

CHRISTIANITY IN ASIA

Report of a Research Trip to Hong Kong

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In February 2014, seven members of the staff of the Nanzan Institute visited Hong Kong as part of a research project on “Christianity in East Asia.” With an eye to learning more about how Christianity understands itself and its history—often very differently from the way the mission-sending centers in the West do—the group consulted with local scholars of Chinese philosophy and religion as well as with Christian theologians.

CHRISTIAN MISSIONS were not established on Hong Kong island until the mid-nineteenth century, nearly three centuries after the first Catholic diocese was founded at the nearby island of Macao in 1576. Today, it is estimated that 10 to 15 percent of the general population (20 to 25 percent of students) in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region are Christian, where churches thrive as in no other part of the People’s Republic of China. From 17 to 20 February 2014, seven staff members of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture travelled to Hong Kong to inquire into the development of Christianity there as part of an ongoing research project focused on “Christianity in East Asia.”

On arriving at the hotel, we were welcomed by Dr. Cheung Ching-yuen of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, who accompanied our group to the University and introduced us to



Crossing through the moon gate (Chinese University of Hong Kong)

the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dr. Leung Yuen-sang. Prof. Leung provided us with an illuminating orientation to the current situation of Christianity and Christian Studies in Hong Kong. After a walk around campus, the members dined at the faculty restaurant where discussions continued with young scholars on issues concerning the future of Christianity in East Asia.



Holy Spirit Seminary and College

The following morning, James Heisig and I called on the Holy Spirit Seminary and College in Aberdeen, while others of the group visited the Wong Tai Sin Daoist Temple. As the Catholic diocesan seminary for Hong Kong, the Holy Spirit Seminary and College is well-known for its Chinese-style architecture. The construction of the seminary began back in 1928. According to the original plan of D. Adelbert Gresnigt, OSB, the buildings would be constructed in Chinese style and to include a cloister. Financial difficulties meant that the cloister could not be completed and construction came to a halt in 1930. The seminary itself opened its doors in 1931. To this day, the old building is still fully used for libraries, administrative office, and dormitories. The faculty offers a variety of courses to both seminarians and laity. The setting and resources combine to make Holy Spirit Seminary a fitting venue for the study of Asian Christianity.



Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre

In the afternoon, the members reassembled at Tao Fong Shan Christian Center with its internationally renowned Institute of Sino-Christian Studies. Dr. Matsutani Yōsuke, an honorary research associate at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, joined the group.

Tao Fong Shan was founded in 1930 by the Norwegian missionary Karl Ludvig Reichelt (1877–1952), roughly the same time as the Holy Spirit Seminary. A Lutheran missionary



“And the Word became Flesh”
(Tao Fong Shan)

and a researcher of Chinese religions, Reichelt travelled widely in eastern Asia and exchanged ideas with local scholars. He was also in Japan in 1927, visiting Ōtani University and Mt Kōya. Reichelt believed that the notions of Tao and Logos, which come together in the Chinese translation of the Gospel of John, represent a critical connection between Eastern and Western philosophy. Throughout the course of his life and work in China, he sought out “friends of the Tao” (道友) among the Chinese, companions in the search for truth.

The Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre continues to promote the vision of its founder, and it was a pleasure for us to learn about their recent work. We spent the afternoon in a small colloquium hosted by the director, Dr. Daniel Hee Nam Yeung. Dr. Jason T. S.

Lam, a research fellow of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, addressed the group on “Christian Studies in Contemporary China,” setting forth the main characteristics of Sino-Christian theology and explaining the Centre’s idea of “public theology.” Kim Seung Chul and Paul Swanson responded with brief presentations on the state of Christianity in contemporary Japanese society and the work of the Nanzan Institute. The audience included Chinese graduate students and a Lutheran missionary couple who collaborate with the Centre.

The final day began with a visit to Hong Kong Baptist University, where we met with Dr. Cindy Yik-yi Chu at the David C. Lam Institute for East-West



Youthful scholarly enthusiasm: Prof. Chu
and the entrance board at the David C. Lam Institute

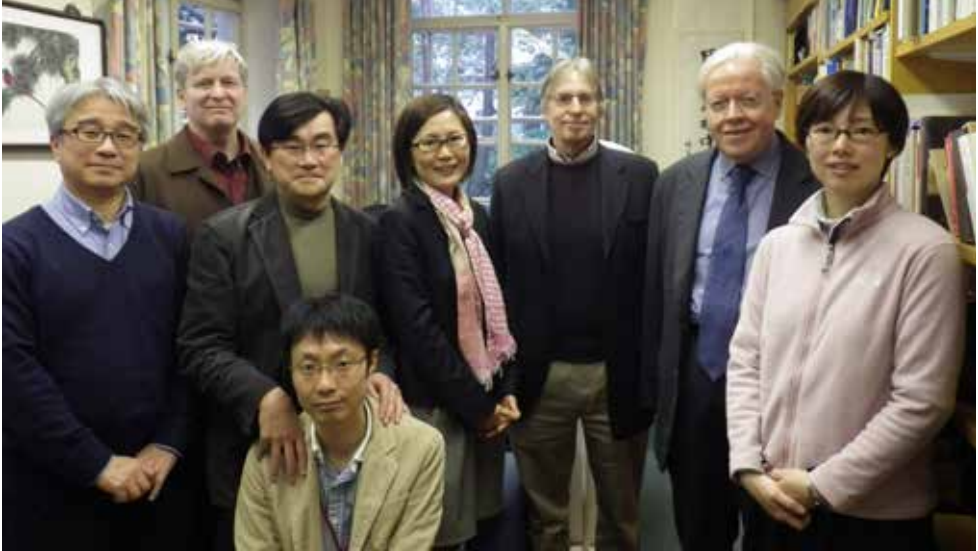


Director Okuyama presents some of the Institute's recent publications to Dr. Wickeri

Studies. Dr. Chu, a professor of history, has written several books on the history of the Catholic Church in modern China from 1900 to the present. She shared details of their Institute's ongoing project related to Christianity in modern China, including her own research on the lives of American nuns in Hong Kong. The atmosphere at the David C. Lam Institute, which was only recently established, was very different from that of Tao Fong Shan, but it left me with the impression that they have struck a balance between preserving the Christian heritage and working to renew the Churches and Christian studies in Hong Kong.

From there we moved over to Hong Kong island where we met with Dr. Matsutani at Hong Kong's bustling "Central" area. We were led uphill to the headquarters of the Anglican Church in Hong Kong to meet with another church historian, Dr. Philip L. Wickeri. Now the advisor on theology and history for the Anglican archbishop of Hong Kong, Dr. Wickeri was a professor at the San Francisco Theological Seminary and a friend of James Heisig from thirty years ago. During an hour of well-prepared remarks, Dr. Wickeri spoke to us informally in the common room of the bishop's quarters, one of the oldest buildings in Hong Kong island. He began by outlining the growth of the Protestant Churches in contemporary China since 1979. From there he turned to what he called the "three social forms of Chinese Christianity" (or of the way Christianity is practiced in China) and "six forms of Christian theology." By happy coincidence, our discussions with Dr. Wickeri came last, making a fitting conclusion to our schedule and helping us to summarize what we had learned. After leaving the bishop's quarters, we gathered in a nearby establishment for a final meeting

to discuss how to proceed with the “Christianity in East Asia” project. We are still gathering information and contemplating new ideas that came up during the trip, but we would like to thank all those we met in Hong Kong and do our best to insure that the contacts and intellectual exchanges they made possible may continue to bear fruit in the future.



The Research Team

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