



China: Change, Christianity, Peacemaking

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One Century of Mennonite Interaction in China

by Myrri Byler

When Henry and Maria Brown left Kansas for China in 1909, they arrived in a country that was only a few years removed from the end of the 400-year-old Qing Dynasty. During the next forty years the Browns and the more than thirty five General Conference Mennonite missionaries who followed them experienced political upheavals, Japanese invasion and occupation, the civil war between the Nationalist and Communist forces, and the takeover of the country by the Communist Party. Despite living in a rural area of extreme poverty and receiving limited support from North America, the Mennonite missionaries began churches, clinics, hospitals, elementary schools, a high school and Bible training schools. With the triumph of the Communist Party and the outbreak of war in Korea in 1951, one hundred and fifty years of Protestant Christian mission, including the work of Mennonites, came to an end in mainland China.

While Mao Zedong succeeded in returning the country to the Chinese people and ridding it of foreign influence, he did not succeed in creating a more modern or progressive society. That work was left to his successor, the diminutive Deng Xiaoping, who swung the doors open to the outside world in the late 1970s. Although there have been bumps in the road—most notably the spring of 1989—the revolution that Deng began when he broke up the cooperatives and returned the land to the farmers has steamed ahead at a pace that the world has never experienced.

Two decades of double-digit economic growth has completely changed the urban landscape and the lives of some 400-500 million Chinese people. Even the casual and uninformed visitor leaves China's shores overwhelmed and dizzied by the frenzied pace of China's modernization. For more than two decades foreign experts have vacillated between (a) predicting imminent collapse or (b) visions of China leading the world. The cost of China's surge can be seen in the quality of the air and the water, and in the faces of youth who bear the responsibility of two families.

Mennonites have been privileged to be present during these almost-three decades of transition and dynamism in the world's most populous country. Goshen College began one of the very first undergraduate exchanges with China in 1980, and China Educational Exchange founded one of the first teacher exchanges in 1981. Based on principles of reciprocity, openness, integrity and a desire to build bridges of friendship and understanding, Mennonite mission leaders and educators recognized the importance of China's history with the West and antipathy toward Christianity. However this did not dissuade them from making immediate connections with Chinese Christians as they emerged from the horrors of the Cultural Revolution.

Chinese educators appreciate the long-term commitment Mennonites have made to the ideals of exchange and mutual understand-

ing. Mennonite educators have stood by their colleagues during difficult times—the student movement of 1986, the upheaval of June 1989, raised tensions in the Taiwan straits, the embassy bombing in Yugoslavia, the downing of an American spy-plane, and numerous strains in China’s relationship with the West. American Mennonites have apologized for the actions of their government, but also found ways to address concerns with their hosts.

The 1990s brought the opportunity to again connect with former Mennonite mission areas, particularly the rural counties in northern China that hosted the Browns and other General Conference missionaries. Partnerships with congregations and church institutions in other parts of China, especially Sichuan, provided valuable insight into the incredible growth of the church. From an initial program attempting to carve out a way for English teachers to be present in meaningful ways on university campuses, Mennonites now have invitations and opportunities to connect in many sectors of society.

The articles in this newsletter are a microcosm of the relationships and bridge building that has occurred during these almost-thirty years. They provide only a small window into China’s emergence and the role of the church in society. Chinese contributors include pastors, seminary teachers, English teachers, religion scholars, a historian and a counselor. North American contributors include those who have lived in China for nearly two decades, and those who have been involved with Mennonite presence there.

There are many questions and concerns as to where the country’s transition is leading the Chinese people and the other four-fifths of the world. The “experts” include the breathless believers, convinced that China can and will solve its myriad problems while creating economic miracles for other struggling nations. At the other extreme are the prophets who predict the coming collapse of China (there is a book by that title) and believe that the leaders in Beijing present a major threat to world—read “American”—security.

While difficult and not without some risk, speculation on the future of China is important whether investing in mutual funds, beginning a business, determining world oil prices, the availability of concrete, deciding which language to learn or working with a program like Mennonite Partners in China. Speculation about the future often overlooks the complexity and paradoxes of China’s transition. As just one example, observers struggle with how a country can be dominated by a single political Party that calls itself Communist, but yet push a very strong free-market agenda that has created greater wealth disparity than that in the United States.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Henry and Maria Brown arrived in a country that was incredibly poor, weak and disintegrating. One hundred years later many predict that the 21st century will be dominated by Asia with China and India as the driving forces. Meaningful engagement with the Chinese people, particularly the growing Chinese church, needs to be a priority for North American Mennonites.

Myrrl Byler has served as director of Mennonite Partners in China since 1990.

The Church in Chinese Society

by Wu Wei

If we say something openly in China, it is taken seriously.

How has your view of the church in China, its strengths and weaknesses, changed since you came to the United States?

Most Chinese have never heard anything about the Gospel, but they are eager to understand and know more about Christianity. They want to know the meaning of Christian faith. I think this is the biggest challenge and opportunity for the church.

Perhaps the biggest weakness is that we need more pastors. We are limited by our lack of qualified personnel. In addition, the churches in China are very similar, even in different cities. We need more diversity, more choices.

We also need to have long-term goals. So often we are kept busy with just the routine work of the church—what happens within the doors of the church—that we only maintain

things. We need to look and plan ahead, to think about the role of the church in society.

What attitudes and beliefs in the Chinese church should change in the coming years?

We need to change the attitude and practice of dividing believers and unbelievers into two different camps. We say that we should love others as our neighbors. But for too many Christians this seems to mean that we should just love those who are in the church. For example, when our church in China helped some poor kids to return to school, there were different opinions. Some felt that because the families weren't Christian we shouldn't help them.

How has the church responded to the massive changes in Chinese society during the past twenty years?

The response has been quite passive. The church has been forced to change. We haven't discussed how we should change, but just responded as things came along. For example, there are many people from the countryside who have moved to the large cities. What the church can do for these persons is a new question for us.

Since society is changing so quickly, people are also searching for real meaning in life. At times we have tried to give some response to these persons and addressed the importance of morality in society. But we Christians are in the minority, and so are limited in what we can do. Perhaps now we are trying to find ways to contribute to the "harmonious society" that is talked about, but it seems like so very little.

What role does the Chinese church have or what role will it have in China's future?

Of course the economy is growing and things are changing, but I don't think of China as a superpower. There is such a large wealth gap and so many poor people. I do think the church will have a more important role in China's future. Along with the development of the economy, there are also growing spiritual needs. Morality is a problem—the family is changing. Christian faith and the Chinese church can help the people through this social transition.

The church also needs to address the needs of those who have been marginalized. There

are so many who do not have a voice in society, who are poor and taken advantage of. They often are not well-educated, or they may have disabilities, or something bad has happened to their family. These people need someone to take care of them.

What are the main issues in Chinese society to which you feel the Chinese church and believers can speak?

When you speak out publicly in China what you say is taken seriously. Speaking out is something that needs to be carefully considered. We don't want to create misunderstandings in society or with the government.

One area where we need to speak out more is for the needs of the poor, those who have not benefited from the changes in society. We need to advocate for these people. But we must choose the issues carefully. For example, abortion is a very important social topic for the church in the United States. But our situation in China is difficult—we have a one-child policy. It is a law in our country.

Maybe it is hard for Americans to understand why we do not speak out on these kinds of issues. Here in the United States people seem to speak out all the time—I'm not sure that many people listen because of all the talk. If we say something openly in China, it is taken seriously.

One thing I've learned while here in North America is that the early Anabaptists took their faith seriously. They didn't only focus on theology or sharing of the Gospel, but they were concerned about how to respond to the Gospel in everyday life.

If I had not studied here I would not have known that there is a faith group that emphasizes the teachings of Jesus and what he did. I think they are quite unique in today's society and among modern churches. While many view Anabaptists as radicals, I think they simply take their faith seriously. They ask questions that go further, questions that bring together belief with how one should live and act.

Pastor Wu Wei graduated from Eastern Mennonite Seminary in 2006 with a Master of Divinity degree. Before coming to Virginia, Wu Wei was the senior pastor of Chongwenmen Church in Beijing. He will return to China later in 2008.

As society is changing so quickly, people are searching for real meaning in life.

Religion and Society in a Secular State

Dr. Yang Huaming and Dr. Li Lin (husband and wife) responded to the following questions. They work as researchers and editors for the Institute of World Religions, of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. As the only nationwide center for academic research on religion, the institute studies the doctrines, history and present situation of the major world religions. Yang and Li spent six months at Eastern Mennonite Seminary as scholars-in-residence.

Since China's opening in 1978, how has the role of religion in society changed?

People view religion as an integral part of culture, not as something that will simply fly away with the wind.

What is the attitude of urban Chinese towards religion?

Most religious believers in China are rural people. The urban areas represent modernization and secularization. We don't think that religion plays an important role in the lives of city dwellers. Many still cannot distinguish religion from superstition. However there are increasing numbers of university students studying philosophy and religion, and some of them are also religious believers.

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We hope the church can play a positive role in society.

The Chinese Government and the Church

by Wang Xiuling

Many Westerners may believe that the government department I work for—I am the director of Christian Affairs at the State Administration of Religious Affairs—is responsible for the control of religion in China, even the persecution of Christians and the church. Many believe that our role is to prevent the spread of religious belief in China, and especially attack the underground churches and their leaders. I'm not surprised if people believe this, because the American press often writes about it.

We all have to acknowledge that there are many differences between China and the United States. Our histories and situations are very different. Because religious believers in China are in the minority, our government has found it necessary to have a department devoted specifically to religion. Our work falls broadly into three categories.

We serve a coordinating role between the church and society. In the United States most problems are resolved through the court system. But the Chinese legal system is still developing. In China, many conflicts and disputes are still settled through negotiation rather than in the courts. The State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) helps to solve conflicts between different religions, between believers and non-believers, as well as between religious bodies and organizations in society.

For example, several years ago believers who lived on a small island erected a church building with large red cross on top. However fishermen living on the island who were believers in traditional folk religions believed that the cross represented blood and death. After a summer of many storms when some fishermen died, some in the community wanted to tear the church down. Of course the Christians protected the church and they entered into a long and serious conflict. Our office worked with local officials to move the church to the other side of the island where the fishermen would not see the cross or church. We also tried to educate the people to respect each other and help them understand the laws that are in place regarding religious practice.

While some may think that the government is interested in tearing down church buildings, in reality we spend much of our time helping local churches negotiate the return

of church property and to build new churches. This can be very difficult because church property was confiscated during the Cultural Revolution, and those now occupying the property need to be relocated before it can be returned. In the last thirty years we have overseen the return or building of more than fifty thousand protestant churches, eighteen seminaries, and about fifty provincial training centers.

China's legal system is slowly developing, and a major part of our work is to draft laws protecting religions. It took us ten years to draft the Religious Affairs Regulation, which was put into practice in the spring of 2005. In order to draft that new regulation, we spent much time investigating the religious situation, as well as listening to opinions and suggestions from religious leaders. The focus of the new legislation is to protect religious freedom, to develop a harmonious relationship among different religions and between believers and nonbelievers, to encourage all the churches and temples to be run well, and to encourage religions to play a positive role in society.

Some people ask, "Why does a communist government want to help the church?" The Western press emphasizes the control of the Chinese government over religion, even the persecution of the church. I believe I can best answer by giving just one example of what we do. In a small, faraway village in Hubei province there was a small meeting point with an illiterate church leader. One day in the winter of 1999, the preacher told his believers that he dreamed a disaster was coming, and that the only way to avoid it was to go to a cave in the northwestern part of China. About thirty believers sold all their property, including fields, animals and houses, and started looking for the cave the preacher had seen in his dream. Among them were some elderly people, women and children. They traveled several thousand miles, but could not find the cave. They returned to Hubei province. Three months later a farmer found them living in the forest and he told the police. The police brought them out of the forest even though some of the believers didn't want to return because they still believed a disaster was coming.

The United States is a developed country. As we look from China toward the USA, everything seems to be so orderly there. Despite

its economic growth, China is still a developing country. You cannot imagine how many problems and tragedies we face right now, and how complicated they are. As a government department, we help and support the church because we hope there will be no more tragedies. We hope there will be enough preachers, we hope all the churches can be administered well, we hope the large number of believers can be taken care of,

and above all, we hope the church can play a positive role in society.

Wang Xiuling is the director of Christian Affairs at the State Administration of Religious Affairs in Beijing. She has a M.A. degree in Religion from Beijing University. Ms. Wang spent four months studying English at Eastern Mennonite University during 2008 through the sponsorship of Mennonite Partners in China.

A Voice in the Wilderness: The Pacifist Movement within the Protestant Church in China, 1900–1950

by Xiyi Yao

In the first half of the twentieth century, Christianity in China was constantly confronted with the question: What could the church contribute to the salvation and revival of China, particularly the relationship between Christianity and nationalism? Since the mainstream of China's nationalism never excluded violence as a possible means of defense and revolution, any Christian response to nationalism had to address the issue of "just war" versus the Christian message of peace. Generally speaking, on the issue of war and peace, the Protestant community in China was divided into three factions. First were the Christian nationalists and revolutionaries. Their theological thinking tended to stress the notion of justice, and their social ideal in many ways was in agreement with secular nationalism. Loyal to the just war theory, they had no fundamental difficulty in justifying defensive and revolutionary warfare. Second were the pacifists. They refused to compromise the Christian principle of love in any way, and insisted on non-violent means of maintaining social justice. Third were the so-called middle-of-roaders. They had strong pacifist tendencies, but did not want to completely give up the option of violent resistance, even though they endorsed war only as an exception. Most of the time the first two factions were a minority and the last the majority voice. The majority group tended to vacillate between the two courses, according to the changing situation. It is notable that all three factions shared a liberal and social gospel type of the theological framework. Except for very rare exceptions, most of the leaders of

conservative or fundamentalist Protestantism in China held a consistent apolitical stance, and thus never became significant players in the discussion of war and peace.

It has become clear that the course of the pacifist movement in China was very rough. Pacifism in China may be insignificant as an organized movement, but its achievements as a theological movement cannot be underestimated. By 1937 a Christian pacifist system of theology and ethics in China was almost complete. This system included at least the following key components: a love and peace-centered view of God and Christ; the universal relevance and practicality of *agape* in personal and social life; the inseparability of love and justice; the evil nature of violence and its incompatibility with the love of Christ; barrier-breaking internationalism; non-violent, non-cooperative resistance to evil.

Here we can see that the pacifism in China had much in common with the international pacifist movement. However, as a result of contextualization, pacifism in China developed a few unique features: an emphasis on "character-building" or cultural transformation by the spirit of *agape*; an emphasis on communication, mutual understanding and cooperation; refusal to treat patriotism and nationalism indiscriminately; valuing the peaceful quality of Chinese culture.

It is perhaps true that pacifism in China never appeared as systematic as depicted in this paper. The turbulent social environment

Religion and Society in a Secular State (continued)

Can religious believers help provide ethical and spiritual direction for modern Chinese society?

Yes, of course. China's economy is developing extremely fast, but the cultural, ethical and spiritual aspects are not developing with the same speed. Even the Chinese government admits that religions can contribute to the construction of the much talked about "harmonious society."

Can Anabaptist theology contribute anything to religious dialogue in China?

Sure. Lin is from the Hui ethnic minority group in China that is Muslim. During his time in Harrisonburg he identified very strongly with the Mennonite community, also a cultural and religious minority. We believe that the Anabaptist emphasis on peace can contribute to religious dialogue in China.

What is the level of interaction between religious faiths in China, particularly between Protestants, Catholics and Muslims?

At the academic level, dozens of books have been translated or written, and religious dialogue and religious pluralism are popular topics. However, we don't think that much interfaith dialogue is happening.

The turbulent social environment made it almost impossible for Chinese pacifists to engage in systematic thinking and writing.

Anabaptist Voice Needed

As China's society and culture are undergoing fast and fundamental changes, we can be sure that there will be new surprises to come. We can witness the amazing work of God and be called to be a part of it. Just as China's economic take-off has already made a significant impact on the global economy, the substantial growth of the Chinese church may have a similar effect on global Christianity.

Mennonite missionaries came to China in the early twentieth century. Ever since then they remained a part of the Protestant missionary movement in China. A uniquely Anabaptist voice can hardly be heard in the past as well as in the present. Nevertheless, in my view, Anabaptism has a lot to contribute in China's context. As churches grow rapidly and take in many new converts, the Anabaptist emphasis on discipleship is very significant in building up the community of believers. Because there is potential for internal and external conflict, the Anabaptist message of peace-making is very relevant, and can equip the believers well in their social witness. The opportunities that Mennonites are facing in China are tremendous.

—Xiyi Yao

The above is excerpted from a presentation at November 2007 Anabaptist Association of Missiologists. The complete paper appears in Mission Focus.

The salvation of Japanese Christians is incomplete until Chinese and Korean Christians forgive us.

in which pacifism grew made it almost impossible for Chinese pacifists to engage in any systematic thinking and writing. Their theology and ethics developed unsystematically and as a reaction to the constant social problems and criticism. This fact can also account for the ethical and practical, instead of metaphysical and theoretical, character of the pacifist tradition in China.

In 1933 Wu Yao-zong wrote an essay to introduce the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). In it he borrowed a biblical metaphor to define the FOR as “a voice in the wilderness” by which “a few persons can keep a light—unifying the whole of humankind—shining in a blood-thirsty world.” In many ways this image is also appropriate for the

whole Protestant pacifist movement in China. In spite of its minority status, the place and influence of pacifism in Protestant history in China are undeniable, and the seeds it planted in Chinese soil are waiting for the growing season to come. For a world divided by hatred and conflict, the voice in the wilderness will not go away.

Dr. Xiyi Yao is associate professor of Church History at the China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong. Dr. Yao has a Ph.D. degree from Boston University and an M.A. in Religion from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana. Dr. Yao is a mission associate with Mennonite Mission Network in Hong Kong. This article is the concluding section of a much longer paper.

Korean and Chinese Peacebuilding

by Todd Hanson

When Chinese student Yue Lan and South Korean peacebuilder Lee Jae-Young discussed options for building better relations between the countries of northeast Asia, their interpersonal conversation mimicked what their governments are attempting on an international scale.

The governments of China and South Korea declared 2007 to be “China-Korea Exchange Year,” in recognition of the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and South Korea.

Mennonite Partners in China (MPC) and Korea Anabaptist Centre (KAC) recently staged an exchange of their own when KAC's peace program director, Lee Jae-Young, spent several weeks on a speaking tour of Chinese colleges and universities. Lee talked with more than one thousand Chinese students in lecture halls and classrooms, at English Corners and over meals.

Lee was surprised at the popularity of Korean soap operas and pop music, even deep in the Sichuan countryside. He was also taken aback at the depth of anti-Japanese sentiment. When Lee asked his audiences if they hated Japanese, students responded with an enthusiastic, “Yes!” When Lee asked if he should hate them because of China's many past invasions of his country, Korea, students responded with an equally enthusiastic, “No!”

Lee explained the apparent contradiction by looking at the issue on the historical/political level and the personal level. Students agreed with his analysis, saying that while they dislike “Japan,” they would feel no rancor for a Japanese person. Lee explained that these feelings show that peace is not a political but a human issue.

Lee found students to be very open and deeply interested in peace education and conflict transformation as well as in other cultures. He did not need to bring up the sensitive topic of China-Japan relations—students brought up the topic themselves. Lee believes that this generation has the potential to relieve the longstanding tension in the region.

To student questions of what they could do, Lee encouraged students to be peace-builders in their families, their dorm rooms, classrooms and in the schools they will teach in after graduation. He likened peace-building to building a house—“You don't start at the top, you start at the foundation. Governments don't begin the peace process, people do.”

Lee returned home with an increased appreciation for the fragility of the relationships among the countries of northeast Asia, and with a strengthened sense of South Korea's important role in bringing reconciliation to those countries. As a victim of both Japanese and Chinese aggression, South Korea can

serve as a bridge to bring the people of the three nations together.

As Christians in the three countries build peace among themselves, they can model healing in relationships. Lee quoted a Japanese Mennonite pastor, who said, “The salvation of Japanese Christians is incomplete until Chinese and Korean Christians forgive us.” When speaking with students Lee discussed this in terms used by educator Paulo Freire: “It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors.” This will not be the message conveyed

by the Chinese and Korean governments during “China-Korea Exchange Year,” but it is the message Chinese students across Sichuan heard from their new Korean friend.

Todd Hanson has lived and worked in China since 1991 under the auspices of Mennonite Church Canada Witness. He taught English at China West Normal University and served with Mennonite Partners in China as educational initiatives coordinator. Todd began a Ph.D. program at Simon Fraser University in the fall of 2008.

Promoting Pastoral Counseling

by Wang Xuefu

Since the policy of Re-Opening and Reform began in 1978, society in China has been undergoing a series of drastic social transitions, accompanied by economic shock waves and rapid urbanization. People are faced with a variety of problems in their lives: frustrations and setbacks in inter-personal relationships, marriage failures, tensions regarding children’s education, intense competition and unemployment pressure. Any of these problems may lead to breakdown and mental health problems.

The statistics tell some of the story. The total number of persons suffering serious mental problems is now more than sixteen million. Suicide causes the death of almost 300,000 persons each year. The suicide rate of females is 25 percent higher than that of males. Behavioral problems, anxiety, phobias, nervous diseases, and depression afflict 16 percent of teenagers in China. Recent criminal cases indicate that psychological disorders cause people to tend to behave in more extreme ways than was the case ten years ago.

Modern psychological counseling did not emerge in China until the early 1980s. It was not until the late 1990s that some hospitals began to set up psychological clinics, universities started to provide counseling services to students, and counseling centers appeared in major cities. Practitioners generally lacked professional training and the services provided were inadequate to meet the needs of Chinese society.

The Church, as is true of other social communities, is also afflicted with the problems listed above. Each day pastors or evangelists

are asked by Christians to help with counseling of all kinds. Pastors and church lay workers feel obliged to offer help and counsel, but they also feel their own lack of training and experience.

Seminaries reopened in the early 1980s, but they are unable to provide courses or training programs in pastoral counseling. Thousands of seminary graduates have gone into ministry without courses or training in pastoral counseling. Leaders in the church recognized the need and in 2002 the Nanjing Theological Seminary began to offer some of its graduate students the opportunity to take a course in pastoral counseling. This has had some impact on other seminaries and Bible schools, and some pastors are emphasizing counseling in their own ministry. Some students who have studied abroad have returned to introduce pastoral counseling in their churches, even though they are over-burdened with administration and preaching duties. The Chinese church has a vital role to play in conveying the love of God and the healing power of concern, comfort, support and spiritual guidance.

“Zhi-Mian Therapy” is a counseling approach developed specifically for the Chinese context. My colleagues and I are aware of the need to develop an approach that will be accepted and recognized by Chinese people. The Zhi-Mian approach is rooted biblically but also within Chinese culture. Literally, “Zhi-Mian” means “reaching out to face” instead of escaping, withdrawing or hiding. The name originates from writer Lu Xun’s expression “A real warrior dares to face himself (“zhi-mian”) and life no matter how gloomy it is, while not escaping from it”.

Poems for Peace in China

In May 2008, Yorifumi Yaguchi and I, as editor of *The Poetry of Yorifumi Yaguchi* (Good Books, 2006), were invited to appear at a number of Chinese universities hosting Mennonite Partners in China (MPC) teachers and/or Chinese teachers of English. We were asked to model peace as evident both in our trans-Pacific collaboration begun 20 years ago in Goshen and then Japan, and also with the poetic of peace that marks much of Yaguchi’s work.

For the Chinese teachers, the most powerful poem appeared to be Yaguchi’s “A Military Nurse,” in which an aging Japanese nurse, now losing control of her rational powers, relives the long-repressed memories of the “Nanjing Massacre,” still officially denied by the Japanese government and a continuing source of tension among the Chinese and Japanese peoples. From her “room 17 of a hospital in the North Ward of Sapporo,” she begins to shout, sees “a sea of blood” with “Heads lying all over” . . . and “Blood scattered all over my white uniform.” In the intense yet solemn discussion that followed, one Chinese teacher voiced deep appreciation for such a frank poetic admission—thus opening the door to healing between nations. For those present in this session late in our time in China, it was clearly a moment of poetic recognition, of honesty, and of hope.

— Wilbur Birky

Wilbur Birky taught English at Goshen College for many years. He was in the first group of teachers sent by Goshen College to China in 1981 and returned for short teaching stints on several occasions. Yorifumi Yaguchi is a Japanese poet, and graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

Each day pastors are asked to help with counseling.

Sweet Apples and a Bitter Reality

After the counseling session when the mother and daughter are gone, Dr. Wang Xuefu slumps on a stool. “How could I ask them to pay” he asks, “when they had to borrow the couple hundred yuan it took just to get here?” Susan, diagnosed ten years ago with schizophrenia, is so out of touch with reality that she can only converse at a child’s level. She is also the single mother of a five-month-old baby; the father long gone. What can Susan’s mother do? Susan barely responds to her child. She barely responds to anyone.

Dr. Wang passes out the yellow and rose-colored apples—a gift from the spiky-haired young man who came this morning as a gift of gratitude for the counseling help he’s received here at Zhi-Mian—to the office staff and volunteers. At first bite the sweetness is overwhelming. We savor the taste of fall fresh from the countryside.

However, there is irony in Dr. Wang’s smile as he flips through the scheduling book by the phone, and I can almost see in his shoulders the burden he carries.

Today is completely booked, but not one client can pay the full fee. A seminary student with serious depression has nothing to give. Young people do well to come up with half. They all need help, but the bitter reality is that there is no money for these free sessions. Indeed, fees for these counseling sessions are supposed to support the teaching and writing and training in psychological counseling that Zhi-Mian provides, at a loss, to Chinese church communities as well as to the larger society.

As the day wears on, one after another the clients file from the quiet office. Their eyes shine the thanks that is pouring from their lips. One girl is almost bowing as she leaves. I take another bite of an apple so sweet it almost hurts.

— Holly Showalter

Holly Showalter spent four years in China, teaching English then working at the Zhi-Mian Institute of Psychotherapy in Nanjing.

In the Bible we read a lot about how God counsels people in order to keep them from escaping their problems—God encourages them to “zhi-mian”. When Adam seeks to escape, God calls: “Where are you?” The first reaction of Old Testament prophets was to escape, but they are finally brought by God to the road of “zhi-mian” on which they realize who they really are.

Currently, many churches in China are not able to provide adequate counseling to people in need. A few persons have found their way to our center, others have responded via our telephone hotline. Quite a number of counselors in our center are Christians who have received comparatively good training and have substantial counseling experience. We have also organized a pastoral counselor group of seminary teachers, seminary graduate students, and Christians in other social agencies who are promoting pastoral counseling. We have used the rather innovative (for China) idea of group counseling, and also organize regular case study discussions as a way of providing further instruction. We have been blessed and encouraged by professionals from overseas like Dr. Al Dueck of the Fuller School of Psychology who have come to give workshops and lead training sessions.

More and more pastors and professionals are looking to provide counseling services in the context of the church. In the summer of 2005, Zhi-Mian began a two-year correspondence course for pastors and church workers. The curriculum includes twelve courses: three are on basic theory and the rest focus on counseling methods and practice. Hundreds of church workers are now enrolled in the program—our goal is train twenty thousand persons who will have basic counseling skills.

We are not a church, but rather an independent social service professional organization founded by Christians. We are committed to providing services for the Church in China as well as general society. Our vision is to encourage the disheartened, support the weak, and heal the wounded. Through love, patience and professionalism, we want to help people restore their self-esteem, confidence and hope for the future.

Dr. Wang Xuefu is a graduate of Nanjing Theological Seminary and received a Ph.D. degree in Chinese Literature from Nanjing University. He also has a M.A. degree in pastoral counseling from Andover Newton Seminary in Boston, Massachusetts. In 2002 Dr. Wang began the Zhi-Mian Institute of Psychotherapy in Nanjing. He will spend the 2008–09 academic year as a scholar in residence at Fuller School of Psychology.

China in Africa: What Sort of World Power?

by Myrri Byler

While the world has focused on China’s growing economic power, China’s international influence and power is expanding just as rapidly. Beijing’s rulers have abandoned the revolutionary Maoist views of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s and moved beyond the internal focus of the past several decades. This shift has come more quickly than Beijing could have expected, and China’s leaders, along with its population, are far from a consensus about what this development means for China and the rest of the world. China has embraced membership in international organizations, and is increasingly needed by other nations, including the United States, to work at conflicts in areas like North Korea, Iran, Myanmar and Sudan. China is

quickly becoming a superpower and world leader—what type of leader will it be?

Perhaps a look at what China is doing in Africa may give a good indication as to what type of world leader China will become, even though policy and actions are changing almost daily.

In the 1990s China began to give some modest aid to a variety of African nations and fund infrastructure projects. African leaders weary of Western calls for democracy and human rights found a less critical ally in China. China’s rhetoric of “mutual respect” and “not interfering in internal affairs” was welcome news to despotic and corrupt African leaders.

The current boom in trade between Africa and China is driven by China's need for the rich resources that the continent holds. Of course China has much to offer—cheap consumer goods, construction expertise and workers, highways, dams, medical assistance and increasingly sophisticated technology. China's trade with Africa has gone from US\$4 billion in 1995 to US\$55.5 billion in 2005. China is predicting that the number will reach US\$100 billion by 2010.

China's leaders have taken the offensive in building ties with many resource-rich African countries. Hu Jintao and other leaders have spent considerable time in Africa. China's diplomats are using a variety of summits to build support for furthering relationships. Beijing pre-empted Western nations and the World Bank by agreeing to forgive some US\$10 billion in loans. China's businessmen snap up commodities while Chinese doctors treat the ill under medical assistance programs, often in countries and areas seemingly forgotten by the West. Marilyn Davies, from the Centre for Chinese Studies at South Africa's Stellenbosch University says, "China's move into Africa is displacing traditional Anglo-French and U.S. interests on the continent."

China's interest in Africa is obviously oil. China now imports 28 percent of its oil from Africa. But China's interests across the continent are expanding beyond energy needs. More than 60 percent of Africa's timber exports now make their way to East Asia. Chinese companies are earning contracts particularly in construction, building everything from major hotels to roads to airport terminals.

While Western countries have alienated themselves from Zimbabwe, China has increasingly become involved with Robert Mugabe's regime. China continues to bail out Mugabe's government with cash, machinery, technology and military supplies. In the meantime China's state enterprises have gained majority shares in many of Zimbabwe's best companies and assets. Chinese entrepreneurs are supplanting local retailers and manufacturers in the streets of the nation's capital. In 2005 Mugabe declared: "We have turned east where the sun rises, and given our backs to the west, where the sun set."

China has overtaken the World Bank in lending to Africa, offering nearly three times as much as the bank did in 2006. This has

led to concern that Chinese lending could encourage African countries to accumulate significant new debt and again build the personal fortunes of corrupt leaders. Beijing pre-empted the World Bank by extending a US\$2 billion loan package to Angola that has no conditions attached. The loan does allow Chinese companies to bid on seventy percent of all the contracts in the country, thus effectively shutting out the possibility of developing local skills while unemployment increases.

Of course China's interest in Africa is raising concerns beyond its competition with the United States and other countries. Is China's investment good for all involved, or is it just the newest wave of economic colonization that will leave poor African nations more destitute than ever? One of the biggest needs in Africa is for jobs, but the Chinese are not doing enough to provide meaningful local employment because of their need to export workers.

China's model of international development is receiving criticism from many Non-Governmental Organizations, international financial institutions and companies trying to improve transparency and human rights in Africa. China refuses to "interfere" in the internal affairs of other countries, a stance welcomed by the leaders of Sudan, Angola and Zimbabwe. Chinese officials show little concern because their focus is on government-to-government relations. While there are aspects of China's relationships with Africa that are free from the historical legacy of Western powers, it is clear that China is no less self-interested than any other power.

While China has the size and strength to carry out its own foreign policy, it remains to be seen whether it can isolate itself from international organizations and coalitions in the long term when carrying out its foreign policy in countries like Sudan and Zimbabwe. Whether China's willingness to overlook genocide, gross human rights violations and extreme corruption among certain leaders in order to meet its own goals is a sustainable long-term policy is questionable. While many in Africa are very grateful for investment by China, there will also be a backlash against the growing encroachment of Chinese power, particularly if the Chinese do not build good relationships with civil society.

Myrrl Byler has served as director of Mennonite Partners in China since 1990.

Is China's investment just the newest wave of economic colonization in poor African nations?

China's trade with Africa has gone from US\$4 billion in 1995 to US\$55.5 billion in 2005.

Further Resources

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Growing Family Pressures

The following observations concerning societal change and family pressure are from several visiting scholars from Sichuan universities who spent the 2007 fall semester at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Each year Mennonite Partners in China invites 7 or 8 visiting scholars to audit courses, learn first-hand about American culture, and complete a research topic or project.

Ms. Feng: I think the one-child policy has had a major impact on society. Kids today are so focused on the classroom and studying that they are neglecting other parts of their development. Physically they may have some problems, or they don't know how to get along with others, or they just don't know how to control themselves.

Ms. Chen: Young students have so much pressure on them. Everything is concentrated on them. They carry the hopes of several families. The fear of failure or disappointing the family is an immense burden to carry.

Ms. Li: In the future my daughter wonders how she will deal with the aging population when she grows up. Most urban families only have one child; when they get married they have to take care of two sets of parents.

Ms. Zhang: We worry that many boys won't be able to find a wife because of the growing gender imbalance.

Ms. Feng: For most it seems that education is the only way to have a good life. Everyone dreams of getting an ideal job. So many fail to find these jobs, and they don't want to take just any job so they are unemployed. Laid-off workers and new college graduates often compete for some of these jobs.

Ms. Li: In small cities like Dazhou many farmers go to big cities to earn money. Children are left behind to take care of themselves. These kids have a lack of love and supervision. In some families parents earn a lot of money and buy apartments in the city. Then they ask their parents to come and take care of their child. Kids often don't want to talk with their parents and grandparents, so they go out and get into trouble. The government gives money for persons to go back to the countryside, but it is hard to make a living there, especially to pay for education.

Ms. Wei: Economic pressures are growing. In the past you knew that someday your work unit would provide an apartment for you, even if you have to wait many years. Now you have to do it yourself and work very hard. You can benefit from the economic opportunities, but everything depends on you. We worry about old age and how we will maintain our living standard. The social security system is not good, so we need to save money. I can't count on my son to take care of me.

Ms. Zhang: The contrast between rich and poor is so obvious now. Some struggle to have one apartment while others have several. People compare themselves to others all the time and many become dissatisfied. It is so different from when we were children and everyone was basically in the same shoes.

Ms. Li: It is very sad, but too many people commit suicide or think about this. People think if you attempt or commit suicide that you are crazy. One of my friends thinks that suicide is the only way out, she was once a successful college teacher but because her husband went to do graduate study in another city, she suffered from loss of identity and a lack of friends. Someone invited her to church and she became a Christian—now with a spiritual dimension her life is better.

Ms. Qi: Many young people aren't responsible enough to get married and raise a family. When they get married they find that they can't get what they want and so they quickly get a divorce. A niece of mine divorced recently. After the divorce neither one of them wanted to take care of their young child, so now the grandparents have to raise the child. This is going to cause a lot of problems for the child.

Ms. Li: Now it is so easy to get a divorce. The laws have changed. Years ago my parents wanted to get a divorce, but the leaders in their work unit helped them to reconcile and work at their difficulties. Today my parents are very glad they didn't divorce. My brother got a divorce because it's so easy. He didn't put any effort into his marriage. Children from divorced families face many problems. My niece was left at 4 months; she doesn't even recognize her mother. Whoever is kind to her or is taking care of her she calls "mother." She is very quiet and withdrawn.

A Dialogue between Aliens

by Li Lin

The Christian tradition has been in China for more than 1,300 years, struggling to be accepted by the Chinese people, but has never successfully entered the mainstream of Chinese history or even become a sub-culture. Today Christians have become one of the largest religious groups in China. What is their future? To continue standing outside the society, being aliens as before, or inherit some of the early Chinese Christian's legacy of indigenization?

In contrast, the Islamic faith was introduced into China a little later than when the first Nestorian Christian missionaries came to China in the year 635. Although the Islamic tradition never became an inseparable element of the mainstream culture as Buddhism did, it successfully became one of the sub-cultures, accepted by the mainstream. Thus, since the Islamic tradition has survived continuously in Chinese society for more than one thousand years, the experience of the indigenization of Islam in China may illuminate this issue for Christians. As an ethnic Muslim, I am interested in how the indigenization of Islam in China can help Christians understand and fulfill their own mission.

The Islamic tradition was first introduced to China in 651. The first Muslims who came into China were envoys, traders and soldiers, whose purpose was business rather than missionary work. They settled down and married local Chinese people. These Muslims were called *zhu tan*, "aliens who live in China." Even their descendants, although native-born, were still called *fan ke*, "resident aliens."

After 1219, when the Mongols built a huge empire spanning Europe and Asia, many Muslim newcomers came to China and dispersed widely in small concentrated groups. The mosque was the center of their communities. In the process of fulfilling their religious obligations and performing religious activities, the mosques throughout the empire became the places where different identities were melted and the Islamic religious identity was shaped.

In this phase the most eminent characteristic was the successful indigenization of Islam in China. There was a shift from "Islam in China" to "Chinese Islam." In this period Islam, as a religion coming from abroad,

began to combine with traditional Chinese culture. This process was signified by the movements of "Mosque Education" and "Translating and Writing Scriptures in Chinese."

During the past 1,300 years, Christianity has had four opportunities to enter into Chinese society. However these attempts only led the Chinese people to view Christianity as an alien religion. Today the Chinese people have begun to embrace Christianity again. The image of Christianity has been altered in people's eyes, partly due to the efforts of academic research in religious studies. Which direction will Christianity go in the future?

Islam focused on forming communities around mosques which held people together, rather than focusing on preaching and evangelism among the people. Even though dispersed and persecuted, the mosques and Muslim communities enabled the adherents to keep their religious identity. Muslims also initiated education programs in the mosque where they trained local clergy and helped develop and indigenize Islamic theology.

One of the reasons that Christianity did not develop as Islam did, I believe, was that for many years preaching of the Christian gospel was dependent on foreign missionaries. And an education system to train local clergy and construct local religious communities was not successfully and continuously developed.

In contrast to Western theology, the Chinese Islamic tradition has been deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture. During several hundred years of translating and writing Islamic works, clerics borrowed concepts from traditional Chinese culture without losing their Islamic nature. These works met the religious needs of Muslims and also clarified the Islamic faith to non-Muslim intellectuals.

I believe another similar translating and writing movement is taking place in the realm of Christianity in China now. The introduction and translation of Christian theology is one of the most important ways for it to realize indigenization. Christians not only need to import the Christian tradition from the West, but also, more importantly, to assimilate within it the ideas and concepts with which the Chinese people are

The Olympic Games and Peacemaking

As we note the 2008 Olympic Games that were held in Beijing, China, in August, we should also reflect on the original ideal of the Olympic Games.

During the ancient Games, all wars were to cease during the contests. So, too, for the modern Olympics. For their two and one-half week duration the Games are intended to replace the rancor of international conflict with friendly competition. Perhaps we should consider instituting year-round Olympic Games as a peacemaking technique?

—Editor

An education system to train local clergy was not successfully developed.



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familiar in order to make the Christian faith available to common Chinese people and relevant to their daily live.

However, should Christians and Muslims focus less on indigenization and instead emphasize their role as “aliens”? This seems to be a paradox. In fact, as used here the term aliens has two different meanings. The first means an alien in the world, while the second means an alien not of the world. We try not to be aliens in China because we hope our tradition, our faith, becomes relevant to Chinese society. But we try to be aliens

because we want to keep our faith—to be an alien in the world for the sake of God. We want to make God relevant to humans, but we can never neglect the unconquerable gap between God and humankind.

Dr. Li received a Ph.D. degree in Philosophy and Religion from Beijing University. He is a researcher in the Islam Department of the Institute of World Religions in Beijing. From March to July, 2008, Dr. Li was a scholar in residence at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia.