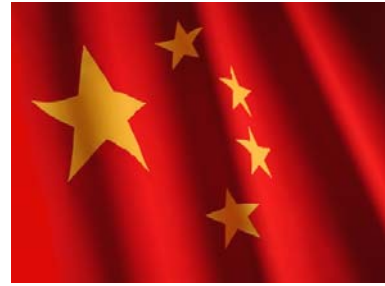

Visit to China

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

26 February-6 March, 2010



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1. Aims of the Visit

A CTBI China visit was proposed in 2009 to provide a chance for representatives from CTBI member churches to visit China and become better acquainted with the Chinese churches. The visit was also designed to visit a number of partners of the CTBI China Forum and illuminate possibilities for future partnership. In addition, the visit had twin study aims

- to better understand the impact of migration upon Chinese churches and more widely in Chinese society
- to explore the roles of Christian women in Chinese churches

A separate section 'Migration and the Chinese churches' is contained in the report below, which otherwise summarises the content of the visit and makes some recommendations for ongoing partnership.

2. Preparations for the visit

The itinerary for the visit concentrated on longstanding partners of the China Forum – the China Christian Council/Three Self Patriotic Movement, the Catholic Diocese of Shanghai, the Amity Foundation, the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, the Catholic Diocese of Beijing and the British Embassy in Beijing. It was also intended that the visit incorporate a visit to Sichuan province to witness the effects of migration on rural communities and the earthquake rehabilitation work, however Chinese partners felt that this was not feasible at this time. In addition, preparations were hampered by difficulty in making arrangements with Chinese Catholic dioceses, partly as a consequence of tensions prior to the National Catholic Congress to be held later in 2010. The visit to Beijing coincided with the opening of the annual National People's Congress, which hampered the possibility of meeting with the State Administration for Religious Affairs. Nevertheless, the timing of the visit which coincided with the final weekend of celebrations for the Chinese Lunar New Year allowed us to witness and participate in one of China's great cultural occasions.

3. Summary of Principal Visits

3.1 The China Christian Council/Three Self Patriotic Movement, Shanghai

We were warmly welcomed to the CCC/TSPM by the General Secretary of the CCC, the Revd Kan Baoping. The longstanding relationship with the British and Irish churches was important for the Chinese churches, and General Secretary Kan encouraged regular visits from the British and Irish churches. Several CCC church pastors and theologians have studied in Britain, and it is hoped that more will come in future. There is also a desire for English-speaking theologians to come and teach in Chinese seminaries, and a need to raise the level of English competency among Chinese church leaders. All this is part of the growth in maturity of the Chinese church.

One essential part of a mature church is widespread social service, something long emphasised by bishop Ding Guangxun (K.H. Ting). A sea-change occurred in church attitudes following the Wenchuan earthquake in May 2008. The Chinese Protestant churches raised US\$24m for relief and rehabilitation work. In addition, the re-activation of the Social Service Department of the CCC has served to build capacity among local Chinese churches. According to its director, Paul Wang, the churches have a crucial part to play in Chinese development. There remain 254 million Chinese people who live on \$1.25 or less per day (according to the World Bank). The Social Service Department is concentrating on building capacity among provincial - and prefectural-level church councils.

Recent cooperation between the China Forum and the CCC has included cooperation in refurbishing Holy Trinity Church in Shanghai (see below), the transfer of the bulk of CTBI's Salisbury Library to China to help enable ecumenical research and teaching, and the provision of grants to Chinese theologians to pursue further studies.

Holy Trinity Cathedral, Shanghai

The restoration of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Shanghai, is nearly complete and it will be in use from May. It is estimated that the congregation will be around 1000 people, meeting in 2 services. Holy Trinity was consecrated as a cathedral in 1875 and is the oldest standing Protestant church in Shanghai (among Chinese it is known as the Hong Miao, or Red Temple).

The building was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, and was the heart of Anglican worship in the city until 1949, though it was severely damaged during the Japanese invasion. Following Liberation in 1949, the cathedral was turned into a secular theatre, and its adjacent tower and steeple knocked down. The church was given to the China Christian Council in 2004, and an ambitious restoration project has already cost more than £3m. The baptismal font and altar are made from white jade from Xinjiang, and churches around the world have made donations toward the renovation. The CTBI delegation presented a gift from the Rt Rev David Urquhart, Bishop of Birmingham, toward the restoration work.



3.3 The Amity Foundation, Nanjing

The Amity Foundation remains one of the principal partners of the China Forum. It was established in 1985 at the initiative of Chinese Protestant Christians and seeks to serve the Chinese people, particularly in under-developed areas in the Chinese interior and in its home city of Nanjing. Looking back, it is possible to say that the formation of a Christian-based, independent NGO in China as long ago as 1985 was a miracle, but Amity has continued to grow and diversify its activities. It now employs 54 staff and has six main programmes:

- Social Welfare (children with special needs; blindness prevention programme; inclusive education; community rehabilitation)
- Public Healthcare (village healthcare worker training; building clinics; capacity building in disease prevention schemes; health promotion; reducing stigma)
- Community development and environmental protection (third stage of integrated rural development programmes; establishing farmers' autonomous organisations; organic production models; eco-forestry programmes; biogas programmes; solar energy production)
- Disaster Management (rehabilitation and reconstruction work; disaster prevention)
- Social Service Centre (Home of Blessings for children with autism; the Amity Bakery; Amity Centre for Children; and the Amity Centre for Senior Citizens)
- Research and Development programmes (Cultural Exchange Programmes like the Teachers Programme, Young Adult Programme, Service Learning Project, NGO Development Centre).

The China Forum (especially the Scottish Churches China Group) work with the Amity Foundation's Social Service Centre in Nanjing to provide in-service training to teachers and staff at the Home of Blessings (established in 2002) and the Amity Centre for Children (established in 2008). The CTBI delegation visited the Home of Blessings which provides care and rehabilitation work for 22 clients aged between 17 and 52 with autism. After twelve months at the Home, the clients generally have sufficient life skills to be self-supporting.

The China Forum also cooperates with Amity in its Cultural Exchange Programmes. The **Amity Teachers Programme** was the first of all the programmes to be established in 1985, and there are currently six English teachers from the United Kingdom teaching with Amity in China. These English teachers are sent through the British and Irish Amity Teaching Group to vocational teacher-training colleges in poorer provinces to China's north and west. These colleges are too poor to support the cost of foreign teachers. The students in these classes are predominantly female undergraduates (around 85%), many of whom go on to teach English in remote primary and secondary schools. As a result, the programme contributes to the development of China's inland provinces and helps promote the status and expertise of women. Amity itself has found that around 2/3 of its staff are women, who are frequently more devoted to social development programmes and more stable in their commitment to the Foundation.

New Developments for the Amity Foundation

The establishment of an NGO Development Centre in Nanjing in 2009 has brought Amity into a close working relationship with local government. The Centre provides capacity development for several local NGOs through the cooperation of Amity with municipal officials. At present there are five local NGOs which are being given office space and training through the Centre. These include NGOs working to protect and teach the local tradition of Kun Opera, to provide environmental protection of nearby Mochu lake, and one providing home services to the elderly through the work of 4000 volunteers.

Amity has also begun to work in building up churches' social work capacity in surrounding Jiangsu Province. Together with the Jiangsu Provincial Christian Council, the Jiangsu Christian Fun for Social Service has been created, to raise funds for improving the social service and social visibility of churches in the province. For the first time Jiangsu church leaders are being trained in social services.

3.4 Nanjing Amity Printing Co., Ltd.

The Printing Company is a joint venture between the Amity Foundation and the United Bible Societies and was established in 1988. It's priority is to serve the Christian Church in China by printing Bibles and Christian literature, however it has also established a solid export reputation and has customers in over sixty countries worldwide. Over 60 million Bibles have been printed by 2010, with 43 million of these sent to 74 main distribution centres throughout China. These Bibles are then sold at over 55,000 registered churches and meeting points. A new printing facility was opened in 2008 which has increased potential annual output to 12 million Bibles. Domestic Bibles continue to be subsidised by the United Bible Societies to ensure that they are affordable for the majority of Chinese Christians. The Amity Press employs around 550 staff in three shifts and has met international standards in environmental protection and worker safety.

The CTBI delegation was warmly welcomed at the Printing Plant by Mr. Li Chunnong, Deputy General Secretary of Amity Printing Company, who has worked there ever since the company was founded. We were also grateful for a presentation copy of a bilingual Chinese-English Bible, commemorating the 60 millionth Bible which has come off the Press.

Chongyi Church, Hangzhou

Chongyi church is the first registered mega-church in China, with capacity to hold up to 4000 congregants in its main sanctuary. The church was built in 2004 on land donated by the Hangzhou municipal government, opposite a major shopping mall which incorporates a Tesco's superstore. Donations by local Christians in the province of Jiangsu covered the entire cost of its construction. It's architectural design incorporates several elements of Chinese Christian spirituality, most eminently its overall shape which resembles the Chinese character for humankind – ren . The church's location in a modern suburb of the prosperous city of Hangzhou is reflected in an affluent, white-collar congregation. Modern technology is used to capture services and make them available to the estimated 150,000 Christians living in the city. The church has a congregation of 3500, with four male pastors. Next to the church building is a multi-function block which provides a centre for lay training, youth services and Sunday School.



3.5 Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Nanjing

Nanjing Seminary (NJUTS) is the national seminary of the Protestant Church in China. It has recently moved to an enlarged campus in a 'University City' suburb of Nanjing. It enrolls 220 students, of whom 130 are women. Students are predominantly from church in the South. Of the new intake for 2009, ¼ had completed university education. The seminary moved in 2009 into a new campus set in the middle of Nanjing's University City. However, funding remains an issue and there were signs that the campus was not well maintained and one major building project remained to be completed.

The China Forum has regularly sponsored Chinese lecturers from Nanjing to come to Britain or Ireland to pursue further studies. In 2008-9 this opportunity was taken up by Ms Wang Jiawei, who completed an MA in Theology at Trinity College, Bristol, and has since returned to Nanjing to teach courses in the History of Christian Thought and will begin teaching a course in Chinese Christian Spirituality next semester. The CTBI delegation were given a warm reception by Ms Wang and several senior members of staff, followed by a lengthy discussion with some of her students regarding the role of women in the contemporary Chinese church.

The anecdotal responses by the students showed that most came from churches which were predominantly made up of women. In the southern city of Wenzhou, the proportion was roughly equal, while in rural areas of Jiangsu and Henan the proportion could be as high as 80-90% women. Women took charge of the 'detailed' work: singing in the choir, leading Bible studies and prayer meetings, doing the cooking and cleaning in the church.

Men frequently took on the leadership roles, and in some cases women leaders were reticent to take on important liturgical functions in baptismal or funeral services, preferring to invite men from other churches to do so. There was a big divide between the rural churches which were often run by older women, with City churches which had younger pastors and a significant proportion of university students.

The Seminary students were anxious to encourage more young people into the church. Many churches are beginning to experiment with more informal service plans to appeal to young people, using Chinese-written songs and melodies in *Springs of Praise*, and giving more time for prayer. In some of the Henan churches they no longer use the CCC hymnals preferring to use locally written choruses and hymns. However, for more formal services, many of the students preferred the traditional hymns and prayers, many of which have been adopted from the West.

Chongwenmen Church, Beijing

The church is one of the principal churches in the capital city, located not far from Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. The congregation of between 4-5000 is pastured by Pastor Liu Cuimin and seven other staff. Pastor Liu welcomed us warmly and she introduced us to the various ways in which the church was being used. A Korean congregation meets every Sunday afternoon, in addition to the four Chinese services. There is a women's ministry, in addition to an important role for the choir and foreign relations. A youth fellowship meets in the evenings. Discipleship is based on the Bible, and there are young fellowship groups which meet after the services. Children's work is done in four classes from the age of four until seventeen. The work is mostly carried out by women volunteers, and the church provides some training. For the first time, the church is also experimenting with 'holy theatre' – producing plays with a Christian theme in a bid to strengthen the faith of the youth. One of the pastors, Pastor Ji, is also renowned for using Chinese cultural themes in his sermons, helping to ground people's faith in its local context.

4 Migration and the Chinese Churches

Internal economic migrants continue to be a vital part of China's economic growth. One aim of the CTBI visit was to witness some of the implications and repercussions of the largest movement of people in human history.

Several church leaders we spoke with mentioned that migration out of rural areas has left communities and churches impoverished and stricken. In villages in parts of Guizhou and Yunnan where there have been strong churches for generations, the migration of young people into distant cities has left weak churches of the very elderly. Other pastors spoke of the consequences of materialism which affects Christian migrants as they enter city life. It was important, they said, to hold meetings and classes for migrant workers to help form Christian responses to the prevalent greed and exploitation which they faced. Pastors in Beijing and Shanghai spoke of difficulties in integrating migrant workers into their congregations.

Pastor Cui at the Chongwenmen church noted this year that many migrant workers could not afford to return home for the Spring Festival. So the church held a special celebration for the Festival and invited those with no family ties to come and celebrate in the church. In another instance the church was helping a family whose daughter had had an aneurism but which could not afford the treatment. Several churches noted that their Sunday school leaders had particularly begun to address the psychological issues faced by children of migrant workers in their congregations. We heard of other churches which are cooperating in meeting the needs of migrant workers. For example, in the northern city of Harbin the churches are running vocational training programmes, including the teaching of English. Meanwhile churches in Shanghai have begun to 'twin' with churches in Shaanxi which have been adversely affected by outward migration.

Our principal first hand encounter with the life of migrants was through visits organised by the Amity Foundation to a school for migrant children and the Ande Men Labour Market, both in Nanjing City. The school was established in 2000, but many of the 520 students are now preparing to move to a new government school which is being constructed nearby. The number of students is unstable anyway as families move to find work. Tuition is paid up front and repaid if students leave early. Tuition costs are around RMB600 (£55) per semester, a level governed by regulations laid down in 2005. The school does not receive any government subsidy, so all costs are furnished out of the tuition fees, including teachers' salaries. In Nanjing, those migrant parents who wish their children to enter the state education system are asked to pay RMB15,000 in advance for the six years of primary education, and will be required to pay tuition fees as well. As a result, in the existing local primary school approximately 20% of students belong to migrant families. The value of education is very high in China, and both parents often work several jobs in order to afford these substantial costs.

The Ande Men Labour Market is the largest in China, with 1 million people seeking work there every year. Employers throughout southeast China advertise at this private establishment, and pay a commission for every worker they subsequently employ. Amity

and the Yuhua District Bureau have established a legal aid centre to help migrant workers understand their rights and to take on cases. So far they have taken on 130 cases and won more than RMB3000 in compensation for illegal work practices. Mr Jiang, a retired judge, leads the work at the centre. The centre has created sets of playing cards in order to help make migrant workers aware of the centre and their rights.

5. Recommendations

1. Encourage further cultural and religious exchange with the Chinese churches through inviting Chinese pastors and theologians to Britain and Ireland, cooperating in the youth exchange programmes proposed by Amity, and sending British and Irish theologians to teach in Nanjing and other seminaries.
2. Look for ways of cooperating with Chinese Christians in the emerging civil society in China by sending skilled professionals to work short-term at the Amity NGO Development Centre, providing training to Catholic Social Service Centres, and enabling the work of the China Christian Council's Social Service Department.
3. Reflect theologically and pastorally on the impact of migration in our own churches, and take into account the experience of the Chinese churches.
4. Re-examine our models of partnership in light of China's increasing economic power and its growing importance on the international stage.

The CTBI visit comprised the following individuals:

Chris Elliott (Chair, China Forum; Secretary for External Relations, Methodist Church)

Margaret Swinson (Chair of Trustees, CTBI)

Gillian Kingston (Methodist Church in Ireland)

Elizabeth Duffy (Young Adult Development Officer, Diocese of Motherwell)

Lawrence Braschi (CTBI China Desk)

We were also accompanied by Margaret Swinson's husband, Michael Swinson. Reflections and more photographs from each of the participants will be available on the ctbi website (www.ctbi.org.uk).

Photographs of churches are courtesy of Michael Swinson; used with permission.