and Weihai, to name just a few. Such an arrangement allows foreign believers working in the city to have some interaction with local believers in a natural and less-sensitive context. At least the authorities are aware of the arrangement and have given their approval. This identification on the part of foreign Christians with the local body of Christ is a demonstration of Christian unity and a testimony to the world, not least to those in government responsible for foreign and religious affairs. It is undoubtedly also a great encouragement to the local pastors and Christians, even if the foreigners are meeting in a separate hall or at a separate time and using English, rather than Chinese. With foreign believers coming from a host of nations, local believers, some of whom are young in age and new to the faith, see clear evidence of the international nature of the family of God.

In his article Kaiser adds a significant point when he highlights the benefits of foreign teachers introducing their Chinese friends and contacts to local believers. This helps give their friends, who most probably have had no previous exposure to Christianity, a sense of the fact Christianity is something rooted in China and is not merely the religion of their foreign teacher or friend. He points out that this in turn increases “the local church’s reach into the community.” (Ibid, 2005:8)

Much of the involvement with the local TSPM church that Kaiser so eloquently advocates, and that Evergreen has so admirably demonstrated in their work in Shanxi Province, is only possible as the foreigners concerned have been able to build trusting relationships with the Chinese church leaders. This requires a longer term commitment and also presupposes a facility with the Chinese language and some understanding of Chinese culture as well as sensitivity to political realities – at least on the part of the leaders.

For foreigners to get involved with house churches, however, is more complicated and not always wise. One important reason is that the foreigner stands out (just think of long noses and blond hair) and his or her presence may well bring unwelcome attention to a group already very much under pressure from the authorities. None of this is to say local house churches do not value fellowship with foreign believers, quite the opposite. Nor does it mean that foreign believers have no concern for their fellow believers in the house churches, again, quite the opposite. It is simply part of reality.

Despite this there are ways foreigners can encourage and even assist the house churches. No doubt most important is prayer and information sharing. This is being done by a number of groups including OMF International¹⁴² and the Chinese Church Support Ministries (CCSM)¹⁴³, to name but two of numerous groups. Various groups and individuals provide a wide range of materials that are

¹⁴² Particularly see OMF’s Global Chinese Ministries monthly prayer material and Tony Lambert’s China Focus articles. OMF’s website is: <http://www.omf.org>

¹⁴³ CCSM, founded by Ross Paterson, has a website at: <http://www.am-ccsm.org>

useful for Chinese Christians and also for those interested in the Christian faith. Some foreigners, and particularly Hong Kong and overseas Chinese, go into China, invited by local believers (both TSPM and non-registered groups), to give seminars and do training. The training provided by some Taiwanese and overseas Chinese, who speak Mandarin, if appropriate, is very much valued. There is no need for translation and there is less of a cultural gap between the visitors and their Chinese hosts. There is not usually the problem, either, of the foreign visitor standing out as much as when they are westerners, for example.

David Aikman mentions the remarkable contribution of Dr Jonathan Chao (1937-2004, 天恩)¹⁴⁴, who though born in China, grew up in the United States. A theologian and historian, Chao founded the Chinese Church Research Centre in Hong Kong and later China Ministries International (CMI). From the mid-nineties he established close links with key leaders of some of the major house church networks in China and encouraged them to come together to discuss and articulate their common theological viewpoints. This resulted in the “Confession of Faith” signed in 1998. (Aikman, 2003:277) Despite being a controversial figure to some (especially certain leaders in the TSPM), through his writing and research and through his involvement with the house churches, Chao has left a legacy of blessing to the Chinese Church.

If Jonathan Chao was controversial to some then another foreigner, also mentioned by Aikman in his book, is even more so (Aikman, 2003:271-275). Dennis Balcombe, founder of the Revival Christian Church in Hong Kong, is one of those long-nosed, light-skinned foreigners who would stand out far more than any overseas Chinese or Asian visitor. This fact, however, did not deter Balcombe who during the eighties and nineties became a well-known visitor to many of the house church groups in inland rural China. Balcombe speaks fluent Chinese. He has promoted the work and witness of the house church movement with untiring

¹⁴⁴ For detail on Jonathan Chao's life and extensive writing, as well information on the Church in China see www.cmi.org.tw/english/chi/homepage/main.htm

passion. The Revival Church has over many years sent teams into Church taking Bibles and Christian literature – “donkeys for Jesus”. Aikman describes how Balcombe was used by God to minister among the Fangcheng, Tanghe, Wenzhou and Anhui house churches bringing a strong emphasis on the Pentecostal Baptism of the Spirit and on charismatic gifts.

Many house churches had already experienced miracles and the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit so Balcombe’s teaching was not entirely new. Even so not all house church groups accepted Balcombe’s strong emphasis. Some in fact stated their opposition saying it caused sad division.¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless his ministry has had a profound and widespread influence and there is no doubt that some house church leaders, such as Fangcheng’s Zhang Rongliang, greatly respect Balcombe. In 1994 Balcombe was arrested, interrogated and expelled from China, which may have enhanced his standing with some of the house church leaders who, far more than any foreigner, know what it is to suffer for their faith. Balcombe was barred from entering China but since 2003 he has been allowed to re-enter the country. However he is a marked man now and probably any further direct ministry with the house churches, for the present at least, is out of the question.

There are many westerners from various countries who travel into China – some trying to be incognito (as was the case with Balcombe) and others working openly with the official church.

One example of an organization working openly in assisting the TSPM churches and seminaries is China Partner¹⁴⁶, founded in 1989 by Werner Burklin, the son of German missionaries to China. China Partner facilitates educational seminars in the 23 TSPM seminaries and Bible schools in China - a training that focuses on evangelism, biblical authority, soteriology, prayer, and practical

¹⁴⁵ See report in Chao, *The Church in China: Needs and Opportunities for Ministry*, 2002, on <http://www.cmi-usa.net/CMR/ChurchinChina> accessed 29 November, 2005.

¹⁴⁶ China Partner webpage is: <http://www.chinapartner.org>

application. They also help provide resources for seminary libraries and for individual students, faculty and pastors. Werner Burklin's book, *"Jesus Never Left China: The Rest of the Story"* contains excellent material about the work of the gospel in the official TSPM churches and outlines how foreigners can make a contribution. However the book is a far from balanced account of the overall picture.¹⁴⁷

There are hundreds, probably thousands, of Taiwanese and overseas Chinese as well as Korean pastors and Bible teachers who travel into China to minister in the house churches, and in some cases in TSPM churches. Some outside groups focus on specialized types of training, children's work, and the provision of materials and financial support. Certainly by no means is all the help offered from overseas appropriate. Sometimes it comes with unhealthy strings attached. Unwise distribution of financial support has been known to cause more harm than good. A Chinese evangelist wrote giving advice to foreign believers,

I have often encouraged foreign Christian workers who have come to China to teach the Word. If the church is given money, it will be used up quickly, but when the church is taught how to give their money for the Lord's work, it is far more valuable in the long run. (Wang, 2004)

Those seeking to serve the church in China need to do so with humility and sensitivity. They need to understand real needs and serve in partnership rather than as "experts" who know it all. Another observer writes:

How often and how long do we outsiders fast and pray? How much Scripture have we memorizedHow do our experiences of God's provision, power, protection, comfort and forgiveness compare with theirs? To what extent do we know and understand the blessings associated with suffering and persecution? (Lee, 2002:12)

¹⁴⁷ See (Burkin, 2005). In his book Burklin rightly warns about the vulnerability of house churches to false teaching and criticizes evangelical hype about the house church movement. The book, while helpful on the situation of the official church, is weak in its treatment of the house church movement in general, and in its discussion of persecution today.

The Chinese evangelist quoted earlier, Wang Jiale, encourages foreign believers serving in China to “take time to observe, learn and communicate with the local church.” He continues, “Some foreign Christian workers have come proclaiming themselves as experts in China ministry even though their knowledge of China is very limited.” (Wang, 2004)

Bays writes of the links that have been established with overseas Christians and churches – both in the TSPM/CCC and World Council of Churches type of forum and also in the form of evangelical groups working with house churches. Nonetheless, Bays rightly states: “The majority of Chinese Christians were converted by other Chinese, not by foreign missionaries, even before 1949, and that is overwhelmingly true today.” (2003:196)

It is a sober reminder that whatever wonderful opportunities foreigners and overseas Chinese may have to bring good news in China today, ours is a secondary role to that of the Chinese Church. It is our privilege to assist them in this great task.

CHAPTER 6 BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to the communist era, as we have already seen, China was one of the world's largest "mission fields" with thousands of foreign missionaries. The Chinese Church itself had begun to put down deep roots in the soil of China. The new government led by Mao Zedong was, however, extremely hostile to the Church. Missionaries had no choice but to leave, and the Church went through the fierce fires of persecution – so much so that by the time Nixon visited China in 1972, outside observers thought the witness of the Church was all but extinguished. Tony Lambert quotes Donald Treadgold as stating categorically in 1973 that "the evangelicals' few Chinese converts were swallowed up by history, leaving on the surface of the clashing and mingling tides of western innovation and Chinese tradition scarcely a visible trace." (1991:9)

It was not the first time in Chinese history that the Chinese Church had faced hostile attack. All through its long history, from as far back as when Alopen of the Assyrian Church (Nestorian) first brought the message of Christ to Tang dynasty China, there has been opposition. The "good news" has not always been seen as good, but rather as a threat to the status quo. The same has been true in other nations and cultures at various times in history, and possibly never more so than during the past century. In this chapter we want to look at two basic biblical and theological issues. The first is how the Church relates to the State and how Christians in general function in a hostile environment. The second issue we want to discuss is so call "tent-making" – serving cross-culturally in one's profession.

6.1 The Church in a Hostile World

The story of the Church throughout the world, and through all the centuries, is a story of the clashing of two opposing kingdoms – the Kingdom of Light and the kingdom of darkness.

It was true in the early church of the first and second centuries.

The witness of the early church was forged in the fires of false accusation, torture, and death. With a unified state religion and a governmental structure that kept every citizen under its iron grip. The Roman Empire tolerated no authority other than its own and regarded anything that resisted or opposed it as an extremely dangerous threat. Jesus warned his first disciples, 'On my account you will be brought before governors and kings...All people will hate you because of me' (Mt. 10:18, 22). And so it happened and continues to happen for all who uncompromisingly follow him. (Arnold, 1970:59)

Tertullian, the famous apologist of the second century, wrote

It becomes evident that the entire crime with which they charge us does not consist in any wicked acts, but in the bearing of a name. The issue is not the name of a crime, but the crime of bearing a name. Again and again it is the name that must be punished by the sword, the gallows, the cross, or the wild beasts.¹⁴⁸

A legal decree according to the second-century pagan jurist Julius Paulus stated, "Of those who introduce new religions with unknown customs or methods by which the minds of the people could be disturbed, those of the upper classes shall be deported and those of the lower classes shall be put to death."¹⁴⁹ The same fear is evident at times in China today – as the government strives to maintain what it sees as social order and stability.

An early Christian wrote c. A.D. 177, "When we assert that he who ordered this universe is the one God, then, incomprehensibly, a law is put in force against us." He also wrote "They charge us on two points: that we do not sacrifice and that we do not believe in the same gods as the State."¹⁵⁰ Almost two thousand years have passed, and little seems to have changed. The State demands loyalty from its citizens and feels threatened by the presence and influence of those who also claim a yet higher authority than the emperor, or the Party.

¹⁴⁸ *To the Heathen*, 1.3 written in Carthage, c. A.D. 200.

¹⁴⁹ *Collected Sentences* V.21.

¹⁵⁰ Athenagorus, *A Plea Regarding Christians*, 7 & 13.

6.1.1 Looking at the Old Testament

6.1.1.1 Genesis

This clash between the two kingdoms goes right back to the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and chose to listen to the evil one, sin and rebellion entered into the human heart. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.”¹⁵¹ Ever since then man’s history has reflected the conflict between light and darkness, faith and disbelief, obedience and disobedience. Cain killed Abel, and the descendents of their brother Seth clashed with the descendents of Cain. It was not long before the human race was living in rebellion against God. Only Noah was living a God-fearing life. “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”¹⁵² A disbelieving and sinful world mocked Noah and his family until it was too late. The Flood came and destroyed them all. God promised Noah that never again would He destroy by a flood those He had made. Nonetheless, despite God’s forbearance, not wanting any to perish, man’s rebellion continued.

Abraham is a towering figure in the Bible. He was to play a key role in God’s amazing plan of salvation. God was calling out a people for Himself and when He called Abraham to leave his homeland and travel to a land God would show him, He clearly stated “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”¹⁵³ God wanted His chosen people to be a channel of blessing to all peoples. No nation was to be excluded, but those blessings were conditional. They involved a choice. The choice was between faith and obedience to God on the one hand and serving man-made gods on the other hand. The stark reality of that choice was shown in the deliverance of Lot and his daughters before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18 & 19).

¹⁵¹ Genesis 3:15.

¹⁵² Hebrews 11:7.

¹⁵³ Genesis 12:3.

The story of Joseph is one of those pearls in the Bible. Here is a young man who refused to grovel in self-pity or to compromise with evil and who held firmly to his faith in God despite being a foreigner in Egypt – and despite all the injustices he suffered. God was to raise him up to be the second most important person in the land. He is a model of how God can use any one who is totally committed to following His way, even in a foreign land. He lived with integrity and godliness (not holding any bitterness) and impacted a pagan nation for God. He chose to trust, to believe, to follow. His life is surely an inspiration for Christian professionals serving overseas in an alien culture and also for refugees driven from their own homelands.

6.1.1.2 Exodus

Hundreds of years passed. Joseph's legacy to his adopted land was long forgotten. The people of God were to suffer untold misery and hardship under the whips of the Egyptian slave drivers. The Pharaoh wanted to destroy the Hebrews and he refused to bow the knee or to acknowledge their God, despite all the signs performed by Moses. There was a titanic battle between God's people and the might of the State. The deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt and their preservation through the forty years in the wilderness were miraculous, as was their conquest of the land of Canaan.

6.1.1.3 The Conquest and period of the Kings

Joshua reminded the people at the end of his life that they had a choice – to fear and follow God or to serve other gods. He said, "...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."¹⁵⁴ Sadly, even though they said they too would serve the Lord, in reality the people of God very often did not obey Him, and time after time they fell into apostasy and defeat by their enemies.

¹⁵⁴ Joshua 24:15.

During the Judges period when the people cried out to God and sought His help He gave them deliverers such as Gideon (against the Midianites) and Samson (against the Philistines). Saul (despite his sad spiritual decline) and his son Jonathan were used by God to defeat the Philistines. The great triumph of the young shepherd boy David over the towering giant Goliath epitomized the struggle between good and evil, light and darkness. David, more than any other king, led the nation in defeating their enemies and establishing the kingdom. Before Solomon's heart was turned away from God by his many foreign wives and concubines, the nation was a powerful testimony to the surrounding nations of the greatness of God. Sadly, that golden era did not outlast Solomon and the history of both the northern kingdom Israel and the southern kingdom Judah was very often one of defeat and failure.

The conflict between good and evil, as recorded in the Old Testament, was reflected not only in the clash between God's people and surrounding pagan nations but also in the clash between those within the Jewish nation who obeyed and worshipped God and those who did not. The fearless stand of the prophet Elijah against the godless reign of Ahab and his wife Jezebel climaxed in the showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Again the conflict between good and evil involved a stark choice - "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."¹⁵⁵

6.1.1.4 The Exile

First the northern kingdom, Israel, and then Judah, went into exile. That period also has much to teach us about God's people living as a tiny minority in a pagan, authoritarian empire. The prophet Jeremiah who had prophesied doom and defeat at the hands of the Babylonians encouraged the exiles to, "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ... Also, seek the

¹⁵⁵ 1 Kings 18:21.

peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”¹⁵⁶

Young Daniel and his three friends were among that first group of exiles. They stand-out as shining examples, as did Joseph one thousand three hundred years before them, of how God sometimes chooses to use foreigners to bless a nation other than their own. Without compromising his faith or convictions, Daniel was able to serve in the court of the greatest empire of the time – and it was a ruthless, pagan, authoritarian regime. In fact Daniel proved so outstanding that he not only served as an advisor to one monarch, but to several. And he not only served under the Babylonians but also under the Medes and Persians. When the Babylonian empire was in crisis Daniel was called in to interpret the writing on the wall. King Belshazzar asked him, “Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom.”¹⁵⁷ Daniel bravely gave the interpretation of the writing on the wall. That very night Belshazzar was overthrown. Darius the Mede took over the empire. Daniel was appointed as one of the three administrators in charge of the 120 satraps (provincial governors) ruling throughout the empire under Darius. The Scripture records, “Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.”¹⁵⁸

Daniel may have reached the dizzy heights of power but even there, as a man of God, he was to face intense opposition. His opponents, jealous at his success and antagonistic to his faith, tried to find ways to bring him down. They tried to find grounds for charges against him in his conduct of government affairs, but failed. “They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of

¹⁵⁶ Jeremiah 29:5, 7.

¹⁵⁷ Daniel 5:13, 14.

¹⁵⁸ Daniel 6:3.

his God.”¹⁵⁹ Despite his ruthless enemies, Daniel was greatly loved, not least by King Darius who was overjoyed to discover he had survived his night in the lion’s den. Daniel’s enemies did not survive more than a few seconds once they were thrown to the lions! Daniel was greatly used for the glory of God and the extension of His Kingdom. Darius issued an amazing decree “that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.”¹⁶⁰

A foreigner in the court of all-powerful, pagan emperors, Daniel served with integrity, expertise and wisdom. The secret of his influence surely lay in his walk with God and in his prayer life. There is much we can learn from Daniel about how Christians might live in authoritarian pagan nations and cultures. Not all Christians of course survive being thrown to the lions – in fact untold numbers have paid for their faith with their lives. However Daniel’s example inspires all of us as aliens and foreigners living in a world that seldom bows the knee to its Maker. Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, also inspire us with their faith and commitment. When facing the raging fury of Nebuchadnezzar they replied, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”¹⁶¹ After all the drama of that confrontation, the brave threesome was promoted by Nebuchadnezzar in the province of Babylon.

The confrontation between good and evil is seen at a deeper level than the purely human level. The experience of Daniel illustrates this very clearly. Chapter 10 records how a powerful spiritual being (“prince of the Persian kingdom”) somehow blocked the way of God’s angelic messenger to Daniel for three weeks. Meanwhile, unaware of why he had had no answer, Daniel continued praying and fasting. Finally God’s messenger, assisted by Michael the archangel, arrived. Clearly there is such a thing as “spiritual warfare” and prayer plays a vital part in

¹⁵⁹ Daniel 6:4, 5.

¹⁶⁰ Daniel 6:26.

¹⁶¹ Daniel 3:17, 18.

overcoming the evil forces of Satan. In this passage both Persia and Greece, nations or empires that were to exert power over God's people, were represented by demonic angelic "princes". These two high-level evil angelic powers were standing in resistance against the revelation made to Daniel about the future of God's people, Israel. John Robb writes,

Satan is a highly organized, intelligent spirit-being dedicated to destroying human beings made in the image of the Creator he hates. He is the master deceiver and the author of idolatry, seeking to bring the whole world under his dominion.... His three-point agenda is deception, dominion, and destruction. ... He is not omnipresent or omniscient, but ... he works through a vast organization of spirit-beings who apparently communicate with one another and work in some sense cooperatively to undermine humanity's encounter with the kingdom of God in every way they can. (2000:204, 5)

In all nations and cultures Satan is active in infiltrating human institutions, the media and religion. Satan is in the business of blinding people's eyes to the gospel. In communicating good news in China today the reality of "spiritual warfare" must not be forgotten. Like Daniel we need to engage in persevering prayer before breakthrough can come.

6.1.1.5 Nehemiah

Nehemiah was another foreigner serving in the court of a Persian king. God had his man in a very strategic position at a very critical time. Nehemiah was closer to the king Artaxerxes, and more trusted, than perhaps any other official. Like Daniel, two or three generations before him, Nehemiah was a man of prayer and faith. Hearing of the plight of the small band of returned exiles in Jerusalem, he was moved to prayer. His earnest intercession over a four-month period birthed a plan in his heart and mind. The moment of destiny came when the king noticed something was troubling Nehemiah. Despite the danger of the moment (being anything but happy in the presence of the king could result in death), Nehemiah was ready to lay his life on the line and calmly explained the reason for his

sadness. What followed next reveals the fact Nehemiah lived in total dependence upon God. He lived more in the reverence of God than in the fear of man.

The king said to me, 'What is it you want?' Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, 'If it please the king and if your servant has found favour in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.' ¹⁶²

God gave Nehemiah a special *entrée* (which the Chinese would call "*guanxi*" or relationship) with the most powerful person in all the empire. Yet Nehemiah's dependence was primarily upon the Lord. Nehemiah outlined his plan to the king. He was specific and clear in the details and asked boldly for the king's help and support. He was ready to use the good "*guanxi*" God had given him, and the king granted all his requests. He was given leave of absence to lead the project, and was given the political and material support of the king himself. He was given material for building, help with transport and a military escort for protection along the way. Nehemiah recognized that it was because of the gracious hand of God upon him that the king granted all his requests.

The story of Nehemiah teaches us much about the sovereignty of God in the affairs of men. It shows how the interests of the Kingdom and of the people of God can be protected and promoted even by pagan dictators. The story is also a classic in terms of teaching us principles of godly leadership. It also highlights the on-going spiritual battle, for in Nehemiah 2:19ff we read that no sooner had they started the re-building work than those opposed to Nehemiah's vision and plan made their opposition obvious and vocal. They started with ridicule and then made implied political threats. "Are you rebelling against the king?" they asked. The opposition got violent, so much so that the Jews had to post guards by day and night and they set up a warning system at different sections along the wall in case of an attack. The workers had to resort to carrying weapons along with their building tools.

¹⁶² Nehemiah 2:4, 5.

Nehemiah was aware of the true source of the opposition and we too need to be aware of the evil one's schemes. In many countries of the world Christians face very real physical danger. In others, such as China, there are restrictions in the area of religious activities. There are political, cultural and religious sensitivities to be faced. Some opposition can be overcome by careful communication and the building of trust. However some of the opposition experienced by God's servants is far deeper than that which can be explained by politics or culture or even religion. There is strong spiritual opposition in some cultures. For example, those working amongst followers of the Tibetan Buddhist religion need to be aware that they are sometimes dealing with demonic forces. The same can be said wherever the demonic is part of local religious and folk practices, where shamans or mediums are operating. Our struggle is certainly not simply with flesh and blood.

I have personally experienced these things in China. In the early nineties, on my first visit to Kashgar in the far west of China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region I was made very aware of the reality of demonic powers. I had casually wandered through a Uygur graveyard fascinated to discover clear evidence of superstitious folk religion in this supposedly Islamic society. That night I had a most frightening experience of being woken from deep sleep by a sensation of being held down by an extremely heavy weight and being choked. I seemed powerless to even move a muscle. Only when I called out "Jesus is alive" (for it was the week after Easter) did the oppression leave me – and it was instant. I was keenly aware that, foolishly, I had gone on my graveyard wander without even a covering of prayer. The spiritual powers were not happy.

Another more recent "encounter" was in mid 2004 when I was in Qinghai province during a Tibetan Buddhist harvest festival. Bus loads of tourists had come to film the dancing in one of the local temples – a truly spectacular and colourful event lasting a couple of days. Few of the tourists would have been aware of the fact a "possessed" shaman was acting as master of ceremonies,

except perhaps when he made the offerings to the mountain god and was seen prancing with incredible agility over the fire on the altar. The tourists had not seen the events preceding the dancing in the temple. For two or three days the shaman had led a procession of gong-banging, idol-carrying devotees going round all the local houses to cleanse them for the coming year. The shaman had passed right in front of me – eyes glazed over and frothing at the mouth. He was clearly demon-possessed. When the dancing and offerings were over, and of course the tourists had left, the spirit finally came out of the shaman with a fearful shout, as obvious an event as when it first entered him. Foreign colleagues and a few local Tibetan believers who live in the town know all too well that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”¹⁶³

6.1.1.6 Esther

The dramatic story of Queen Esther is yet another illustration of both God’s sovereignty and of the forces of evil arraigned against God’s people and His plan. God had his servant, a beautiful young lady, in the court of the most powerful man in the Persian Empire, king Xerxes. “Go gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”¹⁶⁴ Esther and Mordecai planned carefully, but God worked behind the scenes. The plans of the enemy of the Jews, Haman, were thwarted. Esther was God’s chosen instrument in bringing deliverance for her people.

God is able to raise up people like Joseph, or Daniel, or Nehemiah or Queen Esther to impact China. They may be in places of influence in political circles, or in education, or business, or the media, or sports. He also has untold

¹⁶³ Ephesians 6:12.

¹⁶⁴ Esther 4:16.

thousands of un-sung saints making a difference all over the nation – and of course most of them are Chinese believers, not foreigners.

6.1.2 New Testament Teaching

The conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan continues to be seen in the New Testament. Jesus and His followers and also believers in the early Church faced hostility from several sources. There was political, economic, cultural and religious opposition, as well as demonic opposition.

6.1.2.1 The Gospels

Jesus was born and lived within the eastern borders of the Roman Empire. Herod the Great, recognized and supported by the Roman authorities who had given him the title “king of the Jews”, was near the end of his long and eventful life. He was almost insane with murderous suspicion of any rival, even among his own offspring. The callous murder of the children in Bethlehem, as recorded in Matthew, was an attempt to ensure that the one “born to be king” was eliminated. Such an evil act was fully consistent with Herod’s ruthless character. However, behind the political factors at play (a dictator who could not tolerate the thought of any rival) were spiritual forces seeking to disrupt God’s plan of salvation. The evil plans of man and the scheming of Satan were thwarted. The reality of the spiritual battle facing the Christ, and later, all who would follow Him, was clear from the beginning. We live in a hostile world!

“The Roman occupation of Palestine had brought with it many benefits, but had incurred the implacable hatred of the Jewish people. The occupying forces were in their eyes a threat to their national heritage and aspirations.” (Guthrie, 1970:16) While the Romans allowed the Jews a certain degree of autonomy and allowed them to have their own ruling council, the Sanhedrin, they never found the Jews easy to govern. The Jews were strongly isolationist and nationalistic and

their monotheistic religion was very different to that of the Romans, with their pantheon of deities. Some of the Roman procurators, or governors, made serious blunders in their governance, and even committed atrocities against the Jews, none more so than Pontius Pilate. When the Jewish leaders called for Jesus to be crucified, Pilate was loath to further upset the Jews, who already hated him. Also afraid of further alienating the emperor in Rome, Pilate was easy prey for the blackmail of the Jewish leaders: “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar. ...We have no king but Caesar.”¹⁶⁵

The Jewish religious leaders – the Sadducees and Pharisees saw Jesus as a threat to their cherished traditions and their influence. The unique and revolutionary claims of Jesus were too much for them to accept. How could the carpenter’s son from Nazareth possibly be who He claimed to be? It was surely blasphemy for a mere man to claim equality with God! In many ways it was not surprising given their narrow nationalistic view of God’s purposes in the world and their view of the Messiah. The Messiah they looked for was to be a political deliverer from Roman occupation rather than a suffering servant bringing good news to every nation and people. Even for His early followers it was a massive step for them to come to regard Jesus, not just as a great teacher and miracle worker, but as God incarnate, the risen and glorious Lord.

In the Gospels Jesus often warned His disciples that they would face opposition from a hostile world. “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.”¹⁶⁶ Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you

¹⁶⁵ John 19:12, 15.

¹⁶⁶ Matthew 24:9.

when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”¹⁶⁷

John Piper said, "There are no closed countries to those who assume that persecution, imprisonment and death are the likely results of spreading the gospel. And Jesus said plainly that they are likely results." ¹⁶⁸

6.1.2.2 The Early Church

The Acts of the Apostles records numerous instances of when persecution broke out against the early church. In the early period one of the most violent persecutors of the church was the zealous Pharisee Saul of Tarsus. He himself, however, came to faith as a result of divine intervention in his life. Only then did he see that in persecuting the followers of the Way, he was in fact persecuting Jesus, the Messiah. Only after God broke into his life on the road to Damascus did the narrow bigoted nationalist, become Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles.

In his first epistle, the Apostle Peter mentions suffering several times in the context of the response of an unbelieving world to the Christian faith (e.g. 1:6, 7; 3:13-17; 4:12-19; 5:9). The believers were not to be surprised at the painful trial they were suffering. All believers suffer when they let their light shine in the darkness. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: “We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.”¹⁶⁹ Despite all they suffered Christians could know God’s gracious deliverance and protection, and even if they lost their lives (as did Stephen and James) God’s work would go on. It was, in fact, a privilege to suffer for Christ – “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Matthew 5:10, 11.

¹⁶⁸ Sermon given at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, August 16, 1992, entitled “*Called to Rejoice in Suffering*”.

¹⁶⁹ 1 Thessalonians 2:2.

¹⁷⁰ Acts 5:41.

6.1.2.3 Economic and cultural factors

There was opposition to the gospel not only because it threatened deeply ingrained religious views, such as those held by Jewish religious leaders or believers in various pagan deities. There were economic reasons too for opposition to Christianity. The money changers were angry that Jesus upset their business operation when He cleansed the Temple. Some of the religious leaders saw His teaching as undermining their own position and privilege – and wealth. Demetrius and the other silversmiths making silver images of the goddess Artemis in Ephesus were not upset by Paul's teaching itself but by the fact it would affect their profits. "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all."¹⁷¹

The same event, in Ephesus, reflects too how culture and ethnic identity can play a significant part in stirring opposition. Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen, though motivated by economic concerns, used cultural and ethnic arguments to stir up a riot. Demetrius argued: "...the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."¹⁷² His audience was furious and started shouting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" and very soon the whole city was in uproar. In the chaos "...most of the people did not even know why they were there."¹⁷³ Presumably, they at least knew the demonstration had something to do with their religion and culture.

In today's world, cultural and ethnic loyalties are some of the biggest barriers preventing people, in "unreached people groups", from coming to faith. They see Christianity as a foreign and alien religion that threatens their own ancient traditions and values. This has certainly been a strong factor in China,

¹⁷¹ Acts 19:25, 26.

¹⁷² Acts 19:27.

¹⁷³ Acts 19:32.

though among Han Chinese today, as we have seen, Christianity is much more deeply rooted in Chinese soil than it ever was before. For Tibetans or Uygurs or Hui or Mongolians, however, Christianity is seen as something completely alien to their own culture and religion.

6.1.2.4 Political factors

While Christianity was seen as a sect within Judaism, the Roman State was little concerned. "Rome's policy was tolerance wherever religious observances did not conflict with the state's claims. As long as the Christians created no disturbance, they were simply ignored." (Tenny, 1961:344) Once the Church, however, began to grow and spread within the empire and beyond, it began to be seen as a threat. Persecution broke out against the Christians - as illustrated earlier by the quotations of Tertullian and others.

By the time the Apostle John wrote the Revelation, the state itself had begun to persecute Christians. Christians were martyred for their faith and John himself was exiled to the island of Patmos. Revelation brings a vision of the glorified Christ and reveals the future triumph of good over evil. The apocalyptic style uses symbolic imagery to encourage believers in the midst of persecution to know that Jesus would return in glory, God would triumph over all the forces of evil and inaugurate a new heaven and a new earth of righteousness.

The opposition Jesus faced came largely from the Jewish religious hierarchy, not from the Romans. His brilliant response to the Pharisees and the Herodians¹⁷⁴, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's", not only exposed their evil motives in asking Him whether or not they should pay taxes to Caesar, it also laid down principles regarding the dual citizenship of Christians. As a citizen of an earthly kingdom the Christian must obey the law and pay taxes, but as a citizen also of the Kingdom of Heaven the Christian must give first

¹⁷⁴ The Pharisees opposed Roman occupation while the Herodians were supportive of Herod and Rome's policies.

allegiance to God. Despite all they suffered, Christians were taught to submit to the powers of the state – “submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors ... fear God, honour the king.”¹⁷⁵ Paul reminds the Christians in Rome “...to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.”¹⁷⁶ And Paul was referring to an authoritarian imperial government, not to a democratically elected one.

6.1.2.5 The Apostle Peter

When the Apostle Peter wrote his letter to encourage Christians who were going through the fires of trial, he himself was in Rome. And it was around the time the great persecution under the emperor Nero began (c AD 64). Soon to be martyred himself, Peter reminds his readers, “Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.”¹⁷⁷ He goes on to write, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us. ...Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil, live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.”¹⁷⁸ He continues, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”¹⁷⁹ Peter reminds the believers that despite their suffering, the best is yet to be. He writes, “...though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus

¹⁷⁵ 1 Peter 2:13, 17.

¹⁷⁶ Romans 13:5.

¹⁷⁷ 1 Peter 1:17.

¹⁷⁸ 1 Peter 2:12, 16, 17.

¹⁷⁹ 1 Peter 3:15, 16.

Christ is revealed.”¹⁸⁰ No wonder First Peter was an encouragement to believers who had been scattered and were being persecuted for their faith. It still speaks today.

The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, has a wealth of practical teaching relevant for those living in hostile environments. All through the centuries there has been a battle between the forces of good and evil, yet however dark the night, the light of God’s truth will shine. “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”¹⁸¹

6.1.3 Further Application to China

Putting biblical principles into practice is not always easy. Very early in Acts Peter and John were hauled before the Sanhedrin and warned not to speak or teach about Jesus. They replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”¹⁸²

In China today, as in many other countries, Christians face difficult decisions. While recognizing and respecting civil and national authority as ordained by God, Christians also have a higher authority, namely their loyalty to God Himself. The problem comes when the two clash, as they often do, and when the state or civil authorities try to restrict or control freedom of conscience and religion. This is not a problem only for those living in authoritarian and totalitarian states or in Islamic (or other religion-dominated) states. It can happen in democratic nations which bring in legislation that either runs counter to biblical teaching, severely restricts religious freedoms, or undermines family values and social morality. Christians must surely take a stand through godly example and

¹⁸⁰ 1 Peter 1:6, 7.

¹⁸¹ John 1:5.

¹⁸² Acts 4:19, 20.

through positive involvement in society and its institutions or else influence will be lost by default.

In China it is not so easy for Christians to make a stand. There is not the same stress on the rule of law, and Christians are discriminated against and in some cases persecuted. Some Christians feel they should accept the limited freedoms they do have and conform to the regulations regarding religion. Others, especially house church leaders, feel that to accept the limitations and restrictions of, for example, the TSPM/CCC structures would be too great a compromise with the command of Jesus to preach the gospel. They disapprove of the State (albeit indirectly through the TSPM) having such an influence in the affairs of the church.¹⁸³ They see the State as responsible only for temporal and material matters but not for matters relating to the Kingdom of God.

Wang Ming-dao, though writing in an earlier generation, speaks for many Christians in China today when he says,

Christians should obey all the rules and regulations of man and those in authority. But Christians should also obey God's will, which is to fellowship with believers, serve God with others in the church, keep the church holy, witness for the Lord and spread the gospel of salvation." All these should absolutely not be interfered with by anyone.
(Wang, 1983:27)

Wang Ming-dao was writing prior to his imprisonment at the hands of the Communists. He held the same views when, after twenty three years in prison, he was finally released. While the extreme persecution of the mid fifties through to the mid seventies is a thing of the past, Christians in China still face the same issues today.

¹⁸³ See for example, OMF International Global Chinese Ministries, February 2006: "*The Testimony of Allen Yuan (Part 2)*". House church leader Allen Yuan believed that "...under the TSPM, the church became an instrument of the government, led by the Party..."

Some feel they can serve Christ within the framework of the government approved TSPM/CCC - and they enjoy certain freedoms as a result. However those who hold to a separation of Church and State, and who feel that joining the TSPM is detrimental to the purity and growth of the church, prefer to remain independent, despite the inherent dangers that brings. Others do not take sides and are involved in both registered churches and in independent groupings. Yet others, such as newer urban house churches or campus groups, ignore the issue and carry on with their work and witness pushing the boundaries as far as they can. Some individuals, sadly, are not open about their faith and do not meet in any group for fear of retribution or criticism. They remain as secret Christians. Understandably, there are Party members included in this category.

Time and again, in the history of China God has over-ruled the powers of evil arraigned against His Church. Possibly the most powerful demonstration of this fact has been in the past fifty six years of Communist rule. Not only has the Church survived, it has thrived and is now beginning to impact the nation, much as Christianity began to impact the Roman empire in the second and third centuries AD. David Aikman's book, *"Jesus in Beijing"*, uses the sub-title *"How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power."* He writes in his final chapter,

It has been the contention of this book that Christianity will change the nature of China in many different ways over the next several decades, and in doing so, will change the world in which we live. China's moment of its greatest achievement – and of the most benefit to the rest of the world – may lie just ahead. That moment may occur when the Chinese dragon is tamed by the power of the Christian Lamb. (2003:292)

God's Word speaks with powerful relevance to Christians living in a hostile environment, be they foreigners seeking to bring good news in a foreign land or local believers who find themselves in an unsympathetic or even anti-Christian political or cultural setting.

6.2 The Great Commission and “Tent-making”

There is a close relationship between the Great Commission and “Tent-making” not least when considered in the context of China. Despite having a vibrant Christian community, China still has vast numbers of people (among both the majority Han and among non-Han minorities) who are as yet unreached with the good news. The present government strictly controls religion and does not allow the entry of foreign religious workers. Does this mean the Church of Jesus Christ has no option but to write-off China as a closed country? Or are there ways the Church overseas can still make a contribution in supporting the efforts of the Chinese Church? The only difference between the terms “restricted access” and “creative access” is one of attitude. There may be restrictions but there are also creative ways of making a contribution. Traditional missionaries and traditional missionary activity may be excluded but the door is wide open for professionals who are Christians. This is why “tent-making” is so relevant and strategic. China is not the only nation refusing entry to those wanting to do missionary work.¹⁸⁴ The fact so many nations restrict traditional missions does not make the Great Commission any less urgent or binding on the followers of Christ.

6.2.1 The Importance of the Great Commission

The Great Commission is mentioned in every one of the gospels. Perhaps the best known statement is found in Matthew 28:18-20, but parallel passages are found in Mark 16:15-18; John 20:21-23; and Luke 24:44-49 (together with Acts 1:3-8). The teaching of Jesus given to His disciples in the forty day period between the resurrection and the ascension is surely of critical importance. Patrick Johnstone asks:

How is it that Christians down the ages have failed to see the centrality of mission? For most of the Church and the majority of individual Christians it is as if those last words

¹⁸⁴ Dave English of Global Opportunities has pointed out that more than 80 percent of the world's population lives in nations which exclude or restrict missionaries.

of Jesus were never spoken. The Great Commission has become The Great Omission, the appropriate title of J. Robertson McQuilkin's challenging book. (1997:63)

Luke's account records how Jesus outlined for His disciples the many prophecies concerning Himself in the Old Testament and stated that "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."¹⁸⁵ He was the promised Messiah – not a political messiah to free the Jewish nation from Rome, but the One through whom God's plan of salvation for the whole world was to be made available. Right from the beginning the good news was meant for the all nations, not just for the Jews. The messengers of the gospel were to begin right where they were – in Jerusalem – but they were not to stay there. Jesus told them they were to be witnesses of all these things to the ends of the earth.

Jesus promised them "power from on high". They were not to take on this awesome task in their own puny strength but they were to be clothed with supernatural power and strength. The Holy Spirit was to come upon them and equip them for the task¹⁸⁶.

Acts 1:3 tells us that during those forty days Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God. The disciples, still children of their age and so easily short-circuited by their own limited nationalistic worldview, asked Jesus, "Does this mean that after all you are now at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus had been trying to give them a new worldview that extended beyond their own people to the nations but they still were limited in their understanding of His wider purposes. Guthrie states, "Membership in the Kingdom is ...for those who receive God's gift of salvation. This distinguishes it at once from any notions of a materialistic or nationalistic Kingdom." (1970:148) Extending the Kingdom is the extending of God's rule in the hearts and lives of those who believe – "from every

¹⁸⁵ See Luke 24:46-48.

¹⁸⁶ See Acts 1:4, 5, & 8.

tribe, and language, and people, and nation.”¹⁸⁷ God does have a plan for His ancient people the Jews, but it was not for the disciples to worry about the times or the dates in God’s calendar. Their job was to take the news of the Kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Only with the outbreak of severe persecution following the death of Stephen did the early Church move out beyond the confines of Jerusalem and Judea. Acts chapter 8 records the revival in Samaria and also the Ethiopian eunuch’s reception of the good news. In chapter 10 a somewhat reluctant Peter brings the gospel to the Roman centurion Cornelius and his house-full of guests. God blesses the preaching of His Word and the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them.

In Acts 11 we read of some unnamed Jewish believers from Cyprus and Cyrene, who had been scattered by the persecution, sharing the good news in Antioch with Greeks as well Jews. It was a brave and strategic move - one that was fully in line the Lord’s command to His disciples. “A great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”¹⁸⁸ The church in Antioch was to become the major missionary sending base of the early church and it was from here that Paul and Barnabas were sent out on the first so-called “missionary journey”.

Ross Paterson (2000) maintains that the Jerusalem church, by failing to have a vision for mission and by failing to send people out into the world, lost its important role in the purposes of God. It became too turned in on itself and faded into the background of God’s kingdom building activities. It was the church in Antioch, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and that took the Great Commission seriously, that became the key church in God’s purposes in the spreading the good news. Antioch was the launching pad for the gospel to be brought to present day Turkey and to Europe, and also sent workers in following centuries to the East - to present day Syria and Iraq. As mentioned in chapter three of this thesis, the

¹⁸⁷ Revelation 5:9.

¹⁸⁸ Acts 11:21.

Assyrian Church (which has clear historical links to Antioch), took the gospel across central Asia and into China.

When a church is overcome with its own concerns and problems, and loses its missionary vision and zeal, that church begins to die. Conversely, a church that commits itself to obey God's call to reach out to the lost, in both the neighbourhood and in the nations, is a church that beats with God's heart beat. It knows the touch of His Spirit in new and sometimes powerful ways.

Patrick Johnstone writes, "Our present-day marginalizing of missions is only a reflection of the failures throughout the history of the Church." (1997:46) He goes on to outline how this is reflected in some of the great creeds of the Church, including the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed, neither of which makes any reference to the responsibilities of the Church to a lost world. The great reformers, Luther and Calvin, were much clearer about the importance of mission in the Scriptures but due to their historical context, contending for biblical faith, they were more concerned about the important doctrines of the authority of Scripture, grace and salvation by faith. Even the famous statements of the Reformed Faith such as the Heidelberg Confession, the Westminster Confession and the Anglican Thirty Nine Articles have almost nothing about Jesus' final words to His disciples about going to the nations with the gospel. Some Lutheran and Reformed theologians did write about the Great Commission but it was the much maligned Anabaptists, the Pietists¹⁸⁹ and the Moravians, all of whom had a heart for mission, who did something about it.

In the two hundred years during and after the Reformation the above mentioned groups sent out thousands of missionaries. For many Anabaptists the Great Commission was seen as fundamental to the life and witness of the church (Littel, 1984:13-22). They said Jesus meant the Great Commission to apply to all

¹⁸⁹ Many leading figures in the Pietist movement were Lutheran, e.g. Philip Jacob Spener and August Herrman Francke.

believers at all times. Missionaries of the Moravian Brethren, one of the greatest missionary churches of history, played a vital part in the conversion of John Wesley. Out of the Methodist revival of the eighteenth century grew the nineteenth century Protestant missionary movement. Many of those sent out by the Moravians, in particular, went as artisans and craftsmen using their profession to earn a living to support themselves. They were fore-runners of today's "tentmakers".

6.2.2 The Tentmaker Movement: Definitions and Background

I have considered the importance of the Great Commission in Christ's post resurrection teaching to His disciples, and, in previous chapters, highlighted the fact China does not allow missionaries. I considered the dilemma faced by foreign Christians who feel called to China, especially if they see obedience to the Great Commission as involvement in activities such as church planting, preaching, baptizing, and literature distribution. I sought to demonstrate that, despite the fact proselytizing and engaging in certain "religious activities" are taboo for the foreigner (wishing to remain in China for any length of time), there are, nonetheless, appropriate ways to serve in China and to be an effective witness for Christ.

So then, what is "tent-making"? The term itself comes from Acts 18:3 where Paul is said to be working with his colleagues Priscilla and Aquila – "because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them." Making tents, or working in leather, was a specialized trade. While working in their trade, Paul and his colleagues were able to support themselves and also continue the work of preaching and teaching the good news.

In the past twenty five to thirty years, the term "tentmaker" has come into vogue in some mission circles to describe a Christian working in a "secular" position, usually in a country not open to missionaries. It was popularized by the

writing and teaching of Dr J. Christy Wilson (1921-1999), son of missionaries to Persia (now Iran), who served for twenty two years in Afghanistan, mostly teaching English. He was finally expelled in 1972 when the regime began to object to his effectiveness in Christian work and when the international church he founded was bulldozed. Wilson then taught missions at Gordon Conwell Seminary near Boston for the next 18 years. His 1979 book, *Today's Tentmakers*, was very influential as was his involvement with InterVarsity's triennial Urbana Missions Conventions¹⁹⁰. Others who have greatly influenced the movement include Ruth Siemens and Don Hamilton and organizations such as InterCristo¹⁹¹ and Global Opportunities. There is a growing worldwide network amongst individuals and agencies in regard to "tent-making" and some excellent articles are being posted on the Internet¹⁹².

Use of the term "tent-making", however, is not universally accepted and is certainly open to misunderstanding. Various alternative terms to "tentmaker" have been suggested but none has been universally accepted. These include: Christian professional, kingdom professional, bi-vocational witness, bi-vocational missionary, God's special envoy, self-supporting witness and lay apostolate. The term "Christian professional" certainly covers professionals teaching or working in social service, medical or development work. They are people with a profession and are using their skills and training – and they are Christians. For some, however, the term "Christian professional" may not adequately convey the idea of this being a cross-cultural, Great Commission enterprise. I personally, however, feel it is a far more readily understandable and less confusing term than "tentmaker", especially to those not familiar with Christian or missiological terminology. In this thesis, however, I intend to use the term tentmaker, rather than Christian professional, simply because the term tentmaker is now fairly commonly used in mission circles, and the number of those who regard themselves as tentmakers, rather than

¹⁹⁰ As a young staff member of InterVarsity, Christy Wilson directed the very first InterVarsity Missions Convention that was held in Toronto, Canada in 1946. Since the 1948 convention the venue has been the University of Illinois in Urbana, hence the name. Urbana 03 had over 20,000 attendees. Urbana 06 is, however, being held in St Louis, Missouri, at a larger venue.

¹⁹¹ InterCristo, which seeks to help organizations and job seekers holding Christian values to connect, is based in Seattle, Washington. See <http://www.intercristo.com>

¹⁹² See www.tentmakernet.com/articles

traditional missionaries, is growing significantly. Nonetheless, I find it extremely surprising that some major books on Mission hardly mention “tent-making” (for example *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, edited by John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson, published in 1998).

A variety of definitions for a tentmaker have been suggested. One comes from Hamilton who refers to a tentmaker as: “a Christian who works in a cross-cultural situation, is recognized by members of the host culture as something other than a ‘religious professional’ and yet, in terms of his or her commitment, calling, motivation and training, is a ‘missionary’ in every way.” (1987:7)

American Ruth Siemens who worked as a teacher in Peru and Brazil and later in Portugal and Spain says,

Tentmakers are missions-motivated Christians who support themselves in secular work as they do cross-cultural evangelism on the job and in free time. They may be business entrepreneurs, salaried professionals, paid employees, expenses-paid voluntary workers, or Christians in professional exchange, funded research, internship or study abroad programs. They can serve at little or no cost to the church. (1996)

Another definition, produced by The Tentmaker International Exchange¹⁹³ at their first congress in 1994, states: “Tentmakers are Christian witnesses from any nation who because of their skills or experience gain access and maintain themselves in another culture with the primary intention of making disciples for Christ Jesus and, where possible, to establish and strengthen churches.”

The Lausanne Congress in Manila in 1989¹⁹⁴ stated that tentmakers are “...believers in all people groups who have a secular identity and who in response to God’s call, proclaim Christ cross-culturally. Tentmakers witness with their whole

¹⁹³ TIE International (the new name for Tentmaker International Exchange) is a network of individuals and agencies promoting or involved in “tentmaker” ministry.

¹⁹⁴ For example, the *Lausanne II Tentmaker Declarative Appeal*.

lives and their jobs are integral to their work for the Kingdom of God.” A further statement on tent-making came out of the Global Consultation on World Evangelization (GCOWE, 1995).¹⁹⁵

Carol Clarke points out that “tent-making” is “an umbrella term applied to a rather wide variety of Christian service opportunities, practiced primarily in an overseas, cross-cultural ministry environment.” (1997)

A leading light in TIE International, Derek Christensen, has written extensively on the tentmaker movement. In his article *“Mission, marketplace and making tents”* he highlights five reasons why he believes the “tentmaker” movement has become so prominent. The five reasons Christensen mentions are:

1. Globalization;
2. The rise in the number and nature of countries closed to traditional missionary work;
3. The high cost of career missions;
4. The emergence of new emphases in mission including church planting, “unreached people groups” and the 10/40 window; and
5. The rise of new ways of thinking about the role of the laity and about work in both the church as a whole and in cross cultural mission in particular. (2000)

Christensen’s fourth reason for the growing prominence of “tent-making” relates to what is often referred to as “frontier missions”, and his fifth reason relates to so-called “marketplace Christianity”. Christensen develops these points in an excellent in-depth study in his, as yet, unpublished MTh thesis. (2004)

Clarke says that one of the major reasons it is difficult to find a definition for “tent-making” that pleases everyone is that there are so many “variables” in the equation. (1997)

¹⁹⁵ The *Seoul Statement on Tent-making*.

One variable regards financial support. Some tentmakers are fully supported from home while others are “fully supported by marketplace employment”. Some make a lot of money (such as those on expatriate terms working for a multi-national), others make just enough to live in country (without enough for any extras such as insurance or children’s education), and yet others have to serve as volunteers without any remuneration (as is the case for some foreign staff serving in charitable NGOs with limited funding).

Some regard only those working in restricted access countries as being tentmakers, while others see “tent-making” as an option anywhere. While one cannot deny the urgency and gravity of need in the so-called 10/40 window, or the Muslim world, for example, it is certainly not biblical to regard countries or people groups outside that window as of less concern to the Lord of the Harvest. I would concur with those who see “tent-making” as a viable and strategic ministry option world-wide.

The amount of specialized training given for tentmakers ranges from zero to graduate seminary degrees. Christensen has done extensive research in the area of the training of tentmakers. His latest work (2004) focuses on training models. He quotes Danker as saying “without training...the vast Antarctica of the lay apostolate is not going to be thawed out.” (Ibid, 2004:46) Christensen tries to point the way forward in avoiding the extremes of little or no training and overly academic or irrelevant training. In his thesis he also has an excellent overview of the tentmaker movement as well as a most helpful discussion of biblical issues.

Another area mentioned by Clarke as showing great variation in approach is that of the “level of calling” to a specific country or people. Some “tentmakers” are clearly focused on a specific people group or nation before they set out while others are totally open as to where and who they serve.

Clarke points out that there is considerable difference of opinion concerning the nature of the job itself. Some see their “secular” job as just a way to get a visa or to legitimize being in-country or as a way to make the money needed to support what they regard as “real ministry”. Happily, many others see the job as a vital part of their life and ministry, not as an excuse or cover. This touches on the question of integrity. Many have expressed concern about the “means-to-an-end” mentality of some tentmakers. In an article in *World Christian* I stated,

A tentmaker has been defined as “a missionary in cross-cultural ministry who has been called by God, prepared for service and who has a secular identity in the land in which he/she serves.” Some even use the term “Tentmaker Missionary” - clearly identifying the “tentmaker” as a “missionary”. It is not surprising that the authorities in some Islamic countries are on their guard against so-called Tentmakers. In China too the authorities regard such people as “under-cover agents” trying to use their profession as an excuse for secretive religious work. (Anderson, 2001)

Some tentmakers have a hard time integrating ministry and work. They struggle with issues of identity and integrity. Gibson says they suffer from “ministry schizophrenia” and find themselves asking “Am I a missionary in disguise, a sort of James Bond of the foreign missions set? Am I pretending to be an engineer when really I’m an evangelist?” (1997:36)

Christensen highlights some of these issues by putting a series of questions in the mouth of the tentmaker:

Have I told the truth in my visa application?” “Is my work a genuine attempt to serve the people of this nation or a shop-front to fool the authorities while I distribute the four spiritual laws out the back?” “Do I perceive mission as something that takes place within the workplace or only after I clock out at five?” “Am I working cooperatively with local expressions of the Kingdom or working in my own interests as a sole agent?” (2000)

He goes on to point out that once these questions have been answered, the tentmaker, like any Christian in the marketplace, needs to ask other questions relating to the quality of his or her work, relating to the boss and other colleagues, transparency with money, customer service, dealing with faith, gender and race issues at work, etc. One might ask, what is the difference then between the tentmaker and a Christian at home engaged in the marketplace? Christensen replies,

...a tentmaker is simply a marketplace Christian with an air ticket. Marketplace Christianity is the theological and missiological foundation of which tent-making is a cross-cultural expression. The theologies are common to each. Mission is common to each. The core elements of character and gifting are common to each. Tent-making simply adds the cross cultural dimension and operates outside of home culture instead of within it. (Ibid, 2000)

The above has highlighted one important aspect of “tent-making”, namely that it takes place in a cross-cultural setting. The length of time spent overseas by tentmakers varies greatly however. It can vary from a few months to several years, and can even be a life-time commitment involving considerable time spent in language learning and cultural adaptation. The kind of work, of course, also varies considerably – e.g. working for a foreign embassy or government, serving in a multi-national or private business venture, teaching or engaging in healthcare work, working in an NGO in social service, agriculture or relief and development projects, or serving as a consultant or visiting professor. Clearly, one of the major reasons why it is difficult to define “tent-making” is the fact that the nature of the work varies so widely.

Another “variable” is the “level of disclosure”. Some tentmakers operate more openly than others, even in the same country. “The rationale for non-disclosure may be related to more than personal security. Concern for the safety of those whom they might disciple or concern for co-workers motivate some to keep their identity secret.” (Clarke, 1997) Those who see their role as totally up-

front and legitimate are less likely to have a problem over “disclosure”, especially if they operate strictly within acceptable boundaries. For such people the term “Christian professional” might be less sensitive than the term “tentmaker” – especially if “tentmaker” implies the existence of a hidden agenda.

Having looked at definitions and the background to “tent-making”, we turn now to a consideration of relevant biblical teaching.

6.2.3 The Biblical Basis of “Tent-making”

We have mentioned that the term “tent-making” comes from the fact Paul and his co-workers Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers. Some have drawn a distinction between them, pointing out that Paul’s main calling was as an itinerant preacher, whereas for Priscilla and Aquila being tentmakers was their full-time profession. “While they may have shared a profession in common and happily co-operated in the work of the gospel, their lives and approaches to ministry were quite different.” (Ibid, 1997:31)

Gibson goes on to make a distinction between what he calls Pauline Tent-making and Priscillian Tent-making. For Paul “tent-making” was part of his strategy – providing needed support both for himself and his colleagues and serving as a role model to others. Nonetheless, preaching and teaching were his main concern. “Priscillian tent-making, however, places greater emphasis on professional skills, and the ministry that naturally develops from using them.” (Ibid, 1997:35) It seems that Priscilla and Aquila worked in their trade full-time and opened their home for ministry. In Ephesus when the learned and gifted orator Apollos was in town, Priscilla and Aquila “invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.”¹⁹⁶ Theirs was a very strategic and gracious ministry. It is no wonder they also had a church meeting in their home.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Acts 18:26.

¹⁹⁷ See 1 Corinthians 16:19.

6.2.3.1 Paul's approach to "tent-making"

The Scriptures state clearly that Paul worked to earn his living in Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus. He wrote to the church in Thessalonica – "Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you."¹⁹⁸ In Ephesus too he worked night and day and also took time to speak in the synagogue for the first three months. He later used the lecture hall of Tyrannus where he held daily discussions for two years – possibly during the long midday rest time common in Mediterranean countries then and now. Siemens says,

Luke records that Paul's listeners in the hall of Tyrannus borrowed his work apron and his handkerchief (the sweat rag around his brow) in hope of healing the sick. What a poignant glimpse of Paul teaching—in his work clothes! His lunch time audience of working people is probably dressed the same way (Acts 19:11, 12). (1996)

When Paul gave his moving farewell on the beach to the Ephesian elders, he said, "I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak..."¹⁹⁹

Dave English asks the question, "So why did Paul work for a living? Certainly not for access. As a Roman citizen he could move freely throughout the empire. This means Paul found reasons so compelling that he voluntarily chose to work for a living rather than accept donor support." (2001:22)

English goes on to argue that Paul did not simply take up "tent-making" when he needed to support himself. English believes Paul deliberately worked for

¹⁹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:9. See also 2 Thessalonians 3:8.

¹⁹⁹ Acts 20:33-35.

a living rather than relying on support from the churches. While he had every right to such support, Paul states in 1 Corinthians 9 that he chose not to ask for it: "If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more! But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ."²⁰⁰ English comments, "Working for a living was Paul's standard practice." (Ibid, 2001)

6.2.3.2 Working for a living or receiving support

Paul's practice of working for a living helped distinguish him from some of the Greek mendicant philosophers who were often seen as teaching in order to get money. Paul repudiates such an approach, whether the preacher is a Greek philosopher or one of the false teachers: "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God."²⁰¹ He says more to young Timothy warning him of the snare of the love of money. Paul is distressed that some preachers get caught up in controversy "and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain."²⁰² Clearly Paul did not want to be seen as someone who was in ministry for financial gain. He didn't deny that the "workman was worthy of his hire" but in his case he wanted to avoid any possible misunderstanding. He knew pagan Gentiles may have been suspicious of his motives in bringing them the good news.

English believes there is the same danger today. "People know money is so powerful that they suspect ulterior motives. Today, nationals still make statements like, 'They get paid to make converts,' about local missionaries. They ask how missionaries make their livingSome unfairly perceive missionaries as lazy." (Ibid, 2001:22)

²⁰⁰ 1 Corinthians 9: 12.

²⁰¹ 2 Corinthians 2:17

²⁰² 1 Timothy 6:4, 5.

English has a good point. Paul certainly emphasizes his decision not to accept support when writing to the Corinthians. However, in stating that “working for a living was Paul’s standard practice” English may seem to be implying that not to accept support is somehow a better or more honourable approach for a Christian worker. This is not the case, of course, and even with Paul, it is clear that he did, from time to time, gratefully accept the help of willing supporters. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians²⁰³ about the joy of giving and is clearly grateful for the support of the church in Philippi – “...when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need....I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”

Paul may well have wanted to work, in a so-called secular job, in order to counter criticism or misunderstanding on the part of non-believers to whom he was preaching. However he did not find it embarrassing or unacceptable when fellow believers felt led to give him gifts. In fact he states, in the passage just quoted, that such giving is pleasing to God and blesses the giver, not just the receiver. Paul saw the Philippian Christians as being his partners in the gospel.²⁰⁴ They supported him “again and again”. Although he had learned to be content whether living in plenty or in want, Paul accepted their gifts because they gave willingly and he did have needs at the time.

6.2.3.3 More on Paul in Corinth

We see this same approach in what Paul wrote much earlier to the Corinthians. During the time of his ministry in Corinth he had not accepted gifts from them because he didn’t want to be accused of preaching in order to make

²⁰³ See Philippians 4:10-18.

²⁰⁴ Philippians 1:5.

money. Yet he clearly teaches, in 1 Corinthians 9, that as a servant of God, like any other of the apostles, he had the right to support. He asks the rhetorical question “is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?”²⁰⁵ He argues strongly from both Scripture and common practice in society that it is absolutely legitimate for those working to receive material reward for their work. “In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”²⁰⁶ In stating this principle he was repeating what Jesus taught His disciples when He sent them out into ministry with no purse or bag or sandals – “the worker is worth his keep” and “the worker deserves his wages.”²⁰⁷

Paul later told Timothy, when discussing how to honour elders who directed the affairs of the church – “For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages’.”²⁰⁸ Paul undoubtedly believed that those serving full-time in ministry deserved the support of God’s people.

In the case of Corinth, however, Paul says he gave up his rights so as to win more people for Christ. Paul seems to have been extra careful in regard to money in Corinth in order to forestall criticism by either non-believers or the false apostles. In 2 Corinthians 11:7-9 he gives a passionate defense of his approach. Paul worked hard so as not to be a burden to them, but he was not reluctant to tell them that it was the believers in Macedonia who had supplied what he lacked. His use of the word “robbed” is clearly hyperbole for even if the brothers from Macedonia had brought large gifts it would not have been robbery. Even though they may have been poor the Macedonian believers wanted to support Paul. In telling of their generosity Paul may have been shaming the Corinthians.

²⁰⁵ 1 Corinthians 9:6.

²⁰⁶ 1 Corinthians 9:14.

²⁰⁷ Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7.

²⁰⁸ 1 Timothy 5:18.

Also in 2 Corinthians Paul writes at length about the need to give with generosity. The context was not support for himself but support for the poor believers in Jerusalem. In the circumstances of the time Paul encourages the Corinthian Christians to give saying, "...your plenty will supply what they need..." and "you will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."²⁰⁹ In Romans 12:13 Paul teaches the same principle of giving to those in need, when he writes "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." This is in the context of "grace gifts" in the body of Christ, one of which is the gift of giving – "if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously."²¹⁰

6.2.3.4 Being an example and building credibility

Another important reason why Paul chose to work to earn his living, despite the fact this must have made him a very busy man, was his desire to be an example to others. Paul sought to model how a Christian should live and work. Like Jesus, he believed in the sanctity of work. He told the Christians in Thessalonica, "... we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow."²¹¹

Another reason for Paul's approach was his desire to enter in as fully as possible into the lives of those he sought to reach. "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its blessings."²¹² He wanted to identify with people and understand them. What better way than to enter into their everyday life and experience in the marketplace! In the same way today, Christians can and should seek to identify with those they seek to reach. This involvement in people's lives

²⁰⁹ 2 Corinthians 8:14; 9:11.

²¹⁰ Romans 12:8.

²¹¹ 2 Thessalonians 3:8-9.

²¹² 1 Corinthians 9:22, 23.

also gives many natural opportunities through a wide network of contacts for the good news to be communicated.

His critics tried to undercut Paul's authority as an apostle.²¹³ One argument they used was the fact, unlike other apostles, he didn't live off the support of the churches. Paul defended his actions clearly believing that his methods led to greater effectiveness in reaching his target audience. Siemens (1996:8, 9) believes working as a tentmaker (earning his own living) was a deliberate strategy on the part of Paul. It gave him credibility, enabled him to more fully identify with people, and was a good example (or model) for others.

6.2.3.5 Witness in the Marketplace - in Scripture and in today's world

We have focused on the New Testament, and on the Apostle Paul, but in fact Scripture is full of examples of lay people who God used in fulfilling His purposes in the world. Gibson (1997:45, 46) has an impressive chart listing Bible characters, their profession and the cultural setting in which they lived and served. Out of the twenty two Old Testament characters he names, fourteen were neither prophet nor priest. Even in the New Testament there were some outstanding "lay" people used in the expansion of the young church, people such as Priscilla and Aquila, Lydia, Luke, and the Ethiopian Eunuch.

English rightly points out that Paul too, as the great apostle, "...set a pattern of witness and ministry by regular, working Christians, not just 'full-time' Christian workers. He could speak with authority about on-the-job evangelism because he did it. Paul made it normative for every Christian to make disciples." (2001)

Both English and Siemens make a strong case for the relevance of Paul's strategy of mobilizing lay people and modeling self-support. Paul taught and commissioned new leaders and encouraged all believers to serve in the fullness

²¹³ See for example 1 Corinthians 9:1-6.

and with the giftings of the Holy Spirit. “This is why the gospel exploded and Paul said he had fully evangelized Asia Minor and Macedonia (Romans 15:19, 23). He had spawned a rapid church-planting movement, which was penetrating surrounding people groups.” (Ibid, 2001) Siemens writes,

Many of his lay evangelists were from unsavory, uneducated, pagan backgrounds. None had anthropological or missiological training. ...In ten years (the three journeys took a decade) Paul and his friends (without financial support) evangelized six Roman provinces! They did it by winning and mobilizing the largely uneducated, unpaid converts, most of whom were slaves. (1996)

Paul and his co-workers concentrated on the major cities but countless numbers of new believers were mobilized to take the good news back to their own villages and towns, using their own languages. Siemens points out,

The Roman empire was never more than a chain of city colonies and military outposts, each with its own customs, local laws and deities, which were usually respected by the Roman authorities. ...Many languages were spoken even in the cities. What trouble Paul experienced with the Lycaonian-speaking people in Lystra! (Acts 14) Paul's strategy met this challenge. By turning his multilingual, lower class converts into unpaid evangelists, Paul guaranteed the evangelization of the hinterlands. (Ibid, 1996)

The relevance of Paul's teaching and example regarding the need for all believers being equipped for ministry is highlighted by Christensen. He sees “marketplace” Christianity (the involvement of the laity) together with “tent-making” as echoing the challenge of the Lausanne Movement that “the whole gospel is given to the whole world by the whole people of God.” (2000)

Many believe “tent-making” is vital for 21st century missions. Not only are most of the “unreached” in “restricted access” nations where traditional career missionaries cannot go, but few can afford the career missionary route. As everyday believers from many nations are given the vision for tent-making we

could see an unlocking of human and spiritual resources similar to what Paul saw in his day.

In China today the role of the tentmaker, or the Christian professional, is both legitimate and strategic. Missionaries are not allowed while professionals are welcome. The professional may well be more effective anyway. We can surely celebrate all God is doing today through the “tent-making” movement both in China and elsewhere in His harvest field.

CHAPTER 7 THE CHINESE WORLDVIEW AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

In this chapter we want to consider the Chinese worldview and value system and then go on to examine how different sections of the population view Christianity. Finally, and very briefly, we will consider methodology and outline some of the evangelistic and discipleship tools currently available.

7.1 The Chinese Worldview

“A worldview is that set of convictions held by an individual or community about cosmology, ontology, anthropology, epistemology and some kind of theology and attendant morality/ethics.” (Buys, 2003: 162) The worldview of a people has to do with what they believe about the universe, what they believe about man and society, what they believe about the transcendental (about God or gods), and what they believe about values and human behaviour.

How can we describe the worldview and the value system of the Chinese? We are not dealing with something static but with something that is always changing – for China herself is experiencing massive change. Not only does every generation have its particular characteristics but so do different segments of society and different parts of the country. It is just as well our focus is limited to mainland China and does not include the millions of “overseas-born-Chinese” (OBC) - those from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and other S.E Asian nations, and indeed all over the world. There is another category too, which we will not examine, namely “local-born-Chinese” (LBC), including American or Australian-born Chinese (referred to as ABCs), British-born Chinese (BBCs) and Canadian-born Chinese (CBCs), etc.

All of these groups have been influenced by their particular socio-cultural context as well as by the fact they are ethnically Chinese. As far as the Chinese in

China are concerned, the socio-cultural context in which they live varies greatly, for China is a vast country with many ethnic and linguistic groups. To generalize about the Chinese “worldview” is as uncertain an exercise as to generalize about African or European “worldviews”.

While it is unwise to generalize about the Chinese, we can at least identify and describe various factors influencing their worldview. As with all things “Chinese”, it helps to begin with the past.

7.1.1 Philosophies and Religions Molding the Chinese Mind

China has some 4000 years of recorded history. Her cultural development, and the worldview it has produced, has been deeply influenced by a number of ancient philosophical and religious systems. Even those educated under the communist system during the past fifty or more years have, to varying degrees, been affected by the three major creeds of China’s past – Confucianism (*rujiao*, 儒教, or *rujia sixiang*, 儒家思想), Daoism (*dao jiao*, 道教) and Buddhism (*fo jiao*, 佛教). Sometimes called the three main pillars of Chinese thought, they are, however, “not monolithic but multifaceted traditions with complex internal divisions.” (Chan, 2001) There is a wealth of scholarly writing describing the influence of these three major schools of thought in Chinese history.²¹⁴

7.1.1.1 Confucianism

Confucius (551-479 BC, *kongfuzi*, 孔夫子) is China’s most famous philosopher. He was born in the state of Lu (present day Shandong) and lived at a time of social and political upheaval in the late Zhou dynasty, the so-called *Spring*

²¹⁴ See for example: Cheng, Tien-His., “China Moulded by Confucius: The Chinese way in Western light”, London, Stevens & Sons, London Institute of World Affairs, 1947; Patrick Fitzgerald, “Ancient China: The Making of the Past”, New York, E.P. Dutton, 1979; and Fairbank John King and Edwin O. Reischauer, “China: Tradition and Transformation”, Houghton Mifflin, USA, 1978 (revised edition 1989).

and Autumn Period. Through his teaching he sought to promote order and peace in society, basing his ideas on a legendary “golden era” in the distant past. He taught that a prosperous and harmonious society depended upon virtues such as courtesy, filial piety, loyalty, respect and kindness. All important was the maintaining of proper relationships – such as between ruler and the ruled, parent and child, husband and wife, older and younger siblings, and friends.

His teachings, the earliest written accounts of which date from a few hundred years after his death, are recorded in the *Analects* (*lunyu*, 论语), a short collection of writings describing his discussions with disciples. Later disciples wrote more extensively and further debated and developed his ideas. Mencius (372-289 BC, *Mengzi*, 孟子)²¹⁵ and Xun Zi (310-237 BC, 荀子)²¹⁶ are his two most famous followers. Some see them as taking opposite views of his philosophy, perhaps simply described as optimism and pessimism.

Hundreds of years after Confucius’ death, during the Han dynasty, Confucianism was given recognition in China as one of the official schools of thought. Confucius was also particularly revered during the Tang dynasty. The Qing dynasty Emperor, Kang Xi (1736-1795) gave him the title “The Grand Master of All Ages” (*wan shi shi biao*, 万世师表), not entirely undeserved for someone whose teachings have deeply influenced the lives of the Chinese people for about two thousand years.

In times of disunity and conflict between rival feudal states, Confucius promoted the idea that the Emperor, or sage king, should be chosen on his merits, not his parentage, and that he should be devoted to caring for his people. The emperor was called the “Son of Heaven” (*tianzi*, 天子) and ruled with the “Mandate of Heaven” (*tianming*, 天命). As long as the emperor ruled justly Heaven would

²¹⁵ Mencius argued that man was innately good. Evil in society had corrupted man and the goal of moral cultivation was to rediscover that goodness within.

²¹⁶ Xunzi taught that man is innately selfish and evil. He debated on the difference between nature and nurture and said morality was attainable only through education.

bestow blessing, but the opposite also applied – if ruler and ruled were not virtuous the people would suffer natural disasters or war, and the Mandate of Heaven would be passed to another more worthy ruler. Unlike the European concept of the “Divine Right of Kings”, the “Mandate of Heaven” legitimized the overthrow of evil dynasties. Negatively, it also justified the view that “might is right”, for a successful monarch might be considered to have the Mandate regardless of his or her personal qualities. The “Mandate of Heaven” unified the nation and brought peace and prosperity to the people. Many see Confucius as standing for conservatism, for only Heaven could change the order of things.

While the doctrine of the “Mandate of Heaven” encouraged Chinese unity it also caused China to have “a disdainful attitude towards the outside world, since there was only one Mandate, and so only one true ruler of humankind – the Emperor of China.”²¹⁷ Neighbouring people were regarded as “barbarians”. China was regarded as “the Middle Kingdom” – the centre of the world. Over the centuries China never became an aggressive colonial power, but her sense of superiority has, at times, been seen in her domination of Korea, Tibet and Indo-China. These nations were seen as tributary states owing allegiance to the Son of Heaven. When China was ruled by the Mongols (Yuan dynasty) and the Manchu (Qing dynasty) the Chinese “sense of ethnocentrism and unity was strong enough to prevent the breakdown of their culture. In fact, the invaders gradually adapted the Confucian culture of the conquered and became thoroughly sinicized.” (Anon, 1990:11)

Confucius is famous for his ethical teachings. Central to all relationships was the need for *li* (礼) or propriety, or right actions needed to build a better society. The presence of *li* would result in good manners, morality and social order. It is all about doing the right thing at the proper time. *Li* is aesthetic (involving good taste), moral (giving a proper view of oneself and others), and social (bringing order in society – whether between ruler and ruled, husband and wife, parent and

²¹⁷ See Wikipedia (free encyclopedia) article on the Mandate of Heaven. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>

child). *Li* comes out of *yi* (righteousness, 义). *Yi* is more about knowing and doing the right thing than the Christian doctrine of “imputed” righteousness. While *li* flows out of *yi*, in turn *yi* flows out of *ren* (human-heartedness, 仁). Clearly both *yi* and *ren*, while in some ways similar to the Christian terms “righteousness” and “kindness”, do not contain the depth of meaning those terms have in the Bible. Two virtues closely linked to *li* are *xiao* (孝) or filial piety and *jing* (敬) or reverence.²¹⁸ Confucius’ stress on family relationships, filial piety and living a virtuous life has deeply affected the Chinese people who, far more than the average Westerner, respect elders and put family above all else.

Virtue (*de*, 德) or moral character generates harmony with others. *De* is only developed through self-cultivation (*xiu shen*, 修身). Confucius taught about the “contagious” nature of *de*, by which moral rulers spread morality to their subjects and moral parents bring up moral children.

Another important term in Confucius’ teaching is *zhong* (忠), which in classical Chinese means loyalty. It is important for loyalty to be shown to a ruler and, according to the Analects, even to those who may be of lower status than oneself. Again loyalty is developed by self-cultivation.

Confucius is said to have taught the well-known principle, “Do not to others what you do not want done to yourself.” The teaching of Jesus, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” and “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you”²¹⁹ is not only more positive and pro-active, it is a far more radical approach to human relationships. In Confucianism while horizontal relationships, or relationships with other humans, are vital, there is no sense of a vertical component, as in the gospel which teaches about reconciliation with God.

In the Analects, Confucius teaches that at birth all men have equal potential but depending upon how they develop their potential they either become *junzi*

²¹⁸ The Chinese Bible translates “honour your father and mother” as *xiaojing fumu* 孝敬父母.

²¹⁹ Luke 6:31 and 6:27.

(gentlemen, 君子) or *xiaoren* (lit. small men, 小人). The “gentleman” understands what is moral while the “small man” understands only what is profitable.²²⁰ One can only become a “gentleman” (a moral and noble person) through self-cultivation. This requires study (when young), on-going effort and a growing awareness of one's destiny (lit. knowing the will of Heaven, *zhi tian ming*, 知天命).

One can see several points of similarity, and difference, with Christian doctrine in the terms used by Confucius, many of which are also found in the Bible. As mentioned, Confucius believed individuals could improve themselves through effort and disciplined study. In this sense Confucianism is distinctly humanistic and education is seen as all important. The role of education and the belief in the ability of human beings to improve themselves through self effort has been deeply ingrained in the Chinese mind.

During the Song dynasty (969-1279 AD) the study of the Analects was required for anyone taking the imperial civil service examinations, and “aspiring officials continued to memorize the text and orthodox commentaries on it until the early twentieth century.” (Richey, 2005)

In what Confucianism teaches there are some “connection points” with what the Bible teaches. While the Christian believes living a moral life and knowing God's will are important, these are not achieved by education, self-cultivation and human effort. While spiritual disciplines, such as study of God's Word and prayer, are important for Christian growth and holiness, salvation comes through God's grace - “not by works, so that no one can boast.”²²¹

Many regard Confucianism as a philosophy and as an ethical system rather than as a religion. One reason is that Confucius makes only passing reference to religion and to the spirit-world. When asked by a disciple Qi-lu about serving

²²⁰ *Analects* IV 16.

²²¹ Ephesians 2:9.

ghosts and gods Confucius is reported to have said: “You are not able to serve man. How can you serve the spirits?” When Confucius was seriously ill another disciple, Cu-lu, asked permission to pray to the gods for him to which Confucius is said to have replied, “I have long been offering my prayers.” ²²² (Luo, 1991:30)

Even though in the *Analects* Confucius remained largely silent about God it does appear that he takes for granted the fact Tian was a morally good, extra-human, absolute power, active in the universe, which from time to time impacted human society. Long before Confucius’ time, in the Shang dynasty (some 16 centuries before Christ), the earliest Chinese writing (inscriptions found on bones, *jiaguwen*, 甲骨文) reveals the fact the Chinese believed that the world was controlled by an all-powerful deity whom they referred to as Shangdi (上帝). By the time of the Zhou dynasty, Tian (“Sky” or “Heaven”) was used synonymously with Shangdi. By the time of Confucius in the late Zhou period, however, it seems the Chinese were more concerned about their “religious obligations to manifold divinities, local spirits, and ancestors.... and Confucius appears to uphold sacrifices to ‘gods and ghosts’ as consistent with ‘transmitting’ noble tradition.” (Richey, 2005)

Over the centuries there have been times when Confucianism has been treated as a religion by the Chinese, involving elaborate ceremonies, all the trappings of temple worship, and offerings to gods and ancestors. At times worship of Confucius himself, as a god, was state sponsored. Equally, at other times in China’s long history, the state has sought to vilify Confucius. This vilification was especially strong during the Cultural Revolution. “Mao castigated Confucius for imprisoning China in a cage of feudal archaism and oppression.” (Ibid, 2005)

During the Cultural Revolution the drive to smash the “four olds” included Confucius and his teaching. Since China’s “opening” in the early 1980s Confucius has enjoyed something of a revival in terms of official favour. Not only has the Confucian Temple in Confucius’ hometown of Qufu in Shandong province been

²²² *Analects* XI 12 and VII 35.

fully refurbished, but the philosopher is himself hailed as a great teacher and patriot. What is even more significant is that some leading thinkers and officials in China today are proposing a revival of Confucian theories to combat the growing moral and ethical void in society. Commenting on China's social problems, The Scotsman for October 2, 2005, under the heading "From Confusion to Confucius in China", reported an official, Kang Xiaoguang, as saying:

Over the past 150 years China has abandoned its traditional values and has followed a process of Westernization... a mixture of capitalism and Marxist-Leninism. As a result, there are no moral standards to regulate how people should treat each other, their business partners, their friends and families. We have no way of judging what makes a happy life. Confucius offers traditional values that can help rebuild our moral and social standards.

The report goes on to state that the Ministry of Education has approved the teaching of traditional Chinese culture in schools and that more than five million children now study Confucian texts.²²³

After more than 2000 years, the influence of Confucian teaching is not only deep in the Chinese psyche because of its impact on succeeding generations in the past, it is still today being held up as of value for building morality and order in society. This has long been the case in Taiwan where the former nationalist government, in particular, championed Confucianism as embodying Chinese values and culture. Things have come a full circle with some in the communist mainland also turning to Confucianism – at least as a philosophy and moral code “with Chinese characteristics”.

7.1.1.2 Daoism

The second pillar of Chinese thought is Daoism, an indigenous philosophy that has deeply influenced succeeding generations of Chinese. The key figure in

²²³ For the full report see <http://news.scotsman.com/international.cfm?id=2025452005> accessed 20 December, 2005.

Daoism is the philosopher Laozi (老子), who some regard as mythical. He is said to have been born in c 600 BC, some 50 years before Confucius and is reputed to have written the short and enigmatic *Dao De Jing* (The Classic of the Way and Virtue, 道德).

It was not until the Han dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD), that the teachings of Laozi, Zhuangzi (庄子), and others, who shared ideas centering on the concept of *dao*, were classified together under the heading of philosophical “Daoism”.

Over the centuries, there have been numerous, and often conflicting, interpretations of the *Dao De Jing*. It is about the “Way” (*dao*, 道) which finds expression in “virtue” (*de*), in particular through what the text calls “naturalness” (*ziran*, 自然) and “non-action” (*wuwei*, 无). The *dao* (which means both “way” and “spoken word”) is the source of *qi* (气) or “vital energy”, the “One,” which in turn produces the cosmic forces of *yin* (阴) and *yang* (阳). While the *yang* energy (bright, strong, positive, male) rises to form heaven, *yin* (dark, weak, passive, female) solidifies to become earth. A “blending” of the two types creates a harmonious whole. Traditional Chinese medicine is based on a system of balancing opposites, designating foods or medicines that ‘heat’ the body as balancing those that ‘cool’ it. (Anon, 2001:12) The *Dao De Jing* claims to reveal not only “the mystery of the origin of the universe but also the secret of personal well-being and sociological order.” (Chan, 2001) Some interpretations describe the “One” as the purest most powerful form of *qi* which creates and nourishes all things.

Dao is described as “nothing” (*wu*) but in view of the creative power of *dao* this does not mean “nothingness” or absence in the nihilistic sense. *Wu* suggests the idea of “otherness”. The term *dao* infers that “all things are derived ultimately from an absolute ‘beginning,’....like the start of a pathway. It also suggests a direction to be followed, which brings out the ethical interest...” (Ibid, 2001)

De is the virtue or power which has been given to *wan wu* (万物, lit. “ten thousand beings”, i.e. all things) without which life would cease to exist. The union of *dao* and *de* “bridges the gap between transcendence and immanence.” (2001) Desire (*yu*, 欲), to be distinguished from basic physical needs, corrupts the heart and mind (*xin*, 心) and affects one’s judgment and experience of reality. In a world given to the pursuit of wealth and power, in being “empty,” the follower of Daoism is said to be “full.” Without “desire”, he or she is able to enjoy the riches of *ziran* (Nature or naturalness) and to find fulfillment.

Ziran in Daoism does not exclude the spiritual and the social. Gods and spirits have traditionally been part of Chinese cosmology and the *Dao De Jing* accepts them as part of the natural order. Both king and the family are part of the “natural” order. “As an ethical concept, *ziran* thus extends beyond the personal to the sociopolitical level. It is worth mentioning that *ziran* remains an influential idea today, especially in conceptions of romantic love and beauty in Chinese thinking.” (2001)

Unlike the Confucian emphasis on ethics and rites to establish an ideal society, Daoism teaches that man must “be free of all restraints in order to unite with the universe and its governing principle – the Way.” (Anon, 1990:11) There is nonetheless an emphasis on self-cultivation and obedience to follow the principles of the Way in order to enjoy blessing in this life and beyond.

As with Confucianism, some of the terms used in Daoism echo some of the terms found in the Bible – notably *dao* or the Way. The Apostle John used the common Greek word *logos*, which was found also in Hellenistic philosophy, and gave it a deeper Christian meaning. So too in Chinese, John 1:14 “The Word became flesh” is translated in the Chinese Bible as “*dao chengle rou shen*” (道成了肉身). For the Chinese, the word *dao* is full of meaning both linguistically and

philosophically. As mentioned above it means both the “way” and the “spoken word”. Yet the Christian concept is fuller and clearer than the concept of *dao* in Daoism, for the “Word” of Scripture, Jesus Christ, “became flesh and made his dwelling among us ...full of grace and truth.”

Classical Daoism, which we have briefly discussed above, over the centuries, developed into a mystical religion with a mix of ideas regarding immortality, the spirit world, alchemy, and medicine. These mystical and occult elements became inextricably connected with Chinese traditional folk religions. In Chinese folk religion there is much stress on the five elements — water, wood, fire, earth and metal — which are seen as the fundamental energies in the universe. These elements interact and even affect abstract things such as a person’s personality. Related to this is the concept of *Feng Shui* (水) – or geomancy – where the location of a house or building or a tomb is supposed to influence the fortune of a family or a company.

The enigmatic teachings of Daoism may seem far removed from the average Chinese person in China today. However, certain aspects, such as belief in *Feng Shui*, are very much alive – even in sophisticated and modern Hong Kong. Daoism is one of the five recognized religions and many of its concepts are deeply imbedded in the Chinese mind. The teachings of Daoism have strongly influenced the modern martial arts, spiritual breathing and meditation movement called *qigong* (气功) and the cult known as the Falonggong (功) – both of which involve the occult. Practitioners claim “supernatural” psychic powers that can heal mind and body.

7.1.1.3 Buddhism

The third major influence in the development of the Chinese worldview is Buddhism. It has had a profound affect on Chinese politics, literature and philosophy for almost two thousand years. Unlike either Confucianism or Daoism,

Buddhism was not indigenous to China. It was an import from India in the first century AD, brought by monks and traders travelling along the ancient Silk Road.

It was the Mahayana (Great Vehicle) school of Buddhism that came to China, not the narrow more philosophical and exclusivist Hinayana (or Theravada) School. The Chinese elite at first didn't accept Buddhism. Concepts such as monasticism and individual spiritual enlightenment seemed to be in conflict with Confucian teaching which stressed social order, strong families, and practical etiquette. Mahayana however was open to the incorporation of aspects of traditional Chinese religions and philosophies. The new religion adapted to China and took on aspects of the culture, such as ancestor worship. This Chinese hybrid Buddhism, propagated by zealous missionaries, attracted many devotees and appealed to the masses more than did either Confucianism or Daoism. Chinese Buddhism was less elitist and philosophical and far more practical than its two indigenous rivals. It sought to give answers to life's difficult questions – such as the problem of suffering and death.

Buddhism's golden age in China was during the Tang dynasty but it survived as China's major religion through many succeeding dynasties. Pure Land Buddhism (*jingtuzong*, 土宗), also known as Amidism, became the main sect of Chinese Buddhism. It emphasizes devotion and rituals. Another major sect of Buddhism in China is Chan (), known in Japan as Zen. It stresses meditation and has been influenced by Daoism. In China, Pure Land and Chan are often found together.

After the Communists came to power, Buddhism went into steep decline. The Chinese Buddhist Association was formed in May 1953 – in line with Communist Party policy on religion. As with Christianity, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), Buddhist institutions, such as temples and monasteries, were ransacked and religious practices were suppressed. Since the open-door policy, however, there has been a revival of Buddhism in China with temples re-

opened and growing numbers of devotees and pilgrims. Many of those visiting the refurbished temples and flocking to famous Buddhist holy sites are local and overseas tourists (mainly from Taiwan and other Asian nations).

One particular variety of Chinese Buddhism found along China's southeast coast, in provinces like Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong, is the worship of the goddess *Mazu* (祖). She is in some senses a Chinese version of *Guan Yin*, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy (*guanyin pusa*, 音菩).

Tibetan Buddhism is another distinct form of Buddhism in China found among Tibetans and Mongolians and a few other smaller minority groups (such as the Tu in Qinghai and the Pumi in Yunnan). Tibetan Buddhism has a strong emphasis on tantra (a quicker path to enlightenment) and the occult. It involves demon possession and shamanistic practices. "By the time that tantric Mahayana Buddhism entered Tibet, it had become ...transformed by tantric rituals, magic, and sorcery..." (Tsering, 1998:51)

Buddhism teaches that both the material world and the individual "self" are an illusion. It teaches that people can be freed from misery and suffering by escaping from the world and its desires through good deeds, giving of alms, the making of offerings, and by observing religious rites. These build up merit. As Buddhism teaches reincarnation, the aim in life is to build up sufficient merit to improve one's lot in the next life with the ultimate goal of escaping from the endless wheel of life, and thus attaining enlightenment or *nirvana* (nothingness). The Chinese refer to this as "becoming a Buddha" (*cheng fo*, 成佛) or attaining Buddha-hood.

There are many Buddhist terms and concepts that have come not only into the Chinese language but also the culture, and have profoundly affected the mindset of the Chinese. One is the concept of "karma" (*yin guo bao ying*, 因果报) – the law of cause and effect. This is related to the Chinese view of fate (*ming yun*,

命). If one's karma is bad all kinds of unpleasant things are likely to happen. If someone is in trouble it is because of fate or because of something they did wrong in this life or a previous life. People thus tend to be slow to help others in need especially if they are a stranger. This is very different to the Christian way of showing mercy and kindness to one's neighbour.

There is, nonetheless, the concept of mercy in Chinese Buddhism. This is seen in the idea of the Bodhisattva (*pusa*, 菩) – the divine or semi-divine being who assists human beings to escape suffering. The Buddhists refer to this act of merciful assistance as *ta li* (它力, the strength of the other) as opposed to *zi li* (自力, lit. self-strength). The important question is, of course, which *ta* (or other) are we talking about? Are they reliable? Are they real? For the Christian the thrilling answer is we do have another to save us – Jesus Christ our Saviour. He is not simply a figure of hazy make-believe mythology (as are the bodhisattva) but He entered our world in time and space, the Lord of history, in order to redeem us.

The Noble Eight-fold Path²²⁴ (*ba zheng dao*, 八正道) is another basic doctrine of Buddhism. Believers are to strive to follow this way and also to avoid craving or desire (*tan xin*, 心 , or *yu*, 欲). Buddhism is a “works” orientated religion where human effort is all-important. Despite this, most Buddhists, including monks, do not believe attainment of nirvana is even a remote possibility. Their religious observances are largely seen as practical guidelines for building merit and a better next life.

One of the reasons Buddhism appealed to the Chinese masses over the centuries was its acceptance of the importance of filial piety and ancestor worship.

²²⁴ The Eight-fold Path includes: right view (*zheng jian*, 正), right thought (*zheng siwei*, 正思), right speech (*zheng yu*, 正), right action (*zheng ye*, 正), right living (*zheng ming*, 正命), right effort (*zhengjingjin*, 正精), right mindfulness (*zheng nian*, 正念), and right concentration (*zheng ding*, 正定).

Making offerings to the spirits of the departed is believed to help ease their lot in the after-life.

The concept of undeserved grace is largely alien to the Chinese, as is assurance of salvation. Good works are not a response of gratitude for what God had already done (as is the case in the gospel) but rather a way to earn favour. The chanting of monks and the offerings made at a funeral may give some sort of comfort to the bereaved but certainly there is little hope beyond the grave. The fear of death and of the spirit world is very real. Seeing the gruesome images (both carved and painted) in a Buddhist temple reveal something of the fear and darkness found in a religion like Buddhism.

Another Buddhist concept that has deeply affected the Chinese mind is that of the “Middle Way” (*zhong dao*, 重道). To follow the “Middle Way” is to avoid extreme views and lifestyle choices. It is actually not a bad principle to follow, unless of course the majority view is unethical or unbiblical, as is sometimes the case in increasingly secular societies. Traditionally, the Chinese do not like confrontation or extreme views. They seek for the middle way of consensus and sometimes compromise.

The influence of Buddhism upon Chinese culture has been profound. China’s classical art exudes Buddhist imagery and concepts. Chinese literature too is inextricably related to Buddhism. Some of China’s most famous classical works of literature, such as Journey to the West (*Xi You Ji*, 西游), Romance of the Three Kingdoms (*San Guo Yan Yi*, 三国演义) and Dream of the Red Chamber (*Hong Lou Meng*, 红楼梦), are full of Buddhist-related themes and references. Even as classical literature in the West reflects Europe’s Christian heritage, China’s literature reflects the influence of Buddhism and China’s other religions. That influence is also seen in Chinese calligraphy, music, and architecture and even in China’s famous cuisine.

7.1.2 The Chinese Synthesis

“Throughout the course of China’s history, the faith of the vast majority of the Chinese, both the masses and the intelligentsia, has been a syncretistic combination of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.” (Anon, 1990:12)

Though some of the teachings of the three main creeds of China’s past would seem to be in conflict with each other, the Chinese have to a large extent seen them as complimentary. Each has adapted to the others and no great distinctions are made between them. The Chinese often say all religions are the same - they basically are “urging people to be good.” (*quan ren wei san*, 劝人 善). The Christian doctrine of divine revelation is, by contrast, a “proclamation of good news” (*xuan gao hao xiao xi*, 宣告好消息) for no matter how good we try to be we are never good enough. The good news is that Christ has made a way for us to be reconciled to a holy God, finding grace and mercy, forgiveness for sin, a new life and the sure hope of eternal life. It is indeed good news for all people, not least the Chinese.

As we have seen in a previous chapter, Christianity is very much influencing China as a nation today. Some observers even claim that Christianity is transforming China. Certainly the good news is a message of hope and salvation and the Holy Spirit is in the business of transforming lives and families and societies. There is no question the Church in China is strongly indigenous and increasingly a force to be reckoned with. However, the vast majority of Chinese have yet to hear the transforming message of Christ. The nation, for well over fifty years, has been under the rule of an atheistic regime that at times seemed hell-bent on wiping out all religion.

7.1.3 The Impact of Communism

The past five and a half decades of Communist rule have radically affected the Chinese people. The regime not only attacked religious institutions and believers (of whatever faith), it has also radically affected the values of Chinese society and even the culture. In the darkest times, such as the Anti-rightist campaign of the late fifties and the so-called Cultural Revolution (*wenhua da geming*, 文化大革命) in the sixties and early seventies, the nation was traumatized. Hundreds of thousands were driven to suicide after suffering mental and physical harassment by gangs of young Red Guards professing to follow Mao's teachings. As many as forty million may have died in the first twenty five years of communist rule from famine, political purges, factional fighting and war.

Almost three generations of Chinese have known nothing but Communist rule. Despite the fact China calls itself the People's Republic of China (even the currency is referred to as Peoples' Money, *Ren Min Bi*, 人民币), the people had no say, and certainly no vote. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was seen as supreme. It was organized nation-wide from the top level of government right down to the local level of neighbourhood and street committees – a massive bureaucracy, each level taking its cue from the level above it. Party and government were more or less synonymous – at Central, Provincial, County, City and local level. Everybody belonged to a *danwei* (单位) or work unit – such as a factory, school, commune, or government department. Every *danwei* had its Party organization. Chairman Mao once said, “the Party leads in every aspect of Chinese society.”

The individual's chief loyalty was to the state and the CCP, not his or her family. Patriotism or love of one's country (*ai guo*, 爱国) was, and still is, equated with “love of the Party” (*ai dang*, 爱党).

The CCP followed a principle it calls “democratic centralism” whereby power was given to the top leadership – the Central Committee, which in turn gave power to the politburo, a small group of senior leaders. This is still the case today, of course. In reality the politburo has normally been subservient to the supreme leader.²²⁵ The politburo dictated policy (to be rubber-stamped by China’s CCP-controlled Parliament, the National Peoples’ Congress) and the people (or “the masses”) were expected to follow. The Party controlled everyone and everything. People were supposed to dress the same and, of course, think the same. The state-controlled media was simply the mouthpiece for Party propaganda. The propaganda department of the Party controlled the flow of information through newspapers, magazines, radio and TV. (Huo, 2003)

The state promoted atheism and Marxist Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.²²⁶ In communist ideology humans are regarded as their own creator. “Do not worship heaven, do not worship earth: only worship the people’s manual labour.” Humans are simply intelligent animals who need to be molded by education. Their value is not in themselves as individuals with gifts and ideas but in their usefulness to the state – “a stainless steel screw in the engine of the revolution.” Communist leader Liu Shaoqi, at one time second only to Mao, said:

At all times and on all questions, a Communist Party member should take into account the interests of the Party as a whole, and place the Party’s interest above his personal problems and interests. It is the highest principle of our Party members that the Party’s interests are supreme. (de Bary, 1998:137)

In Communist dogma there are no absolutes as far as good and bad are concerned, and no such thing as sin against God. Sin is something social. All depended upon whether or not the individual followed the official line of the Party at the time.

²²⁵ Mao Zedong was an absolute dictator till his death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping was “paramount leader” 1978-1997, Jiang Zemin served as General Party Secretary and later President between 1989 and 2003, and the current senior leader and President is Hu Jin-tao.

²²⁶ In the 1980s the State promoted “the Four Fundamental Principles”, namely – the socialist path, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the CCP, and Marxist-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.

Although the Communist Party never regarded itself as a religion, many of its characteristics closely resemble those of a religious organization. The Party has its doctrines, and its Scriptures - the theory and writings of Communist leaders; it has initiation rights for members who take a strict oath of allegiance; it has weekly training sessions to teach and indoctrinate members; it has a “priesthood” of loyal Party cadres, notably the ubiquitous Party Secretaries; it has songs to eulogize the Party; and spectacular displays and ceremonies to laud the Party’s achievements. During the Cultural Revolution, particularly during the three year period 1966-69, China was gripped by a “religious-like” mania. Thousands “chanted” from and studied Mao’s Little Red Book; people performed the “loyalty dance”, and asked the Party for instructions in the morning and reported back in the evening. People virtually worshipped Mao, the Great Helmsman. Although the CCP officially repudiated the Cultural Revolution in 1981 and admitted Mao Zedong had made some mistakes, to debunk Mao himself would bring into question much of the history and many of the claims held as sacred by the CCP. A whole mythology has grown up around Mao, and his “god-like” portrait still adorns the entrance to the Forbidden City overlooking Tiananmen Square in Beijing. His face also adorns lucky charms hanging down from the rear view mirrors of countless taxis, buses and trucks around China.

Mao believed in endless revolution and in constant struggle. It is a philosophy based on hate and mutual suspicion. Not surprisingly, over the decades the Communist system bred a climate of deceit and recrimination with countless unsettled scores and buried hate. People could shout slogans without regard for the truth and could attack their neighbours and even family members so as to avoid being suspected of disloyalty to the Party. Salvation was seen in terms of human action to overthrow evil structures opposed to the “revolution”.

The Communists had their utopian ideal – a classless society where all was shared and all were equal. Liu Shaoqi said “The most fundamental duty of life is to

establish Communism and to transform the present world into a Communist world.” The Communist ideal was a pipe dream. It denied God and thought man, by his own effort, could build a new world. Communism confused scientific possibility with moral capacity. The individual was made totally subservient to “the masses”. Rather than building a classless society the communist rulers placed themselves at the top of a rigid political hierarchy. (Anon, 1990:63)

The endless campaigns and movements (*yun dong*, 运动), and in particular the Cultural Revolution, left the Chinese disillusioned with communism and desperate for change. Millions had lost their lives – for nothing – including people like Liu Shaoqi who died in prison, a victim of one of Mao Zedong’s purges.

Ever since the era of reform and opening inaugurated by Deng Xiao-ping in the early eighties, society has been undergoing a new kind of revolution. Uniformity of thought and action, typified by the ubiquitous blue Mao jackets of the sixties and seventies, has been replaced by increasing individuality and freedom of expression, typified by the bright colours and modern fashions seen in China’s cities. The all-pervasive presence of the Party has been dissipated but so has the cradle-to-grave care it provided through the *danwei* system. Society has become increasingly market-driven and the Party has retreated from its once central place in people’s lives.

Society and daily life have seen massive change in the past two decades, largely as a result of economic and political factors. However the Party still exerts tight control over the media and over education. The use of the Internet, though it has mushroomed in recent years, is controlled by multiple government agencies via filters and routine Web site checks²²⁷. There have been moves to introduce reforms in education and in the legal system but when it comes to political reform, religious freedom, freedom of speech or human rights, little seems to change.

²²⁷ In order to maintain and expand their operation in China, international Internet Companies such as Yahoo and Google have accepted self-censorship as demanded by the Chinese authorities.

The general climate in China, of external control on the one hand and “everyman for himself/herself” on the other, causes much frustration for foreigners as well as for the Chinese themselves. Lying and deceit are endemic in the system. The problems of rampant corruption and bureaucracy threaten the Party’s already tarnished, if not rotten, image, and make life very difficult for millions of ordinary citizens. Pei writes of “mass disenchantment with the party”. (Pei, 2006: 187)

Aware of the eroding of society’s morals, the Party has from time to time “created” model heroes as examples for the people to emulate, heroes such as Lei Feng (雷锋)²²⁸. Creating such heroes is one of their tools for moral and political education. There are campaigns for choosing model workers or students or teachers or business people – so that others may follow their example. Despite this, for most Chinese their heroes are not the Lei Fengs of yesteryear but rather people like Yao Ming, the towering Chinese basketball player playing in the USA for the Houston Rockets. The government obviously realised this for in April 2005 the State Council approved Yao Ming’s nomination as a “labour hero”. There are new heroes in modern China, even those like Yao Ming recognized by the government, but they are no longer model communists.

The Chinese Communist Party, despite the ideals of Communism and the fine sounding rhetoric of this or that campaign, has been unable to create the “new man” that they once thought was possible. One such campaign (in 2001) to inaugurate the “rule of morality” (as opposed to the “rule of man” and the “rule of law”) was no sooner launched than it was quietly dropped. Even Party members, despite their vows when they sign on, are seldom motivated by high ideals and undying commitment to the cause. Money, rather than morals, is what drives the

²²⁸ Lei Feng is a communist icon. He was a Peoples Liberation Army soldier who served others selflessly and sacrificially. Since the early sixties, after he died in an accident, he has been held up as a “hero of the people”. People are urged to study Lei Feng.

average Chinese citizen today. Position and power is what attracts the potential Party member more than the desire to “serve the people.”²²⁹

Communism, as well as the Communist Party, is all but discredited in China today. There are about 70 million members of the Party but it would be hard to find many truly committed communists. Communism is a totally bankrupt philosophy. Without the underlying bedrock of absolute truth – the recognition of right and wrong as revealed in Scripture, Chinese society today is increasingly adrift in a sea of relativism. This moral vacuum reflects itself in the area of sexual morality. Pre-marital and extra marital sex is more and more common, especially in the cities which are more influenced by westernization and globalization.²³⁰ Marital problems and divorce are sadly more and more common. In the area of business too, corrupt and dishonest practices are endemic.²³¹ Anything goes - as long as one is not found out. The making of shoddy products and the widespread practice of counterfeiting are a further reflection of the moral vacuum in society. Even the police have been known to run prostitution rackets or to be involved in various forms of corruption. Officials are widely regarded as corrupt, and underhand payments for services or favours (e.g. securing a place for one's child in a good school or ensuring good medical care in the hospital) are common-place.²³²

Another phenomenon in society has developed alongside the alienation between the people and the Party. It is the increasing number of people who say that they believe in themselves rather than in any religion or philosophy or political ideal. Communism has long taught them there is no God. Evolution is taken for granted and science is believed to have proved religion to be mere superstition, a crutch for the needy. In this regard CCP propaganda has been remarkably successful. However, not now believing in the Party, and not being attracted to

²²⁹ “Serve the People” (*wei ren min fuwu*, 人民服) is a well-known communist slogan, coined by Mao Ze-dong.

²³⁰ See Hannah Beech, “Sex, Please - We’re Young and Chinese”, Time Asia, posted on Jan 15, 2006 at www.time.com/time/asia.

²³¹ See James Ku, “Crouching Corruption, Hidden Fraud”, International Herald Tribune, March 2 2006 posted at <http://www.ihb.com/articles/2006/03/01/opinion/edku.php>

²³² See for example, “Billing Scandal Exposes China Hospital Corruption”, Dec 5, 2005, Reuters.

China's traditional religions, and not having much contact with Christianity, the average Chinese person today, especially in the cities, is basically secular and non-religious. Many simply say "I believe in myself". This approach to life seems to work fine so long as everything goes well. With more personal freedom and rising standards of living, many, on the surface at least, seem content to believe in their own ability to make it through life.

At the same time, many Chinese are increasingly unsettled by the rapid changes being seen in society. While discreetly (and privately) deploring the evils of Communism and nervous about the growing materialism in society, some have a desire to see a return to more traditional values. In this regard Christian values, such as respect for ones parents, honesty, fair play, moral uprightness, and marital faithfulness are more akin to traditional Chinese values than to either communist or secular western values.

7.1.4 The Appeal of Christianity

The witness of Chinese believers through all the ups and downs of the Communist era, and the contribution in more recent decades of foreign believers especially in the universities and in the NGO movement, have been making an impact. There has been a loving concern for people's real needs, without strings attached.

The gospel of salvation through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit bring into the lives of believers a new dynamic. They are enabled to live out the Christian life – not in their own strength but in the power of God. It is not a case of "self-cultivation" as in Confucianism. It is not *zi li* (self effort) or trying to earn merit - as in Buddhism. It is not bowing to political expediency nor is it an altruistic response to slogans, such as "serve the people". It is not the risky philosophy of simply believing in oneself.

How then do Christians seem to be able to live differently – be they country farmers or middle class urbanites? There is a phrase often seen in TSPM Churches, “Glorify God and benefit people” (*rong shen yi ren*, 荣神益人), which puts it well. Because the Christian seeks above all to glorify God he or she will gladly seek ways to bring benefit to his or her fellow men and women. Christian service is an outflow of gratitude to God for His mercy not an attempt to earn merit or to please man.

“Traditional Chinese culture” writes Jonathan Chao, “can be defined as a culture of ethical humanism.” (2000) In other words, self-cultivation is the way to perfect human character. The difference between Christianity and religion (or humanism or communism) is that in the gospel God stoops down to reveal Himself and to save us. In religion man is striving in his own strength and with his own wisdom to find his own answers and solutions.

In examining the factors influencing the Chinese worldview and system of values we have looked at the past. Enoch Wan describes “traditional Chinese” as “non-Christian Chinese with strong Chinese cultural orientation and ethnic pride”. (2000) Ethnic pride is certainly an issue. During the Qing dynasty, when Protestant missionaries worked in China, a common phrase heard was: “one more Christian, one less Chinese.” In the Communist era too the Party has used ethnic pride and “nationalism” to stir up patriotism (and support for the Party-line). As in the past, so today, when Chinese perceive Christianity as something foreign they are less inclined to seriously consider its claims. Only when they see the failure of their own philosophies (and religions), or when they are disillusioned with “the Party-line”, are they more open to the gospel. When “traditional” beliefs or “official” policies clearly fail to meet human need and are unable to change man or society, people are more open to the gospel.

Many “traditional Chinese” intellectuals in the past were open to consider the merits of Christianity. (Pricskett, 1993) One well-known example in the

nineteenth century was Confucian scholar turned pastor, Xi Sheng-mo. In more modern times, Chinese intellectuals and young professionals, who have been far more influenced by Communism than by China's ancient religions and philosophies, are being attracted to Christianity. These include China's so-called "Cultural Christians". Following the Tiananmen Square Massacre in June 1989, many Chinese people, especially students and urban intellectuals, became totally disillusioned with Communism (and the ideology of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought). The hopes they had placed in science and democracy seemed dashed too and Christianity seemed attractive. Even the media noticed the trend and called it "Christianity fever." That openness to the Christian message continues today. "Urban intellectuals and students continue their search for a new world view and a new value system to fill their spiritual void." (Chao, 2000)

Of course there is a whole generation of young people who have grown up entirely during the time of reform and opening when standards of living have been improving. Most of them are too young to have known anything about the tragic events of 1989. They are the "me first" generation, all of them an only child due to China's "one child" policy. How can the good news be effectively communicated to these young people? We will look at this and other distinct groups within society later in this chapter.

7.2 Characteristics of the Chinese Value System

Chinese ways often seem unusual if not strange or inscrutable to foreigners. Likewise to many Chinese, the ways of foreigners have appeared unusual if not strange and inscrutable. Clearly, with China playing an increasingly prominent role in the world today there is more and more contact between "foreigners" and Chinese, and there is a great need for better mutual understanding.

For those called by God to serve in China or to serve among the Chinese Diaspora it is especially important to understand some of these cultural distinctives.

As we better understand the Chinese mindset and value system we can begin to develop more meaningful and mutually beneficial long-term relationships. As we understand the language and the culture of China we learn how to communicate more effectively. We need to develop sensitivity towards the Chinese and an appreciation for their culture, values and communication styles. There are a number of special aspects of Chinese culture:

7.2.1 Harmony

The Daoist principles of *yin* and *yang* are said to be the two matching and complementary polarities of *qi* (or universal energy). The oldest Chinese classic the *I Ching* (or *Yi Jing*, 易), which at the time was used mainly for divination, has deeply influenced Chinese culture. It speaks of the dynamic balance between opposites and stresses the need for everything to be in harmony with the *qi*. The Chinese attach considerable importance to harmony and balance in all aspects of life, especially harmony between people. The Confucian ideal of maintaining proper relationships in society – showing respect for position and seniority – has also ingrained in the Chinese psyche this stress on the need for harmony.

7.2.2 Face

The concept of “face” relates to social relationships. It is a reflection of one’s status, prestige and influence in society or in a particular social grouping. There are two words used for face - *mianzi* (面子) and *lian* (脸). For the Chinese, and indeed for other Asians such as the Japanese and Koreans, “loss of face” is a very serious matter. To lose face is to lose something of one’s dignity and to lessen one’s authority before others. The Chinese speak of someone who has been embarrassed, or even insulted, as “losing face” or “being without face” (*mei mianzi*, 没面子). “Face is lost when the individual, either through his action or that of people closely related to him, fails to meet essential requirements placed upon him by virtue of the social position he occupies.” (Ho, 1976)

The phrase *diu lian* (丢脸), on the other hand, which also means to lose face, is a little stronger. It carries the connotation of being disgraced. Inappropriate actions or words, such as rudeness shown to one's superior or elder, show disrespect for that person and cause them to lose face (*lian*). The principle of reciprocity (*bao*, 报) is violated. (Bond, 1991: 59) The loss of *lian* sometimes involves the questioning of one's moral integrity or honesty – as if one has been caught out or exposed in some way. Culturally it is a bad thing to cause loss of face for someone and it is only done by those challenging authority or wanting to embarrass or shame a particular person. In order to maintain social harmony Chinese try to avoid causing others to lose face.

Giving face to others helps earn respect and loyalty. When appropriate, the giving of face to others, by publicly giving them recognition or respect, greatly strengthens relationships. It is all part of the culture – name dropping, the giving of gifts, the use of titles, the avoidance of criticism and use of status symbols, etc., are all part of the face-saving and face-giving game. (Ibid, 1991: 59) Certain actions (or even seeming lack of action) are justified on the basis of “saving face” for someone. The outsider may easily mistake such actions (or words) as insincere or as not dealing decisively with the issues at hand. Foreigners, on the other hand, especially Westerners, tend to be far more direct in expressing their views, including critical ones, without in any way implying disrespect for the other person, be they a friend or even their boss or their teacher. It is no wonder many Chinese regard foreigners as brash and disrespectful at times. It is also no wonder that for many Chinese the “struggle” meetings of the fifties, sixties and seventies, when so-called “enemies of the Party” were exposed and criticized publicly, were so shocking. They were an affront to Chinese cultural norms.

It is important for foreigners to understand how giving and keeping “face” affects relationships. It is relevant in business when negotiating a deal and it is relevant in working with officials. It is also relevant in the classroom. Teachers may

not get very honest feedback from students because the students would want to avoid sounding critical or disrespectful of the teacher. The same applies to factory supervisors and workers. The kind of constructive criticism and creative input that is encouraged in the West might, in China, be seen as inappropriate or even insulting.

In seeking to be an effective witness for Christ one has to avoid putting pressure on people or embarrassing them in front of others. One also has to be aware that though some Chinese may indicate a willingness to believe, they may, in reality, merely be wanting to avoid confrontation and loss of face - either for themselves or the person sharing the good news with them. Chinese are reluctant to say “no” but a “maybe” or even a “yes” could be a disguised “no”.

7.2.3 “*Guanxi*” or Relationships

Guanxi (系) is usually translated as “connections” or “relationships” but neither word adequately describes this most important concept in Chinese interpersonal relations. *Guanxi* describes a relationship between two people whereby each is able, in different circumstances or contexts, to prevail upon the other for help or support. The two may not be of equal status but over time or through special circumstances they have become acquaintances, even friends. There is often a complicated network involved and the *guanxi* may be indirect in that it results from the existence of a third person, who is a close friend of both, and who may have introduced them in the first place. The individual can call upon this *guanxi* when, they personally or someone else they are willing to help, needs a favour. One should not overwork *guanxi* for it needs to be kept in healthy balance. *Guanxi* usually does not refer to family relationships or to normal social relationships such as boss and employee, or teacher and student, or friend. The relationships formed by *guanxi* are personal and non-transferable.

The Chinese are adept at building relationships. These take time. Many Westerners want to “get right down to business” but neglect the essential steps required for first building trust and *guanxi*. The Chinese see developing a relationship as an essential prelude to co-operation. Meals are very often part of the process and socializing around a table often helps strengthen working relationships.

Guanxi can have negative connotations as when it is used for personal gain or when it violates business ethics or administrative regulations. In such cases it can lead to corruption, unfair favouritism, or cronyism. However *guanxi* is usually seen as something positive. It can enable one to break through impossible bureaucracy or make good connections that would have been impossible otherwise. The smooth working of *guanxi* networks, when each member at some time directly or indirectly helps another member, plays a major part in Chinese society.

Clearly, for Christians it is important we too understand the importance of *guanxi* in Chinese culture. We can pray for God to give us good *guanxi* that can be used for His Kingdom, and we should play our part in helping others whenever we can. There may be times when undue or ungodly pressure has to be politely resisted. Normally, however, “going the second mile” to help someone with whom we have developed *guanxi* is extremely important in the whole process of effectively sharing Christ’s love with them.

7.2.4 Qualities of Character Valued by the Chinese

The Chinese may define good character (*hao pinde*, 好品德) somewhat differently to foreigners, especially those from a Western background or with a western orientated education. Some foreigners, such as Asians and Africans, do, however, have many cultural affinities with the Chinese.

Chinese, traditionally at least, highly value humility - what they call being *qianxu* (谦虚). Chinese are very often reluctant to push themselves forward whereas westerners, Americans in particular, see it as both necessary and normal for the individual to announce and market their talents. What a westerner may regard as healthy self-confidence, the Chinese may regard as arrogance. The Chinese may, through their generally self-effacing approach, be hiding enormous talent and knowledge.

The Chinese regard tolerance and endurance as important virtues. In the midst of incredible hardship and even tragedy, they often show great patience and poise. The Chinese have had to learn to live with massive disappointment and completely disrupted lives and schedules. The short-fused foreigner may blow up long before a Chinese loses control. Chinese are pragmatic and in many ways more flexible than time-conscious westerners.

The Chinese style of communication is often indirect and circular, not wanting to directly contradict or confront others, even if they do in fact have very different views. "In Chinese culture the light of truth does not arise from the clash of opposing opinions; too much is at stake." There is an "interpersonal system focused on relationship rather than 'truth'..." (Bond, 1991:54) The Chinese operate in a circuitous manner so as to slowly come to consensus without offending others in the process. The westerner, by contrast, typically tends to be outspoken and frank about his or her opinions, is often assertive and even confrontational.

Another virtue highly valued by the Chinese is loyalty. Loyalty is sticking by a friend through thick and thin. Not to help an old friend, not to reciprocate hospitality or gifts, not to keep in touch - is to show disloyalty and lack of commitment to the relationship. This can cause great offense. The Chinese are deeply touched when a foreigner, even after moving to another city or after returning to their home country, keeps in touch with his or her Chinese friends or former students.

The Chinese, both traditionally and in the complex, modern world of twenty-first century China, have their ideals. They know what they admire and they know what they do not admire in human behaviour. To live up to these ideals in everyday life is, however, far from easy. The Chinese may be adept at keeping up appearances but deeper down the picture is not always very rosy. Jonathan Chao writes, "... because there is no clear concept of sin or atonement, there is no authentic ground for forgiveness. Without forgiveness, the Chinese people carry with them a heavy load of hate, distrust, and vengeance." (2000) The Communist system has bred a sad harvest of evil – conflict and deception instead of love and openness. In common with all humankind of whatever ethnic or cultural background, and whatever political system, the Chinese people have a fallen human nature – they too are sinners. They, like all peoples everywhere, need the saving grace and transforming power of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him so much of what they value can be realised, and so many of their aspirations will be fulfilled.

7.2.5 Characteristics of Modern Chinese Culture

7.2.5.1 A Mass Culture

The Chinese stress conformity rather than individuality. To the CCP the individual is always less important than "the masses" and, of course, "the masses" must follow the lead of the Party. Following the "Party-line" is all important. People are to submit to those in authority over them. They are used to taking orders from those above them and tend to show respect for anyone in authority. "Chinese media, political, social and educational structures all support this theme of orthodoxy in ideology and belief." (Anon, 2001:16) Officials, at whatever level and within their circle of responsibility, have great power. They can ignore, over-rule or even change the regulations if they have the required level of authority. Ordinary citizens, on the other hand, have little say and there is no room for dissent.

This general attitude is also reflected in the traditional Chinese method of learning by rote and by memorization. At exam time the student must simply “give back to the teacher” what he or she originally gave the student. There is little room for individual or creative thinking or expression. The cramming method of teaching is referred to as “stuffing the duck” education (*tian ya shi jiaoyu fa*, 填 式教育法). Non-Chinese are often amazed at how much the Chinese think and act alike, “whether it is orthodox opinions about ethnic stereotypes, science, medical reforms, or current events.” (Ibid, 2001) Kay Danielson in discussing the problem of plagiarism in China, observes,

In imperial China, to be considered an educated person, one had to demonstrate not original scholarship, but that he had memorized the Confucian classics. This ethic is played out in the classroom, particularly where writing is involved, as students constantly look for models to copy. That's what writing is - copying the model! (Danielson, 2006)

Chinese prefer to make decisions as a group and by consensus. They do not like to stand out as too independent. Westerners are often the opposite and take pride in their individuality. The Chinese are more likely to ask “What is my place in the system?” while westerners might ask “How can I be fulfilled and achieve my goals?” This clearly affects how Chinese respond to the gospel. They are usually very concerned about what their family or friends might think.

7.2.5.2 An Insider Culture

In colloquial Chinese the common term used for foreigner is *lao wai* (老外). Literally this means “old outside”. “Old” (*lao*) in this context is usually a friendly term of respect and “outside” (*wai*) means outsider. The Chinese always see foreigners as “outsiders”. Foreigners too, understandably, usually see themselves as “outsiders”. They are outsiders to the language, the culture, and the life experiences of the Chinese.

This “inside” and “outside” distinction can also be seen in Chinese society. The Chinese qualities of politeness and hospitality come strongly into play when they deal with family or friends. However in a crowd of anonymous people the Chinese are far less polite and magnanimous. Over the years the Chinese government has initiated many campaigns trying to encourage a greater sense of public morality and social responsibility. For example, one movement in the eighties urging people to improve their manners and hygiene was called “The Five Particulars and the Four Beautifuls” (*wu jiang si mei*, 五四美).²³³ The latest public campaign is meant to combat eight “disgraces” infecting Chinese society, including greed, laziness and wasteful living. In the run up to the 2008 Olympics the government is trying to encourage a “socialist sense of honour and shame” and a spirit of “serving the people,” honesty and self-sacrifice.²³⁴

The “inside world” must be one of harmony and any problem or failure must be kept private. For outsiders to know or, even worse, to intervene, is seen as not only embarrassing but also unacceptable. This mentality is seen in family matters, in a community, a city, a province, and even on a national and international scale. The outsider should not interfere in “internal affairs”. Whether or not there is evidence to hand, outsiders can be blamed for any given problem. “It is assumed that outsiders can never fully understand inside conditions.” (2001:17)

There are various levels of belonging within the culture. Highly secret Party documents are stamped as *neibu wenjian* (内部文件) or “Internal Documents”. Leaking such information is regarded as treason. Even at a much lower level certain information is regarded as sacrosanct and only accessible to those entitled to the information. Open disclosure, even of information of great relevance to ordinary people, is often strongly resisted by those with access to that information. Knowledge and information is power, and it is held tightly. This is why rumour is one major means of the spread of information – and it spreads fast, even if it is not

²³³ The *Five Particulars* were decorum, manners, hygiene, discipline and morals. The *Four Beautifuls* were beauty of the mind, language, behavior and the environment.

²³⁴ See *Beijing Starts Campaign to Beat “8 Disgraces”* (March 27, 2006, Reuters)

always accurate. In relation to foreigners, there is a certain level of suspicion and distrust on the part of some Chinese. Outsiders are presumed to have either a religious or a political agenda or else they are simply trying to make money. There is a natural resistance to readily open up to unknown foreigners. This is why language learning and cultural acquisition are so important for any foreigner seeking to get close to the Chinese. It takes time to demonstrate ones love and commitment to the people. It takes time to build trust.

7.2.5.3 A Relational Culture

We have already seen the importance to the Chinese of *guanxi* and building relationships. We have seen the Chinese emphasis on harmony – within the family, with friends and colleagues and in society in general. “Expressing feelings too openly could jeopardize someone’s face or group harmony.” (2001:18) One always has to keep in mind what others might think. The Chinese strive to build and maintain a wide range of relationships – it is the oil on which society runs.

Subordinates must show deference to those above them and must follow their lead. They may not agree with their leader but they dare not express that disagreement openly for fear of breaking trust or jeopardizing their position. Initiative is not always appreciated as the leader may lose face. People are thus not normally encouraged to express their opinions. Unlike in the West where individuals can be on first name terms, even with the boss, the Chinese have a strict hierarchy in society. A teacher is addressed as teacher, a director as director, a school principal as school principal, a CEO as CEO, a mayor as mayor.

Traditional relationships in the Chinese family have been under siege since the Communists came to power, no more so than during the Cultural Revolution when children were told to spy on their parents. From the late fifties and into the early seventies the nuclear and even the extended family were broken apart as husbands and wives were often forced to live and work in different parts of the

country. The one-child per family policy that has been in place since 1979 has also radically impacted the family. Children are growing up without brothers and sisters, and already many, whose parents themselves had no siblings, are without cousins and without uncles and aunts.

The *danwei* (or work unit) system brought in by the Communist regime had major social implications. The *danwei* used to serve as the major arena for social interaction. Now with the growing emphasis on private enterprise, the *danwei* system is fast dying out. Yet it is still true that the Chinese put much stress on relationships made at work or in their neighbourhood. Many friendships made at school or in the army last right through into old age. Chinese place strong emphasis on maintaining friendships. A common term, full of meaning, is *lao pengyou* (老朋友) or old friend. Chinese rely very heavily on their network of friends. When facing any kind of difficulty or need the Chinese are more likely to ask “Who do I know who can help?” than “What can I myself do about this?”

The good news is communicated most effectively when genuine and deep relationships are established. As is demonstrated in the survey (described below), the single most important factor in people coming to faith was the influence of friends and family. In such a relational culture there are many natural and effective channels for sharing the good news – both for the Chinese themselves and for the foreigner seeking to be a witness to his or her Chinese friends.

7.2.5.4 A Nationalistic Culture

Most nations are proud of their ethnicity and their history and culture, and the Chinese are no exception. The CCP has used patriotism to bolster its own position. Several incidents in recent years have illustrated this – including reactions to the “accidental” bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999, the “spy plane” incident over Hainan in April 2001, and the demonstrations against Japan over the “textbooks” issue (in 2005) and the controversial visits of

Japan's Prime Minister Koizumi to the Yasukuni shrines commemorating Japan's war dead, including some known war criminals. On each of these occasions the government allowed and even organized demonstrations of a distinctly nationalistic nature. China also uses sport to drum up nationalistic fervour. The world will see a passionately united and vocal people when the Beijing Olympics are held in 2008. As a matter of pride China will pull out all the stops. I believe nationalism is going to become more of a driving force in China in the years ahead, especially as communism as a guiding philosophy is very much out of favour.

Most nations and ethnic groups within nations are to some degree blind to their own ethnocentricity. All nations dislike criticism from outsiders but, unlike in a democracy where dissent is normal, China does not tolerate criticism from within either.

Ethnic pride negatively influences relations between the majority Han Chinese and the so-called national minorities (*shao shu minzu*, 少数民族). The Han sometimes appear as arrogant, domineering and paternalistic to minority peoples, such as the Tibetans and the Uygurs. While Han Chinese believe they have brought great benefits to minority areas, such as Tibet and Xinjiang, the locals see their presence as an unwelcome take-over. The Han Chinese point to roads, railways, irrigation projects, improved medical services, education and general economic development. The locals point to increasing numbers of immigrants from eastern China; increasing emphasis on the Chinese language at the expense of the local language; economic exploitation; and domination in all areas of government by Han Chinese. When Han Chinese Christians, by contrast, take time to learn the local language, identify with the locals, living with them and relating to them as friends – barriers are broken down and the good news is communicated powerfully and effectively.

The Chinese have a whole range of views of foreigners ranging from admiration to suspicion and even distain. They welcome overseas Chinese but

often criticize them for their sometimes less-than-fluent Chinese. They have a love/hate relationship with America and the West in general. Many students dream of studying in the US, Canada, Australia or some other western nation. While respecting Japan for its advanced technology, the Chinese struggle to accept Japanese due to the hurts of history and the atrocities of the Japanese occupation sixty years ago. The Chinese sometimes show considerable racial prejudice towards black Africans. Foreign believers need to bear these stereotypes in mind when seeking to be a witness for Christ. Westerners find many openings to make friends but need to keep a humble spirit and live a godly life, making a distinction between western culture and true faith. It can surprise some Chinese to learn that not all Americans are Christians! Japanese who show real love and humility towards the Chinese also find a warm response. Barriers break down quickly. Black African Christians have many incredible advantages despite the occasional insults that come their way. They can often get away with singing gospel songs in the park or sharing testimony openly with Chinese – something few westerners could do without possibly serious consequences. The fact many black Africans are students and have learnt Chinese also quickly impresses those they meet and opens the door for friendship and sharing.

7.2.5.5 A Materialistic and Secular Culture

In today's China money, success, and position are all-important. For the pragmatic Chinese whatever works is worth trying. As with materialism anywhere, integrity and morality sometimes take a back seat. To make money & become rich is seen as success, however it is achieved. To emigrate overseas (especially to America or Canada) is a dream to be energetically followed, especially by young people. The reality for many of course is that life is not at all easy. One can always blame the fact there are too many people!

Not surprisingly, society in materialistic China is also very secular. People are too busy to seriously consider spiritual issues. There is a moral and spiritual

void, which even the media has noticed. The atheistic philosophy of the Party and a strictly secular education has tended to block out from the average Chinese mind any knowledge or awareness of God. Most Chinese have come to believe that science and evolution (regarded as an undisputed fact) somehow disprove the existence of God. The atheistic and humanistic orientation of many in contemporary China “has created a spiritual desert in the Chinese heart.” (Chao, 2000) Despite this people are remarkably fascinated by the transcendental and the spiritual. That fascination ranges from dabbling in superstitious practices (such as going to a fortune teller or burning incense at a temple) to slipping into a TSPM Church to find out about Christianity.

The overwhelmingly secular mindset and upbringing of the average Chinese can be seen in how the Chinese view goodness and evil. “Without the Bible’s special revelation, the Chinese people lack a deeper, realistic understanding of human nature as sinful.” (Ibid, 2000) Sin and evil are defined in terms of criminal acts, and are certainly not normally regarded as having anything to do with attitudes or thoughts. Things such as lust (and even infidelity or adultery), lying, stealing, and cheating are not regarded as wrong unless one is found out. “Most Chinese struggle with how to keep up a good appearance.” (Anon, 2001:52) Goodness is seen as public morality. Along with Zhuangzi, the Chinese generally believe that man is basically good. Those with less education or a bad environment or upbringing are more likely to be bad. It is thus easy to blame others for one’s own mistakes – a common human trait since Adam and Eve!

7.2.5.6 A Pluralistic Culture

The culture of the Chinese in mainland China cannot be described as a mono-culture for it is changing and contains several contending worldviews and value systems. The viewpoints of modern, secular young people stand in stark contrast to the more traditional values of older generations. The generation that went through the Cultural Revolution (now over fifty years of age) is very different

to the students of the eighties who experienced the Student Democracy Movement and the Tiananmen Square massacre. Present-day teens and university students are again very different to the students of 1989. Present-day youth (all from one-child families) tend to be more self-centred and rosy-eyed about China. For this younger generation life is a lot easier than it was for their parents. Urban youth, in particular, have more money and more gadgets, and they know little about the hard times suffered by previous generations. In November 2002 the BBC had a series on the Youth of China. They appropriately titled it *“From Mao to Me”*.

China is a vast country with huge contrasts in climate, ethnicity, religion, customs, and living standards. The inner psyche of Chinese people varies greatly from place to place not only from generation to generation. The rural-urban divide is huge as is the contrast between the wealthy east and the poorer western parts of the nation. The sophisticated Shanghainese businessman lives in a totally different world to the peasant farmer in rural Henan or the Tibetan nomad in Qinghai. Yet each person is precious in God’s sight and each one needs His individual touch. The truth will impact each differently but never has that truth been more relevant or more desperately needed than today. In order to effectively communicate the good news with Chinese it is very important to understand both the background and worldview of the individual or group concerned and also to try to contextualize the message bearing in mind how we present (or package) the gospel and how the Chinese (whether Han or Non-Han peoples) receive what they see or hear.

7.3 How Chinese View Christianity

We turn now to consider the results of a questionnaire sent to mainland Chinese (mostly students and immigrants) in several overseas countries including New Zealand, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, the USA, and Britain. About 10% of responses came from inside China itself – mainly carried out by individuals.

An example of the questionnaire is found in the Appendixes. Responses came from 87 individuals representing various age groups (see graph below).

Date of Birth	Total Respondents
Before 1950	2
1951 – 1960	4
1961 – 1970	25
1971 – 1980	39
1981 – 1990	17
TOTAL	87

The home cities or provinces of respondents included Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Shandong, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, Anhui, Hubei, Henan, Hebei, and Fujian. A small minority of respondents were born or lived for a period in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

7.3.1 Earliest Impressions of Christianity

Every individual has their own story. For many of those surveyed, their earliest impressions of Christianity reflect the fact they grew up in a communist nation with an atheistic education. Some 20 percent thought Christianity was a western religion related to western culture but not relevant in China. Several thought of Christianity as superstition. Some saw it as full of myths and legends (*shen hua gu shi*, 神 故事) and unbelievable events, such as miracles. Others saw Christianity as mysterious and strange. Surprisingly perhaps, knowing communist propaganda, only a few respondents had the impression Christianity was unscientific. Some with a Buddhist or Muslim background thought Christianity was just one of many religions – mainly for foreigners, with very little following in China. Two Tibetan respondents, both brought up in traditional Tibetan Buddhist homes, thought of Christianity as a foreign religion and as an evil cult. They were afraid of it. One of the Tibetans said his early impression was that Christianity was

wai men xie dao (歪 邪道), something crooked and dishonest. A few respondents saw Christianity as being about rules that restricted ones freedom.

Others said their earliest impressions reflected what they were taught in school, namely, that Christianity was a tool of imperialism – brought to China during the Opium Wars of the nineteenth century. Others saw it, and all religion, as an opiate helping people cope with life's difficulties. Several thought of Christianity as merely a psychological crutch or as a form of escapism. A few said that they thought only those who had suffered in life, or were facing trials, or who were old turned to Christianity.

For others, although they viewed Christianity as but one of many religions in the world, it was a positive thing - teaching people to be good. A significant number of respondents, over 40%, saw Christianity in a positive light. Comments ranged from seeing it as “not bad” (*bu cuo*, 不) to seeing it as extremely attractive, “touching and impressive”. Some said they knew Christians went to church, especially in the West, but did not know why they went or what they did at church. A few said they had wanted to find out more about Christianity.

Several mentioned the fact they had met Christians who were nice and helpful. One said that the Christians he had met were friendly and easy-going, always ready to help others in need – completely different to non-Christians. Several saw Christianity as “a religion full of love”, joy or peacefulness. One said he had been amazed by the Christians he knew – seeing them as just like the communist model hero Lei Feng, always helping others and striving for harmony. Many felt Christianity taught good morals, and one said he or she felt “if only all people in the world were Christians the world would have peace”. Another commented that while most believers in Jesus that she knew gladly helped others there were many others who did not live up to this standard.

One respondent commented that he or she saw Christianity as “holy, comfortable, peaceful and beautiful”, but also felt it was far away from them. Several, while attracted to Christianity, felt it was an ideal hard to reach. It was “holy but not practical”. Its moral standards were impossible to put into practice. Some said they felt Christianity helped people improve themselves and move forward in life. Some who had a respect for western culture, notably a few in their early twenties, had been attracted to Christianity and had been curious to find out more. One respondent commented that he or she knew that Christianity had been brought by missionaries who had built schools and hospitals which had been of great benefit to China. Another who first heard about God and Jesus as an eight year old said the impression he had was that God could help people solve their problems and that through praying to God people could reach their goals in life.

About fifteen percent said they had had absolutely no contact with Christianity. It was something completely “out of my world”, said one. Others had heard a little from the media (TV or magazines) but nothing else. One respondent who knew about Christmas thought it was associated with someone called Santa. A few had heard of the Bible, and even some Bible stories, but had never given Christianity any serious consideration. One had seen Christians praying before eating and felt it very strange - “how can they worship someone they can’t see?” Two older respondents and two younger ones came from Christian homes, one of them being a fifth generation Christian. They had always regarded Christianity as the truth and had regarded Jesus as God and Saviour. As a child one respondent had wondered: “if God loved His children so much why did He allow them to suffer so much persecution?”

7.3.2 The Path to Faith

Of those replying to the questionnaire, thirty six became believers in China; four in Hong Kong or Taiwan; and forty-seven in an overseas country – including

New Zealand, Australia, the UK, the USA, Germany, Canada, Sweden, Indonesia and Singapore.

7.3.2.1 Those Finding God in China

Two or three of those who came to faith in China were born into Christian homes. From an early age they learnt about God. One was baptised as a ten year old in the early fifties. Several who only later responded to the gospel actually first heard about God and the Bible as children. Some heard from believing relatives. One heard from an aunt visiting from Hong Kong. A young couple of the Korean nationality (called *chao xian zu* in China, 朝族) who both became Christians in northeast China, heard about Christ from an aunt (in the case of the husband) and a high school friend (in the case of the wife). The father of one respondent gave his son a Bible story book when he was a child. Only later did the son believe but the seeds were sown all those years earlier. Several others heard from school or university friends. One, a former drug addict, heard from a friend while undergoing drug rehabilitation in hospital. Another who had found no relief from the doctors for a medical problem came to Christ when a classmate finally plucked up courage to tell her about Jesus. She was healed. About 60% of those believing in China heard the gospel from relatives or friends.

Several were influenced by foreign teachers, Christian professionals or even tourists. Two Tibetan young people came to faith as a result of working in health and community development projects run by a Christian NGO in west China. They were influenced by the lives and testimonies of their foreign colleagues. The only prior knowledge of Christianity one of them had was from watching a TV cartoon that spoke of a good man called Jesus.

As a student, one respondent was invited by his English teacher to his flat where he and others heard the teacher (a New Zealander) speak of his faith in Christ. As an 18 year old student (in 1996), another respondent heard the good

news from her American teacher. One told of how he and a university friend met some American students studying on their campus who talked with them about God, “the meaning of life” and the “uniqueness of Christianity”. Another respondent heard the gospel from American students on a cultural exchange programme in 2000. One heard the gospel from an American pastor who happened to be on a trip in China, and another heard the good news from a young American tourist. Another respondent, as a student, was given a Good News Bible by an overseas professor teaching at his university. He hardly read it to begin with but later he and his girlfriend started going to the TSPM church in their city. They were very impressed with the love evident between the believers, something they had not experienced outside the church.

Others too were influenced by the witness of local believers. One respondent, now an itinerant house church preacher and teacher, first heard the gospel in 1985 from an old lady who, in her youth, had worked with CIM missionary Isobel Kuhn. Another respondent heard the good news from a university classmate who then took him along to a house church gathering in Fujian, southeast China. As a twenty-two year old in 1998, another respondent was invited by a friend to a house church meeting in Sichuan, where she became a believer. One moving testimony was shared by an older respondent who came to Christ at the age of 55. She had become seriously ill not long after participating in various ceremonies (related to folk religion) performed after the sudden death of her husband in 1987. In a vain attempt to get help, she visited specialists in every hospital in Xi'an – spending lots of money on countless tests and medicines. Eventually a Christian neighbour persuaded her to go with her to a Christian meeting in a home where she was prayed for by an eighty-year old sister. The prayer was simple and powerful. Two days later she had a dream in which she saw Jesus taking away her disease. When wakened by her daughter she sprung to her feet healed. Her testimony, as a former atheist with no interest in God, moved many others and before long a house church gathering was being held in her home too. She also started attending a large TSPM church in Xi'an.

Another respondent told of meeting a Christian woman on the train. At the time he was deeply moved by her testimony but found it too incredible to believe. She wrote out a simple prayer on a piece of paper and told him that if he prayed with true sincerity of heart, God would hear and answer. He did pray that prayer a few days later and knew his life was transformed. It was however only a month after this, after arriving in New Zealand to begin further studies, that he went to church for the first time and got baptised.

Another respondent spoke of a chance meeting with a Christian who shared with him about God creating the world and all things. This led to his becoming a Christian. Another went to a TSPM church out of curiosity while at university. It left a deep impression. A year or two later she became a believer as a result of the testimony of a former classmate who emailed her from the USA where she had become a Christian.

While most were clearly influenced by friends or relatives, a few seemed to have been seeking God on their own. One respondent, a young teenager during the Cultural Revolution, was so disillusioned with all that was happening around her that she shut herself away and secretly read several well-known classical works of literature and taught herself English. She came to faith through reading Madame Guyon's "The Sweet Smelling Myrrh" (in Chinese). God revealed Himself to her as eternal and holy and personal. She came to realise that sin was not a product of society but something personal. Another respondent came to faith as a young teenager during the eighties as a result of listening to Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC) radio broadcasts. Later he received various pamphlets and booklets mailed to him from FEBC. Another respondent, in 1989 when in his early twenties, bought a Bible and some Christian books and magazines in a TSPM church in Shanghai. These played a big part in his coming to faith.

7.3.2.2 Those Finding God Overseas

Over 90% of respondents in this category came to faith after 1999. This is not a reflection of the situation in China generally where people have been coming to faith in large numbers throughout the past two and a half decades. What it does reflect, however, is the on-going movement of God amongst students and immigrants from China who are now living overseas. Testimony after testimony is given of how, soon after arrival, they attended church (either a local church or a Chinese church in the country concerned), heard and responded to the gospel. One student told of going to church in Oxford, England, in 2001. It was the first time in her life she had been inside a church. She had been invited by a Chinese friend. She and her friend were both baptised a few months later – at the same baptismal service. Another spoke of being invited to the Chinese Church in London in 2004 and then attending special outreach meetings, a student group and Sunday services. He soon committed his life to Christ. In 2002 a Chinese graduate student was invited by her flatmate to the Baptist Tabernacle in Auckland, New Zealand. It was her first time ever to attend a church and she was deeply touched by the singing. Overburdened with many worries at the time, the words of the songs moved her to tears. Not long after, she gave her life to Christ.

One respondent told of the how some Christians had met him at the airport in the USA when he first arrived from China. They later invited him to church where he found Christ. One respondent in Canada said she came to faith largely as a result of the help given to her by local Christians when she was struggling to learn English. On many campuses, in several countries, Christian groups hold special events to attract international students. Many of those reached are Chinese, including some respondents to my questionnaire.²³⁵ Many students found that their understanding of Christianity was deepened as a result of

²³⁵ In New Zealand in 2005 there were 90,000 international students from 105 nations. The largest single group, 40,000, was from mainland China. Source: NZ Government Population Statistics.

attending an English or Chinese Bible study group on their campus. Skepticism, in some cases, or ignorance, in others, turned to life-changing faith.

Some respondents told of how friends or home-stay parents, university staff, or even total strangers influenced them. One older, white-haired Kiwi Christian regularly speaks with strangers passing the front of his church in downtown Auckland and invites them in. Over the years, scores of international students, many of them from China, have responded to his friendly invitations and not only attended the church services but come to faith. One of these is a mainland Chinese engineer who had spent a few years in Singapore working in a company while undergoing specialized training. Local Singaporean workmates witnessed to him at the time and invited him to church. However he re-acted against their over-zealous approach and began to avoid them. A few years later he emigrated to New Zealand and the friendly invitation of the white-haired Kiwi met with a very different response. It was God's time.

Not only are younger students and professionals from China being reached overseas. The parents of many of these students and immigrants who come on family visits for anything from three months to several years are also finding Christ. Some are in their sixties and even seventies and they include some who have been atheists and loyal Party members all their lives.

Several respondents shared that very few in China have the chance to hear the gospel. It was only after they came overseas that they had exposure to Christianity. There has been a great harvest amongst PRC scholars and immigrants in the West in the past twenty five years. Prior to the eighties there were very few mainland Chinese in Chinese churches in countries such as the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia or New Zealand. Most pastors in Chinese churches were from Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia or Hong Kong. Today the situation is very different. More and more Chinese churches are not only full of

mainland Chinese, mostly recent converts, but more and more are being led and pastored by mainland Chinese.

7.3.3 Typical Questions

In asking respondents to the questionnaire what questions they had about Christianity before they believed, I received a fascinating array of answers. Several said they had had no questions and readily accepted the gospel when they heard it. A few said they had many questions before coming to faith, and a few still had issues bothering them. Many said that prior to hearing the gospel they knew absolutely nothing about Christianity. Their minds, as far as the Christian faith was concerned, were a blank sheet. Some sixteen percent of respondents had never before read the Bible. Equally as many said they had been atheists. One respondent had a succinct and revealing comment (in Chinese) – “I never seriously considered this religion, for in China I had hardly any contact with it. In fact, I always had a feeling of antagonism and resentment towards religious believers. Maybe it was because since childhood all my education had been atheistic.”

About forty percent of respondents had questions relating to God. One respondent listed a whole string of questions he had had before believing but ended up by saying, “But for me the key question of all was - did God exist?” Many respondents questioned the existence of God, thinking that belief in God must be unscientific. Several wondered if God's existence could be proved scientifically. Some wondered about the wisdom of believing in something, or “Someone”, you couldn't see. A few struggled over the issue of creation versus evolution. One thought believing in Adam and Eve seemed less scientific than believing in evolution. Some had asked *why* God created everything, and one had wanted to know *how* He created everything. Some asked, if there is a God how can we be sure and how can He possibly be interested in helping individual human beings?

One had asked, "What is God's love?" One had had questions about the Trinity and another had asked "What is the Holy Spirit?"

While many had questions about God, even more (over fifty percent of respondents) had specific questions about the Person of Jesus. Several asked: "Who is Jesus?" Other questions included, "Is Jesus true?" "Did He really exist?" "Is Jesus God?" "How do I know that Jesus is the true God?" "How could Jesus be both God and Man?" Several asked what relationship Jesus could have with us. One even asked, "What is the relevance of the incarnation and the Cross to me personally?" Another asked if there was not a better way to save mankind than the Cross. Two questioned the Virgin Birth and four said they had found it hard to believe in the Resurrection.

One asked if Jesus was truly the Saviour of the whole world, of every nation and people. Along a similar line some wondered if all religions were not equally good – just different ways to God. Some had questions about other religions and questioned whether Christianity could claim to be the only truth. A few had questioned why people needed religion in the first place. Why believe in God at all? And why believe in only one God? One Tibetan respondent said that before he believed he had automatically rejected any teaching or beliefs that seemed to contradict Lama Buddhism.

Twenty percent of respondents had questions relating to the Bible. They asked if the Bible was really God's Word as opposed to myth. Several respondents had thought the Bible was mysterious while others said they had thought it was like a fairy tale. A few had questioned who wrote the Bible and how it was written. One had thought the Bible was written for Jews but was not applicable to the rest of the world. A few, while accepting that the Bible was a great work of literature read around the world, did wonder if it could all be true. One said she couldn't believe the miracles in the Bible thinking they were in conflict with what she had been taught at school. Another had wondered why there

had been a period of 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the start of the New Testament when no prophets spoke and when no angels appeared. He or she asked, "Where was God?"

One had asked, "Is God as powerful as the Bible says? If He is, why is there so much injustice and suffering in the world?" Another asked, "Why did God allow Satan to exist, and if God is a God of love, why does the world still have war and suffering?" One had asked why God made the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Another asked, "Why did God make it possible for man to sin?" One thought God was very harsh with people. Another respondent had objected to the idea that all are sinners. She had felt she was not all that bad! Such a comment reflects the commonly held view of Chinese that "sin" (*zui*, 罪) is committing a criminal offense. Clearly, according to this definition, not all should be called "sinners".

A few respondents had had questions about heaven and eternal life. One asked about life after death and wondered how we can get to heaven, while another asked "Is it true that those who believe in Jesus go to heaven while those who don't believe cannot go to heaven?" One had worried about being good enough and doubted God could forgive her. Another asked how God could save him from his sins. Several wondered if God really cared about them or was willing to pardon, accept and help them. One wanted to know if man was inherently evil, and yet another questioned the need to believe if God already knew those who were going to be saved. One had wondered about the meaning of baptism and how to get answers to prayer. Another worried about what his parents and relatives would think if he became a Christian and he also wondered if he would have to marry a Christian.

A few had questions relating to Christians. On the positive side, one wondered why the Christians he knew were always smiling. Another, with a less favourable experience of Christians, had been surprised at how some Christians

treated each other so badly. Another asked if it was possible for bad people to simply go to church, repent, and then be truly forgiven. Another had wondered why believers always seemed to want others to also become Christians. One challenging comment from another, that may have answered the previous respondent, was “If God created the world, why was the gospel spread in Europe for more than one thousand years before it ever came to China?” It is a good question even though, of course, the gospel did come to China possibly as early as the Han dynasty and certainly by the Tang dynasty.

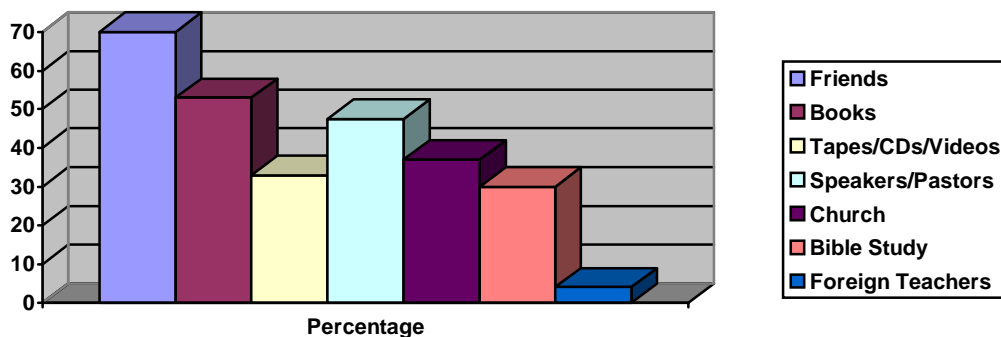
7.3.4 Helped To Better Understand the Good News

The next question in the questionnaire asked how respondents had been helped to grow in their faith and understanding.

Seventy percent were helped by friends. Some spoke of older Christians, some of their own peers. Some spoke of the godly lives and example of their Christian friends, and many spoke of the impact of the testimonies of others. One respondent commented that the testimonies of his Christian friends were fascinating – “they are all different, they mean what they say, they live out what they believe. There is a real sense of trust, and love attracted me and compelled me to explore their faith and read the Bible, which they claimed to be their ultimate authority.”

The second largest single factor in helping new mainland Chinese Christians was the availability of books and booklets – some fifty three percent mentioned the importance of books. Items mentioned included *Song of a Wanderer* (*youzi yin*, 游子吟), *Overseas Campus Magazine* (*Hai wai xiao yuan*, 海外校园), *Life Quarterly* (*shengming jikan*, 生命季刊), and the various apologetic literature booklets produced by OMF International and Christian Communications Ltd (CCL). Also mentioned were Watchman Nee’s *The Normal Christian Life*, *Streams in the Desert* and the *Purpose Driven Life*. One respondent mentioned

the help received through reading Charles Finney, Spurgeon and Thomas á Kempis. For those inside China, getting Christian books was not nearly as easy as it was for those overseas.



Thirty three percent of respondents mentioned being helped by tapes and videos. Some of these also said they had got helpful material from the Internet. Of those giving specific details most mentioned the preaching and teaching of Yuan Zhi-ming (袁志明), Zhang Bo-li (伯笠) and Feng Bingcheng (秉) – all three of whom are from China. They are now living in the West and being greatly used amongst Chinese students and immigrants overseas.

Thirty three percent also noted the help given by speakers, and again evangelist Yuan Zhi-ming was mentioned by several. One spoke of Indonesian Chinese evangelist and theologian, Stephen Tong, and another mentioned the ministry of Billy Graham. The vast majority of those mentioning preachers such as Yuan and Tong were outside China. Pastors (in some cases house church or TSPM pastors inside China and in other cases pastors overseas) were mentioned by 13.7% as having helped answer respondent's questions and having helped them grow in their faith.

Thirty three percent mentioned the help found at church or in church home groups. Some respondents had had involvement with the official TSPM churches and others with house churches in China.

A few respondents studied at seminary – in China. Yet others, especially those who had come to faith after leaving China, were involved in Chinese churches or in local congregations in their adopted country. A few respondents had also studied in seminary overseas.

Thirty percent of respondents mentioned the importance of Bible study. One Tibetan believer said reading and meditating on the Bible was for him the most important means of growing in his faith. Others mentioned both prayer and Bible study as essential elements in their growth as Christians. For several respondents, small group Bible study was most helpful as there was an opportunity to ask questions and discuss. One respondent was helped by an American Christian friend in studying the Bible in English, but later when he studied the Bible in Chinese he learnt far more.

One respondent wrote, “People don’t talk about Christianity much, even between friends. You cannot find books, CDs, videos, or other information about Christianity in China. From my experience, the only way you can hear about God is from believing family members.” Another respondent spoke of the influence of godly parents and grandparents. Another said her believing mother was the chief influence in her Christian life.

One young lady in SW China spoke of the crucial influence in her life of an American-born Chinese, the wife of a doctor working for a foreign NGO, who had spent time discipling her and teaching her from God’ Word. A few respondents mentioned the help given by foreign teachers while still in China. One wrote about her foreign teachers who were Christians from the USA. She said, “They lived a very good Christian life in front of all the students. Before ever sharing with any Chinese in words, their lives were a powerful way to tell people about Jesus.”

A few respondents who had become Christians overseas mentioned the influence of their home-stay parents who were Christians – “the presence of God

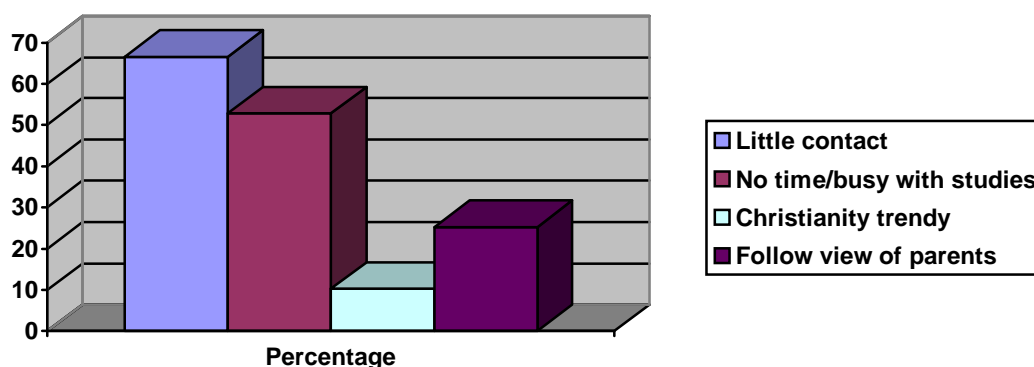
was in their home.” Three respondents spoke of the powerful influence of Christian music and worship in their Christian growth.

7.3.5 Categories of People and their Responses

The final part of the questionnaire examined various groups of people in China and their responses to Christianity.

7.3.5.1 Teenagers

China has about 200 million teenagers²³⁶. From the survey it is clear that the two major factors affecting how teenagers view Christianity are 1) their lack of contact and 2) their pre-occupation with school work and study. One respondent said, “Teenagers have almost no chance to hear about Jesus – unless someone in



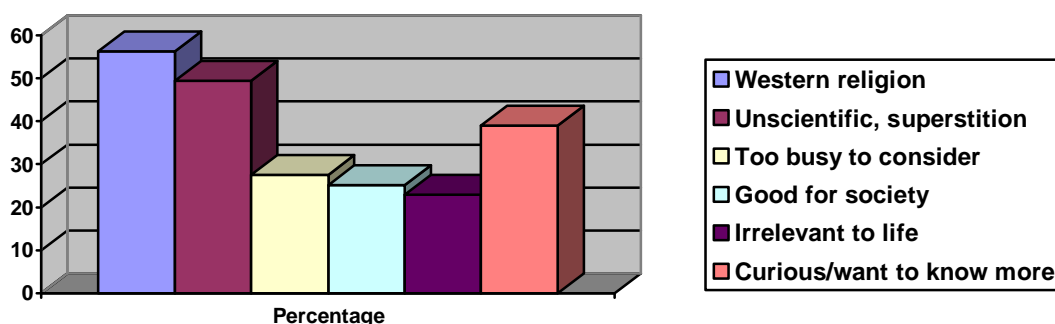
their family circle is a believer.” One Tibetan respondent in describing Tibetan youth’s total lack of knowledge about Christianity used the Chinese phrase: “One question, three don’t knows”, (*yi wen, san buzhi*, 一 三不知). The same would be true of most Han Chinese youth. Most youth do not believe in God for this is the prevailing view taught by their parents and by their teachers. Religion is superstition and belief in God is unscientific. It is best to rely on yourself and work hard so as to get on in life.

²³⁶ This figure is based on UNICEF demography figures for 2004.

One respondent commented, “Young people are crushed under the load of their studies.” They have little time for anything else. None of this is to say that many teenagers are not interested in Christianity. Some 9.8% of respondents felt young people regard Christianity as trendy and interesting. One pointed out that in most cities, young people have an interest in going to the TSPM church. Indeed some churches even have thriving youth groups these days, despite the fact anyone under 18 years of age is not supposed to be taught about religion.

The Tibetan respondents commented that Tibetan children love hearing Bible stories, and those with more schooling are very open, even interested to know more. Those, however, with little formal education tend to be staunchly Tibetan Buddhist and anti-Christian. A significant number of respondents (24.6%) said China's youth, of whatever ethnic group, follow the views of their parents.

7.3.5.2 University students



The university student population in China is rising every year. These are the leaders of the future and their attitudes are a possible indicator of how the Chinese nation will view Christianity in coming decades. One respondent stated it well when he/she said, “Most university students think religion (including Christianity) is unscientific superstition. However some are curious about and interested in Christianity and look out for Christians – so as to learn more about Christianity from them.” Another said, “Most students do not believe but very few reject or oppose Christianity.” Another said, “Students are passionate and creative.

They enjoy thinking and are curious about everything. They easily learn both good and bad things. It is important to get the gospel to them as soon as possible!"

A large number of respondents (56.3%) ticked the option which stated that university students see Christianity as a western religion. In the past this would have implied a very negative view of Christianity – seeing it as “an imperialist tool to enslave China” (as one respondent put it). However, in today’s China, especially among students, the West is seen in a more positive light. Rightly or wrongly, many associate Christianity with “western culture” and society which is regarded as more open and progressive than Chinese society. Many students have doubts about what they have been brought up to believe, and are open to new ideas.

A significant number (39%) of respondents said students are curious about the Christian faith and want to know more. While interested to discuss and debate Christianity, and while generally favouring it over other religions, not many students actually turn to Christ. Some of the students who show an interest in Christianity do so thinking it may help them in realizing their academic ambitions. One respondent said some students befriend foreigners (some of whom are Christians) as a way to improve their English and enhance their chances of studying overseas. Motives can be very mixed.

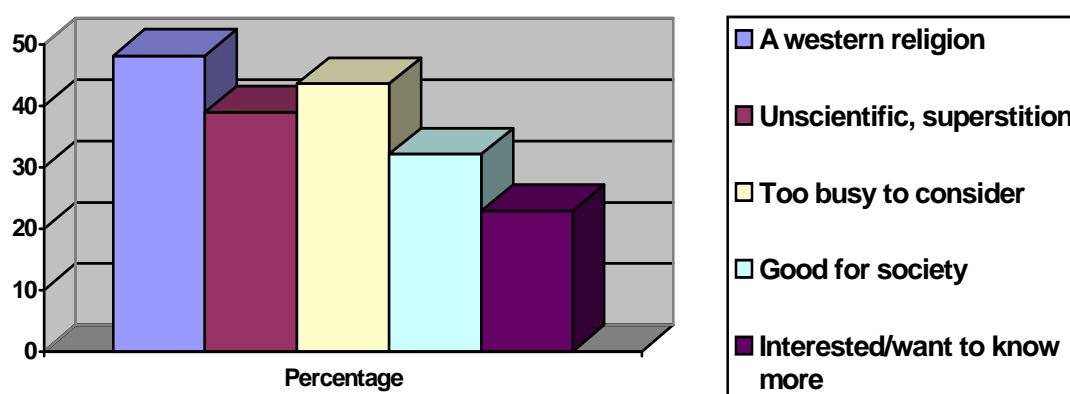
Chinese students in general have little exposure to the good news and little understanding of it. Some see Christianity as too restrictive in terms of morality and life-style. Students in China are more and more influenced by a secular and materialistic outlook on life – pleasure, money and success are most important to them. While many students see Christianity as good for society (25.2% of respondents), a similar number (22.9%) see it as irrelevant to life.

It is a critical time for reaching students. This is why ministry to scholars from China now studying in overseas countries is so fruitful and so strategic. It gives them exposure to the good news and to the Church which they are highly

unlikely to experience to the same degree in China. Many are returning to China after their studies overseas having turned from atheism to God, from doubt to faith – new and committed believers in Christ.

7.3.5.3 Urban Professionals and the Middle Class

“Urban professionals are a small but rapidly growing portion of the population of China.” (Peterson, 2004:12) They include some very wealthy businessmen and entrepreneurs but also the emerging middle class. Some have estimated the middle class at 180 million but their number is expected to grow to 400 million by 2010.²³⁷ Most of the urban middle class are university educated,



“computer trained and internet savvy.” (Ibid, 2004) While most are caught up in the pursuit of material success increasing numbers are open to Christianity. My survey turned up the following results:

Some respondents felt urban professionals and the middle class in general believed in evolution and science and were, if anything, irreligious. By contrast, other respondents felt many urban professionals were interested in Christianity and ready to respond with enthusiasm. Certainly, they would have been taught the typical views regarding Christianity. This is reflected in the fact almost half of the respondents (48.2%) said urban professionals regarded Christianity as a western religion and 39% saw it as unscientific superstition. “Most,” said one respondent,

²³⁷ See David J. Lynch, “Emerging middle class reshaping China”, *USA Today*, 11 Nov., 2002.

“are skeptical of all religions.” Another said, “Most do not believe though very few would reject out of hand.” Some respondents pointed out that the government hinders people from finding out about Christianity and puts pressure on any showing such interest, especially if they work for the government or for a state company. “They are either too busy or face restrictions and so very few believe.” Another wrote, “Some people do not want to talk about religion because being a Christian may affect their career prospects and sometimes it is hard to abide by the rules in a corrupt society.”

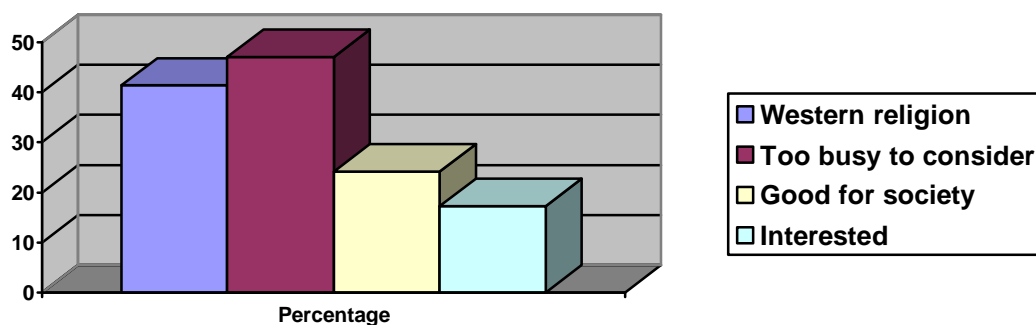
A large number of respondents (43.6%) said urban professionals and the middle class were too busy to seriously consider Christianity. The pressure to make money and to succeed in one’s career affects more and more people in China’s cities. One respondent said some have a feeling of hopelessness and their only concern is for themselves. Many respondents felt urban professionals and the middle class see Christianity as good for society (32.1%) and almost 23% felt they are interested in Christianity and are eager to know more. One said urban professionals believed “...if Christianity is true and can influence the future, it is worth considering seriously.” Another said reaching this group of people needed patience as “...they can be stubborn, and they want proof and logical arguments.”

Some of the most dynamic urban house churches today are led by young urban professionals with a vision to impact society. A significant number of the leaders of these churches were originally reached for Christ through the witness of foreign Christian teachers during their time at university.

7.3.5.4 Urban labourers and factory workers

One respondent wrote, “One of the most under-privileged or neglected groups of people are the *min gong* (民工), or labourers, who are wandering about the cities of China seeking construction or heavy physical work with very low pay.”

The responses to the questionnaire reflect the fact many urban labourers and factory workers have little spare time and also little knowledge of Christianity. Many respondents (41.3%) say workers regard Christianity as a western religion. This is more likely a general perception on the part of these workers (that Christianity is not all that relevant to them) rather than a negative and politically slanted view. Many respondents commented on the fact urban labourers have to work hard to make ends meet. Young factory workers too in China's burgeoning factory zones work long hours and often live in cramped dormitories with limited privacy. Many have no idea about Christianity with little chance to hear. Almost a quarter of respondents (24.1%) think workers are well-disposed towards Christianity - seeing it as good for society. Some respondents (17.2%) also feel there is a significant underlying interest in Christianity on the part of urban and factory workers.

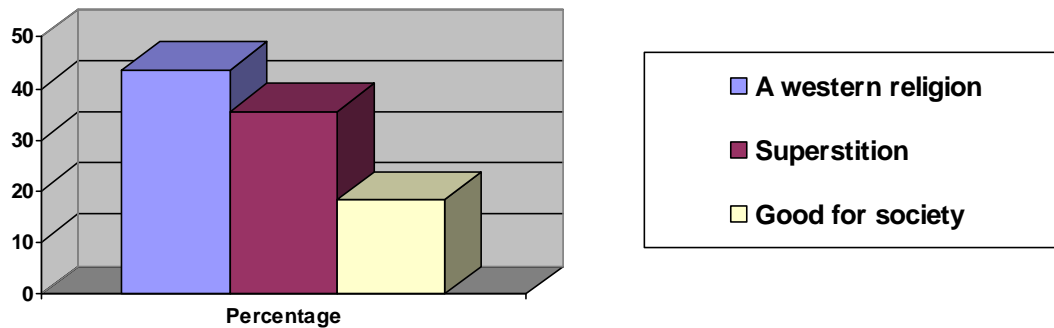


Urban and factory workers live in a tough world where promises are often broken and where lying and cheating is part of everyday life. One respondent said, "They will believe if they see Christianity as offering fairness and love in an unfair and unloving world." Another respondent commented that urban labourers are less controlled by the government than others in society. When facing trials (such as sickness or being out of a job) many lose confidence in traditional support structures and patterns of belief, and are more inclined to turn to Christ – if they hear the good news. While most have yet to hear the good news there are many reports that God is in fact working powerfully among this poorer, neglected segment of society and many vibrant *min gong* churches (albeit unregistered) have been started in recent years.

7.3.5.5 Rural or country people

Some respondents admitted they had little contact with country people. One said she was a city girl and had no idea of how country people think. One commented, “I think it depends on the regions of China. In some poor areas, the gospel has been received favourably because people have witnessed miracles and powers of healing, hence whole villages come to believe. In more wealthy parts of China the rural people tend to be a bit indifferent to the Christian faith.” He went on to mention the huge impact of urbanization on both society and Christianity with many rural believers, mostly young, moving to the cities for employment. “The churches in the cities (both unregistered or underground churches and TSPM churches) have yet to find a way to minister to these people.”

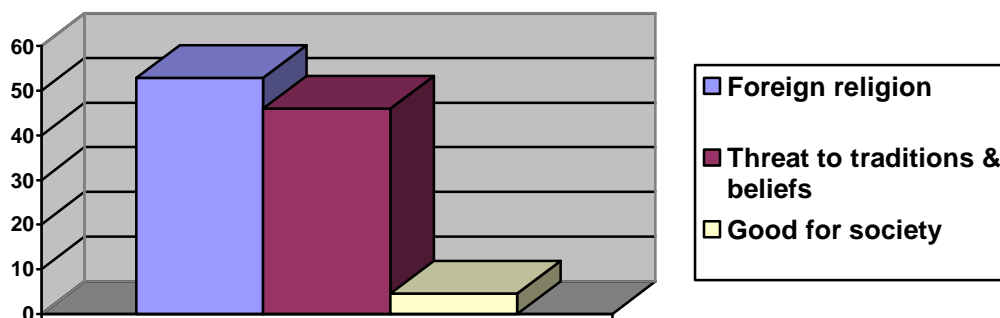
Some respondents felt country people were simple, less educated and generally of a lower social standing. While many were ignorant about Christianity, and others were caught up in traditional religious practices, yet others were very open to the gospel. The phenomenal growth of the house church movement in some of China’s provinces is well-documented and was mentioned by several respondents. One said rural people may find belief in Christianity something akin to a psychological crutch (*jing shen jituo*, 精神寄托) and another said Christianity was seen as a “refuge in trouble”. Yet another said rural people are more ready to accept the gospel and publicly confess their faith because they have been less affected by official propaganda and have much less to lose than educated city dwellers. Some respondents said many country people struggle to survive and have little time for God. Another said, “...if they could but hear the gospel many would believe.” Another commented, “Due to the lack of preachers and teachers many who do believe are poorly informed and even go off the right path.” One Tibetan respondent said some Tibetan country people and nomads believed Jesus was a good man but “if he is a Saviour, he is only the westerner’s Saviour. He is not for Tibetans or Chinese.”



In the survey 43.67% of respondents said rural people regarded Christianity as a western religion, 35.63% said they saw it as superstition and 18.39% said they saw it as good for society.

7.3.5.6 Minorities

Almost 20% of respondents admitted they had little or no idea about how China's minority peoples looked at Christianity. This reflects the sad fact that many Han Chinese have little contact with or knowledge of minority ethnic groups. Several respondents said they knew it was difficult for minority ethnic groups, who typically had their own traditional religions, to accept Christianity. Almost 46% of respondents said that minorities saw Christianity as a threat to their traditions and beliefs, while 52.87% said they saw it as a foreign religion. A tiny number, some 4.59% of respondents, said minority people saw Christianity as good for society.



One respondent who works closely with the Bai and Miao peoples in SW China commented, “while many Miao people are Christians, the Bai very largely believe in a mythical figure called Ben Zhu (*ben zhu*, 本主). Many have little idea of why they worship Ben Zhu but it is a part of their culture and they hold proudly to their superstitious practices. My Tibetan respondents, now believers, also commented on the fact Tibetans find it almost impossible to separate their culture and their religion. They are normally both ignorant of and resistant to other religions, and see being Tibetan and being Tibetan Buddhist as synonymous. In China’s NW the Uygur people have a similar view of Islam, even though very few are deeply religious. It is extremely difficult for any Uygur to publicly confess Christ for this would be seen as a rejection of his or her culture. A respondent from Ningxia, a region of China with many Hui peoples, described how the Hui hold rigidly to their Muslim religion (prayers at the mosque) and culture (including strict food taboos such as not eating pork). For most Hui however Islam is seen more in cultural terms than in strictly religious terms. Many are largely ignorant of the teachings of the Koran, and of course even more ignorant of the Bible.

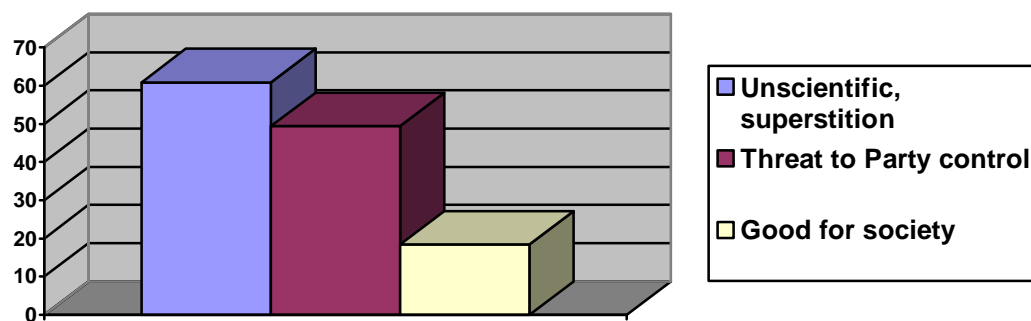
7.3.5.7 Officials

China has a huge bureaucracy and Communist Party members number over 70 million. There are officials at every level of government – from central to provincial to city, county and local level. Each has varying degrees of power and influence. Virtually all senior officials are Party members. The government and the Party are inextricably intertwined.

It is no surprise therefore that most respondents agreed that officials by and large hold views more or less in line with the Party’s view of religion. Certainly in public they would be careful not to appear to be out of line. What officials really believe, in private, may be very different.

A large majority of respondents (60.9%) felt government officials see Christianity (along with all religions) as unscientific and as superstition. Officials strongly influenced by Marxism certainly take this view. Communist Party members are supposed to be atheists and not surprisingly several respondents said the majority of officials do not believe in God or religion. One respondent commented that this refusal to believe was due to government pressure. He or she added that officials are afraid to show too obvious an interest in Christianity.

Almost 50% of respondents said that officials saw Christianity as a threat to Party control. For this reason it needs to be controlled. Religion can be tolerated only as long as it does not become a threat to the government. One respondent said that some top leaders consider any organized religion or society which is not registered and not under government control as a threat. One respondent said that some officials think Christianity can be used by the government as “a tool to control people’s spirit”. Another said some officials considered certain aspects of Christianity, such as the Bible’s teaching that Christians should respect the government and should love their neighbour, could be useful tools in the political control game. Another respondent said many officials see all religions as having value for society in terms of morality but that they needed to remain under government control.



Over 18 % of respondents said officials viewed Christianity as good for society. Some officials, depending upon their background and upbringing, are quite familiar with the Bible and know about Jesus, said one respondent. Another

said that a small number of officials are sympathetic to Christianity. Some even believe in God though they dare not be open about it.

Some respondents pointed out that officials hold a range of views - from outright opposition to all religion to sympathy and even support for religion. Some officials are corrupt and only interested in power and in privilege. For them religion is less likely to be of interest or concern, unless they find their world suddenly collapsing around them. Some officials and Party members are disillusioned with communism. Some are confused about what to believe. Their faith in communist theory has not produced the expected results. Communism has proved an empty dream, an unobtainable ideal. Other officials are genuinely curious about Christianity. They have observed the fact that many ordinary Chinese have become interested in Christianity. These officials have sometimes come across genuine believers in the course of their work – and been favourably impressed.

As China has become more and more open to the outside world many officials have also become more open-minded. Many are well educated and have travelled overseas. When exposed to the Christian faith they cannot deny its value and logic. One respondent said some officials privately believe that Christianity could be the only hope for society, and for China. Another respondent wrote, “Not all Party members have political power and some are very open-minded. We can find some Sauls of Tarsus among them who could become Pauls!”

7.4 Recommendations

My focus in this thesis has been on the role of foreigners (including overseas Chinese) in bringing good news to the Chinese. How can we be effective communicators? Following are a few recommendations – in summary form.

Recommendation 1: Recognize the vital importance of language acquisition and cultural adaptation

Communication is inevitably cross-cultural. “Cross-cultural communication requires learning the language of the ethno-linguistic group to which we wish to talk. However, we need to learn far more than their language! In order to build bridges for the gospel to those who have not heard, we must learn their customs, their values, and their various ways of thinking.” (Terry, 1998: 278) Patrick Lai rightly states, “... nothing is more critical for enhancing our long-term viability and effectiveness in ministry than our fluency in the language. Language fluency and cultural sensitivity are keys to becoming an insider with our adopted people.” (Lai, 2005: 125) Language acquisition and cultural adaptation is a challenging task that takes many years – and is never perfected. As the Chinese say, “live till you are old, study till you are old” (*huo dao lao, xue dao lao*, 活到老学到老).

China is a land of many people groups. Those called to one or other of China’s national minorities also need to learn about the culture and language of these peoples. Sharing one’s faith in some of these other cultures is no less a challenge than doing so in Chinese. In Xinjiang one needs to have an understanding of both the Uygur people and also of the influence of Islam in their culture and history. Working amongst the Tibetans or Mongolians or the Tu one needs to have an understanding of the teachings and the influence of Tibetan Buddhism. Working in Lijiang in NW Yunnan one needs to understand something of the influence of the Dongba religion and shamanism in the culture of the Naxi people. And so on.

Recommendation 2: Be committed to practical identification

While there are linguistic and cultural aspects to effective communication of the good news, practical identification with the people is also essential. This involves having meaningful longer-term contact, meeting real and felt needs. There are also spiritual aspects implicit in being an effective witness for Jesus

Christ - the motivation of love (“the love of Christ constrains us”), holiness of life, and the empowerment and giftings of the Holy Spirit.

Recommendation 3: Learn from experience

The effectiveness of our communication can be developed with experience and with training. As we learn about the culture we identify points of contact and are able to build bridges to the heart. I learnt a valuable lesson, for example, when in conversation with a Chinese engineer on the train. We were getting along very well until I made a somewhat cynical comment about the way the government has exaggerated the story of Lei Feng (the PLA soldier who became a model communist hero). One can hardly distinguish fact from fiction. My engineer friend was upset. “You don’t understand China,” he said. I begged him to explain. He then told me that of course the story of Lei Feng was not all true and of course it was exaggerated. “But,” he continued, “such model heroes are a legitimate means of educating people. They need examples they can emulate.” I learnt my lesson. Since then, rather than being cynical about Lei Feng, I have said something like, “Lei Feng must have been an amazing guy – doing all those kind and selfless things. Do you think many people can live up to that kind of standard?” The reaction I have had has always been, “Of course not. It is impossible.” This then naturally leads on to talk about the One who is our perfect example, and Who also gives us the power to love and serve others – Jesus Christ.

Recommendation 4: Major on friendship evangelism and discipleship

In terms of methodology, I believe the most effective approach is one-to-one friendship evangelism, and for long-term fruitfulness it is also vital to properly disciple those to whom we minister. This was discussed at length in chapter five. Some are good at sowing seeds but unless they, or others, take time to water the seed that is sown and take care of the young plants as they grow, the harvest may not be as great as it could be.

Recommendation 5: Make use of the excellent resources available

There is a wealth of excellent material available for both “sowing the seed” and for helping new converts grow in their faith. Groups like OMF International²³⁸ and Christian Communications Limited (CCL) have developed an impressive array of “apologetic literature” on a wide-range of topics which are ideal for mainland Chinese. The “*Jesus Movie*” is available in several Chinese languages (or dialects) in addition to Mandarin, and is also available in some of the languages spoken by non-Han national minority peoples. Groups such as Ambassadors for Christ²³⁹ and Campus Evangelical Fellowship produce excellent books, tapes and magazines.²⁴⁰ The tapes and videos (CDs, VCDs and DVDs) produced by China Soul,²⁴¹ China Horizon²⁴² and others and featuring Chinese evangelists and Bible teachers such as Yuan Zhi-ming, Zhang Bo-li, and Feng Bin-cheng are well-known and effective tools for ministry to mainland Chinese. The Digital Bible Society is one example of new organizations providing excellent Bible teaching resources online.²⁴³ There are also a growing number of websites, many of them accessible even in China, with a wealth of evangelistic and Bible teaching material.

7.5 Concluding Remarks

God’s primary means of reaching the Chinese is not foreigners at all but is His Church in China. However, as we have seen from both history and in modern times, foreigners can play a part in supporting the Chinese Church in her sacred task. The Chinese Church in turn is likely to become an increasingly significant player in terms of world evangelization.

²³⁸ See <http://www.us.omf.org/9098>, for full list of available titles, accessed 17/04/06.

²³⁹ See <http://www.afcinc.org>

²⁴⁰ See Overseas Campus Magazine, (*hai wai xiao yuan*, 海外校园) at <http://www.cefocm.org> for English translations of some articles, and see “*Song of a Wanderer*” by Li Cheng at www.afcinc.org/afcsite/english/literature/online_resource.htm accessed 17/04/06.

²⁴¹ See China Soul for Christ Foundation (神州 播协会) <http://www.chinasoul.com/>

²⁴² See www.chinahorizon.org accessed 17/04/06.

²⁴³ See www.DigitalBibleSociety.org accessed 17/04/06.

We have considered the wide range of activities in which foreigners can be involved in China today – in “tentmaking” and in “the marketplace” as well as in more directly church-related ministries. We have looked at some of the challenges to be faced and the mistakes to be avoided.

Hypothesis Revisited: I have attempted in this thesis to demonstrate that: ***With adequate spiritual, linguistic, and cultural preparation and with appropriate strategies and resources, foreign believers can become effective and winsome ambassadors of Christ in China.***

My research for this thesis, which has included reflection upon my own experience, has, I believe, demonstrated the truth of the above hypothesis.

Early Jesuit Francis Xavier (1506-1552) who worked briefly in India and Japan died while still trying to enter China. Just a few years before his death he wrote to students in Europe saying: “Give up your small ambitions....come east and proclaim the glory of God.” Surely it is no small ambition for any foreigner or overseas Chinese to be an effective communicator of good news in China today. It is a huge and urgent task and one with a rich heritage of fore-runners from whom we can learn.

Appendix 1

State Council regulations on the management of religious activities of foreigners in the PRC, 31 January 1994 (国 院 于中 人民共和国境内外国人宗教活动管理 定)

Article 1

This regulation is formulated in conformity with the Constitution in order to protect the freedom of religious belief of foreign nationals in China and to safeguard the public interest.

Article 2

The People's Republic of China respects the religious freedom of foreign nationals in China and protects friendly visits, cultural and scholarly exchanges and other such religious activities between foreign nationals and religious circles in China.

Article 3

Foreign nationals may participate in religious activities in religious venues in China, including monasteries, temples, mosques and churches; and, at the invitation of a religious body at or above the provincial, autonomous region or municipality level, may discuss the scriptures and preach.

Article 4

Foreign nationals may hold religious activities for other foreign nationals at venues recognized by the Religious Affairs Bureaus of the People's Government at or above the county level.

Article 5

Foreign nationals in China may request Chinese clergy to perform religious rites such as baptisms, marriages, funerals, and Taoist and Buddhist rituals.

Article 6

When foreign nationals enter China, they may carry printed materials, audio and visual materials and other religious items for their own use; if these are brought in quantities which exceed those for personal use, such items will be dealt with according to the relevant Chinese customs regulations.

Religious publications and religious audio and visual materials whose content is harmful to the public interest are forbidden.

Article 7

Foreign nationals recruiting students within China for overseas religious studies or who come to China to study or teach in Chinese religious educational institutions

are subject to the relevant Chinese regulations.

Article 8

Foreign nationals who engage in religious activities in China must respect Chinese laws and regulations. They are not permitted to establish religious organizations, liaison offices, and venues for religious activities or run religious schools and institutes within China, they are not allowed to recruit believers among the Chinese citizenry, appoint clergy or undertake other evangelistic activities.

Article 9

The Bureaus of Religious Affairs at or above the county level or other offices concerned should act to dissuade and put a stop to religious activities of foreign nationals which violate this regulation. If the violation constitutes an immigration offence or a matter of public security, the public security organs will dispense penalties according to the law; if the violation constitutes a crime, the judiciary will investigate to determine where criminal responsibility lies.

Article 10

This regulation will be applied to the religious activities of foreign nationals within China.

Article 11

The religious activities in mainland China of Chinese citizens residing overseas, or residents of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao will be subject to this regulation.

Article 12

Interpretation of this regulation will lie with the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council.

Article 13

This regulation takes effect from the date of promulgation.

Appendix 2

Questionnaire 查表

(For PRC students, visiting scholars, or recent immigrants

来自中国的学生， 学者，新移民，等)

My name is Peter Anderson 安德生 and I have worked in Asia for 29 years. I am writing a thesis entitled: "*Communicating the Good News in China Today*". My aim is to help foreigners better understand the Chinese people and more effectively share the gospel with them. I hope to use responses to this questionnaire to better understand the topic myself. I would be most grateful for your help and promise total anonymity. Please fill out (in English or Chinese) marking appropriate boxes with an "X". Feel free to add your own extra comments.

Many thanks for your wonderful help 非常感 您的协助.

1. Which year were you born and in which province or city? 您是那一年，在那一省市出生的？

Year:

Province or city:

2. What were your earliest impressions or thoughts about Christianity? 您对基督教最初的印象如何？

3. When, where & how did you hear about Jesus Christ & the gospel? 您是什么时候，在那里，怎么样听到 于耶 基督和福音的？

4. What questions did you have on your mind about the Bible or faith in Jesus **before** you believed? 您信耶 之前对圣 或基督信仰有什么疑 呢？

5. Have you been helped (by friends, books, CDs, videos, speakers, etc) to better understand the gospel? Please give brief details. 什么样的渠道帮助您了解福音呢？（譬如朋友， 籍，磁 ，录像 ， ，等等）

6. In China today (as far as you understand) what do the following kinds of people think about Christianity? Please tick all relevant boxes and add any personal comments. 根据您所了解，今天在中国，以下的人 对基督教有什么样的看法？：

6.1 Teenagers 青年人

☐ Little contact, know very little 接触机会少，知道的不多

☐ No time, too busy with studies 功 茫，没时 思考

☐ Christianity is trendy 基督教很时髦

☐ Follow views of parents 随父母来看它

Other points or comments 其他

6.2 University students 大学生

☐ A western religion 西方宗教

☐ Unscientific, superstition 不科学，迷信

☐ Too busy to consider 太忙，没时

☐ Good for society (good moral values, principles) 对社会有好处

☐ Irrelevant to life 不实

☐ Curious (& want to know more) 好奇，想多了解

Other points or comments 其他

6.3 Urban professionals, middle class people 都市里的人士以及知识分子

☐ A western religion 西方宗教

☐ Unscientific, superstition 不科学，迷信

☐ Too busy to consider 太忙，没时

☐ Good for society (good moral values, principles) 对社会有好处

☐ Interested (want to know more) 感兴趣，想多了解

Other points or comments 其他

6.4 Urban laborers or factory workers 都市里的工人

☐ A western religion 西方宗教

☐ Too busy to consider 太忙，没时

☐ Good for society (good moral values, principles) 对社会有好处

☐ Interested (want to know more) 感兴趣，想多了解

Other points or comments 其他

6.5 Rural or country people 夫或下人

☐ A western religion 西方宗教

☐ Superstition 迷信

☐ Good for society (good moral values, principles) 对社会有好处

Other points or comments 其他

6.6 Minorities (such as Hui, Tibetans, Mongolians, etc) 少数民族（譬如回民，藏族，蒙古族，等）

☐ A foreign religion 外来的宗教

☐ A threat to traditions & beliefs 威胁本族的习俗及宗教

☐ Good for society (good moral values, principles) 对社会有好处

Other points or comments 其他

6.7 Government officials and Party members 政府的官员和共产党人

☐ Unscientific, superstition 不科学，迷信

☐ Threat to Party control 威胁党的利益

☐ Good for society (good moral values, principles) 对社会有好处

Other points or comments 其他

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