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Functions of Protestant Churches in Promoting Social Harmony in Socialist China

A Preliminary Study Based on Interviews with Parishioners and Pastors in Shanghai

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1. Background

Since the "reform and opening" policy was adopted in 1979, China has opened her door to the whole world. With rapid economic growth and industrial development in these three decades many problems and conflicts have arisen in the society. The major problems that China has to tackle can be summarized as follows: first, increasing economic and cultural disparity between the rich and the poor, or in general, between eastern and western China; second, decline in moral values; third, pollution and over-exploitation of natural resources.

Zhang Zhan 張湛, Chen Guo 陳果, and Wu Fuyou 吳福友 were students of doctoral program whereas Huang Wei 黃薇, Cai Yilun 蔡翼倫, Mao Yan 毛妍, Lü Liang 呂亮, and Liu JingJing 劉晶晶 were students of master program in the Faculty of Philosophy, Fudan University, Shanghai.

In recognition of these urgent issues the Chinese government proposes the idea of fostering social harmony in the socialist society, highlighting the current concern of China and the spirit of this age. The Fourth Plenary Session of the Sixteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in September 2004 pledged to build a harmonious socialist society in China. It addressed the need to adapt to the profound social changes in China and to prioritize the task of building a harmonious society by restoring social vitality, advocating social justice and fairness, strengthening the spirit of the rule of law and the sense of integrity in the whole society, and safeguarding social stability and unity.[1] Speaking to leading officials and party cadres in a high-level party seminar held in Beijing, Chinese President Hu Jintao 胡錦濤 emphasized that "building a harmonious society" should be a top priority. He said that a harmonious society "will be characterized by democracy, the rule of law, equity, justice, sincerity, amity and vitality." Hu also pointed out that currently it is important to balance the interests of different social groups, to avoid conflicts, and to ensure that the people could live a safe and happy life in a politically stable country.[2]

2. Objective

Like other religions, Christianity[3] has its social functions in promoting social stability in China. Such a positive aspect of religions has been assured by the Chinese leaders in a number of important speeches.

Compared to other religions, Christianity has its unique features, for instance, unique doctrines, organized structure, strong sense of evangelism, and commitment to social service. Therefore, Christians often play a more vital role in social life than other communities in resolving social conflicts and maintaining social stability. The objective of this study is to find out how Christianity functions in public sphere, and

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[1] See "CPC Pledges to Build up Harmonious Society of Socialism," *People's Daily*, September 26, 2004, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200409/26/eng20040926_158384.html.

[2] See "Building Harmonious Society Important Task for CPC: President Hu," *People's Daily*, February 20, 2005, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200502/20/eng20050220_174036.html.

[3] In this report, "Christianity" usually refers to Protestantism and "the churches" refer to Protestant churches.

whether Christian teachings and practices have positive effects on constructing a harmonious society.

During the past twenty years, the Christian communities, including Protestants and Catholics, have grown rapidly. Harmony among Christians in the church and harmony between Christians and non-Christians in the society are important factors in building a harmonious socialist society in China.

3. Scope

According to *Religious Archives of Shanghai* published in 2001, up to December 1998 there were totally 103 churches, more than 150,000 believers, and 276 ministers in Shanghai (including suburban areas).[4]

According to the statistics as of December 1998, the churches in downtown Shanghai are Mu En Church 沐恩堂, Qing Xin Church 清心堂, Jing Ling Church 景靈堂 (with a branch, Hong De Church 鴻德堂), Zha Bei Church 閘北堂, Huai En Church 懷恩堂 (with a branch, Xin En Church 新恩堂), Hu Dong Church 滬東禮拜堂, Zhu Sheng Church 諸聖堂 (with a branch, Hui Zhong Church 惠中堂), Hu Xi Church 滬西禮拜堂, Pu An Church 普安堂, and Shanghai Community Church 上海國際禮拜堂. The Shanghai suburb consists of 10 administrative regions. The number of churches in each region as of December 1998 is as follow:[5]

Administrative Region	*Number of Churches*
Baoshan District 寶山區	10
Pudong New Area 浦東新區	8
Jiading District 嘉定區	7
Qingpu County 青浦縣	9
Songjiang District 松江區	5
Jinshan District 金山區	9
Nanhui County 南匯縣	8
Fengxian County 奉賢縣	26
Chongming County 崇明縣	9

[4] Sun Jinfu 孫金富, Wu Mengqing 吳孟慶 and Liu Jian 劉建, ed., *Shanghai Zongjiao Zhi* 上海宗教誌 [Religious Archives of Shanghai] (Shanghai, Shanghai shehui kexue yuan chubanshe, 2001), 416.

[5] Ibid., 427–30.

Administrative Region	*Number of Churches*
Minhang District 閔行區	6

Moreover, there are 14 churches set up by China Christian Council (CCC). According to an article of Luo Weihong 羅偉虹, the number of Christians in the Shanghai suburb has been increasing rapidly since the 1980s. In June 1999 the total number of Christians in suburban Shanghai has grown to 86,000.[6] Certainly the figure is now much more than that. For example, when one of our teams started our survey in suburban area, they found that the number of churches in Qingpu County has increased from 9 (as listed in the above table) to 12.[7]

This study covered the main Protestant churches in downtown Shanghai and some of the churches in the Shanghai suburb. Details of interviewed churches and names of investigators are listed below:

District / County	*Church*	*Address*	*Chief Pastor*	*Date of Interview*	*Investigators*
Putuo 普陀區	Pu An Church 普安堂	No. 1907, North Zhongshan Road	Ning Guomin 甯國敏	April 24, 2005	Chen Guo 陳果 Wu Fuyou 吳福友
Zhabei 閘北區	Ling Quan Church 靈泉堂	No. 1555, Linfen Road	Ge Rui 葛蕊	April 16, 2005	
Pudong 浦東區	Zhu En Church 主恩堂	No. 431, Donglu Road	Shen Xuebin 沈學斌	April 9, 2005	
Xuhui 徐匯區	Community Church 國際禮拜堂	No. 53, Hengshan Road	Xie Bingguo 謝炳國	March 20, 2005	Cai Yilun 蔡翼倫 Mao Yan 毛妍
Jingan 靜安區	Huai En Church 懷恩堂	No. 375, North Shanxi Road	Shi Ping 施萍	April 9, 2005	

[6] Luo Weihong, "Cong zongjiao bijiao kan Jidujiao zai Zhongguo de fazhan tedian" 從宗教比較看基督教在中國的發展特點 [The Developmental Characteristics of Christianity in China from the Perspectives of Comparative Religious Studies], *Dangdai Zongjiao Yanjiu* 當代宗教研究 [Contemporary Religious Studies] 1 (2001): 9.

[7] According to the official website of Shanghai Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee 上海市民族和宗教事務委員會, there were 164 registered places of Christian worship (including 103 churches and more than 50 meeting venues), 332 Christian pastors, and more than 180,000 Christians in downtown and suburban Shanghai in 2005. See "Shanghai Jidujiao gaikuang" 上海基督教概況 [Overview of Christianity in Shanghai], official website of Shanghai Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee, http://www.shmzw.gov.cn/gb/mzw/shzj/jdj/index.html.

District / County	*Church*	*Address*	*Chief Pastor*	*Date of Interview*	*Investigators*
Huangpu 黃浦區	Mu En Church 沐恩堂	No. 316, Xizang Zhong Road	Jiang Qianli 姜茜莉	April 9, 2005	
Yangpu 楊浦區	Hu Dong Church 滬東堂	No. 350, Guohe Road	Liu Bin 劉斌	March 27, 2005	Lü Liang 呂亮 Liu Jing-jing 劉晶晶
Hongkou 虹口區	Jing Ling Church 景靈堂	No. 135, Kun-shan Road	Yu Jiang 余江	April 17, 2005	
Jiading 嘉定區	Fu Yin Church* 福音堂	No. 21 Bridge, Caoan Road, Huangdu Town	He Chunjin 何春金	December 30, 2004	Zhang Zhan 張湛 Huang Wei 黃薇
	Zhen Li Church* 真理堂	Xiangle Road, Nanxiang Town	Yang Yulan 楊玉蘭	April 15, 2005	
Qingpu 青浦區	Ling En Church* 靈恩堂	Xiatang Street, Liantang Town	Lu Cai-hong 陸彩紅	March 27, 2005	

* Church in suburban area.

4. Methodology

4.1. Preparation

In the discipline of social science in the West conflict management is a rather developed field of inquiry. Due to the long tradition of Christianity in the West, the Christian Church has already done a lot of work in this respect. Numerous works have been published on this topic as ministers and social workers gained more and more experience in conflict management from their daily practices. In 2003 the Committee for Shanghai Ethnic and Religious Affairs commissioned the Department of Philosophy of Fudan University to organize a training course for pastors.[8] The course was taught by Prof. Zhang Qingxiong 張慶熊. In the second half of 2004 Prof. Zhang selected a title[9] from the series of "Resources for Christian Counseling" to be the major reading material

[8] The title of the training course is: "Shanghai shi Jidujiao Sanzi aiguo hui jiaomu renyuan yanjiusheng peixunban" 上海市基督教三自愛國會教牧人員研究生培訓班 [Training Course for Post-graduate Pastors of the National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in Shanghai].

[9] L. Randolph Lowry and Richard W. Meyers, *Conflict Management and Counseling* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991). The Chinese translation is available at http://www.bigyi.net.

of this course. Those who attended the course learnt much about the basic theory of conflict management and counseling.

Among 37 pastors who attended the course there were pastors from the churches in Shanghai and the East China Theological Seminary 華東神學院. They had substantial first-hand experiences in facing conflicts in the churches. Thus our team invited them to give a lecture to us on how to manage conflicts with the help of Christian resources. They were also invited to share their experience and reflection in writing.

4.2. Data Collection

The procedure of the study includes: first, informal discussions with pastors; second, small meeting at every church; and third, interviews with some members of the church during which we made recordings of their speeches or wrote notes to collect first-hand materials.

In this study unstructured *interview* was chosen as the means of data collection. Interview allows the investigators to express themselves more clearly and so it is more likely for the subjects to get the main point of the questions and provide relevant answers. In addition, interview is suitable for collecting details of case studies so as to find out a true picture of the function of the Protestant Church in promoting social harmony.



Fig. 1. Interviewees of Ling En Church, Qingpu Disctrict.



Fig. 2. Interviewees of Zhen Li Church, Jiading Disctrict.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE CHURCH

1. Major Reasons of Conversion

1.1. Influence of Family

Many pastors came from families with Christian faith. Christianity has come to China for more than a hundred years. In some families the members have been Christians from generation to generation.

Pastor Lu Caihong 陸彩紅 of Ling En Church (located in Liantang Town, Qingpu County) said that her uncle influenced her choice in religion. After she graduated from a technical secondary school, she decided to study at the East China Theological Seminary so as to serve the church as a pastor.

1.2. The Underprivileged

Unemployed workers in urban areas, the old, the poor, the sick, and the disabled in suburban areas are another major source of believers in Shanghai. They are very poor in general, low in morale, and have a low status in the society. However, when they go to church, they find spiritual satisfaction and receive practical assistance in tackling difficulties

in daily lives. What is more, they experience respect and fairness in the church.

Ms. Guifang Su 蘇桂芳 said,

> My husband and I are not local people. I had a hard life in my childhood. When I was fourteen, my father died. I did not know why we were so poor. I thought I would never succeed in anything in my life. Later I believed in Jesus. My husband was a driver in a factory. His wages were quite low. Later on he worked for another factory. Thank God! Now he is the sales director of that factory. Many people cannot imagine that because my husband did not receive much education. God helped him.[10]

1.3. Spiritual Need

Some people come to the church due to personal spiritual need.

Pastor Shi Ping 施萍 (Huai En Church, Jingan District) mentioned a follower who had always quarreled with his wife. Finally their marriage came to an end. He became very depressed and often drank to get rid of his sorrow. One day he passed by Huai En Church. Hearing some appealing songs, he walked into the chapel and listened to the preaching. Then he became a Christian. The pastor of Huai En Church talked to him many times and told him about the importance and sacredness of marriage. He then went to his ex-wife and expressed his regrets. Moved by his sincerity, she reunited with him and became a Christian later. Pastor Shi said that the couple is now core members of the church choir.[11]

Another example is a lady from Zhabei District who has heart disease. Soon after she lost her job, her husband lost his job too. Her husband was in a very low spirit and began to engage in promiscuous sex with other women. At the same time another tragedy happened—her nephew killed his grandfather. She was so miserable. One day she and her husband went to a church and listened to the preaching. Her husband repented for his bad behavior. Then he went to the church and worshipped God every week. Now he is determined to be a good hus-

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[10] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004.

[11] Interview by Cai Yilun and Mao Yan, April 9, 2005.

band and to help his wife to confront the miseries together. He becomes hopeful.[12]

1.4. Diseases and Other Miserable Experiences

The fourth major reason of conversion is the affliction of diseases, which is commonly found in rural areas.

In an interview a Christian told us, "We came to Jesus with our diseases. We came to the face of God when we had no way to go."[13] Moreover, many people talked about the healing of God after they converted to Christianity.

Ms. Yueqin Qian 錢月琴 (Fu Yin Church, Huangdu Town 黃渡鎮, Jiading District 嘉定區) said,

> I was very painful from 1997 to 1998. Besides rheumatoid arthritis, I had gallstone, kidney stone, and diabetes. I had no hope and no light in my mind. I loved my daughter and could not leave her alone. She was only a girl studying in senior high school. I hoped I could live ten years longer till my daughter grow up. I would rather die at that time. I had no one to turn to. A member of the church said to me, "There is a road. There is a bright road. Come and believe in God." So I did. Nowadays most of my diseases are healed. I can do some weaving and play the piano.[14]

Ms. Yang 楊 (Zhen Li Church, Nanxiang Town, Jiading District) said,

> My reproductive organs had some diseases. I went to the hospital for six years. I tried many kinds of medicine and treatment but they were not effective at all. I decided not to go to the hospital. After that I indulged in some traditional superstitious practices. I did some worship in my house and burnt incense. Then I mixed the ashes that remained in the incense burner with water and drank it. I did this kind of things for about six years until one sister persuaded me to convert to Christianity. Then I found that after I prayed for some time, I felt better than before. Recently the local government granted me health sub-

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[12] Interview by Chen Guo and Wu Fuyou, April 16, 2005.

[13] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004. The name of the interviewee was not recorded.

[14] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004.

> sidy, but I did not accept it. I told the official that I had got well and the subsidy could be given to those in need.[15]

Pastor Lu Caihong of Ling En Church said:

> My uncle was a gatekeeper of a factory which was a graveyard in the past. There were a lot of car accidents in front of the factory gate. Many people thought that there was something unusual. At mid-night my uncle even heard some voices that made him stay up all night. The director of the factory suggested my uncle to sacrifice a pig's head. Moreover, my aunt was ill at that time. Then they came to the church and believed in Jesus. Some time went past. Both of them are now very healthy and their son is admitted to university in this year. They believe that God blesses their family.[16]

2. Composition of the Church

From the church visits and interviews we noticed that there are differences between the composition of the churches in downtown area and those in the suburb. A majority of the downtown believers are old people and there is an increase in the number of youth. On the other hand, in the suburban areas most believers are middle-aged people, among whom female followers constitute the majority and a few of them are young people. Most female followers in the suburban area came to Shanghai from other provinces.[17]

2.1. The Aged

The aged make up around 70 percent of downtown believers in Shanghai.[18] Thus these churches are less active compared to those that have more young people.

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[15] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, April 15, 2005.

[16] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, March 27, 2005.

[17] Collected by interviews with pastors and believers, and observation of Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei during Sunday worships in Fu Yin Church, Zhen Li Church, and Ling En Church.

[18] Collected by observation of our investigators who visited the churches in downtown area.

2.2. The Youth

The number of young believers is growing more rapidly in downtown churches than in suburban ones.[19] Such a distinction, in our opinion, results from the gap between the downtown and the suburb.

Young people are more rational than the aged. They often ask about the meaning of faith and the way to live the faith. They find tensions between their faith and reality. They are brought up with the teaching "love the country and the Chinese Communist Party." However, when they convert to Christianity, they are told to love God. They want to make a lot of money but in the church they are asked not to talk too much about money. They are instructed by the bible to marry Christians but in reality it cannot be worked out all the time.

2.3. New Life and Miracles

When we visited Ling Quan Church in Zhabei District, we met an old couple, Mr. and Mrs. Zhu, who impressed us deeply. Their words, especially "We are just ordinary people," still linger in our minds. Both of them are over 80 years old. Mr. Zhu graduated from Whampoa Military Academy (黃埔軍校 Huangpu Junxiao). He was once the security officer of Chang Hsueh-liang (張學良 Zhang Xueliang), the general. He followed Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石 Jiang Kaishi) as his subordinate and had joined an expeditionary army to Burma. His father was then the president of Northwest Normal University 西北師範大學. His wife is a well-educated lady who had been a teacher until retirement and her father was then the leader of Nanjing Transportation Bureau under the administration of Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙, also known as Sun Zhongshan 孫中山). In the early days of New China, especially in the Cultural Revolution, a family with such a background had to face countless restrictions and oppressions. During the Cultural Revolution Mr. Zhu was a prominent target of criticism and denunciation in Zhabei District. He had a difficult life from 1951 to 1988 as a counter-revolutionary criminal and his wife had been labeled as the family member of counter-revolutionaries for 38 years.

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[19] Collected by interviews and observations of our investigators during church visits in downtown and suburban areas.

During those days both of them suffered so much that they thought of committing suicide with their children and mother many times. However, whenever they planned to do so, some unexpected things happened and they had to give up their plan. Meanwhile, Mr. Zhu had escaped from being shot by accident more than once. It was miraculous that some of the incidents were revealed in his dreams and were proved to be true later. What is more, the diseases that they had in hard times disappeared later. In spite of all the sufferings they remain faithful and often give thanks to God. They love life with a positive attitude. When they were interviewed, they said,

> Jesus is not only a god in the bible. He is tangible and trustworthy. We feel and experience him by faith. The one who endures to the end will be saved. We are just ordinary people, but God has saved us. He is the ruler of human history. We know nothing about tomorrow, but God's word is everlasting.

Nowadays they care about people around them. When they give money to beggars, they give 30 *yuan* (not a small amount for them) as a token of the Trinity. When they knew that a pastor was going to buy a new house, they offered to lend her 6,000 *yuan* and in fact that was all they had in their saving account.[20]

Mr. Lianqi Xie 謝連其 from Ling En Church said,

> My temper was very bad. I did not receive any education. Nor could I read and write. But I am a good singer. In my village I was in charge of farm production. I was notorious for gambling and spent all my time on that. And I was also a heavy smoker. After I converted to Christ, I gave up gambling. And I started to learn how to read and write.[21]

Mr. Huixian Zhou 周輝賢 said,

> Before I believed in God, I had many bad habits. I was addicted to smoking, alcohol, and gambling. Since I smoked too much, I felt

[20] Interview by Chen Guo and Wu Fuyou, April 16, 2005.
[21] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, March 27, 2005.

> "drunk" and dizzy sometimes. I went to church and prayed to God with a peaceful mind. After a year I said goodbye to my past.[22]

Mr. Zhiyi Huang 黄志毅 is only 20 years old. He works for Ling En Church in Liantang Town, Qingpu District. He told us,

> I was a tractor driver in the past. One day my tractor loaded more than 70 bags of rice weighing over 5,000 kilograms in total. On my way to the destination, an official of the local police station suddenly blocked my way. This led to a big accident. My tractor turned over. The fall fractured my skull. I had been in the hospital for more than a month and spent a lot of money for the treatment. At that time I had only one idea in my mind, that is, to take revenge on that official. I followed him and wanted to kill or poison his family, or set a fire on his house. I could not sleep at night imagining various ways to take revenge. After believing in Jesus, I gradually learned to forgive other people. Finally I did not hate him. After some time I met him again and I did not want to kill him any more. I feel completely calm in my mind.[23]

All these new converts had a new life in Christ. In addition, they believed that some miracles took place among them.

Ms. Guifang Su said, "My husband once fell from a bridge. There was a pile of rocks under the bridge. My husband fell on the clay in between the hard stones and did not hurt. God saved him."[24]

Ms. Fan 范 said,

> Many years ago I had postnatal depression and mental problem. After I believed in Jesus, I became open-minded, optimistic, and firm. I had a miscarriage and had an injection, which would hurt very much. But I did not feel the pain. Even the doctors could not comprehend it.[25]

Ms. Yang 楊 said,

> My grandson is in primary one. One day in the last semester he was

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, April 15, 2005.

> in the toilet alone. A strong wind blew and slammed the door. He did not have the strength to open the door. When the bell rang, he was anxious to return to the classroom. The little boy then jumped out of the window. He was on the third floor! When I heard about the incident, I called Pastor Lu and asked him to pray for my little grandson. Then I hurried to the hospital. When I arrived at Qingpu Hospital, I found that nothing happened to him except a small bruise on his forehead. We went home shortly. His teacher, the school principal, my son, and my daughter-in-law were all grateful that he was in luck. It is inconceivable, isn't it? I believe that it is God who blesses my family.[26]

Pastor Lu said,

> In our church we have a sister who has had diarrhea for fourteen years after she gave birth to her child. She tried many kinds of medicine but they were not effective at all. Then her husband brought her to our church. After a month she got well. When you believe in God with all your heart and all your soul, you will find the miracle of God.[27]

III. REPORT AND ANALYSIS

1. How Christians Tackle Family Disputes

There is an old Chinese saying, "even an uncorrupted official cannot settle family disputes." Family disputes can be caused by numerous reasons, such as envy, lust, bigotry, adultery, etc. Christian faith functions at two levels to resolve family conflicts:

a) A Christian should obey the biblical teaching of controlling one's temper. Then many quarrels can be avoided.

b) All members of the church belong to a community in which every one is treated as family member. When an individual family is in trouble, other members of the church should help this family to solve problems.

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[26] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, March 27, 2005.
[27] Ibid.

The following examples illustrate that family disputes may occur between married partners, between wife and mother-in-law, between parents and children, and so on in the families of Christians.

1.1. Conflicts among Family Members

Ms. Yueqin Qian 錢月琴 said,

> My family is big but harmonious. It has been many years since my husband's two nephews and niece came to live with us. My husband's younger brother lives with us too. At the beginning conflicts were inevitable. When my husband was fourteen years old, his mother died. His father married again. His stepmother brought her own sons into the family. And she gave birth to more sons later. The family became bigger and bigger. Consequently more and more conflicts arose. Basically the cause of conflicts was financial. I insisted that we should not ask too much from the parents. Presently they are very old people. My mother-in-law is more than seventy. My husband and I influence other family members and no conflict exists in our family any more. My father-in-law is much moved and says, "What a good family!" I feel that I am blessed.[28]

1.2. Conflicts Related to the Elderly

Pastor Lu Caihong said,

> Large families with many sons and daughters have more conflicts within the family, especially when parents are old and need the support of their children. Among these children some are Christians, but some are not. Christians usually take care of their parents on their own initiative. They keep the love of Jesus Christ in mind and are willing to show their love selflessly, though the old parents are sometimes fond of the "bad" children.[29]

Ms. Yiyun Pan 潘遺韻 said,

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[28] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004.
[29] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, March 27, 2005.

> When the old parents were alive, the children did not take good care of them. But when they passed away, the children spent a lot of money on the funeral because what they really care about is good reputation. They pretend to be good children of their parents in front of other people. We, as Christians, never act in these ways. I treat my mother and mother-in-law equally well without discrimination.[30]

Mr. Lianqi Xie said, "My daughter bought me a sweater. I asked if she bought one for her father-in-law too. If not, I will not take the sweater."[31]

Another moving story happened in Chong Ming Island 崇明島. Ms. Wenxiu Lu 陸文秀 has been dwelling there for more than thirty years. Her house is a hundred miles away from that of her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law was a bad-tempered person. Other family members were reluctant to visit her and take care of her. In August 2003 the old lady committed suicide and was saved. Lu Wenxiu suggested taking her mother-in-law to her house. But the old lady did not want to leave her own house. So Lu Wenxiu made up her mind to go to the countryside and look after her mother-in-law. Due to her kindness to her mother-in-law, all neighbors praised her and her story was presented on the television.[32]

In Xingta Village 星塔村, Huangdu Town, Jiading District, an old Christian, Tao Wenbao 陶文寶, was almost eighty years old. His wife died several years ago. He had five children, among them two daughters were married and three sons worked in downtown Shanghai. No one was willing to take care of him. He lived in a small and dilapidated house alone. As soon as the members of the church in Huangdu Town heard about this, they decided to take over the responsibility of taking care of the old man. From then on Sister A Mei went to his house and did all the housework every day. The living expense of Tao Wenbao was paid by the church after he got injured in a fall.[33]

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004.

1.3. Conflicts between Married Partners with Different Faith

When husband and wife have different religious faiths or one of them does not have any religious faith, conflicts often occur. It is written in the bible:

> [I]f any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. (1 Corinthians 7:12–13, NRSV)

This is the text the church refers to in resolving conflicts of faith between married partners.

Ms. Yibing Huang 黄逸冰 said,

> In our church we had a sister whose husband did not believe in God. In the beginning he strongly opposed to her conversion to Christianity. They wrangled about whether the wife should go to the church to worship. The husband even wanted to divorce her. The brothers and sisters in our church advised her to love and tolerate her husband and not to aggravate the problem. They also prayed for her. Several years elapsed. She was always trying to be a dutiful wife. In 2003 the husband was baptized.[34]

1.4. Marital Crisis and Extramarital Affairs

It is believed that marriage is predestined by God. The husband and wife should stay with each other for a life time. The bible says,

> [F]rom the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female." "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Mark 10:6–9, NRSV)
>
> … for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? (1 Timothy 3:5, NRSV)

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[34] Interview by Cai Yilun and Mao Yan, April 9, 2005.

> Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her… (Ephesians 5:22–25, NRSV)
>
> In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church… (Ephesians 5:28–29, NRSV)

Ms. Yueqin Qian said,

> I know a taxi driver who always quarreled with his wife. Then his wife would go to her mother's house. I talked to her several times and persuaded her not to divorce her husband. Nowadays when we see them we always say, "You two love-birds!"[35]

Pastor Yu Jiang 余江 said,

> A husband from Mu En Church was incompatible with his wife in disposition. Both of them wanted to divorce. They had even drafted a divorce agreement. I went to visit them and prayed with them. Eventually they reached mutual understanding and did not divorce.

He continued to give another example:

> A young couple had married for seven years. Neither of them did any housework. They did not cook at home but ate fast food almost every day. And the wife refused to have babies, which made the husband very angry. I went to their house many times and taught them how to take responsibility in the family according to the bible. We prayed together. Later the young couple began to treat each other with consideration and now they have a baby.[36]

In the past twenty years, rapid modernization and economic development in China have brought lots of challenges to the marriage of Chinese people. The number of divorce is increasing and extramarital

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[35] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004.
[36] Interview by Lü Liang and Liu Jingjing, April 17, 2005.

affair is quite common in the society. During our investigation we are astonished to find that there are many cases of infidelity (mostly committed by husbands) in the suburban area.

While it is beyond the scope of our study to find out all the factors leading to this phenomenon, we notice that one of the factors is related to the improvement in spending power of those husbands who work in downtown Shanghai.

When Christian wives get into this kind of marriage problem, they always place great hopes on praying. Ms. Fan 范 said,

> My husband once had extramarital relation with another woman. It was a severe hurt to me. I prayed to God, waiting for His work. I believe in the power of prayer. After some days my husband changed completely. He always stays at home after supper. He loves the family. Our family was once the poorest in our village many years ago. Thank the grace of Lord! We become rich now.[37]

Sometimes these wives have to tolerate. Ms. Yiyun Pan said,

> Nowadays some husbands may have extramarital affairs. But a wife who believes in God cannot curse her husband or quarrel with him. She should love him, care for him, and try to affect him with her virtuous heart instead. In this way an almost-broken family could be brought to reunion more easily.[38]

Pastor Shi Ping told us,

> There was a good couple in our church. However, after the husband made a large sum of money, he began to go to clubs or bars frequently at night. Soon after that he had a new sweetheart and wanted to divorce. The wife refused to do so hoping that they could maintain an intact family for her two children. She gained support to face her life by worshipping God in the church. After several years, her husband failed in business and got a serious disease. The pastor of our church talked to her and encouraged her to forgive her husband. She went to the hospital and looked after him day and night. When he recovered, he was in tears because he was moved by her love. He knelt down and begged for her forgiveness. She told him that she came

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[37] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, April 15, 2005.
[38] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, March 27, 2005.

> because she was a Christian. When they left the hospital, the first thing that the husband wanted to do was going to the church with his wife. It is Jesus who led this lost sheep back home.[39]

Pastor Yu Jiang said,

> There was a white-collar couple who were baptized in Mu En Church. They had cold war for three years because the husband had an extramarital affair. I persuaded the wife to tolerate her husband and the husband to confess in front of God. The young men of our church did a lot to help him and bring them to reconciliation after a three-year separation. Now they are living happily together.[40]

2. How Christians Tackle Disputes with Neighbors

In resolving disputes among neighbors, the church prefers reconciliation to taking legal action. This is in accordance with the biblical principle of conflict management.

There is a family living above Pastor Yu Jiang's apartment. The water pipe of their apartment leaked and the water seeped into Yu's apartment damaging the floor. Pastor Yu wanted to negotiate with that family about a repair. The family refused to take responsibility and threatened to do something bad if Pastor Yu asked for any compensation. Pastor Yu then sought advice from a lawyer. He was told that if he filed a lawsuit against this family, this family should pay for his loss. However, Pastor Yu chose to reconcile with this family and did not bring the dispute to the court. He has put biblical teaching into practice.[41]

Pastor Yan Yuying 嚴育英 said,

> A Christian farmer had a quarrel with his neighbor about the boundary of his land. Both wanted to have more land and thought that the other side had more. The church was concerned about this matter and talked to this brother. After many communications these two guys

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[39] Interview by Cai Yilun and Mao Yan, April 9, 2005.
[40] Interview by Lü Liang and Liu Jingjing, April 17, 2005.
[41] Ibid.

were willing to talk about this issue. Gradually the conflict was resolved. They would not wrangle about the land again.[42]

3. Conflicts within the Church

Harmony within the church is one of the constituents of social harmony. It is also a pre-condition for any religion to perform its social functions.

3.1. Causes of Conflicts

One of the causes of conflicts among Christians lies in the different understandings of God and other basic beliefs, that is, theological disputes. This kind of disagreements may split a church into two. When a fair and friendly atmosphere for dialogues is destroyed, it is more difficult to discuss different theological views and the gap between the parties will become larger.

Secondly, in our study we noticed that many conflicts are caused by or related to the election of church leaders. A church leader should have good reputation not only in the community but also in the society. However, some churches prefer to elect wealthy people to be the leaders and so most of the church members are not satisfied. In fact, the congregation needs a leader who is faithful to God and capable in church administration.

The third kind of conflicts is related to employment in the church, namely "the iron bowl." It means that an employee of the church never gets fired even if he/she is not suitable for the job. As a result, many people dawdle in the church and are not motivated to improve their performance. In addition, some churches have problems in managing the church workers.

In sum, church leaders should commit to solve the above problems so that Christian churches could be salt and light for the society.

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[42] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, March 27, 2005.

3.2. Solutions

Firstly, the church should create a fair and friendly platform to resume conversations between conflicting parties. Paul the Apostle instructed the Ephesians, "I . . . beg you to lead a life . . . with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love . . . ." (Ephesians 4:2, NRSV) Christians should strive to cultivate these qualities rather than focusing on the problem.

Secondly, the church should optimize its election system and improve its management skills. Authentic authority should be built on the virtues and faith of the leader instead of his/her economic background. The leader of the congregation should be one with charisma who can lead the church members to follow God.

Thirdly, the church should cultivate the young generation for leadership succession. The church may provide more resources so that young pastors can pursue higher theological education.

The following example illustrates how conflicts caused by different theological views were resolved.

Since the 1950s, the Protestant denominations in China united to worship together due to various historical factors, thus entering the "post-denominational period." All churches shared the same worship order. However, after the "reform and opening" of China some churches, such as Seventh-day Adventist Church, wanted to dissociate from the united worship because it preferred to hold worship services at a different time. This led to many debates within the churches. Thus some pastors referred to the words of Paul the Apostle,

> The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16–17)

Then the chief pastors of Seventh-day Adventist Church had a meeting with pastors of other churches. After they reached agreements on some controversial issues, they conveyed the message to their congregations. It was proven that since the pastors were trusted by their own congregations, it was more effective for them to persuade their congregations regarding disputes with other churches. If pastors tried to persuade the other congregations that held different views, it would not work.

Moreover, the representatives of different churches collected the comments of believers about church administration and the work of their pastors. They then gave suggestions and advices in monthly meetings convened by the chief pastor of one of the churches. On the other hand, pastors also collected the comments of believers by distributing questionnaires through the representatives. All these measures helped to reduce serious conflicts in the churches.[43]

4. Christian Mediators

The Christian community has three functions in promoting social harmony, that is, mediation in conflicts, introduction of work ethics, and social services. Let us look at mediation first.

4.1. Biblical Teachings

According to Paul the Apostle, God reconciled us to himself through Christ, and had given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17–20). The principle of reconciliation can be found in three biblical passages. The first one talks about the procedure of reconciliation with a member of the church:

> If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15–17, NRSV)

The second one tells us to seek reconciliation at the right time:

> So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23–24, NRSV)

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[43] Interview by Lü Liang and Liu Jingjing, March 27, 2005.

The third one talks about choosing a mediator:

> When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters? If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, but a believer goes to court against a believer—and before unbelievers at that? (1 Corinthians 6:1–8, NRSV)

4.2. Qian Yueqin, Mediator on the Wheelchair

The following examples illustrate how Christian belief functions in conflict management.

Ms. Yueqin Qian is a member of Fu Yin Church in the suburb (Huangdu Town, Jiading District). She is about fifty years old and silver-tongued. About ten years ago she got rheumatoid arthritis and became physically disabled. When we interviewed her,[44] her husband came with her and took good care of her all the time. We could feel the true love between them. She has been a mediator in Fu Yin Church for many years. As a Christian she helps many people regardless of their religious belief. She said,

> They [the people she helped] all enjoy listening to me and are willing to confide to me when they have troubles. I help them to solve problems and conflicts with kindness, patience, and tolerance. This is the power of God. God grants me wisdom and eloquence and I should use them to benefit people. Glory be to God!

[44] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004. The following cases of mediation by Ms. Qian were collected in the same interview.

Conflict is a kind of crisis. In Chinese, the word 危機 (*weiji*, crisis) includes two characters which means "danger" and "opportunity" respectively. In some occasions opportunity can bring alternatives and hopes to the parties involved in the conflict. One could adopt many styles to tackle conflicts, such as avoidance, reconciliation, confrontation, compromise, or collaboration. However, the most important of all is that the mediator can image a vision of reconciliation and move forward to achieve it. It is love and faith springing from one's religious experience that drive the mediator to do so. Ms. Qian has acquired these qualities from her Christian faith and experience. Thus she can help those who are annoyed by interpersonal conflicts. Let us look at some cases in which Ms. Qian served as a mediator.



Fig. 3. Fu Yin Church, Huangdu Town, Jiading District.



Fig. 4. The Interior of Fu Yin Church.

4.2.1. Mediating Family Conflicts

Ms. Qian told us a story about the wife of Lao Jiu 老九:

> Her mother-in-law is a difficult person. Her father-in-law is a usurer in his hometown. She had a high salary in the past. She is a generous person and spent all her money on the weddings of her two brothers.
>
> Nowadays she has lost her job and stays at home taking care of her children. She is very upset for her parents-in-law do not help her to take care of the children. She asked me if I had ever felt unhappy. I told her that I did but I can deal with that because Jesus is with me and shares my pain. Those without faith cannot experience that. I said to her, "You should trust me. I will pray for you." One day she and her children knelt down and prayed with me at my home. I was moved by that.
>
> After some time, she asked her brothers to repay their debts to her. In fact, she did not mean to get back all the money. She just wanted some of the money back because her husband knew about it. She did not want to make him unhappy. But her brothers and father refused to repay her. Her father was very angry, shouting at her, "You are not my daughter!" She did not know what to do. I prayed for her and told her to be nice to her brothers and father. She and her husband, Lao Jiu, then went to visit her father and talked about this matter. Finally they promised to repay her in the following year. Her father said to her, "Last time I shouted at you in rage. I did not mean that." She was moved to hear her father's words and told me that it was the power of God that made it happen.

In other cases, Ms. Qian suggested compromising with family members.

> Lao Jiu's father wanted to borrow 10,000 *yuan* from them. His wife knew that he would not repay the money and might use it in usury. But if she refused to lend the money, her husband would be angry with her. I advised her to lend the money to her father-in-law. Then she did and told him that the money was for his retirement but not usury.

4.2.2. Mediating Conflicts in Workplace

According to Ms. Qian,

> Ms. Cuixiang Chen 陳翠香 came to Shanghai from another province. She worked in a spinning factory as a quality inspector. She had a fight with her colleague in office hour. Chen was badly beaten up by her colleague and was sent to hospital. My nephew's wife worked in the same factory. She made a phone call to me, "You are both Christians. Please come and help her." Their factory manager called me too. Since I could not walk, it was not convenient for me to go to the hospital immediately. I called Pastor He Chunjin 何春金 at once. Then I prayed for her at home.

Then Pastor He and Ms. Liying Wang 王麗英 went to Jiading Hospital to see Chen. Ms. Wang said,

> At first she could not recognize us because of the severe hurt on her head. But she embraced us and her voice shook with emotions. She begged us to help her. We prayed for her day by day. When we visited her again, she became better. We spent more than two hours consoling her. She said to me, "Sister Wang, I will definitely remember your words." In the Christmas time she deliberately came to thank us. She embraced me tight and told her younger sister, "This is Sister Wang who always cares about me. I will never forget her." I replied, "It is not me but God who sends me to help you."

4.2.3. Mediating Lawsuit

Ms. Qian also helped her nephew in a court case:

> When my nephew was riding his bike, a truck suddenly knocked him down. As a result, my nephew knocked down a little girl who was walking in front of him. Unfortunately, the girl died. Her parents were in great sorrow and hatred. They brought the case to court and asked the truck driver and my nephew to compensate 17,000 *yuan* for the loss of their little daughter. Then I called the girl's father. I told him that I was a Christian and nobody asked me to talk to him. I hoped that he could drive the animosity out of his mind. In the end the court decided that the truck driver and my nephew had to com-

pensate 13,000 *yuan* in total and my nephew shared 6,000 *yuan*. The girl's father came to me later and said, "We like listening to your words."

4.3. Relocation of Churches

Large scale relocation is one of the causes of social conflicts in Shanghai. In recent years Shanghai is undergoing rapid development. Most of the old buildings in downtown are pulled down so that the land can be used for developing new economic zones. The government encourages the citizens to move to the suburb of Shanghai and has introduced a settlement policy providing benefits for those who move. Conflicts arise because some downtown citizens do not want to move to the countryside in spite of the fact that the government promises to give them bigger houses in the suburb. Under such circumstance, the churches have acted as mediator in persuading church members to cooperate with the government.

4.3.1. Song En Church

A number of churches were also required to relocate. For instance, Song En Church 頌恩堂 was relocated in 2004.[45] In September 2004, the race of Formula One was held in Shanghai International Automobile City, Anting Town 安亭鎮, Jiading District. The surrounding inhabitants including Song En Church were required to move. With the help of the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of Jiading District, the church and the government of Anting Town signed a contract in May 2004. Then the old chapel was pulled down in August. After that the church members held weekly meetings at the house of Ms. Guifang Hou 侯桂芳. They planned to build a new chapel when a new city plan was finalized. Though it was inconvenient for them to worship in the house of Ms. Hou, they did not complain about it.

[45] Provided by Rev. Pan Xiangbin 潘香斌 in pastoral class, April 15, 2005.

4.3.2. Pu An Church

However, some churches did not move smoothly like Song En Church. Let us look at the example of Pu An Church 普安堂.[46]

Reasons of Relocation

Shanghai has been experiencing economic growth since the 1990s. As a result, there is a need to reconstruct many old areas in the city. Located at a shantytown, Pu An Church also faced the need of relocation and reconstruction. Since the church building was built in a crude way in the past and had been used for many years, it became dangerous and was not safe for church workers and members to gather in the building. Therefore, the residents of the church were required to move out and it was necessary to construct a new building.

Conflicts

As in many other cities, land is a scarce resource in Shanghai. However, church buildings are not used for making profits but for holding worship services. Thus there was conflict between construction of churches and commercial projects. When the government made final decision on the land for building a new chapel, it required the church to reduce the length of the land by more than one meter. Thus the total area was greatly reduced. For this reason, some church members were unsatisfied and went to the local government to make a plea for more land. They did not do this out of ill will, as they knew that good Christians should not break the law.

Actions of the Church

On the one hand, the church asked the government to negotiate with the property developer and protect the rights and interests of the church members. On the other hand, the church explained the situation to its members and persuaded them not to be too emotional but remain rational in tackling problems. The pastors also responded to the actions of the church members by referring to the bible. They persuaded the church members to leave the matter to God and put all difficulties into

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[46] Ning Guomin 甯國敏 interviewed by Chen Guo and Wu Fuyou, April 24, 2005.

daily prayers. They believed that God would give them more than they expected and the wonderful will of God was hidden when they waited for his answer. Then the church members controlled their emotions of dissatisfaction and anger, praying day by day.

Outcome

Through the plea and prayers of the church members, the local government paid more attention to the issue and in the end approved one more meter for the church. Then the ground area of Pu An Church increased from 920 to 985 square meters.

As of today, Pu An Church is the newest and best-equipped among all Protestant churches in Shanghai. The exterior of the church looks like a huge ship entering a harbor, which is a combination of the biblical image of Noah's Ark and modern architectural art. However, during its construction there were lots of difficulties, which were overcome with much efforts and wisdom. It took more than seven years to complete the building and involved all kinds of complicated factors. However, without the long waiting period the church members would not have built the present modern church and collected enough money for construction. The new building of Pu An Church was completed in July 2004 with 2,000 square meters of construction area. It has four stories above ground level and a basement. The main worship hall is located on the second floor with 500 seats. At the same time 450 people can be seated in the chapel on the third floor and 200 in the basement. Thus there are over 1,100 seats in total for services. The fourth floor is designed for church administration. There are 8 offices for pastors and church workers, a guest room, a meeting room, a recording studio, and a store room.

The above example illustrates a peaceful dialogue between the church and the government. On the one hand, the church asked the members to understand, obey, and support the law even in hard times. The church members should stay awake and hold the virtues of love, tolerance, and patience. On the other hand, as the number and education level of Christians in China were rising, the government paid more attention to the voices of the churches. As a result, the conflict was resolved and the church members could worship God in a new and beautiful chapel.



Fig. 5. The Exterior of Pu An Church.



Fig. 6. The Interior of Pu An Church.

5. *Christian Work Ethics*

Integrity is an important quality not only for individuals but also the whole country. In recent years the Chinese economy is developing rapidly. However, China has encountered many difficulties and scandals due to the loss of virtues such as integrity. These problems have led to numerous disputes, conflicts, and even lawsuits which are certainly obstacles to building a harmonious society. Thus there is an urgent need for China to advocate ethical education and set up a mature and fair trading and financial system. The ethical teachings of religions are useful resources in this respect.

For example, Christians are taught by the bible to cultivate various virtues and act with integrity. Thus they are motivated to control their selfish desires and act honestly. In China there is a production responsibility system in agriculture. Under this system peasants make production contract for fixed output with the government whereas the government distributes farmland to them. After this system was launched, the government officials find that most non-Christians like to let Christians join their group in farmland distribution. It is because Christians do not covet what does not belong to them.[47] Thus it is less likely for Christians to argue with their partners regarding distribution of farmland and farm products. Moreover, corporations and stores that are managed by Christians in the countryside often win the respect of their customers due to their honesty and fair trade.[48]

Pastor Ge Rui 葛蕤 (Ling Quan Church, Zhabei District) said,

> Some years ago I met a middle aged woman selling fake invoices at the south square of Shanghai railway station. We told her that selling fake invoices transgressed the law. Then she decided to give it up. Later a brother of our church recommended her for working as a nursery maid.[49]

Pastor Lu Caihong said,

> As Christians we are concerned about food safety. We do not use any poisonous chemicals to stimulate growth of our crops or to make our products look good to attract customers. We refuse to take bribes and do not give fake financial accounts.[50]

Mr. Zhiyi Huang said, "We, every Christian, have a stop light in our mind. We do what we should do and stop when it is not proper to do."[51]

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[47] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004 and March 27, 2005.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Interview by Chen Guo and Wu Fuyou, April 16, 2005.
[50] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, March 27, 2005.
[51] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004.

6. Social Services

As non-government organizations, the churches also participate in charitable social activities. They play an important role in promoting social justice and constructing a harmonious society. According to the Regulations on Religious Affairs 宗教事務條例 of the PRC, religious communities have the rights to receive donations from individuals or foreign nations.[52] All the churches that we investigated spend the donations to serve the society. Their participation in social services has its root in Christian tradition: Christian faith does not only emphasize salvation of individuals but also follows the instructions of Jesus Christ—"the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

6.1. Charity Group

Almost every church has a group that manages charity affairs. Let us look at Ling En Church as an example.

Two silk banners are hung in Ling En Church, Liantang Town, Qingpu County. One of the silk banners was given by the People's Government of Liantang Town and the Liantang Town Committee of Chinese Communist Party to praise the church members for helping the needy in disaster selflessly. The other silk banner was given by Liantang Town Rest Home for their continuous care for old people. Both the local government and members of the society appreciated the services of the church.

Pastor Lu Caihong said,

> Our church has formed a small group to serve Liantang Town Rest Home monthly. Most people in the rest home are very old. Our jobs include hairdressing and nail-cutting for the old. We also sweep the floor and do some washing. When an old person passes away, we help to arrange the funeral and pray for the dead. We do all these things out of our strong belief.[53]

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[52] No. 35, The Regulations on Religious Affairs, PRC.

[53] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, March 27, 2005.



Fig. 7. (Left) Silk banner given by People's Government of Liantang Town and the Liantang Town Committee of Chinese Communist Party.
Fig. 8. (Right) Silk banner given by Liantang Town Rest Home.



Fig. 9. Ling En Church, Liantang Town, Qingpu County.

6.2. Helping the Poor and the Needy

Justice, equity, and sharing are core elements of harmonious society. If there is no justice, there is no harmony. Among the churches that we investigated all of them organize activities every year to serve the poor and the needy. For instance, some Christian doctors visit homes for the

elderly or poor families regularly to provide physical examinations or medical consultation.[54]

Both Community Church and Mu En Church have formed a group to help the needy in their church. Community Church holds an annual fair to raise funds for the poor, including Christians and non-Christians, and the fair has been organized for nine years.[55] Mu En Church serves the needy in other ways. In 2003 and 2004 it set aside 5 percent of the annual donations of the church members for helping the needy. Then it sent several volunteers to collect the names of the poor in the surrounding communities. When Christmas came, the church gave 300 to 500 *yuan* to each person on the list so that they could share the joy of the festival. In addition, Mu En Church also helps the minorities who have different religious faith. Many Muslims from Xinjiang Province dwell on Zhejiang Road near the church. Thus the church provides financial support to some of the poor Muslims.[56]

Among all the developing areas in Shanghai, Pudong is the most prominent. Both urbanization and rapid economic development has brought tremendous change to its population. On the one hand, many well-educated expatriates need the care of the church so that they can adapt to a new environment. On the other hand, many people come to Shanghai from rural areas and other provinces. In general they are low-income workers. Most of them are illiterate and under great stress due to various difficulties in life. Nevertheless, they are faithful Christians. They also need personal care from the church. Therefore, the churches in Pudong try their best to satisfy the needs of these two types of people.

In face of social problems the Pudong churches try to be a channel of grace and buffer by a number of ways. First, they offer financial aid to eight poor children regardless of their religious background so that they can continue to study at school. Second, they organize literacy classes and basic legal knowledge classes free of charge for the illiterates who work in Shanghai. Then they can avoid many tricks and troubles in daily life. Third, the churches regularly visit and pray for the poor who have incurable diseases. Sometimes they also try to get in touch with hospitals and offer financial aids to the sick.[57]

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[54] Interview by Cai Yilun and Mao Yan, March 20 and April 9, 2005.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Jiang Qianli 姜茜莉 interviewed by Cai Yilun and Mao Yan, April 9, 2005.

[57] Interview by Chen Guo and Wu Fuyou, April 9, 2005.

Pastor Ge Rui said,

> In the church I serve there is a ten-year-old boy who comes from a family with four members. They came to Zhaibei District from the poor regions of Anhui 安徽 Province four years ago. The whole family dwells in a small shabby house. One day when the boy was playing with an iron stick on the roof, the iron stick contacted some high-voltage cables by accident. The boy got an electric shock and lost his two arms. His mother cried bitterly. When I saw the boy, there was a kind of grief in his eyes as if he was an adult. Pastors, presbyters, and many members of our church went to visit him, talked to him, and encouraged him. Now the mother has been baptized. And the boy is in grade three in a primary school. He can use his feet to write. He becomes strong-minded and always smiles.[58]

Pastor Ning Guomin 甯國敏 (Pu An Church, Putuo District) said,

> There was a female believer in our church. When she went shopping one day, she saw an old man who fell down suddenly. She helped him up at once and sent him home. Then she found that the old man and his wife did not have children to look after them. From then on she took responsibility to look after the old couple day by day. The couple were so moved that they decided to make a will to give their real property to her. However, she refused politely to inherit the real property. She said that she was simply doing what a Christian should do. The lady was praised by the local people and the local government.[59]

Pastor Lu Caihong said,

> We help the poor families to farm no matter they are Christians or not. For example, a non-Christian couple had some difficulties in harvest season. Their daughter was married and lived far away from them. Their son worked in downtown Shanghai. We organized a group of volunteers to help the couple with the harvest.[60]

Sometimes the churches work with the government to solve problems. Pastor Liu Bin 劉斌 (Hu Dong Church, Yangpu District) said,

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[58] Interview by Chen Guo and Wu Fuyou, April 16, 2005.
[59] Interview by Chen Guo and Wu Fuyou, April 24, 2005.
[60] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, March 27, 2005.

> It has been many years since our church began to raise money for poor families. We have a team who keeps contact with those in need and visits them regularly. Through these liaison people we could know the situation of these poor families. And we work with the local government. They provide us with the information about the families that really need financial aids. Then we can be sure that the money we raise is given to the right person. Unless our church knows more about the needs of the society with the help of the government, we cannot do much in promoting social harmony.[61]

6.3. Assistance to Impoverished Students

Education is a big issue in China. In 2003 Community Church contributed 100,000 *yuan* in total to about ten Hope Primary Schools in Anhui and Henan 河南 Province.[62] When Shinan Middle School 市南中學 of Shanghai set up a special class, "Hongzhi Class 宏志班," for impoverished students, Mu En Church offered an endowment of 10,000 *yuan* to the school.[63] The United Front Work Department of Yangpu District initiated a fund-raising activity for the freshmen of Fudan University 復旦大學 and Tongji University 同濟大學 who have financial difficulties in completing their study. The churches and religious communities in Yangpu District contributed as much as they could, which was greatly appreciated by the public.[64]

Hu Dong Church joined a program organized by Shanghai YMCA to offer financial aids to the poor in Ningwu County 靈武鎮 of Ningxia Autonomous Region 寧夏自治區. Then the Ningwu government received a letter of acknowledgement from a farmer, Chen Zhong 陳鍾, who expressed gratitude to the Shanghai donor for supporting his eight-year-old son so that he could go back to school. In the first half of 2002, the Youth Development Foundation of Ningxia Autonomous Region and the Ningwu government contacted Shanghai YMCA. They then set up a program named "Love of the Yellow Earth" to offer financial support to the children who could not afford to go to school. In the second half of 2002, 100,000 *yuan* was contributed to building new

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[61] Interview by Lü Liang and Liu Jingjing, March 27, 2005.

[62] Xie Bingguo 謝炳國 interviewed by Cai Yilun and Mao Yan, March 20, 2005.

[63] Jiang Qianli interveiwed by Cai Yilun and Mao Yan, April 9, 2005.

[64] Liu Bin interviewed by Lü Liang and Liu Jingjing, March 27, 2005.

schools, and 56 students were promised financial support for five years. Among them four students were supported by Hu Dong Church.[65]

In Zhabei District Mrs. Zhou, a Christian who came from Anhui Province, founded a primary school for 1,000 children whose families came from other provinces to make a living in Shanghai. The tuition fee of this school was so low that these poor families could afford.[66]

Pastor Liu Bin said,

> With the help of Jiuting County 九亭鎮 government and after a half-year investigation, our church decided to donate three libraries to three primary schools. The total number of books reached 10,000.[67]

Pastor Shi Ping said,

> In the summer of 2003, we received a letter from Qi Dong 啓東, Jiangsu 江蘇 Province. A poor student who was admitted to a famous university in Nanjing with a high grade wrote the letter. His father got paralysis and could not walk. His mother was also ill. He happened to know that Huai En Church offered some financial support for poor people. That is why he wrote to us. Two leaders of the TSPM and CCC of Jingan District drove to his house with the relief fund and a gift. We plan to support him for four years until he graduates.[68]

Pastor Ning Guomin said,

> Our church offers financial assistance to two students. One has entered university. His father cannot work and his mother works in another province. The other is studying in high school. His parents have lost their jobs.[69]

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[65] Liu Bin interviewed by Lü Liang and Liu Jingjing, March 27, 2005.

[66] Ge Rui interviewed by Chen Guo and Wu Fuyou, April 16, 2005.

[67] Interview by Lü Liang and Liu Jingjing, March 27, 2005.

[68] Interview by Cai Yilun and Mao Yan, April 9, 2005. TSPM and CCC refer to the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China and China Christian Council.

[69] Interview by Chen Guo and Wu Fuyou, April 24, 2005.

6.4. Disaster Relief

The churches often donate large sum of money or clothes for areas suffering from natural calamities in China or other countries. All donations are used to help the victims. Let us look at the examples of such events.

Pastor He Chunjin said,

> In the year 2002, Fu Yin Church donated 33,740 *yuan* and 7,237 items of clothing to the flood area of Changjiang River 長江. At the end of 2005, tsunamis took place in the Indian Ocean and thousands and thousands of people died. We, as Chinese Christians, prayed for those people. As soon as January 9, 2006 we had raised 40,000 *yuan* for them.[70]

In the year 2002 Ling En Church donated 12,750 *yuan* to the flood area of Changjiang River. From 1997 to 2000 Ling En Church donated 97,342 *yuan* and 25,800 items of clothing to the earthquake areas of Lijiang 麗江 (Yunnan Province 雲南省), Zhangjia Harbour 張家港 (Hebei Province 河北省), and the flood area of Changjiang River. From 1990 to 1993 the total sum of money that Ling En Church contributed was 8,988 *yuan*.[71]

Pastor Pan Xiangbin said,

> The churches often act like charity organizations. At the end of every year, our church usually gives 50 to 100 *yuan* to the poor church members, and our leaders would visit them with some gifts. . . . Song En Church is a small church with 60 members. When tsunamis took place, our church contributed 2,400 *yuan*. Though many church members are old ladies, they did not hesitate to donate money.[72]

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[70] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004.

[71] The statistics come from Pan Deming 潘德明 and Tao Youliang 陶友良, ed., *Qingpu Jidujiao huibian* 青浦基督教匯編 [Collected Works of Christianity in Qingpu District] (n.p., 2002), 74.

[72] Provided by Rev. Pan Xiangbin in pastoral class.

6.5. Social Order

The churches encourage their members to obey the law and maintain social order. For example, "one child policy" is an important measure of birth control in China. However, most people in the rural region think that boys are preferred to girls because only male members can pass on the family name. As a result, lots of parents do not have birth control until they give birth to a son. Therefore, some Christian pastors try to change their views and persuade them to exercise birth control. Pastor Pan Xiangbin said, "In the view of Christians children are gifts from God. We should treat boys and girls equally without discrimination."[73]

In critical moments, the churches followed the instructions of the government. "When SARS broke out, our church worked with the local government and obeyed the temporary regulations. We stopped regular worship services and propagated the ways of preventing SARS," said Pastor Pan.[74]

IV. CONCLUSION

From our study we find that Christianity can promote social harmony in socialist China in various ways. Inevitably we have to look at the social function of Christianity. It is commonly recognized that religion is effective in bringing inner adjustment and socialization within individuals and social conformity and social control in the society. Through this investigation of the churches in Shanghai, we conclude that there are two main ways in which Christianity functions to promote social harmony in socialist China: first, the stabilization of individuals and families; and second, the stabilization of society through conflict management, work ethics, and social services.

There are a number of ways in which Christian doctrines shape individuals, families, and communities. The doctrines of Christianity in-

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[73] Interview by Zhang Zhan and Huang Wei, December 30, 2004.

[74] Provided by Rev. Pan Xiangbin in pastoral class.

clude three main components: the creation of God, the redemption of Jesus Christ, and eschatology (end of world and the last judgment). The doctrine of creation reveals what the world was like at the beginning including harmonious relations (relations among human beings, between human beings and the created world, and between human beings and the transcendent God) and God's original plan for marriage and family. The doctrine of redemption reminds Christians of original sin and urges them to confess and stay away from evil deeds with the help of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The crucifixion of Christ demonstrates the meaning of true love and encourages Christians to love one another, and to love and reconcile with other people including their enemies. The doctrine of eschatology reveals the transience of this world and the importance of godly life. All these doctrines have an impact on the worldview and behavior of Christians, including their marriage and family life, ways to cope with distress and troubles, conflict management, work ethics, social participation and so on. Moreover, Christian ethics help to stabilize Christian communities and motivate Christians to lead a life of self-discipline both within and outside the church. These are all advantageous to fostering social harmony in socialist China.

As there is increasing disparity between the rich and the poor and innumerable social conflicts, conflict management and social harmony have become top priority of the society. With its unique biblical teachings and ethical resources certainly Christianity has a great deal to offer in mediating social conflicts. Meanwhile, Christian communities are contributing to social harmony by helping the poor and the needy as well as offering various kinds of social services. Most of these works are welcome and recognized by the general public.

Shanghai is an important city for Christianity in China. Compared to other regions in China, there are more Christians and pastors serving in managerial level or leading positions. Some of them are members of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China (TSPM), government officials, and seminary teachers who have close relationship with the government. Therefore, they can serve as a mediator between the church and the government and facilitate more communication and cooperation in nurturing social harmony in Shanghai. Their experience will certainly be good reference for churches in other parts of the country.

To conclude, this study is not without shortcoming. As suggested by the reviewers, a number of areas could be further investigated to provide a more profound analysis of the roles Christian churches play in

promoting social harmony. As mentioned in the introduction, social harmony entails social justice and fairness, strengthening the spirit of the rule of law and the sense of integrity in the whole society, and safeguarding social stability and unity. Certainly more works could be done to find out how the churches in Shanghai understand and promote social harmony in this sense. For example, how Christians or the churches tackle complicated cases that involve conflicts and issues of social justice and fairness; whether the churches are involved in fighting for social justice and fairness, between Christians and non-Christians, between the churches and the government, and between Christian churches and other religious groups in Shanghai; what conflicts and difficulties the churches have encountered, and how they cope with them; how Christians tackle the legal status of "unregistered churches" or "house churches" within the churches in China.

For work ethics, further research could be done to find out how the churches teach people to build harmonious relations in the workplace while avoiding the practices of bribing; how to advocate business ethics by referring to Christian ethics; how to be a good and loyal steward in contrast to those who keep "the iron bowl."

As regards social services, there must be lots of other things the churches have done besides the examples mentioned above. For example, what the churches have done to educate people both inside and outside the churches for fostering social harmony; what were taught at the sermons each Sunday; do the local churches run any educational programs. These issues are no less important and could be studied in depth in the near future.

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