

Our Cup Overflows

The China Ministry at First Presbyterian Church
Wilmington North Carolina

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The photo on the title page is the scroll presented by the congregation of the Jiangyin International Church to the congregation of First Presbyterian Church in October 2018. The four large characters are a portion of Psalm 23: “Our cup overflows...” , with the smaller characters reading “Since the year of Ding You”. *Ding You* is a periodical designation, one of which is the year 1897, when missionaries from First Presbyterian Church first arrived in Jiangyin.

Introduction

The China Ministry at First Presbyterian Church (FPC), one of the signature foreign mission projects of the current congregation, has developed in three stages--commencement, reconnection, and partnership. It is a relationship focused on ministries of presence and respect and undergirded by mutual prayer. Over a hundred years old, it is robust and alive and this essay will provide a general account of its history.



Rev. Hannah Vaughn with students at Nanjing Theological Seminary.

Commencement

In 1895 First Presbyterian Church (FPC) sent two of its own, Dr. George Worth and his wife, Emma Chadbourn Worth, to China to serve as missionaries. Their story and the wider Chinese context in which they served has been well told in three volumes: G. Thompson Brown, *Earthen Vessels & Transcendent Power: American Presbyterians in China, 1837-1952*; Lawrence D. Kessler, *The Jiangyin Mission Station: An American Missionary Community in China, 1895-1951*; and Julia S. Worth, ed., *Far & Away: Worth Family Letters From the Mission Field*. Consequently, this report will only sketch some of the highlights of this first stage of contact with China while the interested reader is referred to these three excellent resources for further information.

By the time the Worths set out for Asia, China had become “the centerpiece of the American missionary effort” (Kessler, 30), the location of at least 1,700 American Presbyterian missionaries between 1841 and 1952 (Brown, 5). Upon their arrival in China, the Worths went to the small mission station at Wuxi, but then in 1897 moved to Jiangyin. The mission station that they helped established at Jiangyin experienced a stormy time in modern Chinese history, including the repercussions from the Opium War of 1839-42, the fall of the empire in 1911, the warlord and revolutionary movements of the 1920s, the Japanese invasion throughout the 1930s, and the civil war between Nationalist and Communist forces in the 1940s which resulted in the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.



Statue at the entrance to Jiangyin portraying Xu Xiake, a Jiangyin native who was a noted 17th century geographer in China.

The city of Jiangyin is located on the bank of the Yangzi river in Jiangsu province, about 100 miles northwest (upriver) of Shanghai. In the second decade of the twentieth century its population was around 50,000. Into this locale, the mission station advanced a threefold program offering medical care, education, and evangelism. Despite a slow beginning, by 1913 the roster of the Jiangyin staff listed the following: George Worth, Emma Worth, Lacy Little, Ella Little, Ryda Jourolman, Anna Sykes, Ida Albaugh, Lacy Moffett, Kate Moffett, Carrie Moffett (the sister of Lacy Moffett), Andrew Allison and Ella Allison. FPC considered the Jiangyin mission, its “spiritual daughter” and all of its mission staff “our missionaries,” whether or not they had an actual connection to Wilmington and the church. To that end, the congregation provided support, however, the greatest benefactors of the mission station were James Sprunt and the Woman’s Auxiliary of Wilmington Presbytery in addition to the women’s groups of the congregation. Between 1902 and 1951 the Woman’s Auxiliary and members of FPC (including Sprunt and then his estate after his death in 1924) contributed \$566,688 (over 8 million dollars in today’s currency) toward the support of the Jiangyin mission and its staff (Kessler, 134).



Jiangyin Mission staff and families, 1925

With this level of support, the mission grew, and by 1925 its staff included twenty-three persons, of whom four pursued full-time evangelism, nine worked in education, and five assisted in medical practice. This expanded staff roster would have included Charles and Ruth Worth (children of George and Emma Worth), Grace McAlpine Worth (the wife of Charles Worth), William Cumming, Marion Wilcox, Virginia and Jane Lee, Katheryne Thompson, Lula Conover, and Jeanie Woodbridge. Staff increase was not the only area of growth. By this time the Jiangyin Mission Station consisted of a hospital (the Good News Hospital), a training school for nurses, separate high schools for boys and girls (the James Sprunt Male Academy and the Luola Murchison Sprunt Academy), a Bible school for women, a school for needy children, six organized churches, and thirteen centers of rural evangelistic work serving a church membership in the Jiangyin area of about 1,000 (Kessler, 65, 90; *Handbook of the First Presbyterian Church*, 49).



Good News Hospital, 1920s

The church records which provide these statistics also note the presence of “twenty-five native workers”. These mostly unnamed individuals included five ordained and nine unordained male Chinese assistants plus six Chinese women who taught the Bible to other Chinese women, and five Chinese students for the ministry. These individuals played crucial roles throughout the history of the mission station. Their work of cultural and linguistic translation and interpretation opened channels for the program of the mission station in its medical, educational, and evangelistic forms gaining the foreign missionaries a wider audience than would otherwise have been the case. These Chinese co-workers participated in the daily activities of healing, teaching, and preaching and thereby shared in the accomplishments which the mission station claimed. A sense for the importance of these Chinese individuals can be found in the account of the funeral of Emma Worth in 1926 written by Virginia Lee. Here Lee mentions by name over twenty Chinese participants and well-wishers in the service and helps to personalize those individuals who made such important contributions to the success of the mission station (Worth, ed., 27-33).



Control Committee, 1935. Note equal representation of Americans and Chinese, as well as men and women.

In 1927 a milestone in the history of the mission station occurred, when Dr. William Chen replaced George Worth as director of the hospital. Additionally, in that same year the newly formed Chinese Committee of Control assumed temporary supervision of all the activities at the station. This situation was formalized in the next year with the organization of a

permanent Committee with eleven Chinese Christians and six missionaries as members. Chinese Christians now took over leadership roles not only in evangelism and the hospital, but also in the schools; missionaries served as advisors.

These changes were part of an important issue faced by all mission groups in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, namely the transfer of authority from the foreign Christian missionaries to their native colleagues, in this case from the Americans to their Chinese co-workers. In the Chinese context this meant the goal of developing a Chinese church that was self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating, and both the goal and the language describing it would persist into the twenty-first century. Many of the missionaries at Jiangyin supported this transfer and pointed with pride to the success in the early 1920s of Chinese pastors and lay leaders assuming administration of evangelistic work in several rural chapels and leading schools in both urban and rural settings. The missionaries were especially pleased with the work of two pastors, Tsiang Z-dzi and Wu Me-peh, who directed the two largest churches in the city of Jiangyin itself. Other missionaries, however, were less sanguine. They feared that the Chinese would not carry out evangelism with the same zeal as they had, and that the educational curriculum would not maintain the same standards as they had achieved. They also worried about fundraising among the American constituencies if the Chinese disbursed the monies and had control of the facilities (Kessler, 76-82).



Rev. Wu Me-peh, back row on right. Caption on original photo states that this was a "three-generation consecrated Christian family."

Whether these concerns were realistic or paternalistic or both, this reluctance would be overwhelmed by the sweep of world events taking place during the warlord period of the 1920s, the destruction inflicted by the Japanese occupation during the 1930s, and the civil war of the 1940s which ushered in the Communist government of Mao Zedong. Initially, the new Chinese government was restrained in its attitude toward the American missionary community, however, with the entry of China into the Korean War in October 1950, it was clear that the days of the American mission station were numbered. On April 24, 1951 the last American missionaries left the Jiangyin Mission Station, concluding fifty-six years of missionary activity in that location. Within a year, the Good News Hospital had been renamed People's Hospital and the Sprunts' namesake high schools combined and renamed Jiangyin No. 2 Middle School.

Reconnection

The second stage in the history of the China Ministry at FPC witnessed the reconfiguration of Christianity in China with the departure of the foreign missionaries, the development of indigenous Chinese Christian institutions and their virtual destruction in the years of the Cultural Revolution, the astounding revitalization of religion after 1979, and the reconnection between FPC and the Jiangyin church in 2005. It is a complicated historical era, but Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* and Philip L. Wickeri, *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K. H. Ting and the Chinese Church* provide accessible overviews of this period.

With the departure of the missionaries from China, a chapter in that history came to an end. Foreigners no longer funded, supervised, and administered the Chinese Christian Church. Familiar assumptions, practices and even identities were uprooted, but Christianity certainly did not cease to exist in China. Initially, the concern of the Communist government was not to destroy religion, but rather to monitor and control it within acceptable bounds. In many eras of Chinese history, religion had fueled revolts and uprisings against the imperial government. The Communist government inherited these misgivings, suspicions which were intensified by the history of extensive close ties between Chinese Christians and Western foreigners, foreigners now antagonistic to the new Chinese regime. The government sought to cut ties between Chinese Christians and these Westerners by expelling the missionaries and developing indigenous Chinese religious institutions under the jurisdiction of state and party bodies. The first level in this institutional restructuring was the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). Building on the aspirations expressed earlier, this movement called for the Chinese Christian Church to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. The TSPM was an organization that would manage the affairs of Chinese Protestants under the new Communist regime. While not a church, the membership of the TSPM included large numbers of Christian pastors and laypersons. The second institutional level was the Religious Affairs Bureau, a state agency which supervised not only Protestant Christians, but also Roman Catholics (who for historic reasons had a separate institutional existence), Daoists, Buddhists, and Muslims. The last institutional level was the United Front Work Department, a Chinese Communist Party entity which supervised all relations with non-party groups. (Bay, 159-166).

This institutional framework lasted from 1950 to 1966 and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. In the broadest sense, the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976, was an attempt by Mao Zedong to reassert his political control over China. To that end, Mao condemned the old institutions, ideas, habits, and practices of Chinese society (including religion). He called on his followers to destroy these vestiges of the old order, thereby unleashing a paroxysm of iconoclastic fury in which churches were plundered and their statues pulled down, steeples and spires toppled, and stained-glass windows shattered. All religions (not simply Christianity) were persecuted, clergy were laicized, and religious literature was banned. All houses of worship were closed and any meetings for religious purposes, either in public or private venues were prohibited. In a dramatic gesture two large churches in Shanghai were re-purposed, one became a state-owned grain warehouse and the other turned into a movie theater. The extent of economic expropriation and physical injury was devastating, however Christians continued to meet in secret risking imprisonment or worse for their faith.

With the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 the Cultural Revolution ended and a new era in the history of Chinese Christianity was about to begin. In 1979 President Jimmy Carter, following Richard Nixon's famous visit to China in 1972, and in a diplomatic calculation that involved

the ongoing SALT talks and relations with the Soviet Union, decided to pursue normalization of diplomatic and trade relations with China. As part of those negotiations, the Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, agreed to the reopening of religious institutions and the resumption of the printing and distribution of religious scriptures. Structurally, this meant the official state recognition in China of five religious traditions--Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism--all of which had been accorded some degree of recognition and supervision during the Imperial and Nationalist eras. It also meant the reestablishment of the TSPM and the Religious Affairs Bureau, both of which had been disbanded during the Cultural Revolution. Finally, it allowed for the printing of Bibles again.

Emerging from the nadir of the Cultural Revolution, the Christian Church in China slowly began to grow into the robustly revitalized entity that it is today. The TSPM worked to reopen Protestant churches, while other government bodies sought to return to their previous owners the lands and buildings (including churches) which had been confiscated during the Cultural Revolution. These reopened churches would be registered with the government through the TSPM. As such they agreed to avoid political dissent or criticism of the Chinese government, to confine their preaching and distribution of religious literature to church grounds, to be post-denominational in their orientation and structure, and, finally, to respect other religions so as to work cooperatively rather than competitively with them in the overall goal of a harmonious Chinese society.

While the TSPM found a wide resonance, some Chinese Protestants preferred not to register with the government. This division produced the dichotomy, familiar in the popular Western press, between “government/registered” churches and “house/unregistered” churches. Both Philip Wickeri and Don Snow, a former PCUSA regional liaison in China, have indicated the inadequacy of such a simplified binary opposition. In an unpublished but widely circulated essay, Snow proposed a five-part schema for the contemporary Chinese Protestant Church:

The first category includes those churches, usually urban, that are associated with the Three Self Movement. Because of their connection with the government they have been able to reopen many old churches, set up training centers for pastors and laity, support the publication and distribution of bibles and, through worship and social service, give the church a public face. The opportunity to engage in these activities as well as the right to defend such activities in court and elsewhere if they come under criticism results from these churches’ association with the Three Self Movement.

The second category contains meetings points related to Three Self congregations. These groups often gather in homes or other non-church structures and are usually either registered with the government or under the care of a Category One Church. These meeting points are often organized around professional affiliations, e.g., Businessmen’s Fellowship, Artist’s Fellowship, or around demographics, e.g., Housewives’ Fellowship, University Students’ Fellowship. Some are based on geographic proximity and relative distance from their regular church. Thus, these members attend the large urban churches on Sunday for worship and then go to more convenient meeting points during the week for Bible study or other religious functions. Many of these meeting points eventually grow into Category One churches.

The third category consists of groups that have retained a denominational identity. While the Protestant church in China aspires to be post-denominational, some groups have kept their earlier identity. For example, independent Chinese groups such as the Little Flock, the True Jesus Church, or the Jesus Family or other groups aligned with Western denominations, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, and, increasingly, Southern Baptists fit

into this category. The organization and ethos of these groups vary from strongly asserting their autonomy from other Christians to cooperating in specific tasks with other Christian groups.

The fourth category comprises those who have made a clear choice not to register with the government. Their refusal to register can reflect a variety of reasons. Some want no governmental interference or restrictions imposed on them, while others disagree with the theology of the registered church and insist that the registered church is not meeting the needs of the people and its preachers are “spiritually dead,” unregenerate individuals who are ill-equipped to preach and carry out ministry. Some of these congregations, remembering the days of the Cultural Revolution, believe that the Chinese Communist government is satanic, and no church should have any relationship with it, while others have had personal conflicts with local Three Self church leaders.

The final category encompasses rural Christian groups. Often found far away from the organized Christian life in towns and cities, they may not have a close affiliation with the Three Self Movement. This is not a principled opposition; rather the whole concept of registration seems to be an alien urban one. Thus, if the Three Self organizations can be helpful in providing Bibles or sending clergy to baptize or administer communion, these groups will happily cooperate with them (Snow, “Toward a Nuanced View of the Protestant Christian Community in China” [2008]; Wickeri 254-262, 300-303).

Jiangyin Christian Church, descended from the mission station begun by the Worths and others, reopened under the auspices of the TSPM. In 2003 David Ong, a Chinese Christian who was previously employed in the United States, but now worked in Jiangyin, walked into the church one Sunday seeking to worship with and to meet other Christians in the city. There in a cabinet on a side wall, he saw a small display with a short inscription, which in English read, “This church was started in 1897 by missionaries from the First Presbyterian Church of Wilmington.” The inscription caught Ong’s attention and he spent the next six months, as he was able, contacting churches in the various Wilmingtons to be found in the United States. (After all there are more than one!) He had almost given up, when a respondent at First Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, Delaware suggested contacting FPC, Wilmington, North Carolina.

Ong reached out to this North Carolina FPC and staff members there confirmed for him that this congregation had sponsored missionaries to Jiangyin in the 1890s. Ong was put in contact with Alex Munroe, a Wilmington businessman and a member of the Global Missions Committee of FPC. Munroe made frequent business trips to China, and in 2005 he met Ong in Shanghai and they traveled up the Yangzi river to Jiangyin. The Jiangyin church received the visitors with graciousness and hospitality, delighted to be reminded of their origins with FPC.

Munroe returned to FPC with a videotape of one of the senior Jiangyin pastors praying for the FPC congregation. Informal communication between the Jiangyin pastors and Alex Munroe continued, which Munroe then relayed to the Global Missions Committee. The fruit of these efforts was an invitation for a delegation from FPC to visit Jiangyin in the spring of 2007. Despite all the odds, the reconnection between FPC and Jiangyin had been established.

Partnership

The third stage in the China Ministry at FPC is the relationship that has developed out of this reconnection. Three of the most prominent aspects of this multifaceted relationship have been: sending ministry teams to China; welcoming delegations of Chinese Christians to Wilmington and FPC; and hosting meetings at FPC of our denomination's China Network.

The Jiangyin to which this first delegation travelled in 2007 was a far cry from the sleepy riverside community of the Worths' day. By 2007 the city's population was over 1 million and it had a thriving commercial economy due to its port facilities on the Yangzi. Jiangyin Christian Church was the largest in town, but it joined 13 other smaller churches in Jiangyin which together served a combined membership of 19,000.

The trip in 2007 included Ernie Thompson (senior pastor at FPC), Lucy Worth (granddaughter of George and Emma Worth), Alex Munroe, and Freddie Butler III. The planning for the trip was a bit ad hoc, utilizing the contacts that Alex Munroe had made from his earlier business trips. The group was excited at the prospects of going to Jiangyin but did not really know what to expect. However, the group's goals were simple: to reconnect with the Jiangyin church and to exchange information about the church in America and China and the congregations in Wilmington and Jiangyin in a spirit of mutual respect. The trip was a success and the FPC group's experience was very positive, as their Jiangyin hosts were every bit as gracious as Alex Munroe had found them to be when he visited in 2005.



Jiangyin Christian Church, 2013.

Between 2007 and 2018 six different groups from FPC made the journey to China. The Chinese government allowed the groups to visit with the clear understanding from the beginning that any foreign visitors and subsequent contact must abide by the laws of China, must be open and transparent in their dealings with China, and must treat the Chinese church as full partners, not as subordinates.

In the aftermath of the success of the first visit in 2007, two important developments took place. First, Ernie Thompson recognized that FPC needed help with language and cultural issues if the relationship with the Chinese

church was to go forward. He contacted the Outreach Foundation, a validated mission support group in the PCUSA begun in 1979 whose work connected Presbyterians with church partners around the world. They were glad to share what they knew about culturally appropriate ways to develop a relationship with the church in Jiangyin. Fortuitously, Peter Lim joined the staff of the Outreach Foundation in 2008 as the China Specialist for the Outreach Foundation. Lim

would help lead the subsequent FPC trips through 2015, when he left The Outreach Foundation to join the faculty of Fuller Seminary in Pasadena California. The second development was the organization of individuals interested in the church in China into the China Ministry Team at FPC. By design, “ministry teams” were specific in nature rather than standing committees of the Session or Diaconate. They arose out of perceived needs and were expected to continue only if the issues remained. They met as occasions called for, not on a set schedule, and were informal in style. A representative from the China Ministry Team often voluntarily attended the meetings of the Global Missions Committee at FPC to keep them informed of developments, rather than as an assignment from the Session or Diaconate.

In 2009 Ernie Thompson, Alex Munroe, and Walt Conser from FPC joined six other Presbyterians in an Outreach trip led by Rob Weingartner, executive director of The Outreach Foundation, and Peter Lim. As would become the pattern in such Outreach trips, the group met with leaders of the Chinese church, worshipped with Chinese Christians and fellow-shipped with them over meals in addition to taking in some of the tourist sights of China. Towards the end of the trip, the three FPC participants broke off from the main group in order to go to Jiangyin to attend the opening ceremonies for the new Jiangyin Christian Training Center. At both the opening ceremony and at the regular worship service the next day, Ernie



Ernie Thompson preaching in Jiangyin Church service, with translator

Thompson preached. When he delivered the sermon at the Sunday service in Jiangyin Christian Church, he was the first Westerner to preach there since the closure of the mission station in 1951. Although some delegation members anticipated that government officials would insist on previewing an advance copy of the sermons, nothing of the sort took place. This was taken as a sign of the goodwill with which the FPC participants were regarded.

The Training Center was the culmination of efforts by Jiangyin Christians to help address the critical need for leadership in the Chinese church. Though Chinese seminaries were producing ordained

leaders, the rate was too slow for the demand and consequently the Chinese church was looking to train lay leaders in an expedited program. The challenge of too few leaders was endemic in the Chinese church. To give but one example, in 2009 in Jiangyin three ordained pastors served 14 Protestant churches with a combined membership of 19,000. Through a private donation by a member of FPC in addition to other sources, FPC had actively supported the development of this important training facility. As the FPC members shared upon their return to Wilmington, the Jiangyin congregation was deeply appreciative of this support and of the effort Thompson and the others had made to make the trip and to share in the opening of the new center.

The next trip to China was in 2010. Led by Peter Lim of The Outreach Foundation, twelve of the eighteen members were from FPC: Helen Faller, Sam Markley, Walt Conser, Janet Conser, Joan Manson Ruden, Connie Richards, Abigail Mann, Catherine Snyder, Dana Pray, Bridget Thomas, Charlie Lee, and Ernie Thompson. Again, meetings with church leaders took place, worship services were attended, fellowship and discussion over excellent meals occurred, and significant sites in the history and culture of China were visited.

Certainly, by the 2010 trip the theme of “ministry of presence” had been embraced by the China Ministry Team concerning FPC’s growing relationship with the church in China. Ministry of Presence became the paradigm which the Team used to interpret its work to the FPC congregation and others. Previous congregational expectations regarding mission work often focused on providing something, building something, or repairing something. This was a task-oriented, pragmatic approach - comfortable for many Americans - that could always point to some tangible result as the validation for its trip. However, this ministry of construction ran the risk of encouraging dependency, of devolving into a one-way experience, ‘I am here to do for you’, and one that too easily become paternalistic, ‘and I know what you need.’ The ministry of presence took its lead from Romans 1:12 with its supplication “that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.” It was a ministry that emphasized listening and learning from our Chinese sisters and brothers in the faith. It was a ministry that encouraged the Christians there by our willingness to be with them. As Ernie Thompson once stated, “our prayers, support, and presence strengthen the church in China; their prayers, faith, and example strengthen our faith and church.” The vocabulary of presence shifted the focus from pragmatic and mechanical calculations to spiritual and organic experiences. As one FPC member reflected upon their return, “It is not what I did, but how the experience built relationships and changed me.”



Rev. Jeff Ritchie, Outreach Foundation, leading the way into Jiangsu Bible College, now Jiangsu Theological Seminary

To be sure, spanning more than a decade since the reconnection, FPC’s relationship to China had produced some very tangible results, such as providing support for the Training Center in Jiangyin, or helping in the upgrading of the Jiangsu Bible College, or establishing scholarships for students wishing to attend seminary. So ultimately, it was not either doing or presence but both doing and presence, all engaged in the work of the Lord. Still, articulation of the meaning and context of a ministry of presence has been one of the chief opportunities as the China Ministry Team has sought to interpret the growing relationship with the Chinese church to the FPC congregation.

In 2013 eight members of FPC left for the next trip to China, led again by Peter Lim of The Outreach Foundation. The FPC members were Ernie Thompson, Janet Conser, Anne Parker, Anne Beam, Anne Gordon, Ann Sneed, Bruce Gibson and Karen Gibson. The goal of this journey was to deepen relationships with the Chinese Christian community, especially those in Jiangsu Province. To that end, the group made a regular stop in Jiangyin. While there they visited the Jiangyin Christian Training Center and the Jiangyin People's Hospital as well as the Jiangyin Christian Church. Significantly, the hospital had a history room with memorabilia from the hospital's earliest days which the group explored. Also, in front of the hospital there was a large, recently unveiled bust of Dr. George Worth, with an inscription in Chinese and English describing his role in the founding of the hospital. The perfect spot for commemorative photos.



2018 trip participants at Worth bust

During this trip, as had been the case in the trips in 2009 and 2010, the group went to Nanjing and while there visited the Jiangsu Theological Seminary and the Amity Printing Company. In 2009 the school, founded in 1998 as a Bible college offering three-year courses of instruction, aspired to become a theological seminary offering four-year programs. To do this it had to upgrade its facilities and staff. FPC had previously learned of this goal from its Chinese friends and in 2009 began to assist with the improvement of the school's library. By 2010 the school had graduated 700 pastors to return to the field, which in Jiangsu province meant 4,000 churches. By 2012, the school had thirteen full-time faculty as well as a number of adjunct instructors, its library and facilities had expanded, and it was promoted to a theological seminary offering four-year programs culminating in a bachelor's degree. Many of the faculty

at Jiangsu Theological Seminary received their theological training at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, the one national Protestant seminary in China that prepared faculty for all seminaries (provincial, regional, national) in China. Nanjing Seminary had first opened in 1911, however was closed in 1966 during the Cultural Revolution. Reopened in 1981 it moved to new, much larger facilities and in 2010 had 248 students and 22 full-time faculty.

The decision by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 allowing for the printing of religious literature and scriptures provided the context for the founding of the Amity Printing Company. In 2012 this organization produced its 100 millionth copy of the Bible. Chinese Christians take pride in their ability to produce their own Bibles. They consider it a statement of their own growth as a religious community and as an affirmation of their autonomy. The Printing Company is part of the Amity Foundation, a non-governmental organization founded in 1985 which seeks “through a Christian ideal and ethos to contribute to Chinese social development.” The Printing Company began producing Bibles in 1987 with the support of the United Bible Societies, a British-based entity which donates the paper for the Bibles. Opening a new state-of-the-art production facility in 2008, the Printing Company now produces 12 million copies of the Bible in a year, which are then divided among 74 distribution centers in major population centers throughout China. From there they go to individual churches for further dispersal. Bibles are for sale in China. If one wants to buy a copy, go to the bookstores located on the grounds of the registered churches and they are available there in several different editions, ranging in price from about \$2.00 a copy on up. For example, one can buy a bilingual Chinese-English Bible in various English translations or a Chinese language edition in at least three different versions.



Amity Printing production counter and photo of facility

In addition to Jiangyin and Nanjing, this group also paid a short visit to the historic city of Suzhou and its Dushu Lake Church. The city’s system of canals, which once laced throughout the ancient city, earned Suzhou the nickname by Westerners of “Venice of the East”. (It would be more accurate to call Venice, “the Suzhou of the West,” as Suzhou predates Venice by over nine hundred years and far exceeded it in population, wealth, and cultural achievement.) Opening in 2010 with 270 members, Dushu Lake Church now had well over 2,000. It is located in a suburb outside the city center where many research and higher education facilities have recently located. (North Carolinians might think of it as an equivalent to the Research Triangle

Park). Additionally, one of the church's staff members was Chris Bin Wang, who was known to many people at FPC. In 2011 while he was pursuing advanced theological training at Princeton Theological Seminary, Chris came and preached at FPC and had stayed in touch with several people at FPC, some of whom were on this trip.

The trip in 2013 had its share of meetings, cultural sights, and magnificent meals made possible by the graciousness of the Chinese hosts. It was the embodiment of the ministry of presence, summarized by one participant as "an amazing two weeks filled with great fellowship, learning of and seeing God's work in the churches of China." Here was, indeed, the perspective of the hosts and the guests: neither what the Chinese were doing nor what the Americans were doing, but rather what God in the Holy Spirit was accomplishing mutually through them both.

Before the next group left FPC for China in 2015, they were commissioned by the congregation on the Sunday prior to their departure. Going as representatives of the whole FPC congregation, the words of commission called on them to "engage in a ministry of presence, encouragement, and learning, deepening our partnership with the Chinese church and experiencing first-hand the excitement of the Chinese church." Peter Lim of The Outreach Foundation led the trip and the participants from FPC were Anne Parker, Becky Shuford, Carole Christian, Chris Hayden, Ernie Thompson, Elaine Thompson, Hannah Vaughan, Norm Robinson, Janet Conser, Julia Worth (granddaughter of George and Emma Worth), and Jay Atkinson.



2015 Tour group at Great Wall

2015 was the 120th anniversary of Dr. and Mrs. Worth's departure for China and held special meaning for the group. During their two-week sojourn, they met with church officials in several cities as well as visiting Jiangsu Seminary and the Amity Printing Company. On their visit to Jiangyin they visited the People's Hospital, which was undergoing renovation, and the site of the new Yangzi International Church. This church, still under construction, was

being built on land donated by the government as compensation for church land in the city which was going to be used for public purposes.

After traveling to Suzhou and Shanghai, the group left mainland China, and, for the first time, ventured to Taiwan. There they met Rev. John McCall, a Presbyterian mission worker in Taiwan, who also taught in both Taiwan and mainland China. McCall had met the 2013 group, so several of these participants were delighted to see him again. The Presbyterian Church of Taiwan is the largest Protestant denomination in Taiwan (though only 4-5% of the Taiwanese population are Christians) and they were celebrating their 150th anniversary. For that anniversary Heath Rada, the national moderator in 2015 of the PCUSA, was in attendance and traveled with our group for several days afterward.



Heath Rada and indigenous Taiwanese Christians

As with the other trips since 2007, many discussions with church and government officials took place. Often asked about the tremendous growth of the Christian church in China since the end of the Cultural Revolution and the new opening under Deng Xiaoping, church officials first responded that it is the impact of the Holy Spirit working through Chinese Christians. They quoted Paul's observation in 1 Corinthians 3: 6-7: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." They further noted that some Chinese are familiar with Christianity and the conditions since 1979 have become more favorable for the growth of Christianity in China. Finally, they believed that there is a spiritual hunger and emptiness in China, particularly among those left behind in the contemporary economic upswing and even among those who have become rich but found it meaningless, as evidenced by the higher divorce and suicide rates in China over the last twenty years. These circumstances, they said, present many opportunities but also many challenges.

For their part, officials of the Religious Affairs Bureau with whom the groups have held discussions often praised the usefulness of the Church, particularly in dealing with contemporary social problems and the natural disasters that recently have taken place. When asked about the state restrictions on religion, these government officials explain that only 2% of the Chinese population are Christians and it is the duty of the government to establish boundaries between the minority and the majority and to prevent trespass either way on these boundaries. Accepting these boundaries is the obligation of all religious organizations, for the advancement of social harmony in Chinese society, not the growth of religious organizations, is the goal of the government. It is important, these officials stated, for Christian churches to demonstrate to the larger Chinese society that it is possible to be a good Chinese citizen and a good Chinese Christian. The success of this effort, in the view of one Religious Affairs Bureau official, could be seen in the widely repeated slogan, “Earlier, one more Christian meant one less Chinese; now one more Christian meant one less thief.”

Since 2007 FPC had sent ministry teams to China every two or three years. So, in 2018 another group from FPC set out for China. The participants from FPC included Julia Worth, Betsy Wilcox (great niece of Marion Wilcox, a long time member of the mission staff), Marvin Hage, Miriam Hage, John Stike, Dale Keller, and Glenda Daniels. As Peter Lim had left The Outreach Foundation in 2015, this trip was led by two other Outreach Foundation staff members, Juan Sarmiento and long-time Asian mission co-worker, Jeff Ritchie. During their stop in Nanjing, the group enjoyed seeing the recently renovated seminary chapel and classrooms at



Outdoor bas-relief at Nanjing Union Seminary portraying Christ on the cross looking down on all the cities of the world

the Nanjing Union Seminary as well as marveling at the high-speed printing presses at Amity Printing Company which had by this point produced over 170 million copies of the Bible. Also, in Nanjing they participated in the 20th anniversary of Jiangsu Theological Seminary and gratefully received the acknowledgement by the school's leaders of FPC's role of support over the years. Another visit to the Dushu Lake church in Suzhou was followed by a stop in Jiangyin. In addition to attending a worship service at the Yangzi International Church, which opened at Christmas 2017, they again visited the newly expanded People's Hospital. An aphorism is often repeated, that in one variation goes: the first time two people share a cup of tea, they are strangers; the second time they are acquaintances; the third time they are

friends. Between 2007 and 2018, many members of FPC had traveled to China and some had gone several times. Relationships of familiarity and friendship had developed and partnerships between FPC and the churches in China had begun. A ministry of presence and the assumptions and vocabulary associated with it had taken root in the FPC congregation. Many cups of tea had been drunk and more would be consumed.

The significance of the trips to China was underscored by the second aspect of the reconnection: welcoming delegations of Chinese Christians to FPC and Wilmington. In the aftermath of the successful 2007 trip to Jiangyin, the China Ministry Team wanted to reciprocate the hospitality of their Chinese hosts. With the assistance of The Outreach Foundation, whose counsel and guidance, especially providing insights into contextual meaning, has remained constant and helpful throughout FPC's relationship with the Chinese church, Ernie Thompson invited a Chinese delegation from Jiangsu province to visit FPC and Wilmington. In his letter Thompson wrote,

"It was a joy to meet with you in 2007 and to renew the relationship begun between our church and the church in Jiangyin. We are pleased that the church in China is thriving and that many in Jiangyin still remember the missionaries from our church who served there many years ago. We are interested to hear from you more information about the need for training centers in your province to prepare leaders for the church and would be interested in further conversations about how we might support your efforts."

Subsequently, in 2008 a delegation came to Wilmington. The members were An Xin Yi (Chair of the Jiangsu TSPM and Chair of the Board of Jiangsu Bible College), Pan Rong Hua (Chair of the Wuxi TSPM), Xiong Juan (Pastor of the Jiangyin Christian Church), Dai Ya (Deacon at Jiangyin Christian Church), Zhang Quan (Member of the Jiangsu Provincial Religious Affairs Bureau), and Chen Xiang (Vice-Secretary of the Jiangsu TSPM who also served as translator for the group). One of the leaders of the Chinese delegation explained their expectations in this way, "Our visit is aimed at enhancing the relationship between us. We are especially interested in the role of social services your church has played, and we hope to learn from your experiences and the practices adopted by your church."

The delegation's itinerary was full. Arriving in Washington D.C on September 4, 2008, they toured the city and then drove down to Richmond, VA to the campus of Union Presbyterian Seminary. There they had meetings with the president, Brian Blount, and other administrators and faculty sharing mutual interests and issues related to churches and theological education in both countries. From Richmond they traveled on to Wilmington where they had a full schedule of speaking engagements and meetings before driving to visit First Presbyterian Church Whiteville, where Charles Worth, George and Emma Worth's son, had served as pastor in the 1950s upon his return from China. Thereafter, a short trip to Duke Divinity School for more talks and then a departure for China from RDU airport on September 9.

During the delegation's stay in Wilmington, several members of the China Ministry Team, including Ernie Thompson, Lucy Worth, Alex Munroe, Fred Butler III, Walt and Janet Conser, Buck and Carrie Roney, Bridget Thomas, Julia Worth, Susan and Clancy Thompson, Wendy Pannell, and Tom Wolfe, took the lead in hosting the group and providing for the meetings. It was during these meetings that Pastor An, as head of the delegation, spoke about the critical need for leadership in the Chinese church and the desire of the Jiangyin congregation to open a training center. To his American audience, the scale of the figures he cited was staggering: in Jiangsu province 230 pastors in 4,000 churches and meeting points served approximately 1.6 million believers out of a total population of 74 million. Pastor An also expressed interest in the various social service ministries in which FPC was engaged, as at that

time the Chinese government did not encourage the Chinese church to provide those services, though Pastor An thought that this situation might be changing.

From listening to their Chinese guests and their descriptions of the needs they had identified, the outlines of a positive collaboration between FPC and the church in Jiangsu province, and particularly in Jiangyin, began to take shape. The Outreach Foundation had already made a commitment to support the work of the Christian church in Jiangsu to develop leadership capacity, to develop culturally appropriate Sunday School materials, and to develop curriculum for new believers. FPC could not support all these programs equally, so the China Ministry Team recommended to the Global Missions Committee a focus on the Training Center and student scholarships. The culmination of the efforts by the Jiangyin Christians came in 2009 with the joyous celebration of the opening of the Jiangyin Christian Training Center with Ernie Thompson and two other FPC members sharing in the festivities.

In 2010 another delegation of six Chinese church and government officials was in Washington D. C. Ernie Thompson and two members of the China Ministry Team drove in pouring rain and heavy traffic from Wilmington to Washington and hosted a meal for the delegation. Many of the delegation, including Mr. Gu, Director of the Jiangsu Religious Affairs Bureau and Mr. Zhang, President of Jiangsu Bible College, were familiar faces from earlier FPC trips to China. The members of the delegation were quite impressed that the FPC contingent would travel the 6 hours just to meet them. But as Thompson said in his report to the FPC congregation, “despite all our differences, we are still brothers and sisters in Christ. We share one baptism, we share one Spirit, and we share one Lord. But even more than that, both churches need each other.” He continued, “there are ways that we can help the Chinese build up the church in China and share the good news of Christ...But we also need them. We need to hear about their experiences of keeping the faith alive in difficult situations. We need to understand why people are standing in line there waiting to get into church. We need to see ourselves through the eyes of others, and we need help in putting our own blessings and challenges in better perspective.” Here again was an expression of the ministry of presence: making the effort to be there with our Chinese brothers and sisters in the faith as we prayed for and coveted their prayers, listening as our Chinese friends identified needs and as they choose to solicit specific assistance, and finally through fellowship and a meal strengthening the relationship between them and us.

It was not until 2017 that another Chinese delegation was able to visit FPC and Wilmington. This group had eight members, two of whom, Mr. Zhang Keyun, Chair of the Jiangsu Provincial TSPM and President of the Jiangsu Theological Seminary, and Mr. Shi Li, Secretary General of the Jiangsu Provincial TSPM and the translator for the group, were well-known to members of the China Ministry Team from their earlier trips. Additionally, Professor Ken McFadyen, academic dean at the Richmond campus of Union Presbyterian Seminary, and Juan Sarmiento and Jeff Ritchie of The Outreach Foundation attended the meetings. The itinerary for the delegation was especially tight, as they landed in Seattle, WA on September 16, where they had meetings until the 19th when they departed for Southern California and Fuller Seminary. They left Fuller on the 20th and made the transcontinental flight arriving in Wilmington that evening. The 21st was full of meetings at FPC and the delegation left for China early on the morning of the 22nd. Since their itinerary was so compact, it was quite an honor for FPC to be included (indeed, to be the only East Coast stop) in their short trip.

On the morning of the 21st there was a presentation from the delegation on “Christianity in Contemporary China” which discussed the growth, blessings, and challenges experienced by Chinese Christians. After lunch and a tour of FPC, the afternoon session dealt with

theological education in China and the United States, particularly with the accomplishments, opportunities, and difficulties of satellite-style campuses and their unique cohorts of students (non-residential, part-time, and utilizing distance education). Professor McFadyen began with a presentation on satellite education at Union with its older campus in Richmond and its new satellite campus at Sharon Presbyterian Church in Charlotte. Many of the members of the Chinese delegation were associated with Jiangsu Theological Seminary in Nanjing, which had recently opened a satellite campus at Dushu Lake church in Suzhou, and they spoke about their own experiences. The discussion was lively and continued into the dinner held that evening in the delegation's honor. The mayor of Wilmington, Mr. Bill Saffo, attended the dinner and made introductory remarks welcoming the delegation to the city. After the meal was over, as is traditional, gifts were exchanged between the head of the delegation, Mr. Zhang, and Dan Lewis, senior pastor of FPC. Though the visit had been short, the Chinese delegation had especially enjoyed their stay. Writing on behalf of the group upon their return to China, Shi Li called the encounter an "unforgettable and rich visit because of your hospitality and wonderful arrangements...we trust God will lead the way for us to strengthen our relationship, deepen our friendship, and bring us to work together closely for His ministries."

The third aspect of the relationship stemming from the reconnection was supporting meetings of the national Presbyterian China Network. The China Network was one of the approximately 35 mission networks in the PCUSA centered on a specific country, people, or program of ministry. The Network's mission statement indicated that it was "a forum through which Presbyterians can cooperate with each other as they seek to be in partnership with and serve the church in China and Chinese society." By engaging in beneficial partnerships with the Chinese church, these Presbyterians hoped "to contribute to the unity and well-being of the church in China." To that end, the China Network committed itself to reaching out and being a repository of information for Presbyterian congregations in the identification, development, and recommendation of best practices for these Presbyterians as they sought to engage the Chinese church.

By 2007 informal conversations were underway among various Presbyterians in the United States concerning China. Simply developing a roster of persons interested in, knowledgeable about, and experienced with the church in China was a necessary first step. Not surprisingly, this initial list drew on individuals with connections to the old missionary movement, individuals with academic interests in China, and individuals related in some fashion to the Amity Foundation.

In 2009 under the auspices of the China Ministry Team, FPC joined the China Network. Jeff Ritchie of The Outreach Foundation provided contact information and Franklin Woo, former director of the China Program of the National Council of Churches, USA, gave additional good counsel and encouragement. At this time, Caroline Sunquist Becker, a former Amity teacher in Jiangsu province, edited the Network website, while Lou Haase had charge of the Network's electronic newsletter. Although in 2009 a meeting of the China Network took place in Cincinnati, no one from FPC was able to attend. Nevertheless, members from FPC did participate in the English Exchange Camp, a collaborative project between The Outreach Foundation and the church in Jiangsu and most active for FPC between 2009--2011. The goal of this project was to build the capacity of Chinese church leaders in spoken English and to exchange language, culture, history and faith between Chinese and American participants.

In 2011, in an attempt to renew the Network, the FPC China Ministry Team accepted the request that it provide leadership for the Network and that FPC host a national meeting of the network that year. Peter Lim and Jeff Ritchie of The Outreach Foundation assisted with the

logistics and more than thirty people attended from FPC as well as from California, Texas, New Jersey, and Florida. The speakers included Elder Ou, Enlin, director of the Oversea Relations Council of the China Christian Council office in Nanjing, Michael Parker of the PCUSA World Mission Staff in Louisville, Pastor Chris Bin Wang of Suzhou, Claire Gibbs, a former Amity English teacher, and David Bridgman, director of the Frontier Fellowship, a group that assisted minority group churches, especially in Yunnan province. Many familiar ideas were heard in the discussion by the participants, e.g., mission work is moving conceptually from paternalism to partnership; it is not the Chinese government, but the Chinese church which we are supporting and with which we are building partnerships; Network members should complement the work of other Christians, not compete with or duplicate their efforts; members should not export Western differences, e.g., denominational identities and claims, but cooperate together especially as the Chinese church aspires to be post-denominational; and beware of the Western church creating a dependency relationship by focusing exclusively on funding.

The next national China Network meeting took place in 2012 in Los Angeles and was hosted by Bel Air Presbyterian Church. Taking as its theme, “God is doing great things in China,” the meeting assembled over a Friday and Saturday. Ernie Thompson and another member of the China Ministry Team represented FPC, flying out of Wilmington early on the Friday and taking the red eye flight back the next day. Bel Air Presbyterian has a relationship with the Chinese church in Harbin in the northeastern region of China. Accordingly, several speakers from that congregation shared their experience with that church. Additionally, Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Seminary, who had many years of experience with the Chinese church, extolled the importance of what he called relational evangelism rather than public evangelism in the Chinese context.

In 2014 FPC again hosted the Network meetings. Forty people attended which was about the average attendance for the three meetings so far. Given its location, the majority of the participants were from the East Coast and the speakers included Professor Peter Bao from Nanjing University, Job Zhou, a lay leader from Nanjing and currently a student at Fuller Seminary, Mienda Uriarte, coordinator of mission work in Asia and the Pacific for the PCUSA, and Peter Lim of The Outreach Foundation. Aware of the increasing geo-political significance of the relationship between China and the United States, many participants emphasized the socio-cultural importance of partnerships with the church in China and the changing dynamics the Chinese church experienced in this context.

It was clear by 2014 that the language and vision of partnerships used by members of the China Network built on personal relationships experienced in contexts of familiarity, fellowship, and friendship. However, discussions of partnerships tended to focus on institutional best practices, capacity building, and action strategies for long-term developments. The reconnection which FPC established with the congregation in Jiangyin and the wider church in Jiangsu was always based on informal, personal associations more than institutional commitments, always more like a friendship than like an official arrangement. The broad smiles of recognition when Ernie Thompson arrived at Jiangyin Christian Church or the affectionate greetings shared when Shi Li or Chris Bin Wang came to FPC testified to the depth of the memories and of the relationship. So, ultimately, friendship and partnership were opposite sides of the same coin, though the tone in which they were expressed could differ.

2019 is the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China and the 40th anniversary of the reopening of religious institutions and resumption of the printing of religious scriptures in China. Though estimates vary, China currently has at least 40 million Protestant Christians out of its total population of 1.4 billion people. Chinese society is

changing and these changes present the Chinese church with opportunities and challenges. In the 124 years since 1895 and the sending off of the Worthy to China, the China ministry at FPC has also seen ups and downs, but through it all the fidelity, passion, and courage for Christ of the Chinese Christian community has remained steadfast. This ministry and the relationship upon which it is built and which it serves is significant for FPC. Based on research to date, no other PCUSA congregation has a relationship with China dating back so far and reconnected so deeply. Beyond that, as the situation between world superpowers grows more tense, the Christian church in China and the USA has an important role to share as examples of international cooperation and mutual goodwill. Finally, as a ministry of presence, it embodies opportunities to live out the biblical vision of shalom, to break down walls of hostility (Ephesians 2:14), and to work together, strengthening each other and building up the church of Jesus Christ as it witnesses to God's work in the world.