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Abbreviations

ANS : Amity News Service (HK)

CASS : Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing)

CCBC : Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference

CCC : China Christian Council

CCPA : Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association

CM : *China Muslim* (Journal)

CPPCC : Chinese People's Consultative Conference

FY : *Fa Yin* (Journal of the Chinese Buddhist Assoc.)

SCMP : South China Morning Post(HK)

SE : Sunday Examiner (HK)

TF : *Tian Feng* (Journal of the China Christian Council)

TSPM : Three-Self Patriotic Movement

UCAN : Union of Catholic Asian News

ZENIT : Catholic News Agency

ZGDJ : *China Taoism* (Journal)

ZGTZJ : *Catholic Church in China* (Journal of Chinese Catholic Church)

Note: the term *lianghui* is used in this journal to refer to the joint committees of the TSPM and CCC.

Editorial

Change is definitely in the air. Since November the corridors of academic conferences have been buzzing with discussion about an imminent change of government policy. The origin of this was a conference on the “house churches” sponsored by two government research institutions, the Minorities section of the State Council’s National Development Research Centre and the Beijing Global Centre for Scientific Research. These centres have been involved in developing new thinking about the restructuring of China’s economy and society, but were not known for their study of religion or Christianity; that is, until this conference.

The conference was supposed to be a closed meeting, but almost immediately some of the contents and proceedings were put on websites and Youtube for all to see and hear (see report in Part II). Was it a deliberate effort by participants to put the discussion into the public arena? Or a defensive measure of the participants to protect themselves against a backlash?

The significance of the conference cannot be over-estimated. For decades the phenomenon of the house churches was publicly denied by both government and the official church bodies, although individuals always conceded that the picture was otherwise. Why the admission now? Is the government finally recognising a reality in which the house churches cannot be wished away, or is it the beginning of a more liberal – and therefore more pragmatic – policy to bring the house churches into the mainstream?

There are several interesting aspects of the conference that can be highlighted. The first is the presence of six leaders from the house churches, some of whom are known to be fierce critics of the government. In fact one of them has been “on the run” for some time. According to participants at the conference they were very vocal in demanding official registration and a fundamental change in government policy.

The second important aspect is the absence of the *lianghui* (Three-Self Patriotic Movement and China Christian Council). In that sense the meeting was not meant to be one of reconciliation between Christian groups facilitated by the government, but a direct

dialogue/negotiation between the house churches and the government. To what extent were the *lianghui* consulted? How will they respond if they were bypassed in the process? And how to interpret their silence?

The ambiguity of government departments having responsibility over religions is also to be noted. For example, the Religious Affairs Bureau(s) were also absent, but in a different way. They were not on the official list but were nonetheless there, and so were important officials of the Public Security Bureau(s). In fact any participation of leaders of "illegal organisations", one of them even being on the run, could not have been possible without their consent. Faced with the fierce opinion of the house church leaders, their response was ambiguous, accompanied by a less ambiguous warning: "Don't push us too far".

What is striking, however, are the honest and positive attitudes of the academics and government consultants at the meeting. They gave a sophisticated analysis of the house churches, and related them to wider changes in Chinese society. Unanimously they recommended the official recognition of house churches and put forth concrete policies to allow that to happen, including creating "special religious zones" for the house churches, similar to the special economic zones where some government measures are suspended or adapted as a transitional measure. We hope to bring some of these interesting papers to you in the next issue of the *Journal*.

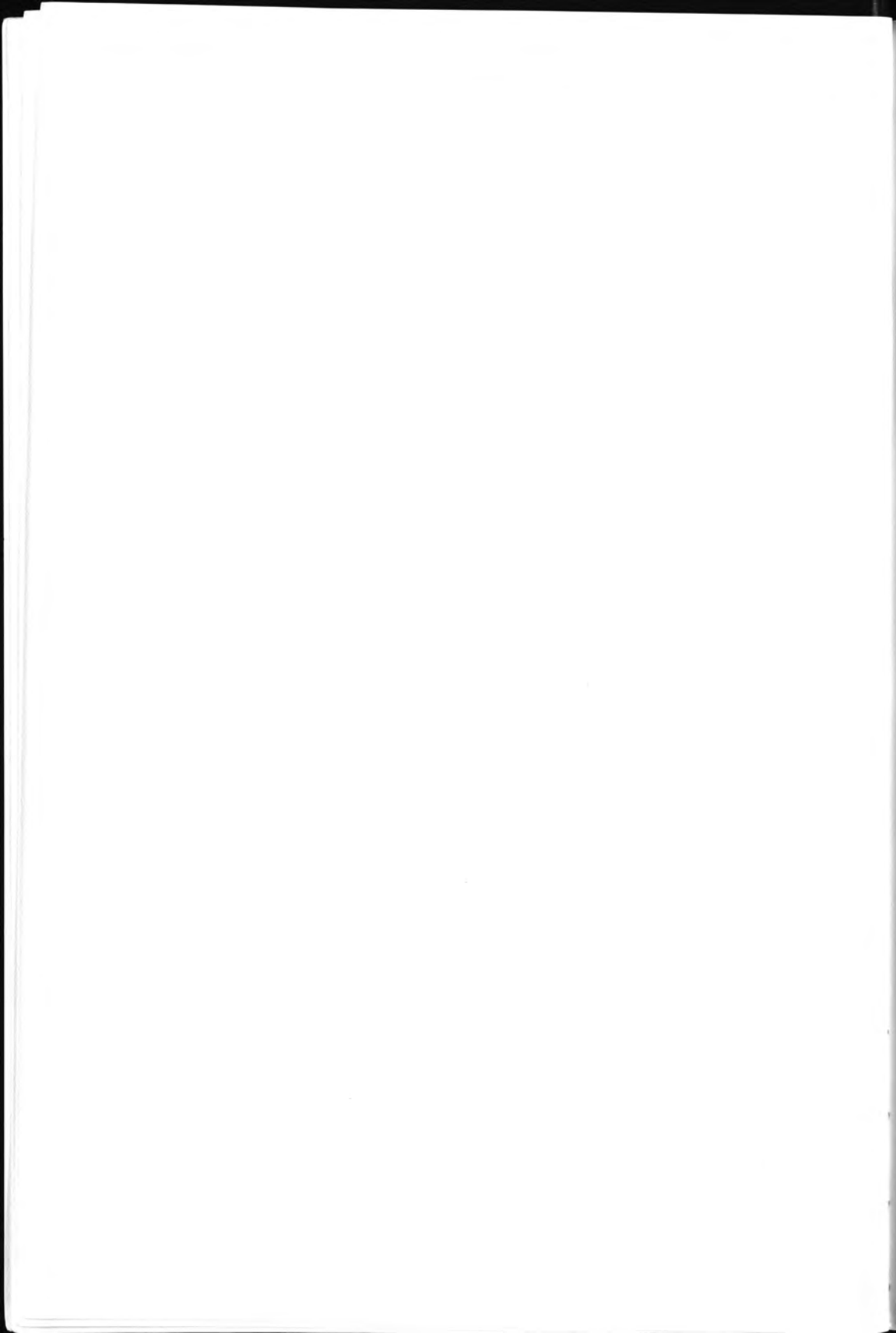
Looking back over the past months, there were clues to a new thinking taking place. The paper in Part I by Prof Zhuo Xinping of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, is an example of the call for a radical re-thinking of the situation of Christianity in China. However, this is only the beginning, and there is no clear change in government policy yet. The annual government meeting on religious work, which used to take place every winter, was postponed. Nearer Christmas, there were many reports of crackdown on religious gatherings by the security forces (who were present at the meeting), including raids on university fellowships, which is a worrying development. The fact that the raids and arrests took place at Christmas, the most important Christian feast in China, was seen by some as a direct challenge to the legitimacy of Christian groups. These, together with the continuing difficulty in the China-Vatican dialogue, should temper any premature optimism that change is finally at hand.

The pessimists see this as a deliberate attempt to draw the house churches into the open. The moderates would be forced into the mainstream, and the more extreme would be subjected to a severe repression. The pessimists would point to past events to support their view, e.g. Chairman Mao's tactics to draw out his critics during the anti-rightist campaign, and more recently the more open attitude towards the Falun Gong in spring to be followed by a general crackdown in the autumn. We can only hope and pray that this will not be the case.

Edmond Tang

Section 1

Articles



Societal Changes and Religious Reconstruction in Contemporary China

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(Trans. Cinde Lee)

I Introduction

Religious propagation in contemporary Chinese society is closely related to societal changes. The debate has been whether Chinese society had the possibility and potential to allow religions to exist. Some regarded religion to be a [characteristic] mentality and spiritual life of feudal Chinese society, one which is weakening and dissipating in contemporary, revolutionary society. Some have even declared that Chinese culture is "nonreligious" or "transcends religions". [They would maintain] that this shaping of an exceptional example of human spirituality is a denial and rebuttal of the view that religion is a kind of "anthropological constant". Just as religions seemed to be fading into an unremarkable existence in contemporary China, they suddenly "resurrected" with the implementation of the Opening and Reform policy and were found in all kinds of social dimensions. Burgeoning with astonishing momentum, this religious revival is a rare occurrence in contemporary Chinese history. In an era of globalization, [however,] this revival moves from being an exceptional example to being a responsive and harmonious part of a world religious trend. Religious phenomena increasingly capture the attention of the people; rethinking and discussing this objective fact has led to a new focus in the domain of contemporary Chinese humanities and social sciences. [...] Why have the religions created such a phenomenon? Where has this significant change come from?

Generally speaking, societal changes and religious reconstruction in contemporary China have both internal and external factors and causes. From the internal and native dimension, this change began as a result of the thirty years of the Opening and Reform policy. [...] From being ignorant and willing to follow blindly what they were told, people's thinking

has become more active and multi-faceted. As a result, spiritual pursuits have broadened and wide choices are becoming increasingly available, providing an appropriate social environment and psychological openness to religious renewal.

External factors are more related to globalization and its effects on the world: improving information technology, widely accessible markets and mutual interdependence. Globalisation has made it impossible for China to completely dissociate itself from external infiltration or integration. China's politics, economy and culture are global participators and have attracted internationalization; its openness meant the once implemented "defence" has become basically defunct. [...] This means that when we deliberate on internal issues, we must extend our consideration to global concerns. [...] This essay aims to analyze religious reconstruction brought forth by the societal changes in contemporary China, offering my personal views and train of thought to the readership as reference.

II Social changes in contemporary China

It is imperative that we should understand that the societal changes occurring in contemporary China have been of vast and profound importance, they have convulsed society and impacted the psyche of the nation. Due to the fact that some traditional structures have survived and some policy makers still lend them their protection, it is still relatively difficult to realize the breadth and depth of these changes on an "existential" viewpoint. [...] The objective and pragmatic understanding of social changes in contemporary China is a new branch of knowledge, demanding a new school of wisdom. From my limited observations, I think we should be concerned about the developmental changes in the following five areas.

(1) Globalization and Chinese international participation has influenced social politics, economy and cultural structures in contemporary China

Obviously, the slogan "the initial phase of socialism" indicates a renewed awareness on the part of the Chinese nation towards the connotations and extension of socialism, and a rethinking of international, multilateral development. At the same time, the nation has also shifted its views on socialism itself, leaning more towards relativity, exploration and possibilities. Contemporary Chinese are rethinking their choices when it comes to social structure or political and economic engagement. The name of socialism may have been preserved, but expressions such as "initial phase" and "Chinese characteristics" have pioneered new horizons for a renewed and reconstructed understanding. [...] The external environment makes us handle the complex situation of being in the first world, the second world and the third world simultaneously. China has to maintain a high alert and be aware of the new unilateralism of the United States even while trading with it on a very large scale. [...] International participation has foiled the balance and egalitarian ideal of a socialist structure, giving rise to the unprecedented complexity of interwoven elements

of feudalism, capitalism and socialism. Social structure is no longer simplistic, definitive or clear cut.

(2) "One country two systems" and the co-existence of multi economic systems is also evidence of the societal changes in contemporary China

Before China implemented the Opening and Reform policy, the economic system basically consisted of state-owned and collective-owned entities. In modern China, mutually reinforcing social and economic systems co-exist: the degree of infiltration and integration is unprecedented and previously inconceivable. Looking at business in China, aside from mainstream public sector operations, capitalist foreign investment and enterprises are becoming more and more established and influential. Within the private sector there are various enterprise structures, which may be financed by the people, operated by the people or concern the livelihood of the people; they may be organized by state officials, owned by individuals, financed by collective investments and run by collective efforts; some have even developed out of rural communes or familial dynastic backgrounds. This diversity and its interlinked nature is causing ambiguity in the basic definition of the overall economic system. [...] The social function of private sector enterprises is gaining significance. If surveys were to be conducted, it is not difficult to predict that national employment opportunities are swerving more and more towards private sector enterprises. Should they begin to employ the majority of the population, it will cause fundamental shifts in the social structure of contemporary China. The impact may not be apparent for the time being, but the influence will no doubt take effect sooner or later. At the same time when private sector enterprises are considered to be attractive employment opportunities, it also increases the risk and instability of employment. [...] In a multi-faceted economy, complex economic structures also bring about a complex social survival mentality. The imbalance found in society and in people's mentality is a far cry from the once well-balanced equilibrium of egalitarianism; looming social incompatibility and conflict is already threatening the construction of a harmonious society.

(3) Social structure and social classes are experiencing changes in many levels

Although contemporary China has proclaimed the disappearance of social classes, its social dimensions now seem to be even more complex than when there were classes! Uneven distribution of wealth highlights an economic disparity which is even more polarized than ever before. [...] The formation of various [new] social classes has been followed by the springing up of new social circles, organizations and clubs everywhere. [...] Transformation of the social classes is speeding up and intensifying, relative consistency is no longer possible, one may reap huge success or plunge into bankruptcy overnight, survival and development is filled with uncertainty, instability and insecurity can be very unnerving. The rollercoaster behaviour of the stock market takes into its stride the happiness and sadness of countless

families, giving the nation a sense of uncertainty and irrationality. More mature market economies have the support of strong social security systems, but although contemporary China in its transitory phase sports all the market uncertainties, it does not have in place a comparable social security system. When the people feel that they cannot rely on social support, they are bound to seek various types of mutual help organisations or psychological self-support, hence festering more social division, misunderstanding and discontent.

(4) Diversification of social culture, value and ideology has become undisputed fact

Today we emphasize the construction of a system of core values and a harmonious culture. It is precisely because we can sense diversity in our society that we are seeking similarities to achieve [national] harmony and focus. In the past, people were accustomed to the leadership of an ideology. It was basically amplification of a soloist: that is to say the political leader was singing solo and the masses were harmonizing, it was monophonic repetition or at most a harmonization. Under the impact of diversification, this type of a unilateral line running the country – one voice leading all people and expecting the entire population to respond conscientiously – no longer exists. Many different persuasions and viewpoints now co-exist, constant interruptions have become an objective reality. Given the situation at hand, contemporary Chinese politicians can only conduct a polyphony and try to bring out the melody, giving emphasis to the main tune. [...] Opposing voices can be heard in imported and local cultures, traditional and contemporary cultures, religious and secular cultures, meritocratic and popular cultures, revolutionary and passive cultures, and political and civil cultures. Construction of an advanced culture requires a selection among the available systems, leaving out the unnecessary and redundant. This type of advanced culture represents not only traditional and national culture it also opens itself to imported and foreign cultures. For example, Marxism, as the advanced and leading core culture of contemporary China, did not originate out of traditional Chinese culture, but was a product of Western culture and was a significant constituent of modern European cultures. The three fundamental aspects of Marxism are entwined with its Western cultural origin and development in recent history. Therefore when examining advanced culture, there is no need to utterly exclude Western culture or westernization. Besides, social acceptance and adoption of a variety of values and ideologies mean that they have become factual reality: the clashes, comparisons, dialogues and exchanges are most energetic. That is the atmosphere in which core values can be confirmed, the difficulty and magnitude [of the task] involved is not difficult to comprehend.

(5) The reawakening of Chinese identity in the reconstruction of Chinese society and culture

In China, cultural self-awareness, self-consciousness and independence have become popular issues. There has been a tendency at all levels of society to return to traditional

culture, but the true significance of this trend is still being explored. What represents Chinese characteristics? How is the Chinese essence and identity embodied? What are the relationships and differences between Sinicization, Westernization and Marxification? All these are questions which must be answered in order to usher in the reawakening of Chinese identity. As China gains strength in its political and economic prowess and displays its "hard strength", many are becoming more concerned about the discovery and development of its "soft power". [...] As mentioned above, Marxism as a mainstream ideology and core value concept may have gone a long way to becoming Sinicized, but whether it can take over or represent Chinese culture remains doubtful.

According to conventional understanding, traditional Chinese culture can be represented by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, with Confucianism claiming the core position among the three. Today we see China founding Confucius Institutes all over the world, encouraging the revival and promulgation of Confucian traditions. This attests to the breadth and depth of Confucian teaching and its historical influence, even though the positioning of Confucianism in contemporary China culture remains inconclusive, and most people have reservations as to whether Confucianism can assume a core function in today's society. Moreover, it is very difficult to analyse the relationship between a traditional Confucian value system and a Marxist value system. Does Confucianism need Marxism to propel it into contemporary society and become a mainstream constant, or is Marxism being Sinicized, to some extent 'Confucianized'? These are questions theoretic and academic communities are still trying to clarify; some even consider such issues too sensitive or taboo. Nonetheless, the renaissance and reawakening of the sense of Chinese cultural concept renders it impossible for us to avoid these issues, and forces us to answer these questions. If we venture into deeper research, we will soon encounter something we are particularly concerned about, and that is the religiosity of Chinese traditional culture. Historically speaking, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism have been referred to as the Three Religions, and although today Buddhism and Taoism still exist as distinct religions, the religious nature of Confucianism becomes more pronounced. Debate on this issue has become progressively intensified. Most people feel that Confucianism is a cultural system which promulgates doctrine in its writings, its viewpoints on life and ethics were the basis of the practical philosophy and social order of the Chinese people. Whether Confucianism used any doctrinal persuasion to establish religious belief or not is a question which has yet to reach a satisfactory hypothesis. In fact, Confucian contemplation of the humanity found within inter-personal relationships and the religiosity found in relationship between god and man shows that the two are mutually responsive and closely related. They cannot be neatly or simplistically separated. If Buddhism and Taoism are both religious and doctrinal beliefs, what determines that Confucianism is doctrinal but not religious belief? If we trace the origin of Confucianism, we find that it was Sima Qian 司馬遷 [c.145-c.87 BCE], well known for his keen focus on the god-man relationship, who when he wrote *Historical Records: Biographies of the Wandering Swordsmen* 《史记：游侠列传》 particularly mentioned that the people of Lu 鲁 taught the doctrines of Confucianism, reflecting

the popular respect and veneration towards Confucius' teachings in that region. Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 [179-104 BCE] of the Han Dynasty instigated Confucian supremacy over all other schools of thinking; the religiosity of Confucianism was thus accentuated. Ren Jiyu 任继愈 has commented, "Since the Southern and Northern Dynasties [420-589 CE], Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism have been referred to as the Three Religions. All three religions had the function of aiding the dynasties and uniting the tendencies of the nation, all have been well-regarded and supported by the state."¹ Hence "the Three Religions are like the legs of a tripod caldron, not one can go missing."² The concept of the Three Religions was commonly accepted and popularized in the empire. However, the three religions did not share similar positions. "Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are all ancient traditional religions. Only Confucianism wielded the vantage of combining politics and religion and became the national religion: in Confucianism, the authority of deity and kingship was amalgamated into one, and cannot be put asunder."³ According to this understanding, Confucianism traditionally claims a far superior position than Buddhism and Taoism because of the "high degree of amalgamation between politics and religion, each not separated from the other, and both working together as one body."⁴ [...] Scholars who disagree with the concept that Confucianism should be granted prominent significance as a national religion feel that Confucianism does not represent supreme sovereignty. Instead, because the ruling classes lost virtue, Confucianism emerged within society as a [cultural] phenomenon, very different from an official religion that might have been established via doctrinal persuasion. Confucianism was the embodiment of a patriarchal religion among the populace; it was substantiated by the people and folk customs, existing both explicitly and latently until today. [...]

Many are still sceptical about the religiosity of Confucianism. As early as the Yuan Dynasty [1279-1368], an anonymous work entitled *Apologetics of Taoism* 《道书援神契》 we find the shocking claim: "Confucianism cannot be considered as a religion, it is a commonly accepted Way of Being". This astonished the religiosity of Confucianism, foreshadowing the argument that Confucianism should not be considered as a religion. Toward the end of the Ming Dynasty, the Italian Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci [1552-1610] came to China and, in order to avoid a full frontal clash with Confucianism, he was the first to publicly argue that "Confucianism was not a religion". Ever since then the argument of whether or not Confucianism was a religion remains a disputed issue within Chinese academia right up until the present day. After the death of Matteo Ricci, his successors [in the Catholic mission] viewed Confucianism as a religion. Consequently an exclusive, monotheistic Catholicism confronted Confucianism and plunged into the Rites

1 Ren Jiyu, 'Foreword', in Li Shen 李申, *History of Confucianism in China*, 《中国儒教史》 (First of two volumes), Shanghai People's Press, 1999, p. 1

2 624 CE, Gouli 高句丽: "King Baozang 宝藏王 ascended to the throne, and wished to promulgate the Three Religions (Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism)". AD 643 Yuangai Suwen 渊盖苏文 said to the king "The Three Religions like legs of a tripod caldron, not one can go missing". The above is quoted from *Dictionary of Religions*, ed. Ren Jiyu, Shanghai Dictionary Press, 1998, p. 634.

3 Ren Jiyu, 'Foreword', p. 6.

4 Ren Jiyu, 'Foreword', p. 5.

Controversy, leading to conflict between the cultures of China and the West. Much later, after the failure of the Hundred Days Reform [1898], Kang Youwei 康有为 exerted much effort trying to reform Confucianism according to a Christian model. He recommended that Confucianism be instated as a national religion, but this was sternly resisted by other leading reformers like Liang Qichao 梁启超 and Chen Duxiu 陈独秀. In order to preclude a return to feudalism they and their companions denied that Confucianism was a religion, and thus fundamentally eradicated the possibility of Confucianism becoming a national religion. They identified Confucianism as a system of education rather than of religious belief. In retrospect, this period of history is of particular interest and meaning in the contemporary Opening and Reform climate. Chinese academia is once again entering into fierce debate about whether Confucianism is a religion or not. [...] Ren Jiyu has pointed out that "Without studying Confucianism, it is quite impossible to study ancient and contemporary Chinese society appropriately"⁵. Without it we cannot see plainly and relate elusive phenomena within contemporary Chinese culture.

The emergence of these cultural trends and the cry for a revival of tradition indicates that this is an unavoidable part of socialist cultural construction. Many think that the creation of a harmonious society and culture should be regarded as a return to the essence of traditional culture, rather than a manifestation of classical Marxism. This return would be based on a philosophy of harmonious amalgamation and definitely not one of [class] struggle. From this we can see that the people are still struggling to construct a socialism with Chinese characteristics, the content and meaning of which has not yet been clearly defined. The issue of how Chinese characteristics and meaning should find expression has drawn concern from many people and is often discussed.

III Religious reconstruction in contemporary China

Based on these social changes and analysis, China can be seen to be entering a period of active and diversified development in thinking, belief and culture. People are seeking direction in the midst of confusion, ambiguity and lack of understanding. Although a mainstream ideology and unified thinking are maintaining their position in a continuity of tradition, they are facing unprecedented challenges. It is in this situation that religious reconstruction is taking place in China, and it is mostly not bending to public opinion. Who is really steering this reconstruction remains an unknown question; hence there is room for maneuvering. Not only must we satisfy our design of "how" a religion should be, we must consider how to steer it, and have a good grip on the factual situation and present position of religious development. At this point, let us analyze principally the structure of religious reconstruction and the non-structural development which is happening to religions in contemporary China.

5 Ren Jiyu, 'Foreword', page 7.

(1) Reconstruction of religious structures

Of the three constituent elements of religion (faith, ritual activities and organizational structures) Chinese scholars usually base their understanding of religions upon the social structural dimension of religions. [In this context] how to reconstruct religious structures seems particularly significant. From another dimension – the relation between religions and the state – many scholars are also concerned about the structural dimension of that relationship. For example, the relationship between religions and the state is generally considered at three levels:

1. an ideological approach: although this level takes into consideration the metaphysical component of religions, its perspective is still a comparison with political values; politics basically considers religions in relation to social structure;
2. a power perspective: this level directly considers the relationship between the social structure of religions and the power of the State
3. a social services perspective: considers religious social activities in relation to government executive structures; this level obviously already includes consideration of the contact, negotiation and communication between religious structures and government structures.

In traditional Chinese political culture, on the one hand there was religious harmony amid diversity and the maintenance of social virtue; on the other hand, there was religious conformity with the state and adherence to the supremacy of the state. The relationship between government policy and religious administration is a unique characteristic of the historical relationship between the state and religions in China.

Reviewing the historical past, “previous ruling classes of China held a practical and functional understanding of religion, which meant that the latter must be subservient to authority. The ruler himself might believe in any religion, but would never allow a religion to threaten his sovereignty. From the ancient Board of Rites 禮部 which governed Buddhist monks to the contemporary State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), political powers in China have always managed and controlled religious affairs and established government departments for that express purpose. During the Tang Dynasty [618-907], special reservations (*fanfang* 蕃坊) were established for foreign traders (*fanke* 蕃客) from various countries, the majority of whom were Muslims. Reservation community leaders (*fanzhang* 蕃长) were appointed and authorized by the imperial government. During the Yuan Dynasty [1279-1368] several bureaux were established to administer religious affairs: a Bureau of Tibetan and Buddhist Affairs (Xuanzhengyuan 宣政院), an Academy of the Worthies (Jixianyuan 集賢院) helped administer Taoist affairs; the Chongfusi 崇福司 administered the Christian affairs of the Yelikewen [Mongol and Uighur] Christian church; and the Huihuihadesi 回回哈的司 administered Muslim affairs. During the Ming

Dynasty, there was the Board of Rites, the Bureau for the Four Foreign Tribes (Siyuguan 四夷馆 with its ten subsidiaries), the Board of War (frontier defense policies often included policies on local folk religions) and the Honglusi 鸿胪寺 which administered protocol and rituals. Down the line of command there were primary units such as the [Mongol] garrisons (*weisuo* 卫所).⁶ During the Qing Dynasty, the Ministry of Minority Affairs (Lifanyuan 理藩院) was the controlling state department attending to Mongolian, Tibetan Buddhist, Muslim vassal and Jinchuan affairs. Under the Ministry there were six Qinglisi 清吏司: Dianshu 典属 Youyuan 柔远 and Lixing 理刑 which were responsible for Tibetan Buddhist affairs, Laiyuan 徠远 was responsible for Muslim affairs, while there was also Wanghui 王会, Qiji 旗籍 and other units. During the Republican period, the Mongolian Tibetan Committee also took up the management of religious affairs."⁷ This structural management was visible, potent, and highly flexible.

From the 1950's, structural religions in China survived because they maintained political or para-political characteristics. The dramatic slogan of "love your country and love your religion" indicates that the state and religions were conjoined in China. It also reflected the dual dimensions of Chinese religions. [...] As a religion in China, although loving country and loving religion were both emphasized, it was an undeniable fact that there was a strict priority: during the 1950's Chinese religions had to put patriotic affiliation before the love of religion, that was the fundamental premise and condition upon which survival depended. Today, amidst raised concerns, many more complex types of reconstruction are happening across the country. Historical records show that although Chinese rulers may believe in one or more religions, they were seldom constrained by their religious beliefs. This type of structural management style had meant that rulers were relatively tolerant of religious beliefs on a spiritual level, but were very strict on religious activities with social structural implications, and only allowed religious development when it was attached to and reliant upon the political structure. A typical example would be the Kangxi emperor's change of attitude before and after the Rites Controversy. At first, under the evangelizing influence of the missionaries, Kangxi was quite susceptible to Catholicism, and personally inscribed tablets with "Respecting Heaven" and "The True Origin of All" to place on Catholic churches. Based on his understanding of the Catholic faith he also wrote down a couplet "Without beginning or end, the true master heralds forms and sounds; proclaiming benevolence and justice, the magnificent authority brings relief and salvation." There were other lines of poetry such as "He who has no beginning and no end, is three persons in one", "Earth's portal once closed by the first man, the way to heaven now paved by the Son", "The work on the cross accomplished, blood gushed in rivers; grace a hundred *zhang* deep streams forth from the West", "His pain shocks all men even the Emperor, his Seven Last Words move all to tears". His favourable opinion on the spiritual faith is expressed when he asked "which real scholar would fail to respect and exalt him"? However, the Rites Controversy began affecting the structure of [Qing

6 Editors note: these *weisuo* were designed to ensure the loyalty of the frontier Mongolian tribes to the new Ming dynasty, and incorporated some controls over Mongolian religious practices.

7 Zhuo Xinping, *Between Sacred and Secular*, Heilongjiang People's Press: 2004, pages 395 – 396.

dynasty] society, threatening his political supremacy. Kangxi put away his sympathetic views towards the Catholic Church without any hesitation, and proceeded to ban religion and to punish and deport missionaries.

In the second half of the 20th century, the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) in China extended this political administrative style to manage religions, maintaining the principle of religious conformity to the State. Politicians of the new regime may not believe in any religion, but came up with the very effective measures of "controlling from within" and "singling out problems to tackle" through religious management. This meant giving sufficient respect to traditional faith and ritual tenets, letting religions promulgate religious doctrine and the utilization of religious methods to tackle religious issues. If from within a religion, any political issues should arise to challenge political authority and launch anti-government activities, then the problem would not be treated as a religious matter but a political one, and would be removed from the religious context and addressed as a political problem. Therefore, religious bodies may enjoy religious freedoms while carrying out religious activities, but political activities arising from the religions are still to be managed by political methods. This separation of religious and political matters is very clear and unambiguous. However, in the midst of the many changes taking place due following the Opening and Reform Policy, contemporary China is encountering unprecedented problems and challenges; separation of issues is no longer obvious and new situations are springing up. For example, in the reconstruction of structural religions, the following three situations have developed.

Firstly, the Five Recognised Religions model⁸ has in fact faltered or shattered; the characteristic of "love your country and love your religion" is facing rigorous challenge. Religion groups not included among the recognized religions are mushrooming and exist in a variety of formats (illegally or with partial permission). In some big cities and their related areas, religions already exist beyond the perimeters of the Five Religions. The state's openness and liberality are lending relative legitimacy to these religions, at least they are not existing illegally or engaging unlawful activities. Under international influence, these changes are beginning to see religion affecting politics, rebellious religious groups are beginning to affect politics. Traditionally, political or para-political religious structures have accelerated the bureaucratization, secularization and marginalization of some religions, and such structures find it difficult to wield the steering authority they have on religious function. These structures are partly losing their authority due to alienation; religious structures are changing from religious organizations to para-religious organizations until they reach para-political status, becoming semi-official or semi-governmental structures. Hence they lose their attractiveness to some believers. Religions are undergoing self-transformation to progress with the times, they are responding to the call of their contemporary age, and these calls are urgent ones. In order to truly wield their religious functionality, religious structures must return to [their] religions, and uphold religious persuasion and appeal.

8 Editors Note: the five recognised religions in China are Buddhism, Taoism, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism and Islam.

Their authority needs to go beyond political or organizational prowess, it needs spiritual integrity.

Secondly, the breakdown of traditional structures or institutional religions has led to the diversification of organizational structures. Religions with collective authority structures are experiencing a division of their authority for a number of reasons. Open religious structures find themselves set against underground religious organisations, vying for the same group of potential believers. Aside from existing structural modes, new religious structures are also surfacing. Religious organizations embrace tradition but are also venturing into the new. Small religious organisations, decentralized religious structures, non-monk (*grhapati*) communities or secular (lay) religious groups, all want to share power with traditional religious structures. Of particular concern are some new religious organisations which, based on their understanding of related laws and government executive regulations, claim that they comply with government management and accept the authority of politics. However they use such claims as a means to depart from or stay outside of the (official) management and co-ordination of structural religions. They are going down the route of compliance with government but asking for a path of freedom for their religious liberty. This type of obedience towards political authority while asserting religious freedom is proving problematic for both sides.

Thirdly, the boundaries between local and international religions are blurring and becoming more complex in contemporary China due to globalization. The traditional Five Religions, besides their own organizational structures, are actively or passively, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by international counterparts with similar structures. Examples are numerous: the subtle changes in the relationship between the Chinese Catholic Church and the Vatican; the revival of denominational inclinations within the Chinese Protestant Church and the complex reconstruction of its relationship with the World Council of Churches; the influence of Hong Kong, Taiwanese and international Buddhism on Chinese Buddhism and its response; the development and transformation of Chinese Taoism outside of China; and the relationships and links between Chinese and overseas Islam. In reviving relationship with foreign religions, their Chinese identity has weakened or transformed. Through these associations, the love of religion is negating patriotic persuasion, and some are trying to break away from political authority and government control. There is also the spread of underground religious structures, and the development, proliferation, infiltration and transformation of overseas religious structures. [...] The internal organization of religious structures and their traditional relationships is blurring the boundary between local and international religions. Some religions promulgate the concept of a cross-cultural, international sense of religious sanctity and loyalty which impacts upon the spiritual dimensions of love your country, love your religion. This is a warning not to be taken lightly. Under such complex circumstances, overseas anti-Chinese factions may exploit internal civil conflicts. The way such conflicts are handled as religious issues can propel groups into resistance or open hostility, highlighting contradictions in

order to politicize religious issues. If the respective government units then take action to address the problem as a political issue, foreign media and public opinion criticize China's "improper" measures in handling religious matters. They suggest that hostile actions are merely "internal civilian issues", blurring the clear line between religious and political problems. They use pretexts such as "defending human rights" and "religious freedom" to internationalize internal problems, thereby attempting to interfere with Chinese internal affairs. Due to the emergence of these complex elements, we must re-examine and analyze structural religions in contemporary China.

(2) Nonstructural religious developments

Responding to [the changes in] structural religions, civic religion or personal religion has been on the rise, challenging the emphasis people used to place on structural religions and shaking their preconceptions. Contemporary China is experiencing various types of nonstructural religious developments which, considering the present course of development and directional trends, may be said to consist of the following tendencies.

Firstly, nonstructural religions are showing signs of growth in China: issues of religiosity and its analytical meaning are resurfacing. For example, within the Chinese Protestant Church there is a discussion about "cultural Christians" which challenges the traditional structures of religion and has caught the attention of the world. Religious identity is no longer as clear cut and unambiguous as it once was within the structural religions. Religious faith has partially become a kind of conscience, a sense of right and wrong, or of spiritual enlightenment. Alongside the strengthening of an internal awakening, external identity and symbolism are weakening. By the same token, the issue of Confucianism and its religiosity also questions our understanding of traditional structural religions. Once the traditional religious structure is lost, can the conscientiousness and spirit of Confucianism survive in the hearts and minds of the Chinese people? Can its ideological values still have the same religious influence over the Chinese people? The dissipation of religion cannot be simply extrapolated from its structural demise. In fact, as long as a spirituality or a religious spirit exists, the revival of religious structures is of secondary importance, and relatively easy to achieve. For example, when [Herod's] Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, because the Jewish people maintained their religiosity, Temple Judaism became Rabbinic Judaism very swiftly. Rabbis became the spiritual leaders of Judaism, which influenced the development of the new structure based on the synagogue system. The rapid and spontaneous uptake of religions based on folk customs, locality and religious worship do not have typical structural characteristics, but can be explained by this spirituality. This is the spiritual function of folk culture. Such types of religious development may seem undisciplined and scattered; nonetheless they are very significant to the religious ecology and its developmental trends.

Secondly, groupings like the family, race, social club and labour organisation are now

appearing in various formats within the religions. These do not possess typical structural characteristics, but are nevertheless embodiments of the concept or meaning of congregation. They are becoming small groupings within society and its sub systems. For groups as small as a family (societal cell) or as big as a race (societal nation), religions have become symbols of faith, values and their own collective. Groups such as these will have a deconstructive function within traditional society and the structural religions. They minimize the attraction of the authority once held by traditional social religions, but at the same time build new collective authorities and re-enchant their respective religious faiths. This revival will mean either a return to the related structural religions or the construction of new religious organisations.

Thirdly, religions are exercising their function in the establishment of community-based enterprises and in reviving local traditions. In the complex structure of today's economic system, cultural construction is increasingly taking on a religious tint. Some local projects are imbued with religious connotations, this is particular apparent among foreign investment enterprises, private sector enterprises and those among rural grass-roots. The religious inclination of organizers and leaders is influencing the construction of their economic enterprises or community culture. Amid burgeoning levels of cultural construction and artistic creativity, para-religious models are breaking out, revealing religious interest, encouraging the search for religions, and advocating the significance of religion. These models are also non structural, aiming at establishing civic religions or personal religions. The revival of a traditional local culture in some areas brought about mainly religious elements. In some enterprises, the religious identity or religious interest of the person-in-charge becomes the focal concept or core value of the enterprise culture under construction, directly influencing employees' preference and choice of religion. Some economic enterprises even build religious venues, then employ religious personnel, making it possible for economy and religion to reach mutual infiltration, dissemination and a win-win situation. [...]

IV Conclusion

In conclusion to all that has just been said, new social changes and complex religious reconstruction have led us to realize that a new vision, methodology and thinking on contemporary religious issues is required. In considering religious issues, we must be proactive in keeping up with continuous change [...]

Regarding this new vision, in order to understand religious issues in contemporary China one must view them within a global context. We cannot be confined by an internal, partial or monochrome religious view. This new, broadened scope is a requirement for the novel situation in which we find ourselves. Globalization is inexorable; the concept of globalization has also become objective reality. While understanding and handling religious matters within China, we must also take into consideration the international

influence and links with Chinese economic development under the Opening and Reform Policy. We must see the complex links between the local and the whole, in China and in the world. Overseas religions are situated in a complex international background and have a long history within their respective countries; this once separate situation has been broken down by globalization and substantive links are forming at present. In any case, after decades of development and change, these overseas religions have gone through monumental changes. One cannot objectively, calmly and correctly analyze them relying on past impressions and criticism, hence it is necessary to develop new observations and articulated analysis. We need to handle these religious relationships through an open, developing and harmonious social structure, analyzing the functions that the international community has on a developing China. We need to leave plenty of leeway for this present stage of exploration, when decisions are to be made about policy, securing foresight before taking action and extending a vision for development. Therefore, the handling of religious issues is related to our cultural strategy, so that religions may exert a positive function, and become an important element of the soft power of our country.

Regarding new thinking, an open society should give guidance to [religious] propagation and infiltration rather than trying to resist and block it. Part of the web of international trends and the complex relationship between China and the rest of the world, it is very hard to effectively block anything unless if we wish to pay the high price of staying shut to the outside world and therefore damaging China's image. It is not necessary to focus on resisting [religious] infiltration thereby attracting world attention, particularly Western concern, outcries and interference, which will hinder and influence us unfavorably when developing our economy and opening ourselves to the wider world. Instead, when we encounter imported religions, we should possess tolerance and a capacity for magnanimity, assimilation and reform. Then those who are different may embrace and become a part of us, and hence achieve cultural enrichment and renewal without blotting out the dissimilar, gaining strength during the process. We should maintain an open and liberal attitude towards legal promulgations on religion, showing forbearance and indulgence. In handling religion, we should adhere to a legal approach, strengthening legislation over religious matters and carefully examining the concepts and values behind such legislation. We need to take action to improve religious management according to the law and ensure that laws are adhered to. In cultural construction, we should scrutinize and consider the meaning of religious beliefs, undertaking dialogue and communication instead of resistance and confrontation; we should seek similarities within the plurality, and hence achieve harmony.

Regarding new methodology, social development requires steadfast reasoning, winning the heart of the people; handling religious matters is a complete and systematic operation, and should be linked with the nation's overall development. Some religions uphold "ecumenical values" in China; the reasoning is that common priority should be placed on serving the society. The spirit of all our peoples is the spirit of China, it is not a value system or spiritual belief. Chinese culture has an excellent tradition of being open, liberal, tolerant

and accepting. Ideological Marxism and religious Buddhism are both the rich fruit borne by our active acceptance of foreign cultures. During the construction of contemporary Chinese culture, this acceptance and openness need to be broadened and strengthened. [...] Religions have always been in continuous transition; development, doctrine and theology are constantly renewed. The success of Buddhism in China is the achievement of active transformation and adaptation. As a foreign religion which has modified into a native religion, assuming a significant cultural position in China, Buddhism still cannot completely represent Chinese culture. Without Confucianism, both Buddhism and Taoism can only attain limited development, and do not suffice as a comprehensive representation of native China. Without the self-cultivation of Confucianism, Buddhism would find it difficult to produce spiritual monks of outstanding virtue, taking up the leadership of Chinese culture. [...] Other foreign religions need further Sinicization to become local spiritual destinations in which the Chinese people may trust and on which they may rely. Hence, religious development should focus on Sinicization. The future of our nation is to build a Big China. This is the cultural self-understanding and self-awareness that China must maintain for its survival, so that it may sustain independence and be proud. The future China is open, tolerant and creative: the construction of its harmonious culture and strengthening of its soft power will bring about the wise embodiment of "a sea accepting hundreds of rivers, embracing all into its greatness".

Another Aspect of Chinese Rural Christianity – Based on a field survey of a rural church in north Henan province

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(Translated by Alison Hardie with Alan Morton.)

I Choice of location for field survey

Weihui is a historic city located on the north Henan plain. To its east and west lie Banqiao and Hewa, sites of the remains of the ancient Yangshao culture. In the Xia and Shang dynasties this area was Ji prefecture, and in the time of King Zhou, tyrannical last ruler of the Shang, it was a grazing area for the capital. In the 11th century BCE, King Wu of the Zhou dynasty, in his campaign against the Shang ruler, arrayed his troops in what is now the urban area. Weihui was the administrative centre for a series of prefectures, circuits etc., and was considered an important area within the central plains. In a sense, Weihui can be regarded as a representative site of the birth, development and continuation of Chinese civilisation. Historically, the Christian church in Weihui city has had jurisdiction over nine counties, and has been an important centre for the development of Christianity; currently it is one of the most important sources for the spread of Christianity in Xinxiang city and indeed the whole of northern Henan. From the arrival of Christianity in Weihui in 1899, over a period of more than a hundred years to the present day, it has been situated within the environment of the ancient culture of the central plains, so it is inevitable that there has been a certain amount of interaction and mutual influence between them: Christianity's construction of a meaning system is inevitably linked to the long-standing traditional Chinese culture.

II Research methods

(1) Participant observation

The author participated in house gatherings and church services with the local Christians and joined them in singing hymns; when they prayed, I bowed my head and closed my eyes, and on particular occasions, I joined them in kneeling down and praying aloud. I should explain that I am not a Christian; in fact I am an atheist, but what I wanted to achieve, in Bauman's words, was 'To be both a participant and an onlooker, to combine familiarity and intimacy with an outsider's critical view, to combine participation and involvement with independent impartiality.'⁹

(2) Interviews

Regarding the credibility of responses to interviews, I should give an explanation of how we are to understand the relationship between the three different levels of what respondents say, what they believe, and what they actually do; naturally, what a person says and what they actually do are not necessarily the same thing, and sometimes they are quite opposed. However, the interview responses in the present study are narratives by these rural Christians of their past experiences, not discussions of what they plan to do in the future; moreover, for a devout Christian, the likelihood of their bearing false witness is very low, because this would mean breaking one of the divine commandments. Consequently, I fundamentally trust the responses of these interviewees.

(3) Documentary evidence

The present study principally makes use of the scripts used by the church choir for their performances, and includes a classified analysis of the content of these scripts.

III Dates of field survey

From January to March 2005, July to September 2005, January to February 2006, and August to November 2006, almost a year in total.

IV The origins of the choir and the content of its scripts

Chinese people have always placed great importance on weddings and funerals, and have a historical tradition of using music at these events, while Christianity and Christians place importance on hymn-singing. As Chinese, these rural Christians are no exception. However, in the view of rural Christians, a traditional folk-music band is inappropriate for

9 Zygmunt Bauman, tr. Ouyang Jinggen, *Liquid modernity*, Shanghai: Joint Publishing, 2002, p.323

a sacred context. Consequently, the rural Christians' own 'band' – the church choir – came into being.

In the north Henan region, the most popular folk art is Henan opera, so Henan opera also plays a part in the people's weddings and funerals. So, like the folk music bands, the rural church choir also performs Henan opera; however, the choir makes use only of the form of Henan opera, while the content is entirely Christian. The rural church choir of Weihui city cleverly and successfully make use of this popular art form to preach and propagate the teachings of Christianity.

One of the main focuses of this study was the activities of the church choir. However, I do not dispute the important role of the church itself in forming the particular religious meaning system of rural Christians; I accept that, without the church, and without the sermons preached during worship every Sunday, rural Christians would not be able successfully to construct their own meaning system. However, it is also an undeniable fact that sermons within the church cannot replace the activities of the rural church choir; participation in Christians' weddings and funerals, and the performances rich in Christian significance which take place out of doors at other times when farm work is slack would be things which it would be hard for the rural church organisation to accomplish. The choir can be described as an extension and enlargement of church activities, and its activities have their own place. It is for this reason that I have made the activities of the church choir one of the main subjects of this study.

Following are my classification and analysis of the content of the scripts for the choir's performances. Naturally, my discussion will mainly focus on the opposition to and criticism of folk beliefs on the part of Christianity.

(1) Relentless attacks on and mockery of folk beliefs:

From Henan opera 'Rejecting the False and Embracing Truth'

Scene 1:

Major demon: (Makes two circuits of the stage.) Ha, ha!...My name is Major Demon. People ask me how I got so fat. It's all because of my magic red belt. If I put it round anyone's head, they get a terrible headache, so they make offerings to me for relief, and the more offerings they make, the worse their headache gets, till eventually I make them paralysed. So they present me with roast chicken, ham, steak, pig's heads, pig's tails, tinned food, and I just get fatter and fatter. Ha, ha, ha...!

Minor demon: Big brother, look at me practically dead of starvation, I'm nothing but skin and bone, no energy at all, I feel as though I'm on my last legs. Could you give me a short loan of your magic belt?

- Major demon: No way. (Makes to leave; minor demon grabs him and won't let go; makes a circuit of the stage.)
- Minor: Big brother, I beg you, give me a loan of it! I'm a hungry ghost and no mistake!
- Major: (resigned to the inevitable) All right, since we've been friends for so long, I'll let you have a go, but give it back to me as soon as you're finished with it, or I won't answer for the consequences. Go on, take it! (Throws it to minor demon) I'm off then. (Exit)
- Minor: Thank you, big brother!

Scene 3:

- Minor: (Enters and runs round in circles.) Wah! Yah! Big brother! Big brother! It's all gone wrong...!
- Major: What's the panic, brother? Have you had enough to eat?
- Minor: Never mind getting enough to eat, big brother, I didn't even get a bowl of soup!
- Major: What? How come?
- Minor: Your magic belt doesn't work.
- Major: What do you mean, doesn't work? Whose head did you put it on?
- Minor: I put it on someone who believes in Jesus.
- Major: Well, you've got a nerve, putting it on a believer in Jesus. You're asking for it!
- Minor: Big brother, don't hit me, don't hit me!
- Major: Even I wouldn't dare put it on a believer in Jesus!
- Minor: Big brother, there must be something I don't know about your magic belt?
- Major: This belt, you can't just put it on anyone.
- Minor: So who should you put it on?
- Major: If you put it on people who don't respect their parents, or nick stuff, or tell lies, or worship false gods and commit idolatry, they'll give you offerings, and you can eat to your heart's content.
- Minor: Well, but, big brother, more and more people believe in Jesus these days, it looks like we'll be suffering from famine.

'Li Huozi Believes in the Lord' (sung to a traditional tune)

Li Huozi (sings):

In order for her to be happy in my house,
I worshipped all the gods and bowed to every Buddha.
The first one I worshipped was the great Jade Emperor;
The second one I worshipped was the Empress of Earth;
The third one I worshipped was Guanyin of the Southern Sea;
The fourth one I worshipped was King Yama of the Five Palaces;
The fifth one I worshipped was the Tathagata Buddha;
The sixth one I worshipped was Zhong Kui the Demon-queller.
The God of Wealth and the God of Earth were all enthroned;
The Stove God had no throne but I invited him onto the stove.
Three sticks of incense every morning and night,
With my bum in the air I bowed my head to the ground.
They sat all in a row but didn't look after me,
Just waited for me to provide them with three meals a day.
This one puffed out his moustache and glared at me,
That one just grinned all over his face.
Some of them bared their teeth and shook their fists at me;
One of them closed his eyes tight and pretended to be asleep.
Today I finally wised up:
You're not true gods, you're evil demons.

Henan opera 'A Change of Name'

Conversion Li : (Li Gaibian, female, aged about 40, a sister in the Lord.) To detect false gods,¹⁰ I need no instruments; just by using ten numbers, I can point them out.

Worthless Liu : (Liu Xiaonao, male, aged about 40, a local layabout.) Good, today I'll learn something: how do you detect false gods?

Conversion: Brother Worthless, listen to me: the false god you worship in the temple can't utter **one** word. He has a mouth but he can't speak, can he? Have you ever heard him say anything?

Worthless: No, I haven't.

Conversion: His **two** eyes are blind: he has eyes, but he can't see, can he?

Worthless: No, he can't. That time I was messing around in the temple, I touched the face of the clay statue, but he didn't even blink an eye.

10 The reference is to Psalm 135, v.15-18: The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths. They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them.

- Conversion: They don't eat **three** meals a day. Your grannie gives him offerings of food three times a day, but have you ever seen him eat?
- Worthless: No, never.
- Conversion: There's no power in his **four** limbs. Can he use his limbs to hold anything, or to walk?
- Worthless: And his **five** senses don't work. The way they made him, that's the way he is; how can he have five senses?
- Conversion: And he doesn't recognise the **six** degrees of kinship. Whether it's a friend or an enemy burning incense to him or bowing down before him, can he distinguish between them?
- Worthless: No, he can't.
- Conversion: His **seven** orifices [a term from traditional medicine] are blocked.
- Worthless: That's right. He's just a lump of clay, his orifices are blocked for sure.
- Conversion: He puts in his **eight** hours a day.
- Worthless: You're right there, he never moves from his workplace.
- Conversion: And he's dressed up to the **nines**.
- Worthless: That clay image in the temple certainly looks splendid.
- Conversion: He gets **ten** out of ten for uselessness.
- Worthless: Seems like he really isn't much use at all.
- Conversion: Strange, strange, strange indeed! An image is the work of man's hand: Make a male image and call it grandpa, Make a female image and call it gran.
- Worthless: You've got a point there.

(2) People are swindled out of money and suffer misfortunes because of folk beliefs, while those who believe in Jesus live peaceful lives and go to heaven:

Henan opera 'Three Sisters'

A (sings):

I know in the past you were many times ill.
How were you cured? Please tell if you will.

B (sings):

When you hear of my torments, you'll cry me a river:
Disease of the heart, and cirrhosis of liver.

Pain all about me, my blood pressure high,
Yet my illness just worsened as each day went by.
Now as medical science continues to burgeon,
And each hospital has its own specialist surgeon,
I determined to make me effectively cured.
So through every last medical centre I toured
From Beijing and Shanghai till I got to Tianjin,
Then to Xi'an via Sanmenxia, wearing me thin.
I paid through the nose for my pills and injections.
Cost me 40,000 yuan, what with things I'll not mention.
'An incurable case', was the doctor's lament,
And back to my home I was hurriedly sent.
There a neighbour advised that she'd summoned a witch
Who for 500 yuan was to sell me her pitch.
So a sheep and whole pig were dispatched for the feast
Which cost all of 3,800, at least,
And despite burning incense and all that kowtowing
The benefits really were hardly worth showing!
Then my relatives told me to look at fengshui;
The master was full of suggestions for me:
Your grave lay one way, but your land was converse,
Pigsties in your back yard would just be perverse!
You shouldn't have two roads in front of your gate
And your fine upper storey was inviting ill fate,
So dismantle it, burn all your new paper money;
Hurry and sacrifice; it's really not funny
Because if you delay there's a very real fear
That three family members could perish this year!
500 yuan was the price for the master
If my priorities lay in avoiding disaster.
Every day I felt more like a lamb to the slaughter
It got to the point I was spewing up water;
The family despaired for me, counting each day,
While my coffin stood ready to take me away
To my home in eternity.... my agony's end!
But my newly-found faith brought Lord Jesus to send
Down His mercy: I always had studied the Bible,
Attending my church every time I was able.
I repented my sins and obeyed His good word,
Setting out on my journey with strength from the Lord.
And just look at me now! Ears not deaf, eyes not dim;
No ache in my back, and nimble of limb!
Thanks be to the Lord for His bountiful grace!

Thanks be to Lord Jesus for all his good grace!
A grace whose true meaning no mortal was given.
The Earth has received the great gospel of Heaven!
Be quick to repent, and believe in the Lord.
May our home be with Jesus in heavenly accord!

Henan opera 'Who Has Gone Astray?'

- Ai (speaks): Yes, we who believe in Jesus have peace in this life, and in future we're sure to go to Heaven and enjoy eternal life there.
- Qiao (speaks): Ooh, hark at you! You're shooting on an aeroplane – aiming high! Everyone knows that when people die they go out like a light, and you think you're going to Heaven!
- Li, Zhang: That's right! Your wits have gone astray! You don't know which way up you are!
- Qiao: A fine young fellow like you, and you've taken up superstition – honestly!
- Ai: You're wrong there, you don't understand the meaning of superstition at all.
- Li: If you're so smart, explain it to us.
- Ai: Superstition means worshipping false gods, like the ones made of clay, stone, wood, porcelain, painted on paper or described by word of mouth, however many of them there are! Hundreds of thousands of yuan earned by the sweat of people's brows have been wasted due to superstitious belief in false gods. And some people make use of ghosts and spirits to make their fortune: they've scared and cheated thousands of our people into spending all their money, only to come to a miserable end.
- Zhang: So what's your superstition? Tell us about it.
- Ai (speaks): All right, listen to me. (Sings:) Superstitious, gone astray? I've not gone astray. This one says I've gone astray, that one says I've gone astray, everyone in the neighbourhood says I've gone astray. Let me tell you just how astray I've gone: I don't get in fights, I don't get cross, I always work hard; I don't drink alcohol, I don't cause trouble, I never smoke cigarettes, not a single one. It saves me money and it's good for my health. You tell me, have I gone astray or not? We're so astray that the women don't quarrel and the men don't beat their wives, we respect our parents and love our children, we love our sisters, we love our brothers, we love them so much that our relatives all believe in Jesus, our neighbours worship God, so that God's gospel can be spread to the ends of the earth, and we can all be saved from judgment and not go to Hell. So what do you think, have we gone astray or not?

- Li: What else has he got to say?
- Al (sings): Elders and fellow-villagers, wake from your slumbers, don't go on straying. Once every seven days, every week, go to church, learn the truth, remember the word of the Lord. Let's wait on the Lord to call us to his feast, and God will give you eternal life. We're all God's good children, let's 'stray' up to Heaven and not go to Hell. You can see whether I've gone astray or not!

Henan opera 'A Change of Name'

- Worthless Liu: Hey! When you believe in Jesus you don't have to burn paper money: there's a lot of sense in that. Indeed, you can't go wrong with a big knife, but when you burn paper money all you end up with is a pile of ash: that proverb's certainly true! One time an old lady who believed in Jesus went to bring the gospel to my grannie, and I heard her say to my gran, 'Mrs Liu, repent and believe in Jesus, don't go to the temple to burn paper money and worship false gods. Look at the people who worship false gods at the temple: the more they bow down, the more they frown; for every stick of incense they burn, someone does them a bad turn; the more vows they swear, the more trouble is theirs.' That's absolutely true!

(3) Contrast between many idols and the one true God:

From the Henan opera 'A Thief Repents'

- Huang: That's right! People commit sins every day. They're selfish and greedy, just thinking of themselves, stealing and cheating, hating and envying, worshipping false gods.
- Zhao: What are false gods?
- Huang: Apart from God, you mustn't worship any other god, like the ones made of clay, painted on paper, cast from iron, made of steel, carved from wood: those are all false gods.
- Zhao: In that case, I've got one of those. I just want to make money, so I've got a statue of the God of Wealth. It's absolutely useless, it doesn't help you with anything.

Henan opera 'Welcoming the Bride'

- Li: How long have you got? I know of lots of gods, at least seventy-two!
- Wang: Uncle, we all know that a country can't have more than one king, and a household can't have more than one head: there's only one true God. It's

a true saying that if you have lots of mothers they can't all love you, and if there are lots of gods they can't all be real. There's only one true God, and that's our Saviour Jesus Christ. He holds everything in his hands: life and death, blessings and misfortune, all our actions and our very existence. False gods have no power to send blessings, and they can't send misfortune either, all they can do is lead you astray and deceive you.

Henan opera 'A Change of Name'

Conversion Li : (Li Gaibian, female, aged about 40, a sister in the Lord.) Hey, Brother Worthless, how have you been getting on the last few years, all right?

Worthless Liu : (Liu Xiaonao, male, aged about 40, a local layabout.) All right? I'll tell you straight out, I was sentenced to two years, I've been in jail three times, my wife's divorced me and run off with someone else. Does that sound all right to you?

Conversion: Brother Worthless, you should repent and believe in Jesus! You'll find peace in the Lord.

Worthless: Jesus? Who's Jesus?

Conversion: He is the one true God.

Worthless: Is he a true god that you believe in? In that case, the one my grannie has on her table, this wide, this big, the one she burns incense to and bows to all day and every day, not to mention going to the temple to burn incense, that would be a false god that my gran worships?

Conversion: That's right, it's a false god! The ones made of clay, carved from wood, painted on paper, cast in bronze, they're all false gods, or you can call them devils. The true God exists of himself, he's not made by men's hands. As for your grannie, the Lord sends her food, but she worships idols made of wood, and it does her little good.

Worthless: Now we've got fake cigarettes, fake alcohol, fake medicine, and fake banknotes, all sorts of fake products, but I never realised we had fake gods as well. Hey, Conversion, there's a machine now for detecting fake banknotes, do you have some technique, or some instrument for detecting fake gods? I'd like to learn about it.

From the contents of the above scripts, we can see that what the choir wants to tell their audience is, firstly, that the Jade Emperor, the Emperor and Empress of Earth, Guanyin of the Southern Sea, Yama of the Five Palaces, the Tathagata Buddha, Zhong Kui and all the rest of them 'are not true gods but devils', because they 'can't say one word, have no sight in their two eyes, can't eat three meals a day, have no power in their four limbs, can't use

their five senses, can't distinguish between the six degrees of kinship, and have all seven orifices blocked'; although they look impressive, they remain immobile and get 'ten out of ten for uselessness'; secondly, that witches, fengshui masters and so on 'swindle people out of money and bring disaster on them', people who believe in folk religion are superstitious, they make images and call them whatever they want, and all they get out of it is 'the more they bow down, the more they frown; for every stick of incense they burn, someone does them a bad turn; the more vows they swear, the more trouble is theirs'. In the end all that happens is 'they throw away all their money and come to a miserable end', while those who believe in Jesus 'save themselves money and keep their health', and finally 'go to heaven and escape hell'. Thirdly, and most importantly, 'there is only one true God', Jesus is 'the one true God', 'apart from God, all others are false gods', and the multitude of false gods should not be worshipped.

Hans Mol pointed out that all groups have a specific identity in common, and that they create sharp boundaries between in-group and out-group, and thereby consolidate in-group identity.¹¹ If the group's position is marginal vis-à-vis other groups in an established society, then the boundaries of that group are likely to be firmly drawn.¹²

V Sermons in church: eradicating witchcraft, drawing boundaries

Apart from the Henan opera performances of the choir outside of the church, at weddings, and at funerals, sermons preached in church naturally play a key role in the formation of the rural Christians' meaning system. A sample sermon is transcribed in Appendix 1.

Wang Xian'en, in this sermon, gives an invaluable summary of folk religion's polytheism and willingness to believe in any god who might prove efficacious: '...because they know that there are plenty of these kinds of gods, and the more protection the better!' Moreover, here Wang Xian'en explicitly instructs Christians not to kneel before the multitude of idols, but to worship the one true God: 'Every one of us who believes in Jesus must not bow down to idols and graven images: God doesn't want us to bow down to graven images, because the Lord our God is a jealous God.' The key point is that Wang Xian'en has raised the issue of a boundary, the idea of within and without: 'As long as you don't step across this boundary, Satan, who's out there, won't be able to eat you up or hurt you, however fierce he is, but if you cross the boundary, Satan can attack you at any time'; 'crossing the boundary is a sin.'

The concept of within and without discussed by Wang Xian'en is the same as the dividing line between Christianity and folk religion; this line is sacred and not to be crossed. In Christian belief, overstepping it is a serious sin.

11 Hans Mol, *Identity and the Sacred*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976, p.166.

12 Ibid., p.182

Within a thoroughly folk-religious environment, faced with rural Christians who before their conversion were believers in folk religion, one thing the rural Church must do is to draw an absolutely clear line between itself and folk religion and eradicate the influence of folk religion, particularly of its magical or witchcraft elements. Otherwise, the rural Church and rural Christians might succumb to the sin of idolatry. Wang Xian'en's sermon makes this absolutely clear.

What I will examine in what follows is rural Christians' distinction, under the influence of the choir's Henan opera performances and of sermons preached in the church, between worshipping a multitude of idols and worshipping the one true God.

VI Christians' distinction between idolatry and worshipping the true God

In the meaning system of rural Christians, so-called 'superstitious' activities involved in 'worshipping false gods', such as employing a male or female witch or a fengshui master, presenting offerings, burning incense, or kowtowing, are strictly forbidden. The first thing that a Christian household must do upon conversion is to get rid of any items connected with folk religion, such as paper money, incense, incense-burners, idols, spells, amulets, etc., which there may have been in the house. Even at a parent's funeral, a Christian will not kowtow or burn incense. For them, this boundary is very clear, sacred, and not to be crossed.

The following interviews involved three rural Christians. The reason these respondents were chosen is that before they became Christians, they were devout believers in folk religion. The complete change in their attitude and behaviour after their conversion to Christianity is very helpful in understanding the distinction between folk religion and rural Christianity. These typical case studies also reveal how the rural Church handles the relationship between Christianity and folk religion. The content of the interviews follows:

Interview 1: Mr and Mrs Zhang Jiucheng. Mr Zhang is a 38 year old Christian; Mrs Zhang is a 36 year old Christian and a member of the choir.

- Author: So, did you clean out your house? Tell me about cleaning out the house.
Mrs Zhang: Eh?
A: Originally when you used heretical methods to cure illness.
Mr Zhang: That's what d'you call it, it's a long story.

- Mrs Z: Before, we just did what anyone suggested, somebody told us to dig a pit in the house and bury stuff in it, that's what we did.
- Mr Z: Before, before we believed in the Lord, I was in hospital, she was at home, she just did what anyone told her: smash the paving stones in the bedroom and bury something underneath; bury things in the back yard; and then go wherever – wherever she heard someone had a reputation, she'd go and call them in.
- A: That superstitious way of healing, of taking care of things, would you call it fengshui? Fengshui healing? Examining the dwelling?
- Mr Z: What's that you say?
- A: Is it a way of healing that involves looking at the ground your house is sited on? How did they try to cure you?
- Mr Z: They were always telling us to bury this and that in the ground!
- A: Mm, ah.
- Mr Z: Bury bricks and things, needles and things.
- A: Amulets?
- Mr Z: Uh, that's right, buried in the ground. And there was someone from South Station who brought a Buddhist statue to the house: cost us over 100 yuan! Dozens of yuan! Brought it to the house. In the end, after we believed in the Lord, we chucked it right out! We got Junjie's mam round, and Qinglin's missus, a bunch of the Lord's folk, and chucked all that stuff out.
- A: That's what they call cleaning out the house, is that right?
- Mr Z: Once we believed, that stuff was no use to us, we got rid of it all, we cleared it out of the house, we threw out all those superstitious things.
- A: Completely cleared it all out?
- Mr Z: Uhuh, the things that were buried, we dug them up. At that time I couldn't do a thing, a brother in the Lord came round, dug them up and threw them out.
- A: You couldn't keep the Buddhist statue or anything?
- Mr Z: Threw them all out.
- A: You couldn't keep the incense burner or anything?
- Mr Z: Nup.
- A: Were those methods any good?

- Mr Z: Once we believed in the Lord, what good could they do? Before we believed, they gave you a thingummy, a feeling of something to rely on.
- A: You sort of believed in them?
- Mr Z: That's right.
- A: You must have spent a bit, eh?
- Mrs Z: You're not kidding!
- Mr Z: What doesn't cost you money? Someone comes to have a look at you, you have to give them some money, sure it costs you!
- Mrs Z: How could it not! I bought a statue of Bodhisattva Guanyin this high, cost me 200 at one go; I had to give it to him, didn't I?
- A: A porcelain one? china?
- Mrs Z: It was what d'you call it... You couldn't break it if you tried. The man said it was bronze, hahaha! He got over 200 out of me. Those paving stones, ben the house, bang, bang, bang, smashed a hole in them with a mallet, buried some...
- A: He smashed the paving stones?
- Mrs Z: Yep! Smashed up the inside room! I could see he was up to no good, but I just did what people said: smashed a hole, buried some needles and thread. That time, the man asked me for 100, he said he'd buried some sort of 'medicine'. I couldn't not give him it. 300 just for that! Never mind that, I had someone else in, smashed another hole in the back yard, but at least the back yard didn't have those paving stones. Now, in the room, where they're smashed, it makes me mad whenever I see them. Perfectly good paving stones, all smashed up, filled in with cement, it looks awful. They buried some things in the back yard as well. That was before we believed in the Lord, they smashed another hole. I went up the mountain [to a temple] with Jiu, his legs were weak, we knelt there and kowtowed: 'Help me, help me', that's what he was saying.
- A: You went up the mountain to burn incense?
- Mrs Z: Uhuh, we went two or three years running, you know, he got ill in 2002, it wasn't till 2005 that we came to the Lord, we must have gone there two or three years running. That place, somebody told me it was good, so I went with them to Taigongquan, to the temple, to perform a ceremony, 10 or 20 yuan a time. If you got someone in to have a look at him, it would be a 30 yuan fee, somebody else would be 50 yuan, the money we spent on it! Finally we came to believe in the Lord, and people told us it was all a swindle. There was another thing, they knocked the front

gate down. In the village you can mostly get the grain into the back yard, but they knocked it down and dumped it under the window, so it was all blocked. What's his name from Zhangwudian said, I don't know what that'll do to Jiu! Hehehe!

A: What a palaver.

Mr Z: A right palaver, we didn't know what to do with ourselves.

Mrs Z: You know what they say, if you're poor, knock down your gate; if you're rich, dig up your grave! What a useless carry-on. I saw it was no use, we'd tried everything, but not only did he not get better, he gradually got more pain in his legs!

A: That way, you must have thrown away a lot of money over the two years.

Mr Z: You're not kidding!

Mrs Z: The way we went on, it was a weight on your mind: surely he ought to be getting better? There was the Guanyin statue sitting there, covered in a layer of incense-ash. Even when our lad was holding a bowl of rice, he'd bow to her, burn incense, kowtow, whatever he did he would say 'Make our dad better, please make our dad better!' I can't tell you how superstitious we all were!

Mr Z: That was before we believed in the Lord.

(Taken from taped interview conducted in Zhang Jiucheng's home on 29 August 2006.)

Before Zhang Jiucheng was converted to Christianity, he was one of the believers in folk religion, and because of the illness in his legs, he and his wife buried bricks and needles and other amulets in their house, and set up an incense-burner, Guanyin statue and other items in their home. They kept going to the temple at Taigongquan to kneel and kowtow. These constant 'superstitious' activities of the couple even affected their child: 'Even when our lad was holding a bowl of rice, he'd bow to her, burn incense, kowtow'.

After Zhang Jiucheng's conversion, with the help of other members of the congregation, they carried out a 'house-cleaning' activity, removing from the house all items connected with folk beliefs: 'Once we believed, that stuff was no use to us, we got rid of it all', 'we cleared it out of the house, we threw out all those superstitious things.'

Compared with Zhang Jiucheng in Interview 1, the life experience of interviewee 2, Hu Changhua, has been richer and more tortuous; her dramatic experiences led to dramatic changes in her faith.

**Interview 2: Hu Changhua, 50 years old, Christian, member of the choir.
For full transcript of interview, see Appendix 2.**

Because of her son's illness, Hu Changhua frequently called in witches, worshipped idols, worshipped false gods, made offerings and burnt incense: 'Yunmeng Mountain, Xunxian Mountain, I'd stay there for three or four nights at a time.' However, in the event, the conclusion Hu Changhua came to was that 'it had me running round in circles', 'those false gods made a right fool out of me.'

What about the hospitals? 'We went through every hospital for miles around: the one in the village, the township, the county'; 'we got a CT done, but it didn't show anything'; 'we went to the neurological hospital, they gave us some medicine, but it didn't help, none of them were any good.' After trying all sorts of ways and means – 'our lad's illness, we tried qigong, you could try witchcraft, some people said he was a maiden changeling, others reckoned his horoscope, whatever you did he didn't get better, he kept having the attacks' – when they were at the end of their resources ('We didn't even have the money for New Year, not even for New Year dumplings'), things finally took a turn for the better: 'Since we accepted Jesus Christ, he hasn't had a single attack, not one!' So it is very natural that Hu Changhua should sum up her experiences in these words: 'Jesus really is the true God, he's stronger than those false gods in the temples.'

Hu Changhua's situation before her conversion was: 'In those days our offering trays... I was better than anyone at folding paper ingots or making wreaths.' After her conversion Hu broke off any connection with folk religion: 'I don't have anything to do with that business nowadays', 'After you believe, the incense, all that false stuff in your house, you have to chuck it all out, of course I've broken off with it.'

The words and actions of interviewee 3, Sun Hongyan, not only reveal the boundary drawn between rural Christianity and folk religion, but also embody the parameters for understanding the meaning of life and for ethical guidance given to the lives of rural Christians by Christianity as a religious meaning system.

Interview 3: Sun Hongyan, 52 years old, Christian, member of the choir.

- Author: How many years have you believed in the Lord?
- Sun Hongyan: It must be fifteen, sixteen years now.
- A: Fifteen, sixteen years ago, you often used to go up the mountain to worship?
- Sun: Uhuh.
- A: You and your husband both went?
- Sun: I wasn't as what d'you call it as him.

- A: He was keener than you?
- Sun: He certainly was. In those days, when we went to Xunxian Mountain, I hadn't had our lass. We'd never been up the mountain, we didn't know what was what. One of our older generation was there, he went up, in those days the old ones were all superstitious, he picked a stone for us, and tied it with red thread.
- A: Mm.
- Sun: Pick a bairn, hold a bairn! Our mam brought it over to us, told me to put it inside the bed, took a lot of trouble over it!
- A: To bring sons? Is that what you mean?
- Sun: Uhuh. That was when we started going up the mountain, we started going up after the harvest, we'd go up just about every year.
- A: How long was it before you started to do something about not being able to have babies?
- Sun: It wasn't that I couldn't have them, I just kept losing them when I was a few months gone.
- A: You couldn't bring them to term?
- Sun: That's right. My first was four or five months, then five or six months, but they never came to term.
- A: So you were worried about it?
- Sun: It happened three or four times, our lass was my fifth!
- A: So it was because of that that you started?
- Sun: Uhuh. It was when he picked it for us, that was when we started going up the mountain. But still I couldn't keep a baby. In those days we were superstitious, we didn't know to believe in the Lord. But actually his gran believed from a child.
- A: Really?
- Sun: She believed from a child, but in those days she didn't go to church, she didn't say anything about it.
- A: Oh, ah.
- Sun: My man was a terror for going up the mountain!
- A: Mm.
- Sun: He was always up there. You know in those days, twenty years ago, ten yuan was worth 100 nowadays, not a cent less.
- A: Mm.
- Sun: He was always making donations, at least ten yuan a time.
- A: He made donations up the mountain?
- Sun: Uhuh. And in the end, was it 1990 we believed?

- A: Uhuh.
- Sun: In those days before we believed, he'd go for a carpenter in the spring, and after the stem of the year he felt sick, he had no energy, he had hookworm, by the wheat harvest he was no better, what to do? He'd said, go and call the spirit medium to heal us, and there he was better by the wheat harvest! So he got the spirit medium in again, he said if they came he'd be able to work again. But he just had some energy for a couple of days, and then he was bad again.
- A: When he got bad again what did you do? Call them in again?
- Sun: Uhuh.
- A: Did you have to pay them?
- Sun: Of course! If you consult them you have to give them a fee! You give them incense money, you give them gifts, what not, every time you go, you can't go empty-handed. That time we had to buy cakes for them, you think that was easy?
- A: Was it a wizard? A witch-doctor?
- Sun: A witch-doctor. God's been so gracious to me, but sometimes I've been weak, I've let Him down.
- A: So you used to be right superstitious?
- Sun: Oh my, I used to be right superstitious! After we believed in the Lord, the folk from Xunxian Mountain, that's in the Dabie Mountains, they sent us a letter, and the letter said they were going to build something or other, they were asking you to go and visit, really they meant go and make a donation. We'd been going for so many years, making donations all the time, always donating! We'd make a donation every time we went. They probably kept a record every time you donated, so our name was down every year, and I dare say they had a look and thought, this one hasn't missed a year, year after year, we donated regularly. So then, I gave the letter to my man, I hadn't opened it, I said, I could see it was in a fancy envelope, I said, here you are, someone's written you a top secret letter, I said, I didn't dare open it. Then he opened it, and he didn't say a thing, just knelt down in the doorway, crying and confessing his sins. Worshipping those false gods then was a sin, after all! Then we wrote them a reply, we must have written five or six pages. We said, when we believed in you, we didn't have a bit of peace, now we believe in Jesus Christ, we're at peace all the time, all that testimony, anyway everything that happened to us, we wrote all about it and sent it off to them, and we haven't heard from them since.
- A: Mm.

- Sun: I'd say that was our greatest sin, I'm telling you, in those days no-one could beat us for idolatry!
- A: Haha!
- Sun: I'm telling you, would the folk on Xunxian Mountain usually write to anybody? I'm telling you, they wrote to us, asking us to go and visit and what not.
- A: Mm.
- Sun: They thought we were totally besotted. They weren't far wrong, saying we were besotted.
- A: Now you've totally abandoned superstition?
- Sun: Yes, we've totally abandoned it.
- A: Right.
- Sun: Now if anyone holds a wedding or a funeral, well, weddings, that's not superstitious, we usually go and join in; but funerals, we don't take part. Even when our dad died, I wouldn't take part! When our dad died, they all made offerings, but I didn't, I said, I'll just give you some money and that's all. I won't get involved in your funeral.
- A: Was that your father-in-law, or your own dad?
- Sun: My own dad!
- A: So you didn't go?
- Sun: I went, all right. You have to go, your dad's died, you can't refuse to go.
- A: Oh.
- Sun: I went, but when they went to the grave and stuff, I didn't go.
- A: You didn't go to the grave?
- Sun: Not to the grave.
- A: But you paid whatever money you had to?
- Sun: Yes, I paid the money. There's our mam to see to, and I had to go and call on the relatives, take whatever I had to take.
- A: Your brothers and so on, what did they think of you?
- Sun: Well, as for that, I said, don't you put pressure on me, I've done all the work I had to!
- A: Were they upset?
- Sun: No, they weren't. Now I just wish I'd believed earlier, if I had, it would have saved me a lot of trouble! That's the way it is with believing, the later you come to the Lord, the more you regret not believing sooner!
- A: So now if they wanted you to go up the mountain to worship, you definitely wouldn't go.

- Sun: Dearie me! What an idea! If you threatened to kill me if I didn't worship false gods, I really wouldn't go!
- A: Hahaha! You've suffered enough?
- Sun: I certainly have! If someone said now, don't believe in the Lord and I'll give you so much money or whatever, and you go and worship false gods, I wouldn't do it! Even if I could go and get as drunk as I wanted every day, I wouldn't take advantage of that! [?]
- A: Haha!
- Sun: Honestly, the way I worshipped false gods! Thank the Lord! Those false gods aren't worth worshipping. I dare say sometimes those false gods have an effect, they might heal illnesses. But their evil power is just temporary, when they leave you, you feel much better in yourself, they don't last, only belief in God lasts! He can give you true peace.

(Extracts from a recorded interview with Sun Hongyan during rehearsals of the Lücun church choir on 2 September 2006.)

In the interview Sun Hongyan says that because of repeated miscarriages – 'I just kept losing them when I was a few months gone'; 'It happened three or four times' – she and her husband, encouraged by others, began going up Xunxian Mountain to the temple, and because they were desperate for a child, they were devout believers – 'in those days no-one could bear us for idolatry!' – to the extent that when there was a major activity at the temple they were sent an invitation. When Sun Hongyan's husband, already a Christian, received the invitation, his reaction was to 'kneel down in the doorway, crying and confessing his sins'. Having confessed to the sin of worshipping false gods, Sun Hongyan's husband wrote a five or six page reply, saying 'when we believed in you, we didn't have a bit of peace, now we believe in Jesus Christ', and that believing in you 'was our greatest sin'. This shows that the couple had completely abandoned folk religion.

Having completely abandoned folk religion, Sun Hongyan now totally avoids idolatrous activities, to the extent that even her father's funeral was no exception: 'Funerals, we don't take part. Even when our dad died, I wouldn't take part!' 'When our dad died, they all made offerings, but I didn't.'

On the subject of bowing down to false gods and worshipping the true God, Sun Hongyan says, 'If you threatened to kill me if I didn't worship false gods, I really wouldn't go!' 'Those false gods aren't worth worshipping', 'only belief in God lasts. He can give you true peace' 'we've totally abandoned [superstition]'.

Considering the three interviewees as a whole, after they had found folk religion ineffective, and medical science had failed to solve their problems, they chose the 'true, living, and efficacious true God', Jesus Christ. Other than this, what better choice could these troubled

country folk have? People could indeed say that their so-called Christian faith is simply another form of folk religion, and they have merely found a god who is more efficacious than the many gods of folk religion. Certainly, in the minds of Christians, and not merely of rural Christians, Jesus Christ is indeed a true, living and efficacious God. However, the key point is that what rural Christianity provides to its believers is not just miracles of healing and so on, but it also forms their religious meaning system, and provides guidance on their everyday behaviour, including their ethical life. It is this that non-systematic folk religion does not and cannot provide. For example, Sun Hongyan in Interview 3 says 'only belief in God lasts. He can give you true peace.' In her view, the meaning and value of her life lies in her belief in God, so that she lives as an example of virtue and purity. With this guidance, in her everyday life, Sun Hongyan avoids idolatrous activities, while in her ethical life, even after the death of her own father, she did not go to the grave or make a sacrifice. Later in this paper, I will discuss this issue further.

From this we can see that the Christian view that idolatry is a major sin has already taken firm root in believers' minds, and has been integrated into their lives, affecting and altering their way of speaking, their everyday behaviour and even their ethical lives. Christianity in this area has shown the characteristic of integrating faith into life and life into faith. Religious faith cannot be separate from life; one of the functions of religious faith is to provide guidance for life, and the Christian view of sin and redemption which is thus manifested in daily life, as well as other aspects of the meaning system of rural Christians which are manifested in daily life, often help us to a deeper understanding of the Christianity spreading in rural areas of China.

It is evident that after the conversion of the Christians interviewed, their attitude to worshipping a multitude of idols versus worshipping the one true God is very clear. They have all drawn a firm line between themselves and folk religion, to the extent of an extreme statement like 'If you threatened to kill me if I didn't worship false gods, I really wouldn't go!' We can see that rural Christianity has in fact successfully eliminated the influence of folk religion, and particularly its magical elements.

I acknowledge that there are redemptive elements in folk religion, such as the concepts of 'the Underworld', 'ascending to Heaven', and 'the Western Paradise of Sublime Bliss'. However, the distinction between Christianity and folk religion is very clear. I will discuss this further in the following.

VII Similarities and differences between miracles in Christianity and magic in folk religion

Practices of healing, casting out devils, and praying for miracles may lead some researchers to liken rural Christianity to folk religion, and to liken the miracles prayed for in rural Christianity to the magic in folk religion, or even to equate the two. In my field survey

I came across and indeed participated in local Christian prayer-meetings. Their prayer-meetings are held once a month, for three days at a time; food and lodging on the first and third days are completely free, while the church requires them to fast on the second day to increase the efficacy of their prayers. The location of the prayer-meetings is the Chengguan (City Gate) Church, which makes it possible for all the Christians in the city to get together. Of course, in the course of the prayer-meeting sermons are also preached, but the main purpose is to pray for the swift recovery of any members of the congregation who are ill, with the elders laying their hands on the sick people as they pray. This is because they believe that 'These signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover' (Mark 16.17-18).

What sort of similarities and differences exist between Christian miracles and folk-belief magic?

Stark's definition of magic is: magic means any effort to wield supernatural powers in order to gain a benefit (or avoid a cost) without involving God or any generalised explanation of existence.¹³

In Frazer's view, religion acknowledges that the world is in the hands of the gods, who control natural forces according to their own preferences and not ours, therefore religious believers prostrate themselves to the gods; they pray to them but do not use magic or curses to force them to act.¹⁴

Malinowski pointed out the simple pragmatism of magic. He held that magic is a practical technique, whose actions are all means to an end; religion, on the other hand, involves behaviour which is an end in itself and has no other aim; the beliefs of magic, because they are in accord with its straightforward and practical nature, are extremely simple; it always states that, if someone employs a particular spell or ceremony, he can achieve a particular result. In religious belief, however, the object of belief is the entire supernatural realm.¹⁵

Durkheim believed that the fundamental difference between magic and religion was that the followers of magic were not organised and did not join into groups: there was no such thing as a church of magic.¹⁶

13 Rodney Stark et al., tr. Yang Fenggang (2003), *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, p.130

14 Daniel L. Pals, tr. Tao Feiya, Liu Yi & Niu Shengni (2005), *Seven Theories of Religion*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Press, pp. 30-31

15 Bronislaw Malinowski, tr. Li Anzhai (1986), *Magic, Science and Religion*, Beijing: China Folk Art Press, p.75

16 Émile Durkheim, tr. Qu Dong & Ji Zhe (1999), *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, p.51

Weber divided the two into salvation religion and magical religiosity. Weber said that in any culture, the more the basic form of society had an agricultural tendency, the more the peasant class among its people would be likely to fall into a traditionalist cast and the less ethical and rationalist the popular religion would be.¹⁷ Popular religion lacks 'the central, religiously determined and rational method of life' which a salvation religion has.¹⁸

Stark et al. hold that the difference between religious miracles and magic is that miracles are believed to be the rational effects of the gods' intervention in secular affairs. The outcomes of magical processes are considered to be inevitable, whereas religion sees miracles as merely being possible, and believers simply seek for the spirits' support, but completely accept that the spirits are independent, and have the freedom to decide whether or not to answer prayers.¹⁹ Stark et al. also point out that all religions provide some sort of generalised explanation of existence, whereas magic is concerned with specific and immediate results, and ignores questions of meaning.²⁰ It is because magic promises that secular rewards will be received in the short term that the believers in magic cannot be organised.²¹ What magic deals with is short-term gains in the here and now, and it cannot make its consumers develop extensive or exclusive ties. As a result, magic cannot produce a stable body of lay 'members'. This point is equally applicable to polytheistic religions with a defined group of gods. They also lack other-worldly rewards, and specialise in quite immediate gains.²²

Stark et al.'s argument clearly synthesises the viewpoints of the renowned scholars quoted above. However, in Li Shen's view, miracles and magic can more or less be equated: he says that 'miracles or wonders are no more than magic performed in the name of a high-level god, while magic is no more than miracles or wonders performed in the name of low-level gods.'²³

To summarise the views of the above-mentioned scholars, they all hold that there is some difference between miracles and magic. The major difference is that magic is temporary and immediate, and there can be no church of magic, while although miracles are only possible [not predictable or inevitable], their effects are long-lasting, and they can draw believers into an organised church, and into a religious meaning system; even in Li Shen's equation of miracles and magic, a distinction is made between 'high-level' and 'low-level', in effect, a distinction between salvation religion and magical religion.

Miracles may not have any special significance for a non-Christian, and to a committed atheist, miracles may amount to nothing more than absurdity, ignorance, or 'superstition',

17 Max Weber, tr. Kang Le & Jian Huimei (2005), *Sociology of Religion*, Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, pp.103-104

18 Max Weber, tr. Wang Rongfen (2003), *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, Beijing: Commercial Press, p.222

19 Rodney Stark et al., tr. Yang Fenggang (2003), *Acts of Faith*, Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, p.135.

20 Ibid., p.129

21 Ibid., p.131

22 Ibid., p.176

23 Li Shen (2006), *Theory of Religion*, vol.1, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, p.367

because unbelief leads to denial of the possibility of miracles. By contrast with non-Christians, to a Christian the miracles of Jesus Christ are an important faith experience, an important component of their faith, and a real event in it.

Since we accept that Christianity is a religion, and that it is a theistic meaning system, we cannot always be evaluating or judging a theistic system from an atheistic standpoint. Driving out devils, healing and other miracles are fundamental components of the Bible, and the power of God is an essential part of Christian belief; therefore, to describe the pure faith of Christianity as 'superstition' or 'folk religion' shows an obvious lack of impartiality and fairness. The difference between religion and 'superstition', among ordinary people just as much as academics, is surely already perfectly clear.

The Western scholar Valerie Hansen, in the English foreword to her book *Changing gods in medieval China, 1127-1276*, points out that 'People pray to gods to get things done, and they judge gods on the basis of their ability to perform miracles'. Efficacy is 'the distinguishing characteristic of popular religion', and the Chinese, unlike Westerners with their divisions into Jews, Catholics, Protestants etc., do not believe exclusively in Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism. Hansen finds that 'none of the [Chinese] people I met identified themselves as Buddhist, Daoist or Confucian. And, as far as I could tell, they all attended the same Buddhist, Daoist and popular religious temples... They were simply seeking a god who was *ling* [efficacious]'.²⁴ Stark says, 'In Chinese culture, the careful supplicant will make offerings in several different temples and will bargain with many different gods and spirits'.²⁵ Hans Küng also holds that Chinese folk religion is usually an entirely utilitarian piety, and people pray to those gods or saints from whom they expect the greatest understanding and eventually also the greatest advantages for themselves.²⁶

'Faith can be described as a substitute for the power of magic'.²⁷ I acknowledge that before Chinese people, who are rooted in folk-beliefs, are converted to Christianity or in the early phase of their conversion, they may continue their attitude of 'believing in any spirit who is efficacious', and may be acting on a cost-benefit analysis. However, once Christians are fully converted, they very seldom revert to Buddhism, Taoism or folk religion, but cut themselves off completely from it. Having conducted a large number of field surveys, Liang Liping also believes that after entering on a religious decision-making strategy, the religious believers who have experienced life-threatening or critical events, especially those suffering from illness, have absolutely no considerations of what sociologists of religion would call the 'costs' of the process of constructing faith, but rather manifest a total hope

24 Valerie Hansen, tr. Bao Weimin (1999), *Changing gods in medieval China, 1127-1276*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House, pp.11-12.

25 Rodney Stark et al., tr. Yang Fenggang (2003), *Acts of Faith*, p.176.

26 Hans Küng & Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, SCM Press Ltd., 1993, p. 52.

27 Max Weber, tr. Kang Le & Jian Huimin (2000), *Sociology of Religion*, Taipei: Yuanliu Publishing Co. Ltd., p.253.

and expectation,²⁸ because in the Christian view, faith mainly consists of obedience and hope.²⁹

In comparison with rural people who have no security of livelihood or medical care, the belief in Christianity of some urban dwellers who do not need to worry about where their next meal is coming from may be a way of escaping loneliness and pursuing spiritual peace, or it may show a desire to be like God in loving others as oneself, but it may very possibly be just like that of rural people, a way of attaining very 'utilitarian' or 'pragmatic' ends.

For example, Luo Weihong carried out a statistical analysis of female Christian believers in Shanghai, and found that among the various reasons for their Christian belief, there were five which applied to more than 20%, which were, in order: they themselves, or those close to them, were ill and they hoped to be cured (31.3%); through family influence they had believed from childhood (28.9%); they were looking for a spiritual home, and hoped to go to heaven after death (28.9%); they were searching for truth (23.6%); they had suffered troubles in their lives and wanted to find peace (21.9%). She also found that the main reason for these women to believe in Christianity was to be delivered from a crisis or problem that had affected their own or their family's life, including chronic illness, facing the risk of death, set-backs in life, problems at work, etc. As 31.3% of respondents were converted because of illness, 21.9% wanted relief from their troubles, and 1.3% felt lonely, making a total of 54.5%, this shows that over half the women became Christians to be delivered from personal or family problems.³⁰

From Luo Weihong's survey we can see that the principal reason given by these female Christians from Shanghai for their belief in Christ was that they thought that by believing, they or those close to them could be cured of their illness. That is to say that 31.3% believed in the hope of a miraculous healing, and the hope of a miracle was their principal reason for conversion.

Leonard Johnston believes that one precondition for the existence of any religious group is that the level of production and distribution of its welfare and services should satisfy the most basic requirements of its members.³¹ As far as voluntary organisations such as modern religious groups are concerned, this means that they must provide their members with the things for which they joined the group, otherwise there is a risk of the members losing interest and leaving the group. In general, when the members of a religious group join the organisation, they obtain certain benefits which they have long hoped for, otherwise

28 Liang Liping (2004), *The Religious Psychology of the Chinese People – A Theoretical Analysis and Practical Study of Religious Identity*, Beijing: Social Sciences Documents Press, p.198

29 Louis Dupré, tr. Fu Peirong (1989), *The Other Dimension: a Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes*, Taipei: Young Lion Cultural Enterprises, p. 37.

30 Luo Weihong (2001), 'An Analysis of Female Christian Believers in Shanghai', *Zhejiang Academic Journal*, no.3, p.126

31 Leonard Johnston, tr. Yin Jinli & Zhang Lei (1991), *Religion in Society*, Chengdu: Sichuan People's Publishing House, p.101

they would not stay, or rather they would not join in the first place. So it is obligatory for a religious group either to 'provide welfare' – to make its members believe that they can now obtain benefits, or at least that they will do so in the future – or else its supporters will disperse there and then. Although, in discussing religious groups, stating this in so many words may appear somewhat crude, or even offensive to the divinity, these religious groups in fact must 'provide' for certain needs, otherwise people will turn elsewhere.³²

Jacques Gernet has also said that it is indubitable that among ordinary people, the best reason for supporting a particular religion is the efficacy of its god(s). A religion is evaluated according to its effects.³³ The proof of the value of a religion lay in its supernatural effects. Hence the crucial importance of miracles.³⁴ If a religion is evaluated according to its effects, ordinary people had no reason to reject the new cults and rituals that the missionaries proposed to them: perhaps they would turn out to be more effective than the old ones.³⁵

What Johnstone and Gernet discuss are in fact the normal religious needs of religious believers. The rural Christians in my research inevitably also have a variety of religious needs. Whether it was for religious or psychological reasons, in Interview 2 we saw how Hu Changhua's son, who 'was always having stomach pains', went to 'all the hospitals in the village, the township, the county' and Hu Changhua's family, after every effort at finding a cure through 'superstition, burning incense' had no success, and also as a result of trying to find a cure for their son 'had no money for New Year, not even enough for dumplings' and were in severe economic difficulties; nevertheless 'after accepting Jesus Christ, he hasn't had one attack, not one!' So as far as Hu Changhua and her whole family were concerned, Jesus 'is the true God, the living God', and she had no reason not to reject the false gods who 'made a right fool out of me', and ultimately become a Christian.

Li Yiyuan says that in general there are three main functions for the existence of religion in human society, the existential, unificatory and cognitive functions. In the process of the human quest for survival, often because of technical shortcomings or lack of experience, various problems or difficulties arise, such as natural or man-made disasters, illness, injury etc. When faced with all these difficulties and setbacks, religion can give mankind some timely help, providing the courage to continue the struggle for survival. In another way, because man is a social animal, who has to live in groups, the existence of religion performs the function of holding the group together and strengthening social norms: this is quite an important aspect of the maintenance of human social life. Naturally, with the progress of culture and the spread of knowledge in human society, the existential and unificatory functions of religion gradually decline in importance because of scientific advances and improvements in law and order. At this point, the third function of religion takes on a more

32 Ibid., pp.101-102

33 Jacques Gernet, tr. Geng Sheng (1991), *China and the Christian Impact*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Press, p.123

34 Ibid., p.147

35 Ibid., p.123

important position, that is to say its role as symbol of a perfect goal and an embodiment of the meaning of life.³⁶

For Interviewees 1, 2 and 3, and other rural Christians who have experienced all sorts of difficulties and setbacks, Christianity gave them timely help, and allowed them to continue the struggle for survival. Moreover, in the later part of this study, the reader will observe that Christianity has guided their everyday life and their ethical life, and more importantly, through Christianity, they have recognised the meaning of this life and the life to come, and have constructed a complete religious meaning system. That is to say that, among rural Christians, Christianity not only performs the existential and unificatory functions but also what Li Yiyuan describes as the third function of religion, the cognitive function. For example, in Interview 3 Sun Hongyan says 'Only belief in God lasts! He can give true peace!' In Sun Hongyan's view, the meaning and value of life lies in trusting in God. This is precisely what Li Yiyuan refers to as the cognitive function of religion in revealing the meaning of life.

So why is it that people so rarely criticise the utilitarian and pragmatic nature of the belief of urban dwellers, such as those in Shanghai? Why is it that they only apply the labels 'utilitarian' and 'pragmatic' to the people of rural China, who are equally believers in Christianity? And why do they equate rural Christianity, with its belief in miracles, to folk religion in which any efficacious spirit may be worshipped?

Here we must discuss the two closely linked concepts of folk religion and the so-called 'tendency to take the form of folk belief'. Folk religion can also be called folk belief, and in itself is a neutral academic term. Hans Küng believes that folk religion refers to all the forms of religious expression – those practices, styles and attitudes – manifested among the less educated lower strata of society. Such folk religion manages without its own sacred scriptures, historical records and systematic organisation. Originally it was rooted mostly among the rural peasantry, in a milieu tied to the natural rhythm of the seasons, with the accent on New Year and harvest, birth and death. Folk religion was oriented primarily toward earthly, material needs, toward economic, physical and psychological requirements.³⁷ Julia Ching holds that Chinese popular religion includes beliefs and practices that are still part of Chinese life among ethnic Chinese communities everywhere.³⁸ There is a possibility that what lies behind folk religion is something which will apparently never disappear, and what is evidently behind these ancient and yet still contemporary religious phenomena are basic human needs: the need for protection and help, for consolation and encouragement, for an explanation and interpretation of human existence and this world.³⁹

36. Li Yiyuan (2004), *Religion and Myth*, Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, p.21

37. Hans Küng & Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, SCM Press Ltd., 1993, p.47

38. Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993, p. 205

39. Hans Küng & Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, SCM Press Ltd., 1993, p.48

Superstition, or 'feudal superstition' as it is often called, refers to low-level theistic beliefs such as fortune-telling, physiognomy and chiromancy, geomancy, witch-doctoring etc.⁴⁰ Li Shen believes that the concept of superstition current in mainland China is primarily a political and legal rather than an academic concept.⁴¹ This is because, in a specific historical period of New [post-1949] China, folk beliefs or folk religion were classified as 'superstition'. The concept of the 'folk-belief tendency' indicates that some eminent academics and theologians are continuing to use political and legal concepts to express a negative view of folk beliefs; in some people's view, folk beliefs or things with a tendency to take the form of folk beliefs are actually bad and therefore superstitious. In the Modern Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary, superstition (mixin) is defined as 'credulity towards the supernatural'.⁴² In the Dictionary of Chinese (Hanyu Cidian), it is explained as '1. Any blind belief or worship; 2. A belief in ghosts and spirits.'⁴³ Evidently, so-called 'superstition' in the Chinese-language environment is, in fact, in academic terms, what academics would define as folk belief or folk religion, or to put it another way, there are many different components mixed together in Chinese folk beliefs, including magic or witchcraft; magic is most readily described by atheists as superstition, and in addition, in a particular historical period of New China, the masses in society, along with some eminent academics, found it very easy habitually to regard many aspects of folk religion as 'feudal superstition'.

I have visited the Kowloon Tong Baptist Church in Hong Kong, and listened to their hymn-singing and preaching; the difference between the Kowloon Tong Baptists and the inland China rural church of my field survey is that the former's church building is much larger and more impressive, and has central air-conditioning in the summer, while the latter only has electric fans for use on the hottest days. The musical instruments in the former are more sophisticated and expensive, while in the latter, the singing is usually unaccompanied; the clothing and appearance of the congregation in the former are more urban, while the latter still have the traditional clothes and weather-beaten complexions of country people. The former are able to sing hymns in English while the latter can only use Chinese; the former speak Cantonese while the latter speak Henan dialect. But there is one thing the two congregations have in common, which is that they are worshipping the same God, and that God is implanted in their hearts.

In regard to the Christian churches involved in my field survey, I believe that differences in where Christians live do not mean that there is any differences in their ability to grasp the doctrines and norms of Christianity. Those who spread Christianity in the countryside truly 'preach the word with great dedication and enthusiasm';⁴⁴ they are not professionally

40 Li Shen (2006), *Theory of Religion*, vol.1, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, pp.59-60

41 Ibid., p.60.

42 *Modern Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary* (2003), Beijing: Foreign Languages Education and Research Press, p. 2081.

43 *Modern Chinese Dictionary (Xiandai Hanyu Cidian)* (1989), Beijing: Commercial Press, p.781.

44 Daniel H. Bays (2003), 'Christianity in Twentieth Century China: Situation and Prospects', in Wu Ziming & Wu Xiaoxin eds., *Christianity and Chinese Society and Culture: Proceedings of the First International Young Scholars' Symposium*, Hong Kong: Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society at Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong, pp.24-25.

employed to do so, but the level of theological education among pastors and even members of the congregation in the rural church is not as 'extremely low' as people imagine. Among some pastors and devout believers, the grasp of some aspects of theological knowledge and internalisation of biblical teachings are by no means more superficial than those of some academics doing research in religious studies. Rural Christians do not 'have only folk-religious concepts and understanding', nor is it the case that their understanding of Christianity 'cannot rise above the level of folk religion'; although rural Christianity cannot 'undertake a critique of politics, society or culture', it is by no means the case that the rural church 'can only remain bound to folk culture' and 'develop in the form of folk religion or mystical cult'.⁴⁵ The rural church in this area has independent church workers, a large and stable body of devout believers, an orthodox doctrinal system in accordance with biblical teaching, and permanent sites of activity in accordance with national law; the rural church in this area is a institutional religion in the full sense, whereas folk religion is a diffused religion;⁴⁶ the distinction between the two is obvious, so 'the tendency of Christianity towards folk religion', 'popular Christianity', 'folk-religious Christianity', 'popularised Christianity', 'the folk-belief tendency of Chinese Christianity' and other such expressions which attempt to encompass the whole of the rural Christian church in mainland China do not fit the actual situation in this area, and are therefore not entirely valid. As far as that is concerned, these scholars' conclusions cannot avoid the charge of taking the part for the whole.

In the same way that we should not refer pejoratively to farmers who have become industrial workers as 'peasant workers' or to farmers who have become entrepreneurs as 'peasant entrepreneurs', nor should we – just because these are farmers who believe in Christianity or because the church is in a rural area, or the rural church is involved in driving out devils – refer to Christian belief in rural areas as 'folk Christianity'. If we are going to do that, we might just as well make our meaning perfectly clear by openly calling it 'peasant Christianity'. According to my understanding, some ministers in the church in Hong Kong also drive out devils: should we therefore talk about the 'urban Baptist church' or the 'urban Presbyterian church'?

VIII Conclusions

1. As regards the rural churches studied in my field survey, there is no confusion between rural Christianity and folk belief. The rural church strictly adheres to the commandment not to worship idols, and makes every effort to reject folk beliefs, and to eliminate the influence on its members of folk beliefs, especially their magical elements. The boundary drawn between rural Christianity, as a salvation religion, and folk belief is perfectly clear; whether at an academic level or a practical level, the distinction between the two is obvious.

45 Liang Jialin (1999), *Challenge and Burden*, Taipei: Yage Press, p.7.

46 C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and some of their Historical Factors*, Berkeley: The Regents of the University of California, 1961, p.295.

2. As regards the rural Christian groups which I have studied, miracles were the motivation for only some of their number to enter into a religious meaning system: it is not the case that all rural Christians have come to Jesus Christ as a result of miracles. For rural Christians, miracles are a normal, everyday, objective religious desire; to pray for miracles while rejecting magic is a strategy and means for the sacralisation of rural Christianity, whereby they can ultimately form a rich and complete religious meaning system.

3. The aim of Christianity's bitter hostility to and relentless rejection of folk beliefs is not simply to overcome folk beliefs, but rather to draw a boundary between Christianity and folk belief, and to sacralise this boundary and constantly warn the group within Christianity that, surrounded by the vast expanse of folk beliefs, they must endeavour to construct their own sacred status, and become members of a divine body; this boundary is absolutely sacred and cannot be crossed.

4. The rural church as such cannot exist in isolation from the social conditions around it; Christianity, as a world civilisation, within Chinese society, cannot remain completely unconnected to traditional Chinese culture. Chinese people have always placed great importance on weddings and funerals, and have a historical tradition of using music on these occasions, while Christianity has always regarded hymn-singing as an important way of praising God. The church choir which performs Henan opera in this study is a local product of cultural integration. As Evans-Pritchard said, 'In different types of society, different types of religion both shaped, and were shaped by, other areas of social life.'⁴⁷ The significance of this case study lies in the fact that it exposes the diversity of rural Christianity in China, and thus helps the state and society to understand more completely and correctly the true situation of the contemporary rural Chinese Christian church; it will thus be of advantage to society in correctly understanding and guiding contemporary Chinese believers on to a distinctive and healthy path of religious life.

47 E.E. Evans-Pritchard, tr. Sun Shangyang (2001), *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Beijing: Commercial Press, p.141.

Appendix 1

Wang Xian'en first read out Exodus 20.4-6: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me: And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

He then began his sermon:

Which of the Ten Commandments was it that we were reading about just now? The Second Commandment. And what for do we want to read about the Second Commandment? Because it relates to us all in many different ways, and it's the easiest sin for us to commit. I'd like to talk to you, brothers and sisters, about this sin, which is so hard for everyone in the world to avoid, so easy to commit, and the most hateful to God. In the Second Commandment, God himself tells us that we must not make for ourselves idols, nor any graven image, in the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, on the earth, under the earth, or in the waters. We must not bow down before such images, or carve images and worship them. So if you disobey the commandments which God has given us, you will be cursed; but if you act in accordance with them, and obey them strictly, then God will preserve and bless you. Now what for do the people whom God has created all go and worship idols and bow down to false gods? What for do they do that? Nowadays there are so many of these idols and false gods. Why do people nowadays go and bow down to these idols? Because they know that there are plenty of these gods, and the more protection the better! Isn't that the way they think? There are specialist ones: the Stove God is the master of the house, and you can tell him about anything that's going on; if it's something major, you can tell the Lord or Lady of Heaven; if you're ill, tie a red sash on to a big willow tree and it's the Willow God, or a big poplar and it's the Poplar God, or a big elm and it's the Elm God, a big dog'll be the Dog God, a big cat'll be the Cat God, they're all Lord This or Lord That – is there not plenty of them? So if there's so many of these gods, people reckon more's better than few – that's the folly of mankind! But God is almighty: omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent – this God can protect the whole world, in every corner of the earth he will protect you. How ignorant people are! To know Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom, but not to know Jehovah, what ignorance is that!

I used to have a pal, and he even finished senior high school, he had a good job at the Grains and Cereals Office, but he left there and he didn't have a job: every day he'd be carrying a bag of books, running hither and yon, even to quite far away. When I saw him – I was friends with his brothers – he told me the truth of it. One day I ran into him and I said, What are you up to with that bag of books every day? He said, I look at folks' houses and graves and illnesses. I says, Does it work? He says, Work? This is superstition that I'm doing! Now, how do you explain the word superstition (*mixin*)? What is it? He'd

finished senior high, he explained that if you divide it into the two syllables *mi* (confused, misguided, troubled) and *xin* (belief), you can see that if someone's confused they'll believe anything. If you're not confused you won't believe, if you are you will! He'd got a point there. He said: The work I do, I make a point of looking for 'confused people', because if they're confused they'll believe me. And when do folk get confused? When someone in their family's ill, or something's gone badly wrong, they're troubled and confused. When they're confused I go and have a word with them, and they believe. Once they believe, they pay me some money – it's a nice little earner! Wherever I go they invite me to a meal, I have a bit to eat and drink and they pay me a bit of money. If I say, No, no, I don't want money, they still slip me some in a wee packet, it's a lot better than clocking on in some office! That's what 'confused belief' or superstition is. He was well aware that it didn't work, but he still went round doing it and swindling folk. So that's why Jehovah laid down the commandment that we shall not make unto ourselves graven images or worship any other god, because that's all superstition!

That's why God also said, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to any sort of image: that's what God requires of us! Some folk say, You have a hard time, you believers in Jesus! If you believe in Jesus your hands are tied! But your hands aren't tied, brothers and sisters: for example, outside there, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. The Ten Commandments are a fence, a wall, a protective circle, and you're inside, you're within the Ten Commandments; as long as you don't step beyond this boundary, Satan, who's out there, won't be able to eat you up or hurt you, however fierce he is, but if ever you step outside the circle, Satan can come and get you at any time. These Ten Commandments are the believers' protection, the protection of God's chosen people. So as long as you keep His commandments, you will be blessed, as long as you stay inside the circle, you will be blessed, and however fierce Satan is outside, he can't do ought to you. But if you go outside the circle, Satan will get you. Why are so many people these days not at peace, and run into all kinds of unforeseen troubles? Because you've gone outside the circle, you've gone outside the protection, you've crossed the protective circle that Jesus has drawn around you, so that's why you've got into difficulties. Do you understand, brothers and sisters? Some people actually complain about God, they say they've believed in Jesus for so many years, why have things gone wrong at home, why are they troubled? You've gone outside Jesus's protective circle, because if you go beyond Jesus's boundary, if you go outside the circle, that's a sin.

Now I'm going to talk about not bowing down to those idols and not serving them. What does serving them mean? If you go and have a look in the temple, right away in the corner, you'll always find an old wifie sitting there, and if you go to burn incense, she'll show you what to do. Is that not serving? And we can't serve them, because Jehovah, the Lord your God, is a jealous god. A jealous god! There's only one Jehovah, there is no god but Me,

just the one, and I am a jealous god. So if you go and worship those gods, bow down to those gods, worship those graven images, you are no longer pure, you have been spiritually promiscuous.

What I'm going to say next is the most important thing! To those that hate me, I will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. So what like is hate? I said before, we must not make graven images for ourselves, likenesses of anything in the air, on the earth, under the earth or in the water, and we mustn't bow down to them or serve them. Now I'm going to talk about people who hate Him. If you hate someone, what sort of things do you do? God has told you not to worship idols, or serve idols, so if you go off and worship and serve idols, that's hating God. And if you hate God, what'll happen to you? What'll become of you? He will visit iniquity upon you, to how many generations? Even unto the third and fourth generation. But if you turn back to Jehovah with your whole heart and mind, and keep his commandments which are written in the books of the law, then God will bless you, and all your animals and your crops will be blessed, but if you disobey these things, God will certainly visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, and isn't that a frightening prospect, brothers and sisters? So every one of us who believes in Jesus must not go and worship idols, or make graven images and carve idols; if we bow down to idols God will be displeased, because the Lord our God is a jealous god. Because we believe in Jesus, but we go and sin and disobey His commandments, well, we've sinned and we'll be cursed, but if the children in our families, our sons and daughters, our grandchildren and great-grandchildren are all cursed as well, and our livestock, our poultry, our calves, our lambs, they're innocent, just because we've sinned, we get them into trouble as well, how would you feel then, brothers and sisters? Would that be a good feeling, eh, brothers and sisters? Do we want to bring down these curses upon us, brothers and sisters? If we don't, what do we have to do? We have to keep the commandments in the books of the law, we mustn't make ourselves graven images, or go serving them. Being a Christian is a serious business, God is very strict, if you disobey those things, a curse will come down on us.

And now, them that love Me, love Me and keep My commandments, I will show My mercy to them, for a thousand generations. How great is God's love! A thousand generations! As long as you love Me and keep My commandments, I will show you My mercy, for a thousand generations. One generation believes in Jesus, and after that a thousand, ten thousand generations will be blessed for ever, will receive God's love and God's mercy. So, brothers and sisters, we must remember never ever to make idols for ourselves. This is a very serious thing: I'd like every one of us, brothers and sisters, to remember, if we keep God's commandments we will be blessed, but if we disobey God's commandments we'll be cursed, and many more generations with us.

(Taken from a sermon given by Wang Xian'en at a thanksgiving gathering in Lücun church on 27 August 2005.)

Appendix 2

- Author: That testimony you were telling me when we were talking on the way here, I thought that was really interesting!
- Hu Changhua: What? What were we saying on the way here?
- A: About worshipping false gods, worshipping idols, and finally turning to the Lord.
- Hu: Those false gods made a right fool out of me!
- A: That was really worth hearing about, I thought.
- Hu: That testimony really happened. God loves us, and the more faithful you are to him, the more He loves you, He really does!
- A: Let's talk about it again in detail, I thought it was really worth hearing.
- Hu: Talk about it again in detail? I was just saying, from three years old our lad wasn't right, he was always having stomach pains, we went through every hospital for miles around: the one in the village, the township, the county.
- A: Ah.
- Hu: None of them did him any good at all. There seemed to be a pattern to it, whenever it got to four or five o'clock he'd have an attack, and it would last for more than an hour at a time, about an hour, oh my, he'd be writhing around on the bed, twisting and turning, it was that painful, his stomach-ache. When the attacks came on it was still dark, and our cart wasn't much use, it's a hand-cart, and sometimes his dad was away from home, a woman like me, I just had to carry him in my arms to the clinic in the village, the nurse would examine him and give him a couple of pills to take. His lips were white! There was no blood in them! Completely white! And he couldn't open his eyes. When the attacks came on he'd be pouring with sweat, he'd be sweating all over, great beads of sweat. You couldn't hardly bear to look at him, and after the attack was over he'd be sick, and once he'd been sick he couldn't open his eyes, couldn't open them, and he had no energy. We took him everywhere but they couldn't cure him. They said it was epilepsy or I don't know what. We tried superstition for a cure, we burnt incense, and then they said it was because he was a maiden, a maiden's someone who's not an adult, aren't they? Then we went to the temple again, and this time they said he was a changeling from the Goddess Someone-or-other, different from ordinary children, and she'd take him back again when he reached a certain age. At any rate wherever you went they told you a different story, all they were after was your money.

- A: What's a maiden?
- Hu: It means they can't get married, you can't find a wife for them.
- A: Oh.
- Hu: If he's a maiden, and you don't give him up, when it comes time to find a bride, as soon as someone tries to broker a marriage, he'll die.
- A: Who will?
- Hu: The maiden, the child will die.
- A: Oh. You can't arrange a marriage.
- Hu: It's all superstition, that's what superstition tells you, he's a maiden changeling, he can't become an adult [i.e. lose his virginity] and whatnot.
- A: Who told you that, the hospital?
- Hu: The hospital didn't say anything about maidens, what the hospital tells you is science, isn't it?
- A: Uhuh.
- Hu: But God, He's the true God, the living God, who created mankind. A person's life or death, happiness or misfortune, are all in God's hands.
- A: So how was your second lad actually cured in the end?
- Hu: Since we accepted Jesus Christ, he hasn't had a single attack, not one!
- A: How did the cure come about? What happened?
- Hu: What happened? We went to Jiaozuo to get a CT done, at that time in Xinxiang township we didn't have a CT, the 371 Hospital in Xinxiang bought one jointly with the People's Hospital in Jiaozuo City, we went to the 371 Hospital in Xinxiang and got a letter of introduction, so when we went to get the image taken we got a discount, the machine's really quick, because we're from Xinxiang, we could get the CT done, but it didn't show anything; we went to the neurological hospital, they gave us some medicine, but it didn't help, none of them were any good! But Jesus must have chosen us, there was an old wife who told me I should believe in Jesus, I said, our old dad's still around, he's still around just now, I thought I'd have to make those superstitious offerings, I said, as soon as our dad's dead and I've made the offerings for him, I'll start believing in Jesus; our mam passed on ages ago, and at that time my father- and mother-in-law had both passed on, but I had that offering business on my mind.
- A: Uhuh.

- Hu: In the end he was constantly in hospital, we spent 1500 yuan in there, we sold all the maize we had and everything. I cried when I was awake, I cried in my sleep, you can see the size of me, when the two of us were staying in the clinic, we had to spend a whole yuan a day on food.
- A: So what was the superstitious way of healing your son?
- Hu: Just offering incense. If you just burn three sticks of incense, light three sticks, you have to give them at least five yuan. Generally we couldn't bring ourselves to give them five yuan, we thought, well, children are always getting ill! When they light the incense for you, they say who's who and what's wrong with them and so on. They'll always tell you some story. You've never gone to evil spirits for healing? You've never seen what goes on?
- A: [blank]
- Hu: At the very least, you kowtow and they kowtow. Then he [the priest or medium] acts like he's possessed, shuts his eyes, recites spells, says 'He's coming, he's coming' and then starts the healing. That's what they do,
- A: And you used to go up the mountain [to a temple]? You were always going?
- Hu: Yunmeng Mountain, Xunxian Mountain, I'd stay there for three or four nights at a time.
- A: Why did you go up the mountain?
- Hu: Our second lad was very ill, wasn't he?
- A: Who told you to go up the mountain?
- Hu: The old wives. The old wife who burnt the incense.
- A: A witch?
- Hu: Uhuh, the witch said, gang up the mountain, if you gang up the mountain your child will be all right. When I was up the mountain with the lad, the rats in that cave were always running over your head, and you had to stay there night after night. Thank the Lord! Now when you stay in the church, they have mattresses, as comfy as anything. I've really had a hard time of it. When you get up the mountain, you go through this gate and make a donation, ten yuan, for them to put up a plaque for you, they're always getting money out of you, but now? You can give whatever offering you want. Thank God! God's care and protection is helping you all the time, that's a lot better than those false gods in the temples! In those days our offering trays ... I was better than anyone at folding paper

ingots or making wreaths. I don't have anything to do with that business nowadays.

A: Afterwards you stopped going up the mountain?

Hu: Our lad's illness, we tried qigong, you could try witchcraft, some said he was a maiden changeling, others reckoned his horoscope, whatever you did he didn't get better, he kept having the attacks.

A: Oh.

Hu: You tell me, should I have kept going? After he left the clinic, they had 1500 yuan off me, we didn't even have the money for New Year, not even for New Year dumplings.

A: So you could say you'd been worshipping false gods for a good ten years?

Hu: Ten years is about right, at any rate on the anniversary of our mam's death, I had a paper house made for her and ingots and stuff [to be burnt].

A: So it all made your family poor?

Hu: It had me running round in circles. If it hadn't been for that, the money I made would have kept us all right.

A: You said that when you worshipped false gods then, you gave someone a whole pig's head. Did they tell you to do that?

Hu: It wasn't a whole pig's head, it was a cut of meat off a pig's head. You can't give them just a little bit, just a wee lump, can you?

A: Ah.

Hu: They don't let you cut it with a knife.

A: You have to tear a piece off?

Hu: That's right, and the cut has to be just the right size. They make you offer it up, offer it in five bowls, that's five different dishes, you can't get away with anything. And cigarettes, all in multiple packs.

A: That's a mighty lot of cigarettes!

Hu: Uhuh, multiple packs. And you put whole bottles of liquor there, part of the incense offering. You have to give whatever the witch-doctor says, we don't know what to do, you don't know what to do, do you? When you don't know, you just do whatever he tells you, after all it's to make our lad's illness better.

A: Uhuh.

- Hu: At the end, the money, he says, Just give some incense money. You don't take the incense there with you, you burn a couple of sticks of their incense. If you take your own incense, he's going to get annoyed, because he's doing it to get the money, that's obvious, isn't it?
- A: Uhuh.
- Hu: When you go to his house, there's always a big bundle of incense-sticks on the table, and if you pay the money it's not just two or three yuan. If our family hadn't worshipped idols those first years, I can guarantee we'd be a lot better off now.
- A: That cut of meat, you had to cut it off by tearing it?
- Hu: Uhuh, the size of the piece doesn't matter, that's what he said, but still it has to be more than one slice, that's the least it can be.
- A: Oh.
- Hu: A roast chicken has to be a whole one, doesn't it?
- A: A whole chicken?
- Hu: If it's beef you can give a piece, but you can't get away with that for a roast chicken, you can't just give pieces.
- A: You leave it all there?
- Hu: You just turn it face down and leave it. Even the basket, along with the buns and the bowls, they must be worth something, haha!
- A: You must have gone back many a time, since it didn't work.
- Hu: Well, of course. Every time your child is in pain, you try a different place, one day we'd go here, the next day we'd go there. That's how these evil spirits do things, that's how those folk make their fortunes, he's built two big houses in the last few years. Because I'm not the only one who's been to him, isn't that right? They all go rushing off there at the drop of a hat.
- A: There are still a lot of families that believe in it, you mean?
- Hu: There still aren't many people who believe in Jesus. Everybody says it [superstition] works, they all believe in these gods, there are plenty of folk who talk it up, but it's Jesus who's the true God; but by the time the people of this world know that Jesus is the true God, it'll be far too late. It's like Noah building the ark, once the ark was built, lo and behold, after the flood came everybody was struggling to get on board the boat, but it was no good, the time had come.
- A: So it was through finding a cure for your second boy's illness that you realised God was the true God?

Hu: That's right, it was through finding a cure for him that I came to know the true God. At any rate when I worshipped false gods in those days I was right sincere, and now I believe in the true God I'm the same. What you were saying, there really is a God, really, Jesus is almighty.

A: Now, since you've believed, you've completely broken off any connection with all that?

Hu: After you believe, the incense, all that false stuff in your house, you have to chuck it all out, of course I've broken off with it.

A: Broken off completely? Haven't you?

Hu: Yes.

(Taken from a recorded interview with Hu Changhua during the thanksgiving gathering at Lücun church on 18 August 2005)

A Minority amongst a minority: an investigation into the situation of [Protestant] Christianity in Southern Gansu

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I Genesis of investigation and Commencement of Research

The Southern Gansu region denotes the South Gansu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, which is broadly situated in the geographical centre of the map of China, i.e. the south western part of Gansu province. The area is situated on the north eastern edge of the Qinghai-Xizang [Tibetan] Plateau, adjoining Qinlong 秦隴 to the east, the Tibetan district of Guoluo 果洛 to the west, the Tibetan district of Aba 阿壩 in Sichuan province to the south and the Linxia 臨夏 Hui [Muslim] Autonomous Region to the north. Within the region there is 1 city – Hezuo 合作 – 7 counties, 111 townships, along with four pastoral areas [...]. Of the counties, Diebu mainly produces timber; Lintan hosts a military camp and specialises in farming and cattle-rearing; Zhouqu also specialises in farming. Historically, the central plateau area has served as an important link between Qinghai, Tibet and northern Sichuan, and has been called the "China-Tibet corridor". From the earliest times of human settlement right up to the Ming and Qing dynasties, more than a dozen famous ancient roads ran through this corridor.⁴⁸ Throughout the ages, the Chinese and Tibetan peoples used these roads to carry on their "trade in tea and horses". Later, an American who devoted himself to Christian missionary work in southern Gansu described

⁴⁸ For more details see a Gazetteer of the Southern Gansu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, 甘南藏族自治州志, (Minzu Chuanshe, Beijing: 1999), pp. 650-653

it as the "Gateway to Tibet".⁴⁹ It was precisely due to its special geographical location and its usefulness from the point of view of communications that the southern Gansu region became an arena of rivalry in all kinds of military, political and economic affairs. It is a region inhabited by people of many races and religions⁵⁰; and area in which Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and Daoists all live alongside each other and intermingle with each other.⁵¹ It is a region where people who adhere to a religious faith form a large proportion of the total population. In contrast with the rest of China, it can be described as an "area of faith" which is both multi-cultural and multi-religious.

It was precisely because of the special nature of the region of southern Gansu, with its particular characteristic of plural cultures and nationalities, and the complexity of its different religions, that we began to take an interest in it. How was it possible that the Christian faith had been able to survive in such a remote, border region as southern Gansu, in an environment in which such totally different religions as Buddhism, Islam and popular beliefs had already taken root and been very well established for so long?⁵² How was it progressing in such an environment?

However, when we began to read the existing literature on the subject, and tried to understand the connection between Christianity and this mysterious region, we discovered that, in contrast with the bustle and excitement of research into [missionary work] in the south-western provinces of China, research into Christian missionary work in north-western China was, on the contrary, cold, cheerless and very thin on the ground. As far as relations between Christianity and the minority nationalities were concerned, specialist discussion was almost entirely non-existent. Research on Christianity in southern Gansu up until now, consists of the officially published documentation on the subject, two nearly identical and brief articles written by the same author and both published recently in the same periodical⁵³ [...] together with a few fragmentary, sketched outlines published in local county magazines. No further material has been found. In particular, as far as the situation of Christianity in the 1990s and beyond is concerned, no one has made any reference to this and nothing whatsoever has been written about it. It would seem, in fact,

49 In 2002, the total population was 664,300, of whom 331,800 were Tibetans (49.95%), 286,500 were Han Chinese (43.13%), 43,700 were Hui (6.58%), with Tu and Salar ethnic groups making up 2300 (3.5%). The population per square kilometre was 14.76 people. See *Southern Gansu in the last fifty years*, 干南五十年, (Neibu chubanshe, 2003), p. 84

50 The Southern Gansu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is designated as such because of the predominant Tibetan ethnicity. Generally speaking, the Tibetans and the Tu are believers in Buddhism, the Hui and the Salar are believers in Islam, while the Han are largely believers in Chinese Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity and folk religion. [...] One local official of Religious Affairs put it this way, Southern Gansu is made up of two 60%, The first 60% is the percentage of ethnic nationalities (*shaoshu minzu*); the second is that the number of religious believers as a percentage of the overall population.

51 Chen Shengbai 陳聲柏, 'The Spread of Christianity in Modern Gannan' 近代甘南地區基督教的傳播 in *Lanzhou Daxue Xuebao*, 蘭州大學學報, 2007.1, pp. 58-64

52 Chen Gailing 陳改玲, 'The missionary activities of foreign missionaries in modern Gannan', 外國傳教士近代來甘南的傳播活動 in *Gansu Gaoshi Xuebao*, 甘肅高師學報, 2002.3 pp. 51-53; and *idem.*, 'Another look at the missionary activities of foreign missionaries in modern Gannan', 再論外國傳教士近代來甘南的傳播活動 in *Gansu Gaoshi Xuebao*, 2005.1, pp. 52-53

53 Li Xiangping 李向平, 'Site as the centre of a space for religious activity - changes within the Chinese "religious system" 場所為中心的宗教活動空間 - 變遷中的中國"宗教制度" in *Daofeng*, 道風, 2007.26

as though nothing had happened during this period or, if anything has happened, it is unworthy of interest. As a result, our research has had to start with the most basic work, that is to say, by beginning our investigation *in situ*.

The point of departure for our investigation was in the churches themselves, utilising the concept of 'site' 場所 as a locus within an active religious space, as expounded by Professor Li Xiangping.⁵⁴ In our own work, we decided to use the concept of 'church' as our starting point. However 'church' does not just mean churches: it was just that in the southern Gansu region, church buildings were the most prominent external sign of Christianity. Within the church building one can witness the full gamut of church activities. [...] So the church became the central element of our description of Christianity in southern Gansu. On the one hand, it is through the institution of the church that the Christian believers carry on the life of the faith; on the other hand, it is also through the institution of the church that the government is able to implement control. The questions we asked ourselves could be expressed as follows: what did the Christian church offer to its members in southern Gansu?⁵⁵ What was the relationship like between the Christian church and the local government? The content of the text that follows concentrates mainly on describing and analysing the situation from these two points of view.

II Christianity in the Southern Region of Gansu

[Protestant] Christianity reached Southern Gansu with the arrival of Christian missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century, and continued to do so during the late Qing and Republican periods. It suffered persecution at the hands of politicians as a consequence of misguided policies towards religion during the period of national reconstruction. This continued right up until the time of the 11th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party [in 1977], when the Party and national government introduced the policy of freedom of religion. From then on, local government departments for the administration of religion constantly introduced new policies and guidelines. These gradually led to the resumption of normal religious activities, handed back church property and enabled some churches and centres for religious activities to reopen. By the end of 1990, Christian churches had been re-opened in three locations and nine new centres for religious activities had been set up. In Lintan there were 1,757 Christian believers and 31 religious personnel (comprising one pastor, one teacher, six elders and 23 persons holding executive positions). In addition, there were 2,006 religious believers in the districts of Xiahe, Zhuoni, Zhouqu and Diebu,

54 Of course, the social institution of the church does not only have a connection with believers, but also possesses external links to non believers (and believers of other faiths). However within Gannan, the 'minority' nature of Christianity means that it doesn't have much capability or capacity, and during the investigations there was seemingly no mention of social service or social benefit.

55 It is generally thought that 'indigenisation' can resolve such issues. However indigenisation needs to be strengthened in village communities, while in the cities such as provincial capitals, difference needs to be emphasised – Christianity acts as a different, Western cultural disposition. What does 'indigenisation' mean in Southern Gansu? To make [Christian] belief more of which of the following: Confucian, Buddhist, Muslim or popular? Or a *mélange* of all five? At the same time, [indigenisation] touches all the religions differently including the nature of religious identity and mutual sympathy. This is a highly complex issue.

who had continued to take part in religious activities and who had, on their own initiative, re-opened one church and 26 centres for religious activities [...].

By the end of 2006, in the whole region of southern Gansu, the number of Christian believers had increased to 5,000. [...] Up to now, in the entire region of southern Gansu, only three churches and seven centres for religious activities have been [officially] opened and those are all in the Lintan district. The three churches are located at Chengguan 城關 (opened in 1985), Xincheng 新城 (opened in 1987) and Yelu 業路 (opened in 1990), while the centres for religious activities are at Chubu 初布 (also known as Shubu 術布), Shimen 石門, Biandu 扁都, Yeliguan 冶力關, Xinbao 新堡, Chenqi 陳旗 and Sancha 三岔. In the county as a whole, then, there are about 2,500 Christians, twenty-five of whom are religious personnel.

From 1980 onwards as, one after another, three churches in Lintan County were reopened, local branches of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council were also established. [...] These jointly took the initiative in bridging the gap between the Christians and the Bureau for Religious Affairs. [...] Regulatory committees were also set up in each of the churches and the members of those committees are elected by the entire church membership. As an example, the church in Chengguan has a committee of six members, comprising one or more teachers, elders and executive post holders. [...] Religious personnel in the churches [...] are all elected by the whole body of the faithful and remain in office for an indefinite period. Should any personnel be found guilty of a serious crime, s/he is removed from office. Should any other major incident occur in any of the churches, it is resolved by the regulatory committee. In the event of any disagreement or friction between individual members of the committee, other members try to mediate between them and do their utmost to avoid any clash of opinion. Should there be a lack of clarity as to the interpretation of church teachings, this should be corrected by religious personnel. [...] As to relations between the churches, and between the churches and the activity centres, these are all independent of each other and there is no organisational link between them.

III What does Christianity in the Southern Gansu Region Have to Offer its Adherents?

(1) Presiding over Religious Services and Meetings

These matters are the church's most important responsibility. Where there is a religious official who can preach a sermon, a sermon will be preached, and if there is someone who can preside over a meeting, a meeting will take place. (That is the way it is, because there is a shortage of religious personnel of a sufficiently high standard.) A big religious service takes place in the churches every Sunday. The number of persons who attend the services

varies from church to church. The church at Chengguan generally has a congregation of between sixty and seventy people. The members of Xincheng church are widely scattered, and live mainly in farming villages, so that the congregation generally comprises only ten to twenty persons, and sometimes fewer than that. Members of the Yelu church live close together, so the congregation generally comprises thirty or forty people. Even fewer people attend the less important church services. On one particular Sunday, when visitors were invited to come along and see for themselves what went on at the Chengguan church, the number of congregants was discovered to be in the region of about 120 people, though this would not have happened on a day when the weather was hotter. Also, this event coincided with a day when the churches at Lintan and in Chengguan township were hosting an annual goods-exchange bazaar, when many believers who were busy shopping also took the opportunity to pay a visit to the church. Our observations suggest that those who attend church services are predominantly elderly men, women and children. Few young men are to be seen. Many young men go elsewhere to work and are unable to attend regularly. According to what one hears, at the end of the year, when the young men return home, church attendance increases. The main activities at church are singing hymns, saying prayers and preaching (or listening to) sermons. Services are held from 11 am until 2 pm.

The churches and the larger meeting points also hold a joint meeting every three or four weeks. Taking the most recent meeting that took place at the Chengguan church during the last 'golden week' of the May holidays as an example, over 600 people attended. Of those who took part, over 200 came from Lintan district, while over 300 people came from other parts of the county (including a few areas in outlying districts and even a few from as far away as Lanzhou). Apart from activities similar to those that take place on Sundays, qualified clergymen may also be invited to come along to preach special sermons. On such occasions, religious services usually take place continuously every day throughout the seven day period, from eight o'clock in the morning right up until eight in the evening. Also, those who participate in such meetings are expected to bring gifts with them. The church then keeps a record of everyone's gift in a book which is open to public view.

During religious services or meetings, if there are members who are experiencing difficulty or need help – if any are sick or have problems to contend with – then religious personnel will help them to pray.

In the southern Gansu region, in addition to normal religious services and meetings, there are two other important sacred activities that take place, namely ceremonies of baptism and communion. Baptism in the form of either partial or total immersion is usually administered after the end of a major service. Communion usually takes place [only] at Christmas time, and comprises both the partaking of a wafer of bread and the drinking of wine (though a freshly boiled, wine-like fruit juice is usually used as a substitute).

As far as the Christians in southern Gansu are concerned, the main religious festivals are on Christmas Day and on Easter Sunday. At Easter time, however, only a small number of believers from a minority of districts attend.

(2) Controlling the Churches' Financial Income:

Generally speaking, the churches do not apportion the burden of contributing to administrative expenses among ordinary church members. Their income derives mainly from the gifts which members donate and from other financial resources. For example, the Chengguan church receives rental from its courtyard areas and from shops. As far as gifts are concerned, the main gifts are donated at Christmas and when [special] meetings are held. The amounts given vary from 5 to 200 yuan [between £0.50 and £20]. Individuals are free to decide whether to bring gifts or not, and the amount of money to donate. The Christians in Lintan generally all come from farms and their financial circumstances are not good, so the amounts they donate are fairly small. The donations received at Christmas time usually add up to several thousand yuan. While the relevant departments of the Government and Party take an interest in the growth of the churches, they never provide them with any financial support.

Money is mainly spent on the following few items. Large items of expenditure, for example repairs to church buildings, are mainly covered by the *liang hui* [China Christian Council and Three Self Patriotic Movement]. When repairs were being undertaken at the Xincheng and Yelu churches, the *liang hui* had to subsidize the work, and the cost of doing so was relatively high. Assistance for poverty-stricken church members is also given. If, for example, there is a church member who is taken ill and has no option but to go to hospital but cannot afford to pay the bill, then the church will come to hear of it and will try to take appropriate action. Where there are church members living in straitened circumstances, the *liang hui* may give them anything from one to two hundred yuan [between £10 and £20] to ensure that they have enough to live on. Another cost follows funeral services for the deceased. When a church member dies, whether it is in Chengguan or out in the countryside, no matter whether the deceased party is an elder or just an ordinary church member, a member of the deceased's family only has to ask a member of the *liang hui* for a religious service to be held and that person will straightaway be sent a gift of 30 yuan [£3] in cash and a card. Daily expenditures for the churches include the cost of water, electricity and basic maintenance, plus the wages of a doorkeeper. In addition, a small amount of money is spent on hospitality expenses, which are incurred mainly to provide hospitality to clergymen and elders who are invited to come and preach sermons.

All contributions made to the churches by their members may be made public. As far as expenses are concerned, details of these used to be published by the Chengguan church, but, during the past few years, because of the death of the elder concerned, there have been so many different financial managers one after another that, during the past few years, no details have been made public. Although no figures have been published, however, the

church has been very conscientious in the way that it has spent money, and any expenses in excess of 20 yuan have to be unanimously approved by the management committee as a whole. Questioned about this, individual church members said that they considered that, although no details had been published, they believed that no money had been wasted, because, in the presence of God, the elders were incapable of spending money extravagantly.

(3) Managing religious affairs

Lintan district and even the whole region of southern Gansu comprises many different races and many different religious areas, and it is only too easy for contradictions and squabbles to break out between members of the different religions. This has become a serious problem which the religious bodies need to deal with. For example, in some villages in southern Gansu, there are working-class people who call Christianity a "foreign religion" 洋教 or "a foreigners' religion" 洋人教, and always adopt a discriminatory attitude when dealing with Christian believers.⁵⁶ This has reached the point where they sometimes force Christians to participate in such activities as kowtowing and burning incense [at temples], or stop cattle or sheep belonging to Christian believers from grazing on a mountain slope, or prevent the Christians from drinking the water [from the village well], and other similar, life threatening activities. In such circumstances, the Christian church may react by taking the matter up with the Bureau for Nationalities in the hope that it or the Bureau for Religious Affairs will act as a mediator. However, if there is no prospect of mediation, the churches have no alternative but to counsel the Christians to be patient. From a Christian point of view, it is contrary to Christian principles to get involved in a quarrel with other people. Moreover, in Lintan district, and indeed in the whole of southern Gansu, Christians are in a small minority, and being in dispute with or antagonistic towards non-Christians in such an area would not be in the best interests of either the Christian religion or its followers.

(4) Harmonization of internal and external relations

With Southern Gansu being a region in which there are many different religions living side by side, the Protestant churches are in a position in which they have to relate to other religions. These constitute its external relationships. At the same time, the Christian religion is constituted of different denominations and different churches, which constitute its internal relations.

[Let us first consider] its external relationships. As seen from the perspective of Party and government organs for religious management in Lintan county, the relations of the churches with Islam, Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism are quite harmonious. In our conversations with officials belonging to the Islamic religion and both forms of Buddhism, respectively,

56 'In 1957 the provincial Christian Council resolved that they would not evangelise in minority ethnic areas' (*Gazetteer of the Southern Gansu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture*, p. 1732).

all were in unanimous agreement on this point. They also took the view that all of the different religions had mutual respect for each other, and no one expressed any opinion that was other than favourably disposed towards solidarity between all the religions and all the ethnic nationalities concerned. When clergy of the different religions contacted each other, they were always open with each other, taking the view that if at any time they should be deceitful in their dealings with each other, then people might in future come to hold their religion in disrepute, so they never behave in that way. When Christian clergy expressed such opinions, they expressed them even more strongly. In Lintan district, whenever a religious body holds a celebration, they always invite officials from the other religions to come and join in. When the Muslims held celebrations to mark the opening of a new mosque, Christians were invited to take part and send representatives to attend. When, in turn, the Christians celebrated the opening of their new church at Chengguan in 1996, they invited Muslim officials to come along and join the festivities.

Secondly, [we should consider] the matter of internal relations, i.e. relations between Christians of different denominations and between local churches. There is a clearly defined relationship between the Chengguan church and the other two churches in the same county, namely Xincheng and Yelu. The elders [of the Chengguan church] sometimes go down to undertake missionary work and also to attend meetings [at the other churches]. Apart from the relatively frequent contacts between the church in Lintan County and Christians in the neighbouring counties of Min and Tan, contacts with the Christians in other counties do not occur very often. Pastor Zhou at the Min County church and vice-chairman of the provincial Three Self Patriotic Committee, is invariably polite in inviting Christians from Lintan to attend meetings there. In these cases Lintan will send delegates to participate. In the same way, when the church in Lintan is holding a meeting, it will send an invitation to the church in Min 岷 County to participate, and people from that church come along and attend. Apart from all that, Christians in Zhang 漳 County, which adjoins southern Gansu province, also have a close relationship with the Christians in Lintan district, and come and take part in meetings in Lintan. In Yangba 羊巴, Zhuoni 卓尼 County, which is where Christianity in southern Gansu had its origin but where there is currently no open church, whenever the local Christians hold a meeting the Christians from all the churches in Lintan district go along too.

We heard that the TSPM committees in the various districts act independently in the manner in which they run the activities of the churches and that they do not interfere in religious matters. It is only when large meetings are in progress that they sometimes send delegates to participate. In every district, all TSPM committees regard running the churches well as a matter of priority and do not concern themselves with the affairs of the churches in other parts of the country. As they see it, it is impermissible for evangelists to depend on outsiders for assistance. [...]

IV What are relations like between the Christian church and the Government in Southern Gansu?

With religions in our country developing under the supervision of the government, what sort of changes will emerge in the Christian religion, existing as it does in a racial minority region and in a plural and multi-faith culture? As things stand at present, religious issues invariably get mixed with racial issues. Upholding racial solidarity and regional stability can inadvertently clash with guaranteeing freedom of religion, so when it comes to undertaking the supervision of Christianity, which policies, methods or tactics can the local government best adopt? The specifics of the situation are for the government and the church to work out in collaboration with each other.

In fact, as far as the supervision of religion is concerned, it is for the United Front Work Department to take charge of policies and principles. At the county level, it is up to the local Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs 民族宗教局 to put the policies and principles into practice. We understand that in Lintan, the only region in southern Gansu where Christianity has flourished, religious policies have been implemented fairly well. In the other counties within the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Southern Gansu, the predominant – indeed, virtually the only – mass religion is Tibetan Buddhism. However, Lintan is a multi-racial and multi-religious county with a history of pluralism and a complexity of problems as far as the different religious faiths are concerned. If religious policy had not been implemented properly, this would have been detrimental to the building up of a harmonious society. Maintaining religious stability is part of the process of maintaining stability within society.

It is for this reason that, in the wake of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress [in 1978], successive local officials in Lintan gave the highest priority to religious work, frequently conducting supervisory investigations. It was taken very seriously, both from an ideological and a practical point of view. As far as the government departments responsible for the administration of religion were concerned, they did their utmost to tackle situations before things got out of hand. In the first place, they adopted a sympathetic attitude to each religion. The People's Congress and the People's Consultative Committees both included representatives from each of the religions among their ranks. The State Administration for Religious Affairs and the local Religious Affairs Bureau regularly adopted a sympathetic approach, understand the situation, and resolved problems promptly so as to strengthen solidarity. The next step was to place a greater emphasis on propaganda work devoted to religious policies. Dissemination of religious policies and education was conducted at county and township level, among the different [ethnic] nationalities and religions, with the object of instilling the policies deeply into people's minds. Education is based on 'three never-abandons' (the Han people will never abandon the minority nationalities, the nationalities will never abandon the Han people and the nationalities will never abandon each other). This form of education requires the nationalities to respect each

other, intensify solidarity between them and honour each other's beliefs. At the present time, mutual respect does exist between the different nationalities and religions and there have been no signs of any discrimination between them.

At the same time, attention was paid to the strengthening the links between the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs and the various religious associations themselves. The Bureau would invite the more senior levels of religious people to discussion meetings and cups of tea, sending out circulars reporting on trends in religious developments. Each religion was invited to give comments and recommendations. Thoughts would be exchanged, emotions and knowledge shared. Whenever a religion had a festival to celebrate, the Bureau would send greetings and good wishes, ensuring that its United Front duties were handled properly. In May 2006, for example, when the Chengguan church held a meeting, the chair of the Lintan County Bureau for Religious Affairs and the leader of the local United Front Work Department jointly attended the meeting to convey their greetings and congratulations.

Finally, Lintan County also took a pragmatic stance on the question of opening centres for religious activity. There was a concrete policy that where it was possible to open up centres for religious activities then they should be opened, for the convenience of the masses. After the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress, the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs restored [religious] buildings and returned land to its rightful owners so as to enable the faithful to resume their normal religious activities. The process of restoration proceeded quite well, so that the needs of the religious faithful were provided for. Because of this, the mass of religious believers were extremely satisfied with what had been accomplished. Under the supervision of the Party-Government, each religion is able to conform to national policy. Through positive links with the government they are resolving any problems which confront them.

Under this policy of relatively relaxed religious freedom, the management of Christianity in Lintan County encouraged the guiding principles of self governance and self support. Firstly, churches were not required to submit financial reports to the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau. The Bureau did conduct periodic investigations to ensure the churches were not receiving funds from outside. At the same time, they frequently stressed that financial affairs should be made public, and strengthened the [account] examination systems. In terms of regulating religious personnel, the Bureau only managed the personnel in the *liang hui* while churches were free to choose their own elders and leaders. On top of this, the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs routinely investigated church activities, paying attention to whether the Regulations on Religious Affairs 宗教事務條例 (before March, 2005, these were known as Regulations for Administering Religious Activities and Sites 宗教活動場所管理條例) were being adhered to in relation to education, property, handling work matters, improving management systems and so forth. Investigations of whether or not churches' income had connections with abroad, whether there were connections with

outside evangelists, whether there was any underground evangelisation, and investigations of whether the Three Self personnel were implementing the three self principles were also conducted.

From the point of view of the State-Party administration, the churches are basically required to respect national policy, to communicate with government departments and organisations and jointly resolve internal issues. Their main tasks are as follows:

Firstly, they are [only] to open churches and meeting points on the basis of respective government policy. Following the third plenum of the 11th National Congress, the responsible people in the churches in Lintan County have always sought written permission from the relevant government departments before initiating [any kind of] Christian activity. Under valuable leadership from the government departments since the 1980s, the Lintan churches and meeting points have succeeded in opening. Having given permission, the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs has taken step to ascertain the status of Christian property. Since 1958, the old sites of the Christian churches had been used by various work units. The County Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs began undertaking ideological work 思想工作 with these work units, promulgating the way of justice, and instructing them on national religious policy. In the work units gradually began returning some of the property, and as a result today's Chengguan church was reopened. From this perspective, the implementation [of government policy] by the Lintan County Bureau was exceedingly good. From the point of view of religious believers wanting to conduct religious activities they still would like further churches to be opened, the upgrading of meeting points to full churches and the opening of more churches in other parts of Southern Gansu.

Secondly, the cooperation of government religious administrative departments with the religions has created a stable society. As far as responsible figures among the religions are concerned, whatever policy is instructed by the government will be implemented in the churches. The churches have never caused given the government trouble, never incited difficulties. As a result, the relations between government departments and the church are very good, and County Party and government officials have confidence in local Christian church [leaders].

Thirdly, [the churches] report on relevant religious activities to the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs. For example, relatively remote rural areas sometimes contain non-Christians or adherents of other religions who sometimes compel Christians to engage in superstitious activities 迷信活動 (activities like kowtowing or burning incense at temples is considered by Christians to be superstitious), or prevent a Christian's cattle or sheep from grazing or using water sources. In these cases, the churches will report to the Bureau for Religious Affairs. In another case about three or four years ago, the churches wanted to gather altogether for a meeting and submitted a request to the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs.

Following ratification they were allowed to hold the meeting, if it had not been ratified it would have to have been postponed.

V Analysis of Problems

(1) Problems prior to the re-opening of churches

In fact, the situation is not totally the same throughout the southern Gansu region as it is in Lintan County. Approximately 2,500 Christians who live in the counties and towns outside of Lintan still belong to unregistered churches. How did this situation come about? This is a problem that confronts both the Christian churches and the government's religious administration departments:

a. Reasons why churches have yet to be reopened: resistance from local people

Why are the Christians – other than those in the towns and rural districts of Lintan – unable to re-open their churches? According to a leading person in the Bureau for Religious Affairs there have always been Christians in the southern Gansu region. However, southern Gansu as a whole is a Tibetan Minority Autonomous Prefecture where the faith of the population is mostly Tibetan Buddhism and in such a region it is inappropriate to propagate or promote Christianity.¹⁰

Looking at the situation from the viewpoint of historical progress and present circumstances, the resentment of the local masses towards Christianity, especially amongst the Tibetan minority people, is quite considerable. They do not want Christianity to flourish among their own people. In fact, the spread of Christianity in Tibetan minority regions has caused friction and a lack of harmony between the minorities. A leading person in the Bureau for Religious Affairs whom we interviewed gave two examples: before the creation of New China [in 1949], there was a Christian church in a certain place in southern Gansu which, although it had not been granted permission to re-open, was nevertheless used by the Christians for the purpose of holding religious services. This gave rise to several clashes between local Tibetans and Christians (who were mostly Han Chinese). As a result, the Tibetans would not allow the Christians to hold any more services. In another example, during the 1970s and 80s, in a forest area in another part of southern Gansu, there were some Christians among a group of lumberjacks who had migrated into the area from elsewhere. Before long, there were masses of Christians in a village in the area, and the rest of the local population refused to allow the Christians to drink the village water. Elsewhere in southern Gansu there were other cases of villagers preventing Christians from drinking village drinking water. They would not even allow their cattle or sheep to graze on the mountains. According to this same leading official, the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs in the whole Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture decided, as a matter of prudence, a

mark of respect for the minority peoples and to maintain social solidarity, that permission to open new churches would not be granted.

The leading official explained that it is only in Lintan County that churches have been re-opened because Lintan is a county in which the Han people predominate. In fact, in the county as a whole, Han people form 70% of the total population, which is why churches were re-opened there. On the other hand, in the districts of Zhuoni, Luqu, Maqu and Xiahe, it is Tibetan nationality people who predominate: in these districts they form over 70% of the total population. There were Christians in these districts during the Nationalist period [prior to 1949] and Christians still form a minority of the population there, but in order to avoid clashes between the different minorities, for the time being no churches have been permitted to re-open.

b. How does the government react when Christians ask for churches to be re-opened?

According to the same leading official, some Christian believers in rural districts and towns in which no churches have yet been re-opened have asked for this to be done. A minority of Christians have even appealed negative rulings and brought not a little pressure to bear on the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs. In reality, the crux of this issue is that the principle of the policy of religious belief and the practical implementation of this policy are mutually exclusive. As far as the religious policy is concerned, all Chinese citizens have the right to freedom of religious belief. Theoretically, therefore, as long as there are people in a particular district who belong to a particular religion, that religion should be open there. However, in the southern Gansu region, if a church were to be allowed to open this could give rise to clashes between the Christians and the masses which belong to the Tibetan nationality.

In order to avoid such clashes between the two sides, the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs has relied mostly on the tactics of persuasion, trying to persuade Christians, where possible, to meet together at home, so as to avoid causing a loss of face. As one leading official saw it, at least holding a religious service at home is a way of holding a religious service. In the same way, he also considered that, theoretically speaking, Chinese people who believe in Christianity are completely free and should in no way be prevented from conducting services. At the same time, however, every effort should be made to discourage Tibetans from adopting Christianity, because, if that were to happen, it might lead to clashes between the different nationalities. During the course of our interview, while the leading official repeatedly stressed that the tactics of persuasion might be contrary to the policy of religious freedom, he maintained that, in an area like southern Gansu in which the relations between the different minority peoples was so complex, the practical work of the Bureau could not be any different from the way it was, and no better way of dealing with the situation had yet been found.

As far as the matter of reopening Christian churches and centres for activity is concerned, as has been stated already, the departments for religious administration have been very cautious. As the leading official saw the situation, where conflicts do take place at the present time they are clashes between individuals of religious faith who belong to two different religious groups [rather than clashes between religions]. The government is able to handle that kind of situation. However, if one day the government were to give approval for the churches to reopen, and if, subsequently, conflicts broke out as a result of that decision, then both sides might seek government support and the government might then become the leading figure in the conflict. In that case the work of the government administrative departments for religion might be jeopardised. So, at the present time, it is a question of doing one's utmost to maintain the status quo and withholding permission for churches to be opened. It is also necessary to have more discussions on policy, carry out more propaganda work and lead more from the front. Apart from all that, there is nothing else that can be done. This is a particular situation that applies only to areas where ethnic nationalities predominate. Such things could not happen in the Han nationality regions of China.

c. Problems arising from the laws and regulations relating to the control of religion and their practical implementation.

As far as the laws of the land are concerned, all the ethnic nationalities are equal, all religions are equal and all citizens have the right to freedom of religious belief. In the present circumstances, however, the task of implementing these laws is much more complicated, and the protection of these rights is not easy. As far as actual cases and circumstances are concerned, the provisions of some laws and the actual situations encountered can be at loggerheads with each other. The churches in the southern Gansu region are one such example. According to the provisions of the law, this issue can be easily resolved, and the churches ought to be opened. However, if one takes into account the reality of the numbers of ethnic nationalities and the number of religions in the southern Gansu region, and considers the actual result of maintaining solidarity and avoiding conflict between different ethnicities, and if you add to those considerations the arguments put forward earlier in this report, then the refusal, for the time being, to permit the opening of the churches is the correct decision. In addition, in it is sometimes difficult to proceed in accordance with the law. The new Regulations of Religious Affairs which came into effect in March 2005, and the stipulations of Approval when Establishing and Methods for Registering Sites for Religious Activity 宗教活動場所設立審批和登記辦法 promulgated in April 2005 were short of detail and some of the details had not been formulated for easy implementation. Moreover while, in practical terms, the Regulations for Religious Affairs should apply in every region, the circumstances of the different religions are not the same in every region. For example, on the question of how many congregants there have to be before a church can be re opened. If the Bureau for Religious Affairs tried to apply the law in this region, the prevailing circumstances would make this a difficult matter to handle. According to what we were told by a leading official in the Bureau, the minimum number for a religious

site might be 50 people, 100 people, 200 people or even as high as 1,000. There is still no clear standard figure provided. So when the local Bureau for Religious Affairs comes to implement regulations, the number of difficulties they encounter in practice is likely to be extremely large.

For these reasons the Bureau for Religious Affairs finds the actual work of administering religious affairs in strict accordance with the law extremely difficult. To a very great extent, the pattern is one of integrating the law with prevailing policies. Of course, confronted as they are with the facts of the existence and development of Christianity in the southern Gansu region, the provincial and county Bureaux for Religious Affairs are all giving careful consideration to the whole situation.

(2) The slow growth of Christianity in southern Gansu and an analysis of the reasons for this

The fact is that the development of Christianity in Lintan district has been rather slow, as far as the numbers of Christians are concerned, especially when one compares the rate of growth with that at the beginning of the period following Liberation [in 1949]. In fact, the overall rate of growth of Christianity in the Southern Gansu Autonomous Prefecture has been much the same. By the end of 1990, churches had been re-opened in three places and centres for religious activities in seven other places. There were a hundred religious personnel, and 3,763 Christian believers. Today, the number of churches remains at three and there are still seven meeting points, while in the region as a whole the number of believers is about 5,000. Furthermore, if Lintan County is taken as an example, there were over 2,000 believers at the end of 1990. Today, however, the number of believers has grown only to just over 2,000. Looked at in this way, whether one looks at it from the viewpoint of Lintan County or of the region as a whole, the growth of Christianity has been quite slow, especially when it is compared with the rapidity of its growth in eastern China in recent years. So what is the cause of its [slower] growth in Lintan district? Our analysis suggests that this is due to the following reasons:

a. The assault on Christianity by modern society

The special characteristics of modern society are evident in its patterns of consumerism, leisure pursuits and way of life. In all of these areas, there have been major changes when compared with traditional society.

Firstly, as regards the materialistic aspect of consumerism. As the productive capacity of modern society has reached such an advanced level in the wake of the technological revolution, society now has the ability to manufacture products to satisfy all the material needs of human life. As a result, man's self-identity has become more and more materialistic, while the emphasis placed by traditional society on spiritual and emotional needs has tended to be disregarded. If one is speaking of the way of life within a Christian society,

with its emphasis on the cultivation of and the emotional need for spiritual development, such factors can constitute a not inconsiderable assault on the traditional way of life. They can also develop into a form of consumerism which can all too easily degenerate into materialism in the hearts of our young people. As we saw for ourselves during our recent visit, at a meeting held at the Chengguan church, many of those present only came to the church to do some shopping, rather than the other way round.

Secondly, there is the proliferation of different forms of pleasure. "This kind of proliferation of pleasures is closely linked to the process of materialisation referred to earlier. It adds a whole variety of different forms of pleasure on top of that basis of material technology. For example, such forms of pleasure as the television sets, cameras, music and the internet are in universal use throughout today's world. It really is the case that multi-faceted forms of pleasure now occupy a large proportion of a modern individual's leisure time, especially that of the younger generation. Because of this, the ritualistic activities offered by Christianity are, for the majority of people, lacking in attractiveness. It is natural that the multi-faceted pleasures available should have had an adverse impact on the message of Christianity. For example, nowadays, many Christian middle school students get bogged down in the internet's recreational activities at the weekend and go off in search of pleasure activities instead of attending church services.

Another point is that the rhythms of life in our modern society beat so much faster and the pressures are so much greater, especially as far as our young people are concerned. Today, the number of young Christian believers who attend religious services in the Lintan district is relatively small. Some of the young people are studying at school. If they go on to university when they graduate they each go their own. If they do not go to university, then, in order to make a living, they will usually go elsewhere to get a job in industry. Even if they stay in their own village, they will be the main family breadwinners, working on the farms. So they will have no way of offering their services to the church. So, generally speaking, the religious outlook of the young people is dimmed and there are few who really retain their enthusiasm.

These various characteristics of our modern society form the wider social background to the slow growth of Christianity in southern Gansu. It is these characteristics, combined with the following other factors, which between them have brought about the slow growth of Christianity in the Southern Gansu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

b. The opposition of the mass of people in the region to Christianity

The South Gansu region is a multi-racial region in which the main ethnicity is Tibetan. It is also a region of many different faiths. Long before Christianity's arrival on the scene, Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Daoism and Islam had already become well established. Some people who were brought up in the customs of the traditional beliefs and who were biased against Christianity, called Christianity a "foreign religion" and took

the view that for Chinese people to believe in a foreign religion was an act of unspeakable treachery. So there were many people who would react with disgust at the very mention of the word "Christianity", and who would invariably take discriminatory action against Christian believers. For example, the Christian church banned Christian believers from entering Chinese temples or from kowtowing in front of Chinese images. And when, the masses were asked to donate money for the repair of a Buddhist temple in the neighbourhood, the Christian believers, because of the tenets of their faith, would never make a donation. Thus, more often than not, it was for financial reasons that conflicts broke out between people of different religions. In addition, the whole body of Christian believers was relatively small, their influence was weak; they were very poor, and could be at the receiving end of discrimination from members of other religions. [...]

Of course, there were occasions when some people initially wanted to convert to Christianity, but because of the traditional beliefs of their families or ancestors were not permitted to do so. There were also those who were brought up with attitudes that derived from the Cultural Revolution who took the view that conversion to Christianity would not do them much good. So, because of the work that they did, or to avoid prejudicing their future prospects, they decided against doing so.

c. The dumbing-down of Christian missionary work

While we were interviewing some of the Christian believers, we found, when we got on to the subject of the prospects for the development of Christianity in Lintan County, that some of the interviewees, when asked about the present situation, displayed a mood that was distinctly pessimistic. As they saw it, they were unable to work out the matter of how to develop and expand the influence of the Christian religion. They considered that the local [religious] environment and cultural level, as well as economic circumstances, made the situation unfavourable and that, at the present time, there was basically nothing anyone could do to speed up the growth of Christianity.

The fact was that, when foreign missionaries came to evangelise during the Republican period [1911-1949], they regularly used to hand out leaflets and go down to the villages to preach. They also offered medical services and did charitable work. Nowadays, however, the church neither produces nor distributes any relevant propaganda leaflets. This is principally because there is a shortage of manpower and worries about the cost. For example, the church used to distribute Jesus calendars to all its members. This year, however, even this practice has been abandoned.

The great majority of believers in the southern Gansu region are people who inherited their Christian beliefs from previous generations. That is to say, it was their forebears who converted to Christianity and, generally speaking, most of them wanted their children to follow in their footsteps. (In fact subsequent generations readily accepted the faith of their parents). Some families have in fact been Christian, generation after generation, for five

generations, ever since the end of the Qing dynasty. Christianity in the Southern Gansu region has, in fact, mainly propagated itself by means of being handed down from one generation to the next and does not rely on any other method of propagation. This has led to a situation in which, unless Christian families provide a substitute for natural increases, there is never any significant increase in the number of Christians.

In addition, according to what some Christians say, the elders and people in executive positions very rarely have heart to heart conversations with ordinary Christians or exchange views with them on the question of how to propagate and develop the Christian religion.

d. The low educational level of Christian believers

Following observer-participation in the activities of church meetings, talking with church leaders and engaging in contacts with ordinary believers, it became clear to us that their educational level was relatively low, and that there were very few of them whose educational level was higher than that of senior middle school. Even that of church leaders was the same. For example, of the clergy at the Chengguan church in Lintan, only one had graduated from senior middle school [at the age of eighteen]. Of the others, most had either got no further than graduating from primary school or had not received any formal education at all. Recent cultural data relating to Christian believers indicates that only 5.5 per cent of them have an educational level above that of junior middle school, 31 per cent are below that of junior middle school, while the illiterate make up 64 percent of the total. So the ability of these people to comprehend Christian teaching is likely to be lacking in depth, while their ability to read religious publications is also fairly restricted. This would suggest that, should they engage in the process of propagating Christian thinking, they do not have sufficient knowledge about the subject and are without the ability to get the message across.

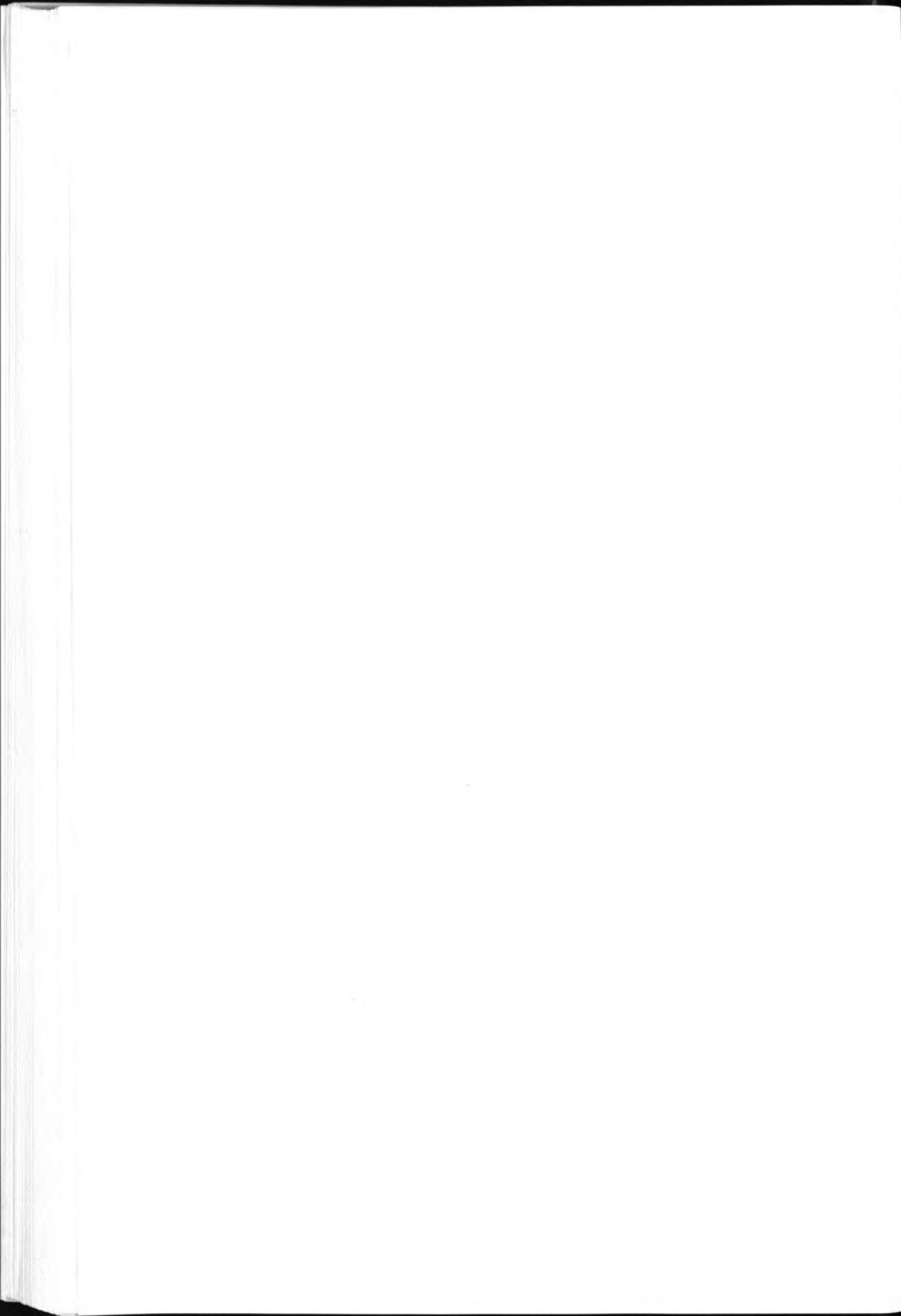
As we were told by a church official, the only publication relating to Christianity that is ever ordered is *Tianfeng* [the official publication of the CCC]. The official we interviewed considered that, even when this was ordered, no one read it, either because people were too busy farming or doing other work and had no time to read, or – even more importantly – because their educational standard was not good enough to enable them to read and understand it. According to our own observations, it [was clear that] even as far as the clergymen were concerned, very few were sufficiently well educated to read religious papers or books. Even if the clergy and some of the younger men were sent to a theological college to study, their lack of education would still pose a problem, and in any case there are no funds available.

Southern Gansu is a region in which many religions are propagating their beliefs and promoting their cause, and people have many faiths to choose from. Compared with Tibetan Buddhism and Islam, Christianity has relatively little influence. When, in addition,

the factors referred to above are taken into account, this explains why Christianity is expanding so slowly.

VI Conclusions

To return to our original questions: how is Christianity faring in southern Gansu, an Autonomous Region containing numerous nationalities and religions, in which Tibetans are the majority race and their religion is the majority religion? What are the differences between their religious life and that in China proper? And do they come up against any local problems? In the light of our research and analysis, there can be only one answer: namely that they form a minority within a minority. To speak in concrete terms: (1) as things are, Christian believers form a small proportion of the total population of the region as a whole; (2) co operation between the Christian church and the Party-and-government's regulatory department is relatively harmonious; (3) there are few links between religious personnel and ordinary Christians; (4) the lack of religious personnel of a high calibre within the church means that interaction between them is restricted; (5) the Christian religion and its clergy and other personnel exert little influence on local social and financial affairs; (6) relations between Christian believers and the ethnic nationalities are very complicated. The reasons for these various problems need to be given due consideration, at least by the Bureau for Religious Affairs and by the church itself. The context of the relevant laws, regulations and policies, of the social environment and of the unique historical circumstances which apply in the southern Gansu region must also be taken into account. These are matters which cannot be dealt with in this essay.



Section 2

Documentation

Sino-U.S. religious leaders call for dialogue, understanding among faiths, nations

ATLANTA, the United States, Sept. 9 (Xinhua) — Dozens of Chinese and American religious leaders met here Tuesday, calling for more dialogue and mutual understanding among different faiths to promote life and maintain world stability.

"We should base (ourselves) on the common well-being of mankind, get rid of narrow-mindedness and prejudice, stick to mutual understanding and communication, mutual respect and solidarity," said Ding Changyun, vice president of the China Taoist Association, at the Chinese-American Multi-religious Dialogue event in the Mercer University.

He said it has been proved by history that religions can play a significant guiding role in individual moral cultivation and promoting family harmony and harmonious social development.

More religious efforts are required to realize human peace and social harmony, so religious communities across the world should bear the words "Friendly (and) Equality" in mind and develop extensive and in-depth exchanges and dialogue, Ding added.

Gao Feng, president of the China Christian Council, told the conference that in view of the Christian spirit of "loving others like loving yourself," his religion encourages dialogue with other faiths to further understand and trust others, and then love others.

Taking Christianity and Buddhism, Jing Yin, a member of the standing committee of the Buddhist Association of China, said that despite their differences in the basic doctrines, both religions seem to be able to offer stability, values, identity recognition and a goal to the individual.

Michael Elliston from Atlanta Zen Soto Center noted that we are living in a time when the desire for peace and stability has never been stronger.

"Securing it (stability) will require an abiding appreciation of the value of life, honoring each person's unique identity and a clear grasp of the higher purpose of life," he said.

The three Chinese are among a delegation of religious leaders from China, who are on a 12-day visit to the United States at the invitation of three U.S. Christian groups, starting last Thursday.

In Atlanta, the delegation staged a forum for multi-faith religious leaders and government officials, as well as civic leaders including U.S. former President Jimmy Carter.

Delegates discussed topics on how each religious tradition seeks to inform and strengthen family relationships in the light of globalization and rapid change in modern society.

They also addressed the issue of how belief systems impact majority-minority relationships and religious freedom in China and the United States. The delegation is also scheduled to meet with U.S.

lawmakers, federal government officials, academicians and media in Washington, D.C. later this week.

Dee Froeber, an organizer from North Carolina Forest Hills Baptist Church Raleigh, told Xinhua that the visit is aimed at creating understanding of religious roles in both Chinese and American societies, exploring from multiple perspectives the contribution religions can offer to society and discovering new directions and opportunities for dialogue on the status of religious freedom in the two countries.

Editor: Jiang Yuxia

Catholics

CHINA Dioceses Reach Out To Non-Catholics During Christmas Celebrations

TAIYUAN, China (UCAN) – The Christmas period has proved an opportune time for the Catholic Church in mainland China to evangelize, and 2008 was no exception.

In Taiyuan, capital of Shanxi province, for example, tens of thousands who do not belong to the Church but flocked to Immaculate Conception Cathedral to soak in the festive atmosphere received free literature on Christianity.

Assistant parish priest Father Anthony Pan Lizhong told UCA News that this year, the cathedral administration prepared 10 different pamphlets, and printed a total of 300,000 copies, on aspects of the Catholic faith. These included the origin of Christmas and why people celebrate it.

Dozens of parishioners, nuns, and seminarians from the nearby Montecorvino Major Seminary distributed these pamphlets and explained the faith to visitors from the afternoon of Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, until dawn on Christmas Day.

The helpers also gave away 10,000 Catholic books and periodicals, as well as bookmarks depicting Christmas themes and the cathedral, to the continuous stream of people entering and leaving the building.

Meanwhile, a group of young Catholic volunteers ensured that the visitors who toured the cathedral did so in an orderly fashion, and that Catholics were able to pray and attend Mass undisturbed.

A seminarian shared with UCA News that some visitors told him they knew that Christmas is "Jesus' birthday," but otherwise had little knowledge about the Church.

Li Min, a volunteer, admitted that being a helper is tough work, since the Christmas period is usually the coldest time of year. Nevertheless, she said she felt happy to see "many

people who are not Catholics coming to church to learn about Jesus, the Church and its teachings."

Bishop Silvester Li Jiantang of Taiyuan, 83, presided at the midnight Christmas Vigil Mass, after which Catholics and non-Catholics alike took part in games and enjoyed various performances in the cathedral courtyard until 5 a.m., even though Christmas Day is not a public holiday in China.

In Sichuan province, southwestern China, the Nanchong diocese cathedral held two evening celebrations, on Dec. 23 and 24, attended by many who are not Catholics.

According to sources, visitors were moved to tears on Dec. 23 watching *The Soul of Love*, a six-act musical portraying the life of Christ.

The Dec. 24 celebration saw members of an Internet chat group, Dream Kingdom, singing carols and hymns in Chinese, including *Silent Night* and *Ave Maria*, to an audience that included about 1,000 people who were not Catholics.

Dream Kingdom's 500 members, who not only chat on the Internet but also have occasional face-to-face meetings, comprise mostly non-Catholic young workers.

Sister Wang Yan of Nanchong, a celebration organizer who knows one of the leading members, Tang Chunhui, invited the group to be part of the festivities.

Tang, who directed his group's performance, said taking part in the celebration helped deepen members' understanding of the Catholic Church. It also showed them they could make a "contribution to society and boosted their self-confidence."

Sister Wang agreed. She told UCA News the two evening celebrations certainly allowed more people to know about Christ and the Catholic faith.

On Christmas eve in Fengxiang, Shaanxi province, just west of Shanxi, curious onlookers thronged the streets while motorists slowed down their vehicles as Bishop Luke Li Jingfeng took the Infant Jesus in procession from the cathedral at 7 p.m.

Holding the statue in his arms, the prelate walked at the end of the one-kilometer procession that included a brass band, people waving colorful flags, folk dancers, priests, nuns and parishioners. Drums and firecrackers helped to create a festive mood.

Back in front of the cathedral, a party that began at 9 p.m. drew many non-Catholics. During the event, priests shared about the life of Jesus and the meaning of life itself. Parishioners and seminarians also distributed religious pamphlets to people at the event and explained about the Catholic faith to them.

At 11 p.m., as the crowds left, Catholics went into the cathedral to prepare for midnight Mass.

In his homily, Bishop Li, 86, reflected on the diocese's evangelization work during Church festivals. "We have spacious churches, good Bible stories and pretty pamphlets," he said, but added that the Church has not fully used these resources to preach the Gospel. He urged Catholics to intensify evangelization efforts.

Cardinal Zen asks Chinese bishops for more courage

by James Wang

The bishop of Hong Kong condemns as "outdated" the celebrations of 50 years of "self-election" and "self-ordination" of Chinese bishops as promoted by the United Front, the Patriotic Association, and the Office of Religious Affairs. He is asking the bishops to follow the example of Saint Stephen, and not to offend the pope by participating in meetings sponsored by the regime to appoint the new presidents of the PA and the council of Chinese bishops, two bodies not recognized by the Holy See.

Hong Kong (AsiaNews) – The bishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen, has asked all of the (official) bishops of China to be courageous, and not slip into compromises with the regime.

In an article in the January 4 edition of the diocesan weekly *Gong Jiaobao*, he urges Chinese bishops and priests to have the virtues of Saint Stephen, the first martyr, and not to submit constantly to directions of the state that are contrary to the faith: "to suffer for the faith will eventually bring victory, even if today everything seems lost."

In the article, entitled "Inspiration from the martyrdom of Saint Stephen," Cardinal Zen provides an analysis of the developments of the Catholic Church in China over the past two years, remembering the illicit episcopal ordinations (without the permission of the Holy See) in 2006, when – "regretfully," he says – a dozen bishops, approved by the Vatican, took part in the ceremony out of fear, and some of them perhaps through deceit.

He then recalls the "ray of light" that appeared in 2007 with a meeting at the Vatican about the Church in China, and especially with the release of Benedict XVI's letter to Chinese Catholics. In the letter, the pope says that the Chinese Patriotic Association has purposes that are contrary to the Catholic faith, wanting to manage the ordination of bishops and constitute a Church independent of the Holy See.

Precisely for this reason, in the article Cardinal Zen rails against the celebrations in Beijing last December 19, celebrating the 50th anniversary of autonomous episcopal ordinations

in China. The celebrations were sponsored by the United Front, the Patriotic Association, and the state administration for religious affairs (cf. AsiaNews 20/12/2008 Beijing, Vatican must break with Taiwan and not interfere in domestic affairs).

For the bishop of Hong Kong, there is nothing to celebrate, because the method of "self-election" and "self-ordination" was promoted during the 1950's by radical forces of the extreme left, which looked at the pope as a representative of imperialism. But this view is now outdated, at a time like today when China is celebrating 30 years of economic reforms, aimed at opposing that radical mentality.

"Forcing Catholics to do something against their conscience," the cardinal writes, "is a grave insult to the dignity of every Chinese citizen, [and for this reason] there is nothing to be proud of, nothing to celebrate. Launching this celebration demonstrates that those who hold power do not want to give it up, and are forcing our great nation to bear the shame of backwardness in this regard."

The prelate then asks if the entire emphasis of the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Patriotic Association (PA) and "self-election" and "self-ordination" might not be a preparation for meetings to vote for the new president of the Patriotic Association and the president of the council of Chinese bishops [a sort of episcopal conference, which includes only the official bishops and is not recognized by the Holy See]. The elections of these two leaders is supposed to be held at the national congress of Catholic representatives. It should take place at this time, since the two posts have been vacant for some time: patriotic bishop Michael Fu Tieshan, elected president of the PA in 1998, died in 2007; Joseph Liu Yuanren, patriotic bishop of Nanjing, elected president of the council of bishops in 2004, died in 2005.

The cardinal seems to be suggesting to the bishops that they boycott the upcoming meeting. He asks: "Does this meeting really need to be held? . . . Is it not an insult in response to the pope's letter to Chinese Catholics? Is it not a slap in the face to the pope to participate in such a meeting? . . . Does your conscience really permit you to do this? Will the people of God accept such behavior on your part?"

(AsiaNews 3 January)

Top official: one-China principle, non-interference prerequisites for China-Vatican ties

Only when the Vatican severs its ties with Taiwan and stops interfering into China's internal affairs can the two sides improve their relations, said a top Chinese official on Friday.

The two principles must be followed when seeking improvement of the relations between China and the Vatican, said Du Qinglin, head of the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee.

Du, also vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, made the remarks at a seminar marking the 50th anniversary of the selection and consecration of bishops of Chinese Catholic churches.

"The Vatican must not interfere in China's internal politics, including using religion to interfere in our country's domestic affairs," said Du.

Du reiterated that the Vatican should cut off its "so-called diplomatic relationship" with Taiwan and recognize the government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government representing China.

"Only on the basis of these two fundamental principles can both sides have constructive dialogue, overcome difficulties, narrow differences and make real progress towards improving relations," Du said.

Over the past five decades, Chinese Catholic churches, out of the needs of their own development, have selected and ordained more than 170 bishops, Du said.

He urged to continue the selection and ordination work in order to fill the vacancies of bishops and advance the development of Catholicism in China.

(People's Daily, 20 December)

Vatican Letter Urges Chinese Bishops To Fulfill Duties With Courage

HONG KONG (UCAN) -- A letter the Holy See sent earlier this year to Vatican-approved bishops in mainland China reasserts principles that Pope Benedict XVI highlighted in his June 2007 letter to Chinese Catholics.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican secretary of state, addressed the April 22 letter to 90 bishops, including some who are retired, but it excluded a few whose ordination circumstances remain unclear. The letter began to circulate through China in May, but a few bishops only received it recently.

It stresses "fundamental principles of Catholic teaching" and reminds the bishops of "the role of the Episcopate" as communion. It says the pope invites all mainland bishops to "discharge courageously your office of Shepherd," to promote the Catholic nature of the

Church, and to obtain greater freedom of activity through direct and respectful dialogue with civic authorities.

The cardinal's letter also asks the bishops "acting together" to request the right to meet as a group and to be able to discuss issues in true freedom. By respecting principles laid down in the pope's letter, the April letter says, the bishops can discover a "correct attitude to adopt with regard to those bodies to which reference is made in (section) No. 7 of the Papal document."

That section of the papal letter says some agencies that implement "the principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration of the Church" are incompatible with Catholic doctrine. A footnote there cites the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association's statutes.

The letter also reminds the bishops to be "particularly careful to ensure that episcopal ordinations take place only with the apostolic mandate."

In November, one recipient, Bishop Peter Fang Jianping of Tangshan, told UCA News listing legitimate bishops' names helps eliminate "guessing who is and who is not (legitimized) ... which Chinese Catholics are quite concerned about."

Bishop Fang, a Hebei native, was ordained without papal approval in Beijing on Jan. 6, 2000, but the Holy See legitimized his episcopal status in 2002.

He describes the April letter, which emphasizes communion and the Holy Church, as "good overall" for the development of the China Church.

Another open Church bishop, whose name appears on the list but who asked for anonymity when he spoke with UCA News, agrees the list gives mainland bishops "a better understanding of the situation" by identifying legitimate bishops.

He added that he appreciates the cardinal's letter is a call for action on the papal letter, but even he himself finds it hard to call a meeting of just priests, so a nationwide meeting of bishops would be even harder to convene.

In northern China, an underground bishop who received the letter told UCA News the April letter more concretely addresses issues mentioned in sections 7, 8 and 9 of the pope's letter, which refer to the local Church and state agencies, the Chinese episcopate and the appointment of bishops.

Even so, he questions if the Holy See fully understands the situation in China when it urges all bishops to meet together. "We hope to see this moment materialize, too, but the government does not give us such a chance," he said.

"We are very willing to maintain harmony with the government," the bishop added, "but what it wants is the 'independent, autonomous and self-management' principle of the Church, and 'self-election and self-ordination' of bishops."

A priest identified only as Father Joseph similarly pointed out to UCA News that travel is hard for some elderly bishops and there is no freedom of travel for many underground prelates. Some bishops have been missing and no one knows if they are alive or dead, he said, "so how can they contact each other?"

The priest suggests that the Holy See assign a bishop or a committee of bishops to call such a meeting. In his view, this is important to resolve the decades-old conflict between the underground and open Church communities.

He sees the pope's letter as the answer to such differences, but "when it falls into the hand of the Chinese bishops, each has his own interpretation."

Kwun Ping-hing, a Hong Kong-based China-Vatican watcher, remarked to UCA News that Cardinal Bertone's letter re-emphasizes basic Church principles but also requests concrete actions. Kwun also said the list of recipients provides a foundation for solidarity but, in his view, the Vatican is well aware that the China Church issue cannot be solved at once.

The bishops' names were presented alphabetically in the letter but some Chinese Catholic websites posted it in other ways, such as listing bishops by provinces and indicating their dioceses and episcopal titles. One site even provides an extra list of bishops who have not received Vatican approval.

Ever since the letter was signed in April, four bishops have died but no new ones have been ordained, so Vatican-approved bishops on the list now number 86, and about 60 of them belong to the open Church community.

December 19, 2008

50th Anniversary Of 'Self-elected, Self-ordained' Bishops Commemorated

HONG KONG (UCAN) – In Beijing on Dec. 19, 45 bishops and about 200 Catholic priests, nuns, seminarians and lay leaders holding key positions in the government-sanctioned "open Church" have attended the commemoration of the golden jubilee of "self-election and self-ordination of bishops."

Du Qinglin, director of the United Front Work Department (UFW) of the Communist Party of China, and Ye Xiaowen, director of State Administration of Religious Affairs

(SARA) received the Catholic representatives during a meeting that morning in the Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen Square.

Du, who also is vice-chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), was the highest-level government official at the event. He addressed the occasion to acknowledge the contribution of "self-elected and self-ordained bishops" for Church development during 50 years.

The next speaker was Bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin of Kunming, secretary of the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC), who was ordained without papal mandate in 2006. Following him were speeches by a Protestant pastor, four Catholic bishops, a priest, a nun and a lay representative.

Thereafter was an afternoon tour to the Olympic "Bird's Nest" stadium, and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at Immaculate Conception Cathedral of Beijing. The event is to close with an evening dinner hosted by the UFWD.

UCA News has learned that written or verbal notices were given about a week earlier to "open" bishops, administrators of dioceses with no bishop, and Church officials of the provincial Catholic Patriotic Associations. Some recipients also told UCA News they received train or plane tickets to Beijing.

The invitees arrived at the Beijing headquarters of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and BCCCC on or before the morning of Dec. 19.

According to Catholic sources, the meeting was like that of the CCPA's 50th-anniversary celebration in Beijing on July 25, 2007, when about 300 Catholic representatives, including 37 bishops, were received at the Great Hall of the People by Vice Premier Hui Liangyu, CPPCC Chairman Jia Qinglin, and heads of the UFWD and the SARA.

Before the Dec. 19 meeting, a Vatican-approved bishop in southwestern China told UCA News government officials had given him an air ticket to Beijing. However, he acknowledged that he did not know what event would be taking place in the capital.

Some Church leaders did admit knowing the event was to commemorate the 50th anniversary of "self-elected and self-ordained bishops," but they claimed it did not conflict with Church principles to attend the meeting as long as Church authorities were not ordaining another bishop without Vatican approval.

In 1957, six years after Beijing expelled the Holy See's apostolic nuncio from China, the CCPA was set up to uphold the principle of an "independent, autonomous and self-managed" China Church.

In 1958, the government-sanctioned China Church elected and ordained, without papal approval, Fathers Bernardine Dong Guangqing and Yuan Wenhua as, respectively, bishops of Hankou and Wuchang in Hubei province.

Before those ordinations took place, several telegrams were sent to the Vatican asking for approval. But the Holy See replied by citing Canon Law, which says any bishop ordained without papal mandate, or who ordains such a bishop, incurs automatic excommunication, "reserved to the Apostolic See."

Nonetheless, the China Church proceeded with the illicit ordinations at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hankou on April 13, 1958. During the next 50 years, there have been about 170 "self-elected, self-ordained" bishops in China.

With easier communications developing after the reform and opening of China in 1978, Chinese Catholics in the mainland have gradually resumed contact with the Universal Church. Many "self-elected and self-ordained" bishops sought papal legitimization, and some candidates apply for papal mandate before they are ordained. These days, there still are some bishops who were ordained illicitly and have not been legitimized by the Vatican.

Among the 60 or so bishops currently in the open Church community, more than 80 percent are in communion with the pope.

In his June 2007 letter to Chinese Catholics, Pope Benedict XVI said the pope's appointment of bishops guarantees Church unity and hierarchical communion. "The Pope, when he issues the apostolic mandate for the ordination of a bishop, exercises his supreme spiritual authority: this authority and this intervention remain within the strictly religious sphere," he asserted.

(December 19, 2008)

Wanzhou Bishop Dies At 92 After Critical Illness, Postponed Church Blessing Proceeds

HONG KONG (UCAN) -- Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan of Wanzhou (Wanxian) died of multiple organ failure on Dec. 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. He was 92.

Father Matthew Ran Qiliang, vicar general of Wanzhou diocese, told UCA News two priests, four nuns and some laypeople were praying at the prelate's bedside when he died at 1:30 a.m., after doctors' emergency rescue efforts failed. The critically ill prelate was hospitalized in late September and then discharged in mid-November, after which he was

under treatment at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The diocese is based in Wanzhou district, Chongqing municipality, 1,250 kilometers southwest of Beijing.

During his last days, he was in and out of a coma and could not recognize anybody, reported Father Ran, a high-ranking diocesan official.

On the day Bishop Xu died, Auxiliary Bishop Paul He Zeqing, 40, and most clergy of the diocese were in Kaixian county, 20 kilometers north of Wanzhou, to consecrate a new church on the Marian feast day. Father Ran remained in Wanzhou to take care of the dying bishop.

Bishop Xu's body is being kept at the cathedral for laypeople to pay their last respects, and his funeral will be discussed after Bishop He and the other priests and nuns return to Wanzhou, Father Ran said. He added that it would take place in "no more than five days."

The new church was built in the new main town of the Kaixian county with funds donated by Catholics from Hong Kong and overseas. The old town, located within the catchment area of the Three Gorges Dam along the Yangtze, China's longest river, will be submerged when the water level rises 175 meters.

The diocese had originally planned to consecrate the new church on Oct. 18, but postponed this because priests and nuns were too busy visiting the ailing prelate.

Bishop Xu was born in neighboring Sichuan province in 1916 and ordained a priest in 1949. In 1989, he was ordained coadjutor bishop of Wanxian, as Wanzhou was then called.

Wanxian was part of Sichuan province before Chongqing municipality was erected in 1997.

Father Ran said Bishop Xu contributed a lot to priestly formation, since he taught at and managed the regional seminary in Sichuan. The elderly prelate was also passionate in pastoral work and persisted in serving the people despite his old age, the vicar general noted.

Bishop Xu's predecessor, the late Bishop Matthias Duan Yinming, died in 2001, also at age 92. Pope Pius XII had appointed him bishop in 1949, the year the Communists took over China.

In 1998, the Chinese government forbade Bishop Duan and Bishop Xu, his coadjutor at the time, from leaving the country to attend the Synod for Asia. That Vatican assembly reserved two empty seats for them throughout the meeting.

Wanzhou diocese covers Wanzhou district and eight counties in a mountainous area. It currently has an estimated 60,000 Catholics scattered along the Yangtze. Its auxiliary bishop and 11 priests work among them.

December 8, 2008

Funeral for Bishop Jin Peixian of Liaoning held in China's Shenyang

SHENYANG, Nov. 8 (Xinhua) -- A funeral mass for Bishop Jin Peixian was held on Saturday in the Nanguan Church in this capital of northeast China's Liaoning Province, a diocese where the bishop once served.

The mass was attended by more than 4,000 people, including officials from the Liaoning provincial government and the Shenyang municipal government, representatives from religious societies and Jin's congregation.

The mass was conducted by the incumbent bishop of Liaoning, Paul Pei Junmin, who took over from Jin in June.

"Bishop Jin was patriotic and loyal to the Catholic religion," said Pei.

He said that Jin will be cremated and his remains will be escorted by priests to the Tieling Catholic Graveyard in Liaoning on Sunday.

Jin died on Nov. 4 at age 84. He had held the title of vice president of the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China.

Pei said as the conference leader, Jin had not only served the Liaoning diocese but also churches elsewhere in the country.

"Bishop Jin used his world exchanges to manifest a decent image of China's religious society and help people around the world to know more about churches in China," said Bishop Pei.

Both Jin and his successor received papal approval before their respective episcopal ordinations in 1989 and 2006.

Jin was born into a Catholic family on March 16, 1924. He entered the minor seminary at the age of 12 and then studied at major seminaries in Shenyang, Changchun, Beijing and Hong Kong.

His ordination in Shanghai in 1951 came two years after the founding of new China.

During the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977), he was victimized as a prisoner and only returned to the Fushun parish in Liaoning in 1980. He won a popular vote to become the bishop of Liaoning diocese in 1989.

Wu Yuxiang, an official from the Liaoning provincial administration for religious affairs, spoke highly of the bishop.

"Bishop Jin upheld China's basic religious policies and contributed to the building of a harmonious political and religious environment. Under his leadership, Catholic believers in Liaoning have exerted themselves in the building of a harmonious society," he said.

www.chinaview.cn 2008-11-08

Retired Bishop Pius Jin Peixian Of Liaoning Dies At Age 84

HONG KONG (UCAN) -- Bishop Pius Jin Peixian of Liaoning died of kidney cancer in the early morning of Nov. 4 at the age of 84.

The northeastern diocese has scheduled a funeral Mass on Nov. 8.

Many Church people in and outside China considered Bishop Jin a prominent leader of the China Church. He held the title of vice president of the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China before his death.

With "trust in God and a love of the Church," says Liaoning diocese's obituary, Bishop Jin "served the spiritual needs of the people for his whole life." It described him as "a good shepherd for his flock."

Anthony Lam Sui-ki, a Hong Kong-based Church-in-China observer, said on Nov. 4 that Bishop Jin -- archbishop of Shenyang, according to the Vatican -- maintained a successful balance between his "loyalty to the pope and compliance with national identity."

Lam, senior researcher at Hong Kong diocese's Holy Spirit Study Centre, explained to UCA News that Bishop Jin strengthened his priests' sense of the universal Church. He pointed out that the retired bishop and his successor, Bishop Paul Pei Junmin, received papal approval before their respective episcopal ordinations in 1989 and 2006.

The Vatican made Shenyang an archdiocese in 1946, when it established the Chinese Catholic hierarchy. In 1981, government-sanctioned Church authorities combined Shenyang with Fushun, Jinzhou and Yingkou dioceses to make Liaoning diocese, covering all of Liaoning province. Shenyang, provincial capital of Liaoning, lies 630 kilometers northeast of Beijing.

Lam noted that Bishop Jin had provided good formation for priests, nuns and laypeople, enabling the diocese to have sufficient human resources and strong morale. As a pioneer in the China Church, he sent his priests and nuns to study overseas after religious activities revived in mainland China, beginning in the early 1980s, following the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

He also played a successful role in making Catholicism part of the local culture of Shenyang, Lam said, noting that the bishop promoted the Gothic-style century-old Sacred Heart Cathedral as a city landmark.

However, Lam also said one limitation Bishop Jin faced was that he had not made enough contacts with the "underground" priests in the former dioceses in Liaoning, causing duplication in pastoral work in some areas.

Bishop Jin was born into a Catholic family on March 16, 1924. He entered the minor seminary in 1936 and then studied at major seminaries in Shenyang, Changchun, Beijing and Hong Kong. His priestly ordination in Shanghai in 1951 came two years after communists established the People's Republic of China. Initially, he taught in a high school in Beijing and then worked as an accounting clerk in a factory 1952-1955, before returning to preach in Fushun parish.

In 1957 a meeting of Catholics from the three northeastern provinces -- Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning -- denounced him as a "rightist." The following year he was sentenced to 10 years in prison for "counter-revolutionary" crimes. In 1968, his release from prison, he was sent to a farm for "reform-through-labor." Eventually, he returned to Fushun parish in 1980. He was ordained bishop of Liaoning on May 21, 1989.

This past June 29, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, he retired and passed his episcopal responsibility to Bishop Pei, coadjutor until then.

Bishop Pei was born in 1969. Following his priestly ordination in 1992, he served first as assistant pastor of the cathedral parish. In 1993, he became one of the first Liaoning diocesan priests to go abroad for further studies. He obtained master's degrees in theology and biblical studies in the United States.

After returning to China in 1996, he served as the vice rector and dean of studies at Shenyang Seminary. He was ordained coadjutor bishop on May 7, 2006.

Liaoning diocese has more than 80 priests and 180 nuns serving 110,000 Catholics in five deaneries, or parish groupings.

(November 4, 2008)

Zhengding Bishop Jia Released after Paralympics, But Still Under Strict Surveillance

HONG KONG (UCAN) -- "Underground" Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding returned to his cathedral on the afternoon of Sept. 18, one day after the Paralympic Games ended in Beijing.

A local Church source told UCA News on Sept. 19 that the 73-year-old prelate presided at a Mass the previous evening after being sent back to his Christ the King Cathedral in Wuqiu. The village is near Shijiazhuang, the Hebei province capital, 270 kilometers southwest of Beijing.

Bishop Jia is not affiliated with the government-sanctioned "open" Church administrative structures.

According to a press release from the U.S.-based Cardinal Kung Foundation dated Sept. 19, security officers escorted Bishop Jia to his residence at 1 p.m. on Sept. 18.

However, he remains under 24-hour police surveillance and is isolated from his priests and faithful, not being allowed to receive any visitors, it said.

Over the past 25 days, according to the report, officers moved the bishop around Jingxing, Pingshan and Lingshou counties outside Shijiazhuang.

Sources told UCA News the officers tried to ban news of his release from being spread and that word has not reached many of his priests.

On Aug. 24, the closing day of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, public security officers and government officials took the prelate from his residence after he celebrated Sunday Mass that morning.

Some local Catholics told UCA News on Sept. 19 that Bishop Jia was taken away after a journalist working for foreign media made an appointment with a parish lay leader of his diocese. They speculated public security officers might have been worried the reporter might visit and interview the underground Church leader.

(September 19, 2008)

Protestants

Gao Feng: Reviewing a Decade of Theological Reconstruction: Continue to Strengthen Theological Reconstruction; Strive to Run the Church Well

Gao Feng, President of the China Christian Council, gave this address at the meeting in Nanjing to mark the 10th anniversary of Theological Reconstruction. He began by locating Theological Reconstruction in the context of the government policy of reform and opening, which began in 1978. Gao cited Christian response to recent natural disasters, such as the major snowstorms in January and the Sichuan earthquake in May, as well as participation in many forms of social service and Christian support for the Olympics as ways Chinese Christians have shared in their nation's development and progress toward the goal of a moderately well-off and harmonious society.

In his review, Rev. Gao gave a retrospective on the background of Theological Reconstruction from the articulation of the need for new explorations in theological thinking by Bishop K.H. Ting, to the passage of the Resolution on Strengthening Theological Reconstruction at the Second Joint (expanded) Standing Committee meeting of the Sixth TSPM and Fourth CCC held in November, 1998, in Jinan (Shandong) and the results of this emphasis in theology, theological education and practical pastoral work during the ensuing decade. Rev. Gao characterizes the goals of Theological Reconstruction as "continuing the fine tradition of Christian theological reflection founded on biblical teaching, adhering to the basic faith set out in the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed, assimilating the best of Chinese culture in combination with the important historical experience of decades of adherence to the Three-Self patriotic path. From within a contextual theological approach, it is a response to the real issues facing the Chinese Church that seeks to eliminate modes of thinking that have posed obstacles to sound development in the church, and gradually explore building a system of Christian theology with Chinese characteristics. The ultimate goal is to assist Christians in establishing a pure faith, a lively spiritual life and a positive attitude to life, to promote better development of Chinese Christianity, and to enable Chinese Christianity to adapt to socialist society and make a fine witness within a socialist harmonious society."

Results achieved during a decade of Theological Reconstruction include 1) its importance has been widely recognized; 2) theological reflection in the church has been invigorated; 3) Christians' understanding of their faith has been deepened; 4) preaching in the church has been enriched; 5) Christian morality and ethics is widely honored; and 6) Christians' sense of social responsibility and consciousness of service have grown.

Rev. Gao also reflected on the experience gleaned in putting Theological Reconstruction into practice: 1) a biblical foundation is fundamental to progress in Theological Reconstruction; 2) maintaining three-self principles is a prerequisite; 3) sound CCC/TSPM organizations, nationally and locally, serve as institutional safeguards in the process; and 4) the basic stuff of Theological Reconstruction is a Christian response to the realities of the times.

Future Prospects: What is Needed for Continued Progress in Theological Reconstruction

The practice of the Chinese Church proves that upholding the three-self principles and following the love-country love-church path is crucial for running the church well. Today, history has entrusted us with a new responsibility and a new task. As we commemorate a decade of Chinese Christian theological reconstruction, we must, building on the foundation of the elder generation's hard work, carry forward the task we have inherited, and take Chinese Christian theological reflection into a new phase. We have seen gradual achievements during the last decade, but the road we must follow in our great task of Theological Reconstruction is arduous and long. Thus we have identified the following points for future action. The bases for continued progress in Theological Reconstruction are as follows:

a. Running the church well according to three-self principles

The Chinese Church initiated Theological Reconstruction on the foundation of respect for the Bible and the over two thousand years of outstanding church tradition. A theological direction has been established for Theological Reconstruction that is consistent with the development of the Chinese Church. Furthermore, running the church well on three-self principles has been made its foundation.

We say that Theological Reconstruction is the development and deepening of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, first, because the social function of both can be traced to the same origin. Fifty years of history have amply proven that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement is the successful practice of the patriotic spirit within the realm of Christianity, erecting a fine political and economic foundation for Christianity's adaptation to socialist society. In the late 1990s, the elder generation of church leaders initiated and promoted Theological Reconstruction in order to set a stable foundation of thought and theology to further guide the adaptation of Christianity to socialist society.

Secondly, Theological Reconstruction is a response to the demands of the times; i.e., that the Chinese Church realize true self-government, self-support and self-propagation. Achieving these principles is necessary for self-development. It is also a necessary demand to the church from an already independent people, and even more from an already liberated Chinese society to a Christianity that had entered China with the backing of Western cannon. Undertaking adjustment and reform of theological views enables Chinese Christianity to both be consistent with the essence of the Bible and adapt to the development of the times; it is the positive Christian response to the realities of the present and the demand to be light and salt in its context. This will have a huge and far-reaching positive impact on the sound development of Chinese Christianity in the future.

Thirdly, the three-self patriotic movement is the precious experience and riches of Chinese Christianity. It has not only historical and political significance, but also theological and ecclesial significance. This unique experience requires constant review and assessment, refinement and improvement. At the same time its nature as church means it requires theological nourishment before it can serve as the theoretical guideline for running the church well, as well as being an important component of the spiritual treasurehouse of the universal church. This is the task of Theological Reconstruction. So we say that Theological Reconstruction maintains and develops the three-self principles, deepens and enriches the content of three-self and enables the practice of three-self to be lively and vigorous.

b. Reliance on local Christian Councils and Three-self organizations

We need to be aware of the longterm and arduous nature of Theological Reconstruction. We must not produce loose or static thinking, but constantly strengthen our own study. Like the prophets who kept watch in days of yore, we must be constantly awake and ready to apply Theological Reconstruction in all our work. The CCC/TSPM must have an overall plan for unified planning, theory and research on the one hand and transforming results into practice on the other. ... Local Christian Councils and Three-Self Organizations nationwide must mobilize pastoral workers to take an active part in Theological Reconstruction, making full use of their theological knowledge and pastoral experience. They can identify believers' concerns and difficulties and solidly promote Theological Reconstruction. Volunteers and Christian intellectuals should become involved and ever more people encouraged to join in Theological Reconstruction, which will enliven it. A definite plan of work and goals must be set, a theory group organized, and funds provided for activities so that Theological Reconstruction can move securely and effectively forward.

c. A base in seminaries and bible schools

Seminaries and bible schools are the base of Theological Reconstruction: their role is crucial to its promotion. Not only must Theological Reconstruction be well established in the present, even more, we must keep our eyes on the training of the next generation of theological thinkers. ... To this end, the CCC/TSPM and Christian Councils and Three-

Self Organizations nationwide must increase their support and concern for seminaries and bible schools and provide guidance for courses and research in church subjects offered in these institutions, as well as motivate the church and believers to support running these institutions well both with prayer and funds.

d. Prioritize the transformation of preaching

Theological Reconstruction has an impact on every aspect of the work of the Chinese Church, but most directly on the pulpit. Christian Councils and Three-Self Organizations throughout the church must encourage pastoral workers to bring the fruits of the theological reconstruction discussions into their sermons. The CCC/TSPM must continue its publication work, including Tian Feng and the CCC/TSPM website, using forms that believers find user friendly, strengthening readability and effectiveness. ... Most importantly more pastoral workers should be involved in Theological Reconstruction, linking its concerns to every sort of pastoral work, so that more people may share in its benefits.

e. Absorb the best of Chinese culture

Theological Reconstruction must be rooted in the fertile soil of China's outstanding culture, and must also pay attention to the reality of Chinese society. Just as a good seed, in order to grow, must fall on fertile ground to absorb fertilizer and nurture, before it can bear fruit in abundance, only by putting down its roots in the soil of China's outstanding culture can Theological Reconstruction be invigorated. This is the truth revealed to us by the incarnate Christ. We must rid ourselves of that generalization that says Chinese culture is an "heretical" or "alien" culture and intentionally meld Christianity with the ongoing stream of Chinese culture, so that Christianity becomes an accepted part of the culture and a religion that is welcomed by the Chinese people. We must avoid manufactured contradictions between ourselves and those who hold to different beliefs and actively pursue dialog with them, absorbing what is helpful from other experiences to enrich ourselves.

f. The practice of faith should be a key task

Only sound thinking can produce positive action. The concrete effects of Theological Reconstruction will be seen in the actions this theological thinking is able to bring about. We must see whether it can truly be an effective guide to the witness and practice of the lives of Chinese Christians; whether it is helpful in running the church well according to three-self principles; whether it is helpful in the process of mutual adaptation between Chinese Christianity and socialist society. We must translate its fruits into action. Theological Reconstruction should be a vital force for every Christian, just as our Lord Jesus acted in "gentle humility" to accommodate others and care for them. We should gladly serve as he did, with the goal of service to others, rather than being served ourselves; we should be light and salt in the workplace; we should embrace the concept that "a good Christian should be a good citizen": everywhere living out a Christian life. Thus, Theological Reconstruction

will better safeguard pure Christian faith, and the positive strength of this pure faith will give greater glory to God and benefit to people!

Translated, summarized and excerpted from Tian Feng No. 345, December, 2008 by Janice Wickeri

(Amity News Service 18.1-3, March 2009)

Bishop K.H. Ting's Message at the Tenth Anniversary of Theological Reconstruction

Bishop Ting's speech was delivered on Nov. 11, 2008.

It makes me very happy to be taking part in this meeting today marking the tenth anniversary of Chinese Christian Theological Reconstruction and at the same time to have the opportunity to see many old friends. To my knowledge, in the ten years since the inception of Theological Reconstruction, the CCC/TSPM and Christian Councils and Three-Self Organizations throughout the church all have all placed a great deal of importance on these efforts and every aspect of its promotion has been vigorous, distinctive and influential.

By saying influential, I mean that affirmation and expectations of the positive role we Christians are playing in the building of a harmonious society has increased throughout every sector of society. Along with the continued deepening of Theological Reconstruction, Christians have established themselves in their occupations, love and respect their jobs, serve society, and actively engage in the modernization of our nation. Through their enthusiasm for public welfare endeavors they are bringing about a happy change in Chinese Christianity. A large number of outstanding persons who love country and love church and are dedicated to society have emerged. By their practical actions they display the brilliance of Chinese Christians and elevate the image of Chinese Christianity.

The recent Third Plenum of the 17th National Party Congress indicated that we must fully implement the spirit of this Congress, achieve a thoroughly scientific view of development, and strive for a new victory in the comprehensive building of a moderately well-off society, a new situation in a socialism with Chinese characteristics. In this new situation, we must further promote Theological Reconstruction, run the church well according to three-self principles, strive to achieve China's harmonious society, and play a role in promoting the economic development of that society. To this end, I would like to present three hopes and views on developing Theological Reconstruction well for your consideration.

First, I hope the CCC/TSPM and its counterparts throughout the church will maintain the development of Theological Reconstruction as *prima inter pares* in every aspect of their work. I hope especially that responsible colleagues place a high degree of emphasis on it. In

improving self-management, while striving to build the CCC/TSPM into a church body that is institutionally strong, united, cooperative, and managed in an orderly fashion, the main duty of Christian Councils and Three-Self Organizations throughout the church is to serve the church, and build up the church. Therefore, Christian Councils and Three-Self Organizations must implement Theological Reconstruction where they are and give practical guidance for the sound development of the Chinese Church.

Second, I hope that seminaries and bible schools will bring all their fine qualities to bear in their role as bases for Theological Reconstruction. Our seminaries and bible schools bear the heavy responsibility of equipping and building up the younger generation of evangelists, therefore they must fully utilize their best qualities in achieving a higher standard of research in theological theories, abundant resources, and a concentration of personnel, as well as being connected to the realities of the church. In teaching and research, they should redouble their efforts in promoting Theological Reconstruction, giving a new impetus to Theological Reconstruction, training new talent and mobilizing new potential. To this end, I hope Christian Councils and Three-Self Organizations throughout the church will make this their concern, supporting the construction of seminaries and bible schools and devising ways to help these institutions solve their difficulties, strengthen their management and raise the level of teaching and research.

Third, I hope we can translate the fruits of Theological Reconstruction for the messages preached in our churches in a timely manner. We must preach the revelation and message given us by God in this age and enliven our theological thinking, so that a pure gospel and sound theological thinking will lead Christians to live out a proactive and uplifting attitude to human life and be light and salt, caring for those alone or in need. Christians should be a blessing to others, spreading Christ's love and playing a positive role in the harmonious society. Christians are found throughout the countryside and cities, and in every profession. By their every word and action, they represent not only themselves as individual Christians, but the image and prestige of Christianity in the eyes of others. Therefore, as we promote Theological Reconstruction, we must make its results a reality in a timely manner, so that more people will share in its beneficial results. These will manifest Christians' noble qualities and maintain Christianity's good image. Our good image consists in taking a positive attitude and engaging in every project of building up society, by treating persons and situations with tolerance, by seeing gain and loss as normal, serving society with grateful hearts and being a blessing to humankind.

Translated from Tian Feng, No. 345, December 2008 by Janice Wickeri
(Amity News Service, 18.1-3, March 2009)

Liu Tongsu, 'The first government sponsored conference on the Chinese house churches'

On 21-22 November, 2008, the State Council's National Development Research Centre 发展研究中心民族发展研究所 (sponsor) and the Beijing Global Institute of Scientific Research 北京普世社会科学研究所 (joint-sponsor) held a conference whose central theme was: 'Christianity and Society in Harmony – a Symposium on the Question of the Chinese House Churches' 基督教与社会和谐研讨会——中国家庭教会问题专题讨论.

Participants included representatives from the following groups:

- officials from the government research institutes, including Zhao Shiqing 赵曙青 (director of the National Development Research Centre 民族发展研究所).
- representatives of government organisations and universities, including the specialist in this area, Liu Peng 刘澎 (researcher at the American Institute at CASS); Gao Shining 高师宁 (researcher in religion at CASS); Li Xiangping 李向平 (professor at Shanghai University); Yu Jianrong 于建嵘 (researcher at the Institute for Rural Development at CASS).
- researchers from civil institutes, such as Li Fan 李凡 (Director of the thinktank China and the World); Cao Zhi 曹志, (Editor in Chief of the Universal Social Sciences website 普世社会科学网主编).
- six especially invited House Church members: You Guanhui 游冠辉, Jiang Dengxing 江登兴, Liu Tongsu 刘同苏 (all of Beijing house churches), Zhang Yinan 张义南 of a Henan house church, Zheng Leguo 郑乐国 and Yan Xin'en 颜新恩 (of Fuzhou house churches).

The majority of papers submitted at the conference considered the conditions surrounding the development of the house churches and surveyed their number, geographical distribution, cultural composition, origins, history, structure, developmental trend, foreign connections, etc. Participants noted that the number of people involved in the house churches is vast (with conference figures ranging from 50m to 100m). The house churches are spread across a range of geographic and social strata (over the entire nation and every social class), and their own internal administration is gradually being rationalised. They are likely to gain more adherents and enter even more into the mainstream of the masses [...]. Some participants stressed the current rapid growth of the house churches, and that God's protection over this long period is as a result of persisting in the 'way of the cross'. Another factor [mentioned] was that the new form of civil society 公民社会 has given them room in which to operate.

A significant number of reports touched upon the politics of government religious management. Almost all the reports found that the present organs and regulations of China's religious management system are seriously lagging behind social developments. These [government] organs and regulations derived from a time when regulations were tools in the state's attempts to intervene in popular society 民间社会. In a gradually emerging civil society, they have become anachronisms of a dictatorial society (participants used the phrase, a 'social appendix'). Fundamentally, the method of forcing a nationwide unification of church and state control violates the essence of [religious] belief and [proper] government. In the present, democratic society 民主社会 it must inevitably be on the wane. Owing to this inherent violation of [proper spheres of] work and the emerging trends in society, the system of official-administered religions 官办的宗教 will only cover a small number of people, (within Protestant Christianity, barely 20 million or so), and appears to have no real jurisdiction over the majority (50-100 million Christians). It seems that forcing control in this inherently abusive and out-of-date system can only create antagonism between the state and the vast majority of Christians. The present Religious Affairs Bureau and the Three-Self Movement cannot, in their own interests, help but distort the actual situation. They induce the government to execute already unworkable policies in a rigid fashion.

Following this research into the actual situation, the conference put forward proposals which could improve obvious frailties. Long term proposals included (1) the abolition of organs of official religious management (the Religious Affairs Bureaux and the 'Three Self Movement'). These are already failing to carry out their proper supervisory function. (2) The abrogation of regulations which violate constitutional rights, for example the Regulations on Religious Affairs 宗教事务管理条例, Regulations on the Registration of Religious Sites, 宗教场所登记管理条例, and Regulations on the Registration of Social Organisations 社会团体登记管理条例. By examining actual circumstances as things in themselves and in the light of social progress, regulations regarding religious and social organisations should be comprehensively redrafted. In a word, within the context of governmental 'de-ideologisation' 非意识形态化 the state will completely renounce administrative interventions in matters of religious faith and association, and through legalisation implement a democratic administrative management system.

More practical, short-term proposals included the trial of 'special religious zones' 宗教特区, the revision of regulations which violate the constitution, the setting up a routine dialogue between the house churches and government, and greater awareness of (non-statutory) management standards. On the premise of the government wanting to retain the official-administered religious system, it should still lift the ban on house churches. Generally speaking, if social circumstances do not permit the attainment of these ends, ameliorating measures may eventually allow for a later, comprehensive renewal. Without such measures, popular society 民间社会 will not be able to develop authentically, nor will the house churches be able to implement suggested reforms of their understanding or

improve their administrative structures. Many of the participants made this point: revision of the religious management system should adhere to the similar route mapped out by previous economic reforms.

Both the invited house church participants and the Christian academics affirmed the great significance of this dialogue between the government and the house churches. However, throughout the dialogue, they maintained this bottom line: only God can have jurisdiction over our spiritual life; earthly authorities of whatever power have no right over people's souls. In regard to the content of belief, the house churches (and any authentic church 真正的教会) can only submit to Christ and preserve the right to self-government 自主权利, preferring death to ceding this authority to earthly powers. Government leaders are entrusted their authority by God to have jurisdiction over public order and peace.

(The Chinese account of the meeting can also be found online at <http://www.douban.com/group/topic/4729243/>, accessed 12 January, 2009; trans. Lawrence Braschi.)

More Than 400 College Students in Beijing and Zhejiang Detained and Interrogated; Four Church Leaders Sentenced to Labor Camps

December 3, 2008

BEIJING and ZHEJIANG – After conducting detailed investigations, ChinaAid has confirmed that from the end of September to early November 2008, a large police force was dispatched to raid house gatherings in Beijing and in areas near college campuses in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. More than 400 Christian college students were arrested and interrogated. House church leaders who led the gatherings were detained, and four were sentenced to re-education through labor for one to one and a half years. House church members were accused of “preaching to students” and “engaging in cult activities.” The house church groups were all affiliated with the Local Church network founded by Witness Lee (1905-1997).

It is believed that this large-scale suppression by the Chinese authorities against the Christian college students in Beijing and Hangzhou is a part of the government's efforts to limit citizens' religious freedom after the Olympic Games. ChinaAid calls on the relevant agencies in China to stop the harassment of house church Christians, return illegally confiscated funds and personal property, and immediately release the four church leaders who have been sentenced to re-education through labor.

(www.ChinaAid.com)

Chinese Government Launches Attacks Against Christians During Christmas Season

December 25, 2008

The Chinese government targeted Christians in Anhui province, Henan province and Xinjiang Autonomous Region between December 21 and December 24. On Christmas Eve in Henan province, nine Christian women were arrested during a nativity play and are still being held by police. In Anhui province on December 22, officials arrested 19 students and two house church leaders and threatened to demolish their house church building. On December 21 in Xinjiang Autonomous Region, a house church was forbidden to gather and the pastor threatened with arrest.

HENAN – An eyewitness informed ChinaAid that at about 11 a.m. on Christmas Eve, a group of Public Security Bureau (PSB) officers raided a house church Christmas party in Yucheng county, Henan province and detained nine Christian women. The house church Christians were reenacting the nativity on the street, and police charged the women with “organizing illegal religious activities.” The nine women, including Mrs. Yue Zengyun who led the group, are currently being held at Detention Center of Yucheng County. The PSB officers demanded the family members pay a fine in order for the women to be released.

ANHUI – At 5 p.m. on December 22, 2008, officials conducted a joint raid on a Shepherd Fellowship Bible training class affiliated with a house church in Dianlong village, Yanghu township in Dongzhi county. The government offices conducting the raid included: the Domestic Defense Protection Squad Branch of Chizhou Municipal Public Security Bureau of Anhui Province, the Domestic Defense Protection Squad of Dongzhi County Public Security Bureau, the Yanghu Township Police Station and the Dongzhi County Bureau of Religion.

The Bible training class of 19 students was jointly founded by pastors from house churches in several local counties to train young Christians. More than 10 uniformed police raided the training class and searched its facilities for two hours. Officials showed only their police identification certificates and did not present a search warrant when they searched the rooms. Officers seized two account books and two other books, but did not give the Christians a receipt for the confiscated objects.

At 7 p.m., the 19 students and two house church leaders, Zhu Jianguo and Cheng Donglai, were taken to the Public Security Bureau for investigation where they were forcibly photographed and videotaped. Officials also recorded the Christians’ personal information. During the interrogation, the Public Security cadres pounded on the desk to scare the Christians and lectured the students with political propaganda in an effort to force the students to say that the church lured them to participate in the study. At about 10 p.m., the students were released, but the two church leaders were not released until about 12 a.m.

The next day, December 23, 2008, the Public Security Bureau called the church leaders and warned them to send the students home before government officials arrived at the site of the training. Having no alternative, the church sent the 19 students home. Later that morning, officials from the Municipal Public Security Bureau, the County Public Security Bureau, Bureau of Religion and the police station returned to the site of the Bible training. They photographed and videotaped all materials at the site and threatened the church members that anyone touching the materials would be in punished. The County Bureau of Religion posted sealing tape to shut off the house church building. Officials then read the seizure decision statement of the government in which they claimed they were notified that Cheng Donglai illegally ran a school, then pronounced the school abolished. Government officials also announced that they would demolish or sell the building used for the Bible training.

At press time, the incident has not been resolved. Zhu Jianguo and Cheng Donglai, the two church leaders involved in this incident, expect officials to summon them at any time for further investigation.

XINJIANG – On December 21, a house church in Yili city, Xinjiang Autonomous Region, was banned. Pastor Xie Xianhua, who leads the church, was warned he could face arrest if he continued his house church service. ChinaAid will publish more information on this incident as details are available.

(www.ChinaAid.com)

Christians in Earthquake Disaster Areas Raided by Police on Christmas Eve
December 26, 2008

SICHUAN – ChinaAid contacts issued the following report of police raids on four households in the Sichuan earthquake disaster area on Christmas Eve. The households were raided because of the help they received from Christians:

The construction sites of four households for disaster victims: Deng Zonghua, Li Baohua, Huang Tinggui and Li Baotong located in Group 2, Jingjia village, Quchuan township, Beichuan county of Sichuan province, were illegally raided by more than 40 policemen on December 24. The reason for the raid is that they received the help of Christian volunteers from outside the area.

At about 3 p.m. on the afternoon of December 24, as the earthquake victims and the Christian volunteers for the construction of a building were taking a rest on the construction site, more than 40 policemen and an estimated 10 police vehicles led by Deng Changda, Chief of Security Section of the County Public Security Bureau, illegally raided the site. The policemen, untidy, badly dressed and reeking with strong smells of

alcohol were vicious in their attack. They beat, swore at and insulted the people at the scene without apparent reasons except to fight illegal Christian gatherings. They threatened to demolish the house, newly built by the earthquake victims. Finally, the police took away Li Zenggui, a local earthquake victim, and Christian volunteers Cao Gang, Brother Yang, as well as others. They also seized Bibles, hymnals, televisions, motorcycles and many other items owned by the Christians. During the raid, the police refused to present documents to prove their actions were legal.

Quchuan township in Beichuan county of Sichuan province, is an area that was hard-hit from the last earthquake in Sichuan. Due to its remote location, it is hard for the area to receive assistance from the government and official relief agencies. Most of the earthquake victims in this area are still living in simple and crude shacks. In cold weather, where the temperature is 4-5 degrees below zero Celsius and where it snows from time to time, it is extremely difficult for the disaster victims to make it through the cold winter without care and assistance from the outside. After the earthquake, Christian volunteers have continuously provided assistance to the local earthquake victims and have won approval and praises from the local earthquake victims.

The raid by the police is extremely unpopular among the local earthquake victims. They want to hold the police liable for their illegal conduct. The consensus among them is that receiving assistance from Christian volunteers and accepting Christian beliefs are their rights as citizens and that it is very unreasonable for the government to attack them and punish them for helping themselves while the government is not able or willing to provide any assistance.

Brother Xing Guichang, leader of the local Christian volunteers, is a missionary from a house church in Taihe county, Anhui province. He came to the disaster area of Beichuan county only seven days after the earthquake and has been working there up to the present. With a good knowledge of the overall effects of the disaster in the local areas, Brother Xing has deep sympathy for the disaster victims. He has also won the trust of the local quake victims. Since he was not at the scene during the raid, he was not arrested by the police. He cannot make sense of the government's conduct in attacking Christian volunteers for their assistance to the quake victims. Brother Xing has a great burden for the dilemma currently facing the quake victims. He calls on all Christians and those in the international community with a sense of righteousness to express their concern for the quake victims in Sichuan.

(www.ChinaAid.com)

Buddhist

White paper: China collects, publishes lots of Tibetan religious documents

BEIJING, Sept. 25 (Xinhua) -- The Chinese government has collected, collated and published a large quantity of Tibetan religious documents and classics, said a white paper on Protection and Development of Tibetan Culture issued by the Information Office of the State Council on Thursday.

Traditional sutra printing shops of monasteries still operate and are developing well. There are nearly 60 large printing shops, including those of the Meru Monastery and the Potala Palace, producing 63,000 titles of sutras a year, available at 20 non-government-funded sales outlets, according to the paper.

In 1984, the government of the Tibet Autonomous Region presented the Lhasa version of the Tibetan-language Kangyur to the Tibet branch of the Buddhist Association of China, and gave funds to the Lhasa Sutra Printing Shop to produce more woodblocks for the monasteries in and outside Tibet, the paper said.

In 1990, the government allocated 500,000 yuan to Lhasa's Meru Monastery to engrave a new woodblock edition of Tengyur, and the 160 volumes so far engraved are now being printed. This is the first time that Tengyur has been engraved and printed in Lhasa, it added.

The state has appropriated 40 million yuan and organized more than 100 Tibetan-language experts to finish collating Tibetan versions of Tengyur and Kangyur within two decades, it said.

Now all 124 volumes of Kangyur are available, and 108 volumes of Tengyur are to be published by the end of 2008. So far, 1,490 volumes of Kangyur have been printed; Tibetan Buddhist classics on rituals, biographies and treatises have also been printed and distributed, it said.

In 1998, The Kangyur of Bon Religion was compiled and published by the Tibetan-language Classics Press of Tibet, and The Tengyur of Bon Religion, by the Tibet People's Publishing House. A large quantity of other Buddhist works, such as On Pattra-leaf Scriptures and History of Bon Monasteries in Tibet are also available in bookstores, according to the paper.

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