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The constitution of the SCCG states that we are a membership organisation, and we're delighted to have members from all the main church denominations and from partner organisations in Scotland. Individuals can also become members. There is no cost, but membership ensures you are kept up-to-date with our work and activities. Contact Patricia Johnston if you'd like to know more (details below).

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Renewing ties

by Patricia Johnston

As the Chinese government has lifted its stringent Covid restrictions, there is a possibility that I may finally be able to visit our Chinese partners later this year. It would be so helpful to meet with our partners in person and to see their ongoing work. I can hardly believe that the last time I was in China was in June 2018. Nothing is definite yet about a trip this year as Covid infection rates are still high in China but, for the first time since 2020, it is looking like it may actually happen.

It will likely be a two-person visit, and we would visit partners and projects in Shenyang, Nanjing and Shanghai, all very sophisticated, cosmopolitan cities. We can book all of our journeys from here, before we leave, will fly into huge, ultra-modern airports and travel on a bullet train between Nanjing and Shanghai – all very different from when I first arrived in China in 1988.

When myself and the four other British and Irish Amity Teachers arrived in Nanjing we walked off the plane and across the tarmac to a very small building with just two or three rooms. We waited there for our luggage to be passed in through a window! We soon learned that, eager as we may be to visit different places in China, it wasn't that easy. Only single tickets could be bought and these could only be purchased 2-3 days in advance of travel. I was based in Hangzhou so, if I wanted to go to Shanghai for the weekend I would go to the train station to buy my Hangzhou-Shanghai ticket, and then, on arrival in Shanghai, set about trying to get a ticket back to Hangzhou for two days later. Not always easy!

So much has changed: so much progress has been made in China but there are still fields of work where development hasn't been as rapid as in other areas. These are the areas that the SCCG and our Chinese partners focus on – palliative care, spiritual care, inclusive education for children with additional needs, capacity building for staff supporting people living with dementia. There is so much expertise, in Scotland, that we can link in our Chinese partners with as they continue to build and develop their skills and their knowledge.

There is much to look forward to and to anticipate, but all of this takes funding. As always, we would appreciate any help anyone can give us in accessing grants and donations to help us continue this very important work. Please contact us if you can help at all - details are on this page.



Photos above: modern Shanghai; Patricia Johnston filming in Shenyang in June 2018 for the 'Scots in China' television documentary; young people at the Amity Bakery social enterprise and sheltered vocational training centre in Nanjing. (Amity Bakery photo: ©The Amity Foundation)

Amity responds

Our long-standing partner in China, The Amity Foundation, has become a very large NGO that is now able to operate outside China as well as within. (The SCCG is involved in projects entirely within China itself.) As we went to press, we heard they have sent staff to help with urgent relief work following the deadly earthquakes in southern Turkey and northern Syria. Amity has much experience within China of this sort of relief work.

New links

We've been pleased to be able to place an article about the SCCG's work, 'Care for China', in a number of church magazines recently. The article highlights the history of Scottish church links with China and the range of our current work supporting vital educational and health initiatives, responding to requests from Chinese partners. We realise that, as a small charity, not many people have heard about what we do, so it is great to get the word out. We're grateful for the positive response we've had from church magazine editors. If you would like a copy of the article for your own church magazine - or if you have a church group with overseas interests - let us know!

Scottish Churches China Group

苏格兰教会中国会



NEWSLETTER



Photo © The Amity Foundation

Rural Revitalisation

We are hoping to make progress this year with our involvement in revitalisation projects in rural China. Rural revitalisation has been a priority of the Chinese government since April 2021, and our partner the Amity Foundation had 55 projects related to rural revitalisation in 50 counties and cities of 20 provinces up and running that same year. At a recent online meeting of the European Network of Amity Partners (ENAP), attended by ourselves, Amity's General Secretary, Ling Chunxiang restated that village revitalisation projects were still a main priority for them. SCCG is very interested in being involved with this work, and were able to tell Ling Chunxiang that. We can offer help with staff capacity building or training, or specialist help regarding dementia support for elderly people. We will need more detailed information from Amity about specific projects to be able to go to a funding source for partnering in these projects, but we are hopeful to be able to do that later this year.

Amity's development projects use rural industry, traditional culture and rural finance schemes, and aim at the improvement of community governance and capacity. In addition to Amity's traditional project areas including Yunnan, Guizhou and Qinghai provinces, Amity has set up new projects such as social care practice, waste recycling, beach cleaning, and citizen scientists in Hunan and Guangxi provinces.

Practical love following prayers

by Godfrey Stone

“This has been an untypical, but fruitful, 38th year. Through money, our practical love is following our prayers to places where we ourselves at present are not able to go.” This was the year’s summary at the November 2022 Annual Meeting, of the Friends of the Church in China (FCC).

By contrast, the FCC budget for 2023 allows for the resumption of mutual visits to and from China. Already FCC finds itself considering help for an Amity Foundation staff member recommended for an upgrading of her editorial, language and cultural skills in the UK in 2023. (Scottish Churches China Group members will remember the constructive way in which FCC and SCCG worked together to help develop Amity staff member Xie Jie in her work in waste management and related environmental matters.)

Looking back to 2022, the FCC sent £26,000 to support a range of social projects initiated from within China. Partnering with the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Amity Foundation, the China Christian Council and the Barbour Trust, these projects have focused mainly in South West China, where FCC members have had connections for many years. A new development in 2021-2022 concerns Pastor He Qicong, the founder and leader of a major HIV/AIDS project in Xi’an: he has begun to train churches in other places for social action in their local communities.

But how about church life in China? Most churches to which FCC is linked were closed at Christmas 2021 because of the pandemic. The resumption of regular church life was slow, but reports indicate that by the summer of 2022, most churches were open, enquirers’ groups were in operation, seminaries



Holy Trinity Church in Shanghai, photographed in December 2022. © Julien Delerue

were celebrating the graduation of their students, new pastors were being ordained, and important anniversaries were being celebrated. The Shandong seminary celebrated 35 years of service, and the national ‘Union’ seminary in Nanjing celebrated 70 years since the union that brought together 11 seminaries in East China.

Just before Christmas, news arrived of the reopening of the former cathedral in central Shanghai. Situated next door to the national offices of the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Three Self Patriotic Movement, this building was, during the Mao era, used for a combination of cinema and warehouse. It remained in a poor condition into

the new millennium. But no expense has been spared in introducing new wooden pews, in restoring the stained glass (with a little panda included in the south transept!), and in rebuilding a grand organ.

The sermon from the CCC chair concluded with these inspiring words: “Here we are not only asking God to bless us, but we are also asking God to bless the Holy Trinity Church, so that this church can be the outlet of God’s grace and blessing, so that this church can be God’s blessing to this city.” FCC members invite our friends in SCCG to join us in a hearty ‘Amen!’

You can keep up-to-date with the work of the Friends of the Church in China on their website at www.thefcc.org



Photo © Yasmin Dangor

Learning together

We are very encouraged about the current work in Nanjing towards supporting the integration of young students with autism and other conditions into mainstream primary schools. Ma Xiaobo of the Amity Children’s Development Centre, is making very good progress and we are getting a lot of positive updates. As you may know, we have arranged for Jasmine Miller to work with Ma Xiaobo online as she develops the programme of integration.

Ma Xiaobo was recently featured in the Amity Foundation’s Outlook Magazine (Jan-Mar 2023). She told them that there remains a confusion between autism and mental illness by many people. She says, “Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder... [and] intervention is a hard journey, requiring a lot of willpower, hard work and perseverance for uninterrupted and continuous education. During this process, parents are usually very stressed. Each child with autism has his or her unique cognitive, linguistic and social behavior, and that’s why individualised education is particularly important to help them learn social rules. Our ultimate goal is to help integrate into society.”

“Drink Tea, Make Friends”

By Mark McLeister

Although nearing retirement, Pastor Liu is busier than ever before. He is the most senior church leader in the district, which is one of four districts in the city of Huanghaicheng (a pseudonym) in northern China. Pastor Liu spends countless hours in any given week preaching and meeting with church leaders in the many meeting points in the district. He is often involved in training sessions for church workers which can be one day or many days in succession.

Pastor Liu lives in the church compound together with his family. Besides the main church sanctuary, the most important space in the compound is the church office. It is here that church staff prepare their sermons and hold church planning meetings. But it is also an important space because this is the centre for church hospitality and pastoral care. It is here that Pastor Liu receives guests such as leaders from other churches or local officials, and it is also here that Pastor Liu spends many hours each week providing pastoral care to church members.

Whether members of the church or otherwise, Pastor Liu serves tea to all his guests because this is an important element of being a good host in China, hence the saying “drink tea, make friends” (shicha jiaoyou). Serving tea in China is not as simple as throwing a teabag into a mug, adding hot water and then milk and/or sugar as desired! The water has to be at the correct temperature for the type of tea (there’s more than just “green tea” in China), and the host has to follow subtle rules for cleansing the utensils, rinsing and brewing the leaves, pouring the tea and knowing whether the particular leaves should be brewed just once or more than once. Attention to such details, and keeping the guests’ cups filled are just some of the markers of a good host.

Pastor Liu began to intentionally learn about tea culture when he met a Christian tea seller from another part of China. Despite Pastor Liu’s important role in his community, he wishes to serve his guests in real and tangible ways, and this is one way in which he feels he can embody the servant nature of Christ to those he seeks to help. So as Pastor Liu talks through his guests’ problems, gives them encouraging words, names their child, or gives practical advice, he does so from a position of servanthood.

Mark McLeister is Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Edinburgh

