

The Church and Christian Theological Education in Contemporary China: An Edifying Visit of Delegation of Indian Theological Educators and Church Leaders

In 1987 a Chinese delegation led by Bishop K.H. Ting visited churches and Christian organizations in India. Twenty-five years later, another Chinese delegation consisting of 6 members led by Rev. Dr. Chen Yilu, visited India from August 17 to 27, 2013. This visit was facilitated by the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (FTESEA) having Rev. Dr. H.S. Wilson as its Executive Director. The delegation visited Kolkata, Serampore, Delhi, Agra, and Bangalore. The members of the delegation considered it to be a very meaningful trip as they got to visit theological colleges, churches and church organizations, thereby gaining an insight about India, in particular about the life and ministries of the Church in India, along with some of its cultural expressions. A bond of friendship was thus established between the Chinese friends and Indian church leaders and theologians. This paved the way for a reciprocal visit of Indian theological educators (represented by the Board of Senate of Serampore College) and church leaders (represented by the National Council of Churches in India) to China from November 13 to 22, 2014. This programme was again facilitated by FTESEA through Rev. Dr. H. S. Wilson.¹

We are indeed grateful to Dr. H.S. Wilson for having organized these mutual visits which hold promise for ongoing fruitful partnership between the churches and theological institutions of China and India. At the same time our thanks go to China Christian Council (CCC) for having consented to host the Indian delegation and making excellent arrangements for our entire programme in China. So also our gratitude goes to the State Administration for Religious Affairs, abbreviated as SARA (a functioning department of Foreign Ministry which oversees religious affairs and issues for the People's Republic of China), since SARA approved of and facilitated this visit of the Indian delegation

The following persons constituted the visiting team:

1. Bishop Dr. Taranath S. Sagar, President, National Council of Churches in India (NCCI)
2. Rev. Dr. Santanu Patro, Registrar, Senate of Serampore College (SSC)
3. Prof. Dr. Lalitluangliana Khiangte, Principal, Serampore College
4. Rev. Dr. Mohan Larbeer, Secretary, Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College
5. Rev. Dr. Ivy Singh, Treasurer, Senate of Serampore College
6. Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad, General Secretary, NCCI
7. Rev. Dr. H.S. Wilson, Executive Director, FTESEA
8. Mrs. Eva Wilson, (She took time out to be with us on this visit on her personal travel expense. The FTESEA chair and CCC colleagues also consented to her visit).

We regret that two of our members, namely Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philexenos, President - SSC and Rev. Dr. Mar Atsonchanger, Vice President – NCCI, could not make it because of visa problems.

The Christianity in China which the Indian Delegation was going to relate to

It is said that there are six eras of Christianity in China. The first wave was supposed to be soon after Jesus' death and in the first few centuries AD. The second wave was Nestorianism starting from about the seventh century. The third wave was Catholicism that was spread during the Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368). The fourth wave was Catholicism during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) Dynasties. The fifth wave was mainly Protestantism and Evangelicalism when missionaries arrived mainly from Western Europe and America during the 1800s and early 1900s. The sixth wave, which started during the

¹ For more information about FTESEA, visit www.ftesea.org.

middle of the twentieth century, was characterized by the expulsion of foreign missionaries, and the development of a largely indigenous Chinese Church.²

The Indian delegation was going to relate to the Christianity arising out of the sixth wave period in China. In the 1950s, in order to change the image of Christianity as a foreign religion, Chinese Christians with a broad vision initiated the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. The principles of self-governance, self-support and self-propagation quickly received a positive response from Chinese Christians. The first national conference of Chinese Christians was held in Beijing in 1954. After that, the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China was set up. Its purpose was to unite and guide Chinese Christians to love the motherland, abide by the law, actively support and participate in the construction of socialism, while it endeavored to implement the three-self principles.³

The Cultural Revolution of the 1960s sought to destroy the “*Four Olds*”— old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas. Religion fell into this category, and therefore many temples, churches, monasteries, and mosques were closed down or even destroyed.⁴ For the entire decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), schools in China did not operate; this left a whole generation with no formal education. All of the educated and professional people had been targets for reeducation. Those that hadn't been killed were dispersed across the countryside, toiling on farms or working in labor camps.⁵ The Chinese economy basically came to a standstill during those tumultuous years, and it took many years to recover.⁶

When Mao Zedong died in 1976, the Cultural Revolution era effectively came to an end. Eager to make up for lost time and wasted resources, China's leaders initiated China's "second revolution"—a comprehensive economic modernization and organizational reform program. Deng Xiaoping and his associates mobilized the Chinese people in new ways to make China a world power. Starting with the Third Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party's Eleventh National Party Congress in December 1978, Deng reaffirmed the aims of the Four Modernizations, (the modernization of industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defense) placing economic progress above the Maoist goals of class struggle and permanent revolution.⁷ After the "cultural revolution," especially since China initiated reform and opened itself to the outside world, the Chinese government made notable achievements in restoring, amplifying and implementing the policy of religious freedom and guaranteeing citizens' rights in this regard.⁸ In the spring of 1979, Chinese churches resumed worship after the Cultural Revolution. In order to revive the church, the China Christian Council was founded at the third national Christian conference in 1980. It has served since then to unite and provide services for churches in China by following the Bible, formulating Church Order, and encouraging theological education.⁹ It is this Christianity within a fast developing China with its open door market socialism that the Indian Delegation sought to understand and relate to.

The Programme of the Indian Delegation

During their 10-day sojourn, the Indian Delegation visited churches, theological institutions and Christian organizations in Shanghai, Suzhou, Nanjing and Beijing. In Shanghai we first met with the national leadership of China Christian Council and the Three Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China, consisting of Rev. Dr. Gao Feng, President of CCC and NJUTS; Rev. Xu Xiaohong, Vice Chair and Secretary General of TSPM; Rev. Baoping Kan, Vice President and General Secretary of CCC; Rev.

² Cf. <http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/christianity.htm>

³ Cf. <http://www.bibleinchina.org/index.html>

⁴ <http://blogs.transparent.com/chinese/chairman-mao-the-cultural-revolution/>

⁵ <http://asianhistory.about.com/od/modernchina/f/What-Was-The-Cultural-Revolution.htm>

⁶ <http://blogs.transparent.com/chinese/chairman-mao-the-cultural-revolution/>

⁷ <http://www.chaos.umd.edu/history/toc.html>

⁸ <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/7/7-VI.htm>

⁹ <http://www.bibleinchina.org/index.html>

Shan Weixiang, Vice President of CCC and Director of Media of CCC/TSPM; Mr. Gu Mengfei, Deputy Secretary General of TSPM; Elder Enlin Ou, Director of Department of Overseas Relations of CCC/TSPM; Mr. Wang Baocheng, Acting Vice Director of Social Service Department; Ms. Liu Song, Secretary of the Department of Theological Education; Ms. Fang Ying, Editor of Tian Feng; Ms Zhou Xiaoyan (Grace), Secretary, Department of Overseas Relations; and Rev. Huang Tianhua, Guangdong CCC/TSPM. In Shanghai we also visited the Holy Trinity Church, and the East China Theological Seminary. In Suzhou we participated in Sunday Worship with a Chinese congregation: Du Shu Hu Lake Christian church, had lunch fellowship with them, and met with provincial leaders of China Christian Council and the Three Self Patriotic Movement. In Nanjing we visited Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Amity Foundation, Jiangsu Theological Seminary, and Amity Press. In Beijing we met with the officials of Beijing China Christian Council and the Three Self Patriotic Movement, visited Yanjing Theological Seminary, and met with Officers of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). Also included in the programme were visits to places of urban, cultural, historical and ecological interest in and around the above mentioned four places. It was indeed an edifying trip! The team members gained several important insights about Christianity in China.

China Christian Council is Post Denominational, Vibrant and Socially Responsive!

The Chinese churches, having Protestant roots, are described as being “post-denominational”. Denominations went out of existence in the China Christian Council since 1958 though there are still some differences within it related to past traditions. As the WCC write-up puts it: “The churches in China have now entered a post-denominational period. Within the CCC, institutional protestant denominations no longer exist and believers worship together. Differences in theological or liturgical background are dealt with according to the principle of mutual respect.”¹⁰ In India, where churches are divided along denominational lines and where more and more denominations are mushrooming, here is something very exemplary in China. On the other side, it may be asked whether the Chinese Church needs to be taught about denominations since the present generation of Chinese Christians seems to be oblivious about the nature and function of denominations. It may be helpful to be informed about the history of denominations, their administrative, doctrinal, and ritualistic differences, so that they can better appreciate what it means to be post-denominational. Such study of denominations should not however be done at the cost of the revival of church divisions thereby leading to church-weakening denominations.

As the Indian delegation worshipped with one of the Chinese congregations in Suzhou, we were very impressed with the liveliness of the worship. The worship was led by a young woman theological graduate. The sermon was preached by a woman pastor, who was also theologically trained. (In many local churches, there is usually one senior pastor assisted by younger pastors.) There was much enthusiasm in the singing of hymns, with quite a few persons raising their hands in joyful praise. The Bible was read collectively by the congregation and even the Creed was professed in unison. So also the congregation responded with loud ‘Amens’ on important occasions during the worship. So, though as such one could realize that there are no set liturgies in the churches, the worship was very orderly. Could this be yet another expression of the post-denominational church? The institution of Sunday Schools particularly for children as found in India and elsewhere does not seem to be established in the local churches; however they do have Bible Classes. Lay leaders who look after house churches which are related to registered churches undergo some sort of Bible school training. A full-fledged Christian education programme is yet to be developed.

The delegation visited regions of East and Central East China where development and industrialization are visible. In those regions churches appeared to be middle class, educated and affluent. The younger generation of Chinese Christians seemed to be quite enthusiastic about their faith, worship and ministries. This generation is one which has not been influenced by the cultural revolution of the sixties and early seventies. Indeed a new Christianity has emerged which is grown in native soil, locally administered and

¹⁰ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/china-christian-council>

theologically contextual.¹¹ The polity and administration of church is such that it does not give any denominational consciousness nor is it attracted to support from outside China. The Church truly is self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating.

The Official figure of Protestant Christians in China is 25 million but some independent scholars claim that the number is 60 million or more.¹² The WCC write-up adds: "Pastoral work of the Chinese churches has been expanded during the last twenty-five years. More than 55,000 churches and meeting places have been opened, 70 percent of which are newly built. Of the more than 16 million Protestant Christians 70 percent live in the rural areas."¹³ In such a context, leadership development is one of the biggest challenges for the Church in China. There is a shortage of trained and ordained pastors; the Church relies heavily on lay leadership. Another big challenge is mobilizing support for Christians in rural areas.

The CCC/TSPM is advocating theological reconstruction in the Chinese church to build up theological thinking that is biblically grounded, rooted in Chinese culture that encapsulates the special experience of the Chinese church, and is able to provide a sound explanation of Christian faith in the modern Chinese contexts. CCC/TSPM has eight commissions (Church Regulations, Theological Education, Bible Publication, Christian Publication, Tian Feng Editorial, Sacred Music, Women's Ministry, Rural Church Ministry) and eight departments (Training, Publication, Tian Feng Editorial, Research, Social Service, Overseas Relations, Administrative Office and Nanjing Office). In addition, CCC/TSPM has an advisory committee.¹⁴

The CCC/TSPM is involved in the development of the state and people. Christians make positive contribution to the State and their participation is acknowledged by the State. The church is running 37 medical centres in rural areas, 4 rehabilitation centre, 180 elderly homes, 43 kindergarten and 9 orphanages. Christians have witnessed their faith and related themselves in developing the state. Indeed religion can have positive expressions and therefore is indispensable to any society, including Chinese society.

What the above-mentioned WCC document talks about pertains to registered churches. However there are unregistered churches as well in China. A registered church is one which has chosen to comply with the Government regulations for registration as a place of worship and has met 6 general requirements:

- A fixed place or building
- A name or title
- A management organization composed of citizens who are believers
- A group of people who regularly meet there
- Officials and trained personnel/ Pastors who can lead religious services
- Its own legal source of income

While some churches may not want any kind of civil registration, others are committed to a narrowly defined set of religious beliefs, and some may not qualify or are unable to meet one of the 6 criteria. There are many unregistered churches-mainly because they do not have a full time pastor or satisfy the financial and administrative conditions for being registered and these are largely in the more rural areas.¹⁵ However the term "underground church" is a misnomer. One has therefore to be careful about agencies which make propaganda about underground churches in China and seek to raise funds for their cause.

¹¹ However church buildings and seminary constructions do not suggest that architecture is native grown. The cathedral style church building and modern architectural designs of church buildings give an impression that the church is being influenced by globalization culture. People are attracted to Western culture and music and there is a great interest to learn and speak English. Today English is being taught in many primary schools and so also in Seminaries.

¹² Cf. David Aikman: *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China And Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington DC: Regnery Pub Inc., 2003)

¹³ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/china-christian-council>

¹⁴ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/china-christian-council>

¹⁵ <http://www.moortownbaptistchurch.org.uk/mission/china/the-christian-church-in-china-faq>

Some Positive Aspects about the Relationship of the State with the Church

"In China, the State is hostile to all religions, including Christianity!" This is one stereotype which people outside China construct about the state-church relations in that country. The reality is that China recognizes 5 religions and they alone have the right to function. They are (1) Daoism, (2) Protestant Christianity, (3) Chinese Catholicism, (4) Buddhism and (5) Islam. Different facets of this phenomenon have however to be understood:¹⁶

1. Political Relations

The Chinese constitution does not have a specific provision spelling out the relationship between the government and religious organizations. However, the government and religious organizations have each issued their own statements on the matter. When religious organizations such as the Chinese Buddhist Association, the Catholic Patriotic Association, and the Protestant Three-self Patriotic Association were established, they all declared in their constitutions that they were under the leadership of the People's Government. In 1982, the Chinese Communist Party issued Document No. 19, which states that "all patriotic religious organizations should follow the Party's and government's leadership." In 1992, the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee issued Document No. 6, which reiterated this stance.

These statements, on the part of both the religious organizations and the government, clearly show that the government has a leadership role over religious organizations. Formal religious organizations must be approved by the state, and once approved they have the obligation to carry out the policies of the Chinese Communist Party and government and are subject to state regulation. Religious organizations have their own administration, but politically they are the same as other organizations in society in that they remain under the direct leadership of the government.

2. Economic Relations

It is widely believed that Chinese religious organizations (Christian) are "State-run churches," but this understanding is inaccurate. Religious venues, whether they are Buddhist or Taoist temples, churches or mosques, are not built with funding from the state and are not considered state property. Furthermore, religious leaders, such as priests, monks, and pastors are not government employees. In general the budget for religious organizations comes directly from the renting out of their facilities, donations from religious adherents, or the work of the clergy.

It's important to note, however, that religious organizations do receive some financial assistance from the government. The national and local level administrative offices and national level religious schools (seminaries) are part of the state system and the government does allocate funding for repair and upkeep of religious buildings. This assistance, however, does not mean that the religious organizations are 'state-run.'

3. Government Functions

Religious Affairs Departments have been set up at all levels of government (central, provincial, city, and county) to manage and supervise religious affairs. This is clearly articulated in Document No. 19 which states that "all places of worship are under the administrative control of the Bureau of Religious Affairs."

4. The Relationship between Religion and Public Administration, Justice, and Education

Document No. 19 clearly spells out this relationship: "Religion will not be permitted to meddle in the administrative or judicial affairs of the state, nor to intervene in the schools or public education." In other words, religion must not interfere (or be involved with) the public administration, justice, education or mass media in China.

¹⁶ <http://www.pacilution.com/english/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=3089>

However the interpretation of this religious policy and its implementation in specific areas, especially isolated rural areas, are two different things. Church leaders work hard on a case by case basis to have believers legal rights honoured. Rights are most easily protected for members of the registered churches. Even foreign visitors are free to attend church, to have informal contacts and friendships with Christians and to give money to the local church. Foreigners are however not free to organize events, religious gatherings or services for Chinese Christians, and to proselytize.

While the number of religious adherents, particularly Christians, has been increasing, how has the State been responding to the phenomenon? An article entitled, "Cracks in the Atheist Edifice" published in The Economist, November 1-7, 2014, pp.24-26, presents some insights:

1. While around 7400 Christians have suffered persecution in China during 2013, that figure constitutes less than 0.01% of all Chinese Christians. Even if the figure is higher, in this century "persecution is clearly no longer the norm", says Brent Fulton of "ChinaSource", a Christian group in Hong Kong.
2. Many state officials see advantages in Christianity's growth. Some wealthy business Christian persons in Wenzhou provide helpful biblical approaches to making money. Others form groups encouraging each other to do business honestly, pay taxes and help the poor. Rare is the official anywhere in China who would want to scare away investors from his area.
3. Regional Officials find that Christians are good citizens. Their commitment to community welfare helps to reinforce precious stability. Therefore the government itself is sponsoring the construction of new Three Self churches to encourage Christians to continue to be good citizens. Three Self pastors are starting to talk to house-church leaders; conversely, house-church leaders (often correctly) no longer consider official churches to be full of party stooges. In recent years the party's concerns have shifted from people beliefs to the maintenance of stability and the party's monopoly of power. If working with churches helps achieve these aims, it will do so, even though it still frets about encouraging an alternative source of authority.
4. Increasingly, the party needs the help of religious believers. It is struggling to supply social services efficiently; Christian and Buddhist groups are willing, and able, to help. Since about 2003, mainland government officials have been inviting religious groups in Hong to help set up NGOs and charities. In an age of hedonism and corruption, selfless activism has helped the churches' reputation; not least, it has persuaded the regime that Christians are not out to overthrow it.

The Officials of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), who met the Indian Delegation, asserted that Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution articulates a policy of religious freedom to all citizens.¹⁷ SARA is responsible for protecting the rights of religious believers and maintaining amity between the religious communities and state. SARA does not interfere in religious matters, rather it supervises their activities as per the law of the land. No one is discriminated in the name of religion. Religious communities however are not to interfere in the affairs of the state nor engage in politics. Religious communities are called to participate in nation construction. SARA appreciated the work of the church among the poor and vulnerable.

SARA has its administrative body at provincial as well as municipality levels. This allows all religious groups to come together and settle all issues related to religion at national, provincial and municipal

¹⁷ Article 36: Citizens of the Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one can make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.

levels. Some Universities in China have faculties on Religion. As per the policy there are no official religious festival holidays. The vision of China is to see all religions are equal and that there is no disharmony in the name of religions.

SARA regulates relationships of the churches with churches and ecumenical bodies outside China. Thus China Christian Council is a member of the World Council of Churches but is not a member of Christian Conference of Asia because the latter has recognized Taiwan as an independent entity. The Catholic Church in China does not have state-recognized relations with the Pope and the Vatican. Orthodox Churches are beginning to have discussions with SARA regarding their presence in China.

Evangelism is not totally banned in China!

"No evangelism is allowed in China! Evangelists will be jailed or deported!" Such are the stereotypes which Christians outside China have constructed about situation in that country. However the reality is quite different. Evangelism is allowed in China as long as it is not in the "public domain, such as a city square," and not in "public institutions, such as government offices or Communist party. Individuals can proselytize in state-sanctioned religious venues within their own region; proselytizing in another region is prohibited, unless the individual receives permission from the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB)."¹⁸

In fact the Executive Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council stated, in August 2009, that he had even witnessed and participated in "open air evangelist campaigns sanctioned by local government." He indicated that the government response to proselytizing varies from place to place, since there are "hundreds of thousands" of administrative authorities in China. He further noted that in one place proselytizing may be prohibited, while the administrative unit "next door" may allow the same practice. The Executive Secretary also pointed out that because foreign media tend to focus only on cases where the government prohibits proselytizing, a "grossly distorted picture" has been created.¹⁹

Since conversion is permissible in China, Christian congregations in particular have quickly grown in membership from the time churches began reopening when Chairman Mao's death in 1976 signaled the end of the Cultural Revolution. China's Protestant community, which had just one million members in 1949, has already overtaken those of countries more commonly associated with an evangelical boom. In 2010 there were more than 58 million Protestants in China compared to 40 million in Brazil and 36 million in South Africa, according to the Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion and Public Life.²⁰

"By my calculations China is destined to become the largest Christian country in the world very soon," said Fenggang Yang, a professor of sociology at Purdue University and author of *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*. He believes that number will swell to around 160 million by 2025. That would likely put China ahead even of the United States, which had around 159 million Protestants in 2010 but whose congregations are in decline. By 2030, China's total Christian population, including Catholics, would exceed 247 million, placing it above Mexico, Brazil and the United States as the largest Christian congregation in the world, he predicted.²¹

Officially, the People's Republic of China is an atheist country but that is changing fast as many of its 1.3 billion citizens seek meaning and spiritual comfort that neither communism nor capitalism seem to have supplied.

¹⁸ According to the United States (US) Department of State's 2009 *International Religious Freedom Report*, the Chinese "Government permits proselytism in registered places of worship and in private settings, but does not permit it in public, in unregistered places of worship, or by foreigners" (26 Oct. 2009). The report further states that leaders and members of unregistered religious groups "faced criminal and administrative punishments" relating to assembly, travel, publishing and "public proselytizing"

¹⁹<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4b8631d828.html>

²⁰ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10776023/China-on-course-to-become-worlds-most-Christian-nation-within-15-years.html>

²¹ Ibid.

Christian Organizations engage in Significant Service of the Society: the Amity Foundation Model

The Indian Delegation had the privilege of visiting Amity Foundation. Amity Foundation, an independent Chinese social development organization, was created in 1985 on the initiative of Chinese Christians, headed by Bishop K.H. Ting, to promote education, social service, health, community development and civil society building from China's coastal provinces in the east to the minority areas of the west. Doing away with the traditional concept of charity, it emphasizes people's participation, sharing and mutual development, with the final goal of true harmony of the whole society.²²

While learning social development values from international organizations, Amity has created a whole set of systems and methodologies to ensure effective project management as well as organizational accountability and transparency. With the implementation of poverty-reduction and development work in central and western China, Amity has cultivated its own development concepts and ideas including: Model of Three Participations – beneficiaries, experts and local governments; Principle of Three Shares – Amity, local governments and beneficiaries (Three project stakeholders share the costs of the projects); and Objective of Three Benefits – economic, social and ecological. In their dedication to serve the people, they are following the culture of the Six Cs: Compassion, Commitment, Competence, Communication, Cooperation, and Creativity.

Amity Foundation has therefore been focusing on Church related and Social Service; Community Development, Environmental Protection, Public Health, HIV Prevention; Disaster Management; Education and International Exchange; Schools, Scholarships and Orphan Fostering; Urban Community Services; and Social Welfare. Amity thus emphasizes Christians' involvement and participation in building Chinese nation while also witnessing Christ to the Chinese people through love and action.

Amity Foundation has created Amity Social Service Network (ASSN) which trains social workers and religious leaders on disaster management, addressing social issues, promoting amity among communities etc. Pastors are also given training on social work so that they can serve the communities more effectively. Though the introduction of free market has brought a new middle urban class, at the same time many communities have been living under poverty. Economic reform also has its limitations. There is a need to train more workers to reach out to the deprived sections who have not been benefitted by the emerging market and industrialization. Indeed the challenge for the church is to become more engaged in social reform and community transformation. This ASSN also trains Asian and African social workers and leaders.

China is one of the largest Bible Publishers in the world!

During China's Cultural Revolution, Bibles had been prohibited. After the Cultural Revolution and before 1987, only three million Bibles had been produced in China between the years 1980 and 1986. Many Chinese Christians had to make do with shared hand-written versions of the Bible, and treasured their Bibles greatly.

Amity established its Amity Printing Press in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, in 1987. With the arrival of the Amity Printing Press in 1987, millions of Bibles are being printed annually, and are legally and openly distributed to churches and congregations all over China. The first 50 million Bibles took 20 years to print. The second 50 million only took five years - the mark of 100 million Bibles was reached in 2012 - and the 200 million milestone could be realized within ten years.²³

²² <http://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/who-we-are>

²³ Cf. <http://www.biblesociety.org.au/news/china%E2%80%99s-amity-press-celebrates-100-million-bibles-the-presses-are-gearing-up-for-the-next-100-million>

Editions of the Press Bibles include versions in traditional and simplified Chinese, Chinese-English, ethnic minority languages, and Braille. Through a partnership with United Bible Societies, Bibles are produced to be affordable to most Chinese Christians. Not only is the Amity Printing Press one of the leading enterprises in the local printing industry, it has also greatly contributed to the cause of religious freedom in China.

The Amity Printing Press also produces other religious texts and hymnals in Chinese and in other languages that are used by partner churches around the world. In order to continue meeting the existing demand for Bibles, the Printing Press moved to a larger facility in 2008 in Nanjing spread over an area of 85,000 square metres.

As already indicated earlier, Amity and the CCC legally print and distribute Bibles in China. *To bring Bibles into China tarnishes the witness of the church and generates suspicions.*

Theological Education is fast developing in China

In 1981 at a consultation of Christian Conference of Asia, Bishop K.H. Ting identified the following goals for theological education in China:

1. To prepare more Chinese Christian intellectuals who are concerned about the problems in China. The old seminary curriculum focused on problems that had not been raised by Chinese; they were predominantly problems raised by Christians in other countries.
2. To prepare Christian intellectuals who would work for the church and work for evangelism in China as pastors, evangelists, teachers and lay leaders.
3. To prepare select experts in religions as there is increased interest in religions in the academic circles in China. Such experts would also be expected to be trained as writers, translators and artists.
4. To prepare teachers for the seminary.
5. To popularize theological education to reach Christians and their leaders nurtured in different contexts like worshipping in homes through correspondence courses without diluting the quality and integrity of theological knowledge that is imparted.
6. To revise the curriculum (as subjects that were taught then were more or less similar to those taught outside China) to relate the content of theological education to current thinking in China and Chinese church history. Theological education cannot detach itself from what is happening around the community.
7. To train evangelists who are sensitive to the issues that are prevalent in public discourse in Chinese society and develop common language to converse about them like, the meaning of life, what is good, truth, beauty, goodness, order and morality.²⁴

Bishop Ting projected a vision for Chinese Christian theology as follows: "Our future vision of the Chinese church is one that is rich in a theology that respects reason and is more suited to Chinese socialist society. It will be one that can help believers to establish more harmonious and reasonable faith and witness. Such a theology will gain the attention and ear of our people, especially in intellectual circles and in the Christian community worldwide. Christians overseas will be happy to engage in equal dialogue and exchange with us. They will no longer take us lightly or say that China has no theology. I deeply believe that more and more Christians will recognize the urgency of theological renewal and be willing to dedicate themselves to this vision."²⁵

One can therefore witness that during the past three decades, theological education has started to develop and make its impact on the faith communities in China. The country presently has 21 regional/provincial seminaries and one national seminary. Most of the seminaries have recently

²⁴ K.H. Ting. "Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Theological Education in New China, in *Ministry by the People. Theological Education by Extension*, ed. F. Ross Kinsler. Geneva: WCC, 1983, pp.264-272.

²⁵ K. H. Ting. "My View of These Fifty Years." in *A Chinese Contribution to Ecumenical Theology. Selected Writings of Bishop K.H.Ting*, eds. Jane and Philip Wickeri. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007, p.113.

remodeled campus facilities, built new facilities, or moved altogether to larger facilities. While the provincial seminaries largely have a B.Th. programme, the national seminary namely Nanjing Union Theological Seminary has the B.Th. and M. Div. programmes. In fact the State has asked the national seminary to start the Ph. D. programme using the resources of the Religions Departments of the State Universities.

Each of the Seminaries chooses candidates after a careful selection and screening process. All applicants have to write an entrance examination and only upon passing the examination they are selected. It is said that usually women candidates outnumber the men in the selection process, but to maintain the ratio, men are given admission! There are good numbers of women faculty in each of the seminaries that the Indian delegation visited.

The Seminaries are responsible for making their own curriculums and syllabuses as per need. They are however guided by the national curriculum that has been proposed by Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS) and approved by the CCC. Under the supervision of the CCC, the Director Department of Theological Education oversees the work of the seminaries, especially their curricula and syllabi. Most of the courses are offered from the branches of Bible, Theology and Christian Ministry. Attention is also sought to be given to contemporary Christianity and contextual theological education. The Presidents of each of the Seminaries are the leading CCC leaders and hold several responsible positions in the church. The Dean of each seminary looks after the day to day administration of the seminaries. While the Seminary professors have been trained in China, some of them have done higher theological studies in Hong Kong, Singapore, Europe and North America.

In the seminaries that the Indian delegation visited, it was observed that United Bible Society helps seminaries to establish Bible Resource Centres so as to develop biblical studies and encourage research. The Libraries have a good collection of Chinese books. Many of the books have been translated from different languages. The seminaries would have to however give greater attention to subjects and literature dealing with contextual theologies, modern Chinese political theory, religious laws of the state, study of religions and inter-religious dialogue, church management and leadership, and pastoral counselling. The seminaries seem to have a very strong music course component in their theological education curriculum. Though Chinese music plays a greater role, often western music is also used for singing choruses that have been translated into Mandarin.

Continuing theological education and refresher courses are being offered to the graduates and pastors. Theological teachers are also given training on many issue-based emerging theologies. Theological seminaries also offer external programmes for training and equipping lay leaders and others who are interested to know about Christianity. There is a growing interest among the Chinese people to know more about Christianity due to its recent exposure to the Western media and culture. The Correspondence courses facilitate learning of the Bible and biblical interpretations. Each of the Seminaries has a strong publication department to promote scholarship and produce study materials in Chinese.

Faculty development is an urgent concern for the seminaries. More and more trained and qualified teachers are required for the growing demand of the Church. Many of the graduates prefer to be in church ministries rather than going for higher theological studies. Presently, visiting faculty from within the country and overseas reduce the burden of developing faculty to meet the teaching needs of the seminaries. However it is difficult to employ visiting faculty as language is the biggest impediment. It would not be out of place to mention here that The Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia has been supporting Christian theological education in China and South East Asia through grants to institutions and projects, scholarships, consultations, and publications.

In December 2012, Shanghai hosted a Chinese Christian Theological Education Fair.²⁶ The statements made by some of the Chinese leaders at the fair are insightful about the concerns of the Church in China about theological education.

Pastor Kan Baoping, Secretary-General of the China Christian Council:

This conference played a crucial role in theological education nationwide. The future of Chinese Churches depends on our theological education today, for the seminaries are the birthplace of the shepherds. God gives every theological educator this responsibility and entrusts us to create a good educational environment, to insist on the correct guidelines and to set up reasonable curricula. Training and communication help us to reflect on our purpose for running seminaries. Also, it inspires us to evaluate our recent educational methods to examine how well those methods are helping us achieve our educational goals.

Zhou Yongjian, President Emeritus of China Graduate School of Theology:

Because of the changing times, seminary education should first position itself well and hold on to its mission to foster good shepherds who are kind, faithful and wise. Seminary education includes but shouldn't be limited to theological study. It should be a comprehensive educational experience – academic, spiritual and practical. In addition, seminary education should keep pace with the times and understand the current needs of the church and society, improve itself and offer quality teachers and students, and plan for future development. While focusing on self-improvement, we should open ourselves up to overseas exchanges—sending excellent people to study abroad and introduce well-known scholars abroad to teach some courses to learn from their experiences and strengths. If we do so, the future of China's theological education will be bright.

Gao Ying, President of Yanjing Theological Seminary:

The lifeline of Seminary development is teacher training. Just as the aim of theological education is to pass on our faith, the fortress of sustainable development of seminaries is teacher training. The quality of the believers depends on the quality of the pastoral staff; the quality of the pastoral staff depends on seminary education. And the core of seminary education is teacher training and candidate development.

Yu Daxin, President of China Graduate School of Theology:

The word secularization comes from the Latin word *saeculum*, meaning “now” and “the present.” “Secularism” refers to the life philosophy that only the present is meaningful; there is nothing to seek beyond the present and there is nothing that is ultimate. The contemporary world is pervaded with this secularization. To respond to this phenomenon, theological education must strengthen the interaction of the transcendence, strengthen the real experience of God's presence, strengthen the consciousness of the last days and the knowledge that God has shaped and is shaping history. This kind of theological education must emphasize the building up of spiritual life and the broadening of the horizon of the last days. Spiritual intensity is indispensable in the fight against secularization.

Women play an important role in theological education and ministry

Over the years, Asian women have sufficiently been exposed to the problems of the lack of women concerns in theological education. It has been strongly felt that adding some new subjects on contextual theology in a traditional curriculum of theological education will not suffice. It rather requires a radical and honest restructuring of curricula making them inter-disciplinary and integrated with a focus on 'faithfulness to the Gospel and commitment to the society'. This process would involve problematising women issues, critiquing the hierarchical gender relations, and understanding it in constant interaction with other

²⁶ <http://chinesechurchvoices.com/2013/07/05/a-discussion-of-seminary-education-in-china/>

important social, economic, cultural, political and religious hierarchies, such as class, race, ability, patriarchy and capitalism. The purpose of this venture is to make theological education an Interdisciplinary concern to prepare women and men to think critically about gender stereotypes, unlearn the capitalistic patriarchal ideologies, explore the diversity of women's experiences and their contributions historically and across cultures and to realize the equality of women and men in all areas of life by empowering them

In China, one could observe that the number of women in theological education has been increasing. It is indeed inspiring to see that women have been more involved than men in Church ministries in China. This shows the interrelatedness of the Church and the seminaries. In Seminaries more than 60% of the students enrolled are women and in Churches an equal number of pastors is women. This is very unique in China. Nowhere else do we find such involvement. One could even say that theological education in China exhibits the "ability not to be present-based but future-focused". It is moving towards practicing collective, collegial, participatory and egalitarian leadership so that the new generations of pastors, church workers and educators can help transform traditional leadership styles at the grassroots level. Theological training in China is becoming more holistic by addressing human development. Women theologians are emerging and doing women theologies in China.

What next?

The Church in China is full of pleasant and edifying surprises for those who have been fed by western media and propaganda about the problems of Christians in China and the consequent stereotypes that they have given rise to. The post-denominational Church in China, while it abides by the law of the land is vibrant. The worship places are packed with believers, the worship services are lively involving much congregational participation, and women too play a decisive part in ministry. Theological education is also on the rise in China. It shows the keen interest of people in studying the Word of God and in being engaged in ministry. The Church is also making a significant contribution to development and social transformation. The State authorities also recognize the importance of the life and service of the Church. Churches and theological institutions in India have a lot to learn from churches and seminaries in China

Yet the Church in China could also be benefitted through relationships with churches in India. The unique characteristics of different church traditions in India in terms of faith, rituals and ecclesial and social ministries could have an edifying effect on Christianity in China. So also the different traditions of theological education, and the contextually focused theological curricula and syllabi would prove to be an enriching influence for the seminaries in China. Hence it is proposed that churches and theological institutions could share information electronically as well through newsletters, bulletins and publications. The translation of important books, journals and magazines could also be facilitated. Ecclesial and theological leaders could be invited to attend church gatherings, meetings and conferences as well as the meetings of the Board and Senate of Serampore College. Arrangement could also be made for mutual exposure of church leaders, theological teachers and students, including even short term exchange programmes, dialogues on contextual theologies, and research facilities for doctoral scholars.

At the same time the churches in China and India have to play an important role in addressing the issues and concerns that arise as both our countries are engaged in socio-economic development. The churches have to work to see that all the citizens of our countries are beneficiaries of development on the basis of justice and peace, that development is eco-friendly, that development is holistically transforming the total individual and the whole society, that responsible dialogical relationships are cultivated in pluralistic societies, and that good neighborly relationships are cultivated and strengthened between the two countries.

We shall be grateful if FTESEA continues to facilitate this mutually edifying venture.