



***Members of the Friends of the Church in China are Christians in Britain and Ireland who seek to promote contact, partnership and mutual understanding with Christians in China.***

.....

## **Annual Report for 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020**

Registered as a charity in England and Wales

Charity number: 1004221

Registered charity address:

Flat 8 Elgar House

Boyton Close

London

N8 7BD

Email: [FriendsChuChina@aol.com](mailto:FriendsChuChina@aol.com)

Website: [www.thefcc.org](http://www.thefcc.org)

### Trustees

Antony Rose

The Revd Rachel Hextall

The Revd Lawrence Braschi

Ian Blaney (General Secretary)

Angela Evans (Vice-Chair)

The Venerable Godfrey Stone (Chair)

Rosie Carter

William (Bill) Birmingham

Dot Stone (Membership Secretary)

James (Jim) Gibson (Treasurer)

### *Banking details:*

Co-operative Bank, PO Box 250, Delf house, Skelmersdale, WN8 6WT

Sort code 08-92-99; Account no 65265110.

External Examiner: Margaret A Logan, 6 Shillingworth Place, Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire, PA11 3DY.

.....

# **The 'Friends of the Church in China' – Annual Report 2020**

## **2020 – a year in overview**

2020 has been a year of new things for FCC – not by our own designing, but graciously emerging through changed circumstances. The Annual Meeting in November was symptomatic of this – it was held on line, was attended by 50 members and supporters, and allowed a dozen or so people to make valuable contributions alongside the formal business. This built on a pattern previously developed at a committee meeting, and a subsequent members' meeting in the summer, at which Chinese friends (coming from Shanghai, Wuhan and Hong Kong) were able to join the virtual conversations of British-based members.

The year began with a financial gift going from FCC to a joint fund set up by the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Amity Foundation in response to the Covid epidemic. But later in the year, FCC was in receipt of several deliveries of face masks from Shanghai and Jinan. These were passed on for use by community groups in four different places. So while the Covid crisis meant that no visits were possible this year, either to China or to the British Isles, in its place we gladly report a mutuality of giving and receiving, and a year when warm messages of goodwill went to and from between FCC and our main partners in China.

Meanwhile FCC projects have made steady progress. Our partners in urban Xi'an adapted their work to cope with the need for social distancing; our Amity partner Li Guoming in rural Yunnan has made a good start to the new waste management scheme; and FCC's support for theological education took a practical turn when our friend Du Nana needed additional financial support for a re-location to Cambridge. In all these projects, FCC gladly acknowledges support from other partners – the Barbour Trust, the Li Tim Oi Foundation and the Scottish Episcopal Church.

This has been a year when geo-political tensions have made relationships between 'East and West' somewhat strained. The committee has considered some of the well-publicised issues in Hong Kong and Xinjiang; FCC has received a helpful paper from a partner organisation outlining some of these situations in more detail; and the regular FCC Updates have commented briefly on the way these and other issues can become sources of tension also with Chinese church leaders. But these strained political relationships make the development of international friendship all the more important. And while FCC is a small charity run by volunteers, we never underestimate the significance and positive value of developing friendship links. Indeed, the correspondence we have shared this year has reinforced such a belief, and led FCC committee members together to send warm greetings to all our main partners at Christmas, and to produce a diary of prayer for members' regular use to be distributed with this Annual Report and placed on the FCC website. We eagerly hope for opportunities to resume mutual visits and face to face meeting - in 2021 or 2022?

## Insight into relationships that FCC have had in 2020.

At the 2020 Annual Meeting, it was reported that while the year has seen no visits in either direction, there have been many personal connections between China and the British Isles through various digital means. What follows is a summary of some of the 'friends' with whom we have had contact in the year.

### National Organisations on the east coast:

These organisations include the leaders of the **China Christian Council (CCC)** and the **Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM)** based in Shanghai; in Nanjing the headquarters of the **Amity Foundation**, and also the Jinling national **Nanjing Union Theological Seminary**.

**TSPM 70<sup>th</sup> birthday** The 2020 FCC Annual Meeting learned of the celebrations to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) in China. A letter of congratulation was sent from FCC to the leaders in Shanghai through the Revd Kan Baoping who wrote earlier in the year: *"The pandemic is a threat to human lives. It is important at this critical time for people of our two churches to foster mutual understanding and mutual respect."* One of the speakers at the celebration in Shanghai was the senior leader, well-known to some FCC members, the Revd Cao Shenjie.



### **Partnership with National organisations on the east coast**



### **FCC had news from Dr Wen Ge, and Dr Lin Manhong.**

The latter is now the Associate General Secretary of the China Christian Council, retaining her role as Director in the department of Theological Education. Through her, FCC was able to welcome Nanjing's first two ThD students in the summer of 2018 for an extended visit.

It was therefore a great joy to hear that both doctoral students had successfully defended their theses, and become the first two doctors of theology from a Chinese mainland theological institution within the Protestant church. (Lin Manhong is seated at the left in the front row; Chengzan and Jiawei are standing in the middle of the back row)

### **After a successful defense of their theses, Luo Chengzan and Wang Jiawei complete their doctoral programmes**



### **35<sup>th</sup> Birthday**

2020 marked the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the origin of the Amity Foundation. At the FCC Annual Meeting, Maggi Whyte spoke of FCC's appreciation for the work that Amity continues to undertake. A letter of congratulations was subsequently sent to the General Secretary Lin Chunxiang in Nanjing. Earlier, in September, **Mr Qiu Zhonghui** wrote *"As Christians, let's pray together for the peace of the world & for God's mercy"*.

### **The Greater Bay area – Hong Kong cathedral, and Shenzhen**

With the eyes of the world often on Hong Kong this year, FCC has kept in touch with Hong Kong cathedral. **Will Newman** is a former treasurer of FCC, now based at the cathedral. He was able to join this year's online Annual Meeting. **Frankie Lee** carries responsibility for the cathedral's oversight of education, and FCC has had regular communication with him throughout the year. Changes of staff at the cathedral, and the challenges of change in Hong Kong, mean that they ask for our continual prayers.

### **Regional seminaries**



Across China, there are five seminaries that serve a catchment greater than their own Province. These 'regional' seminaries have been generous in welcoming FCC visits. Here are brief insights into FCC's connections with three of these this year.

**Ms Chen Qirui** (at Hua Dong Seminary in Shanghai), teaches the

history of Christian thought. She is currently studying for her doctoral degree in Helsinki. However with Covid, she has been unable to return to Finland, so has spent the year at home, combining family life with teaching and study. She gave an interesting insight in July about a pastoral issue arising in the light of many weeks of 'on-line church':



*"Some new and young church members have found it more convenient via virtual meetings, so they prefer to stay at home to worship God."*

Sichuan Seminary in Chengdu opened its doors again to students in October, receiving a cohort of 75 students. Many come from the rural ethnic minority communities of Yunnan Province. 'Peter' **Yuan Shiguo** is a long-term friend of FCC, and is keen for future face to face meeting.



In July he wrote: *"I hope you will visit here in China again. I can't forget the two wonderful visits I have had to the UK and the friends I made there. I am always sharing my great stories about these visits with my Chinese friends."*



Zhongnan seminary September 2020  
31 students got their diploma

Again, the eyes of the world have been on Wuhan this year. Some senior leaders in the Provincial Christian Council, and in the regional 'Zhongnan' seminary, had some weeks in hospital – but they are now healthy and back to work.



Meanwhile the seminary Dean, 'Jenny' **Zhao Qiufen** continues her own study towards a further degree – one of many seminary staff aiming to upgrade their own academic abilities at this time.

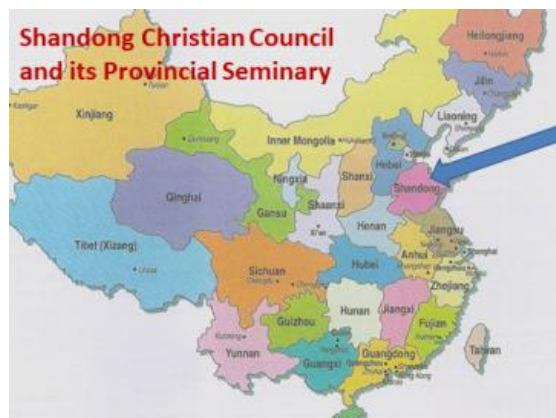
### **Provincial CC and Seminary in Shandong (Jinan)**

Conversation with Mr Bian Rongliang  
and Revd Gao Ming, President of SDCC



Over the last few years, a friendship has developed with Revd Gao Ming, who is President of the Shandong Christian Council. Through him, a couple of young colleagues have made short visits to the British Isles.

In July Gao Ming wrote: *"Greetings from Shandong in Jesus Christ, peace & health! Thank you for support, encouragement and help to Pastor Du Nana. Now is also a difficult time for China, the Yangtze River Basin flood situation is bad. God give enough of his grace to FCC and the Shandong Church, and may our friendship in Christ persist!"*



Greetings to  
FCC from  
**Du Nana &  
Wang Wei**  
in October  
at the  
Mid Autumn  
Golden Week  
festival



Pastor Du Nana came to the UK initially for three months a few years ago. This was a pilot project to see what value could be gained from such a visit. She later returned to study for her Masters degree in Edinburgh. She is for the current year living in Cambridge, continuing with her research into the book of Isaiah towards a doctoral degree. She and her husband sent greetings to FCC at the Autumn festival in 2020.

## A year of FCC Projects in China

In 2020, there were four projects that FCC contributed towards.

1. £1,161 to a joint appeal by the Social Services Department of the China Christian Council and the Amity Foundation to buy personal protective equipment and other materials to help China deal with the Covid-19 outbreak when it first appeared (and before it hit the UK). Subsequently FCC received several generous of masks from China – initially at a time when there was less emphasis in the British Isles on the value of wearing masks. Through the personal links of committee members, these gifts were put to good use in Glasgow, Kenilworth, Slough and Stoke on Trent - as suggested by the photographs, and by the following quotation:

*“The masks were a godsend!*

*Those receiving them appreciated very much the kindness of friends in China”*





2. £4,000 (plus another £4,000 generously matched by the Barbour Trust) was given to the HIV/Aids relief and education programme provided by the church in Xi'an whose pastor is He Qicong.

The Social Services Department of the China Christian Council (led by Paul Wang) re-connected FCC with this as a project needing priority funding (it has sometimes been less easy for CCC to motivate Chinese churches to support this project).



### Outreach activities



Those benefitting from this project are, in particular, migrant workers. Through training student and other volunteers, the project provides education, contraceptives, antiviral drugs and testing to those at risk from or subject to HIV/AIDs.

3. £4,000 (plus another £4,000 generously matched by the Barbour Trust) was given to the Amity Foundation's waste management project in Yunnan. This is to help villagers to collect three types of waste into different bins. Initially this project works with 40 - 100 families in Long Nai village (mostly amongst the "Wa"



minority) in Cangyuan

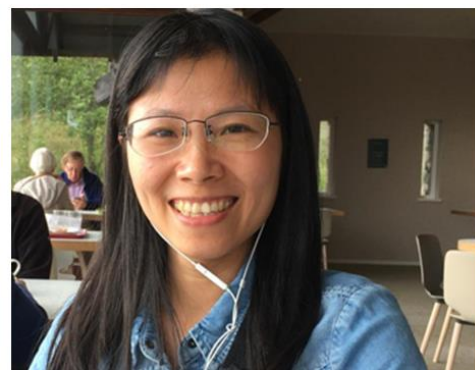
county - near the border with Myanmar.



By modelling in a couple of villages and by seeing benefits, it will hopefully be spread throughout other villages in the county. This project arises in part from the earlier visit to the UK by Xie Jie from Amity Foundation.

4. During the course of 2020, a study grant was made available to Pastor Du Nana. She is working towards a PhD in Old Testament studies at the University of Gloucestershire. This year she will be resident in Cambridge, using the specialist resources of the Tyndale House library.

With a generous additional contribution from the Li Tim Oi Foundation, her additional costs of a move from Edinburgh were covered in full.



### **Projects in the future?**

In the 2019 Annual Report, several proposed activities were listed – albeit briefly. In the light of events, those involving travel overseas have been postponed.

But the committee is clear that some of these proposed activities are still in the pipeline. The correspondence of this year has only reinforced the view that a warm welcome awaits FCC in several places in China - whenever travel between China and the British Isles again becomes possible, and can be undertaken safely. A number of these visits are promising links that may develop into projects in the future.

For example:

- FCC's links with SW China remain strong;
- there are five new ThD students at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, some of whom may benefit from a study visit to the West;
- back in 2019, a couple of Christian Councils were asking to send a member to the UK;
- FCC suggested to Amity that they might again send an appropriate staff member to the UK for staff development.

Also, in 2022, there will be a theological conference in the UK to which Chinese friends might be invited. Through the Archbishop of Canterbury, Chinese leaders may be invited to his Lambeth conference – also in 2022. There is some interest in one particular British theological college for welcoming Chinese scholars or students.

So while no plans are as yet in place, there remain a number of possibilities for the years ahead.

However, after the events of 2020, we conclude with 'God-willing'!

.....



## Brief notes about three resources:

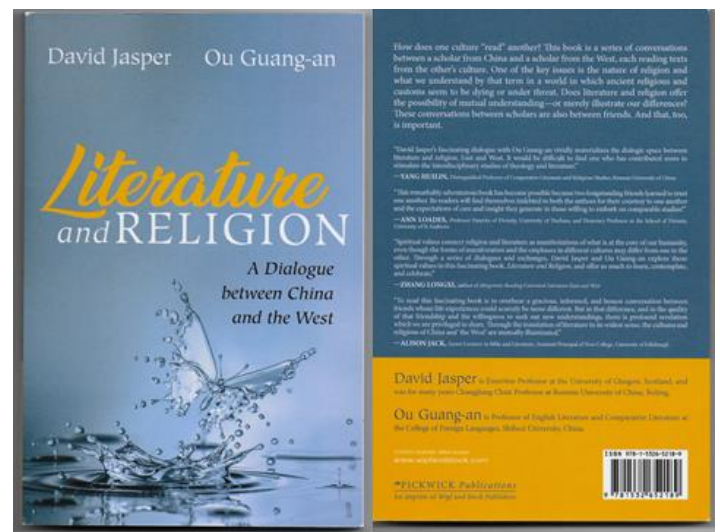
### 1. Living with the Dragon

This was the title of a well-nuanced report on China by Nick Robinson on Radio 4 on 17<sup>th</sup> November. It emphasised the value of a relationship-based understanding of history, and therefore a relationship-emphasising approach to future links with China. There are no easy answers to the way other countries live with the 'Dragon'. It can be accessed on the BBC website ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)) and lasts 37 minutes,



### 2. David Jasper & Ou Guangan: Literature and Religion – a dialogue between China and the West (2020).

David Jasper was at the FCC Annual Meeting and introduced this book prior to its launch in November. FCC members will appreciate the emphasis on friendship as the basis for this series of academic conversations across cultural boundaries.



### 3. Sheila McClure introduces in more detail the book she has written, and briefly announced at the 2019 AGM (it was mentioned more briefly in the 2019 Annual Report): **Letters from Chefoo - Constance Douthwaite's Life in China 1887-1896**

"Letters from the past open a window into another world. I felt this extraordinary immediacy as I first read the letters that my great grandmother, Constance Groves, wrote home from China, throughout the ten years that she spent there. She arrived in China in 1887 aged nineteen, as a junior member of the China Inland Mission. She went to Chefoo on the coast of Shandong Province in northern China, where the CIM ran a busy hospital for the Chinese population and a thriving school for the children of their own missionaries in China. I was drawn into this world, and the result of six happy years of research is the book that I published last year, which tells Constance's story through her letters, illustrated with many family photos and images of late nineteenth century China.

Every week Constance wrote home to her loving but eccentric Brethren family in Bristol. Her letters create vivid pictures of China in a period of great turbulence and change, of daily life in the CIM compound, of colleagues who became close friends, of the many visitors who arrived each summer, and of the school which was at the centre of the CIM community in Chefoo. As social history the letters reveal fascinating details of food, clothing, childcare, travel and celebrations such as Christmas. In a wider context they illustrate the slow but steady progress of evangelisation in China, pioneered as much by Chinese pastors and their congregations, as by western missionaries. In parallel to events in China, the letters follow the shifting fortunes of Constance's family and Brethren community in Bristol.



At first Constance struggled to settle into the strange and sometimes hostile world of rural China, but after two years, convinced she had found her vocation, she went home to Bristol to break off an ill-advised engagement. In 1890 she returned to China to marry the man with whom she had fallen in love, Arthur Douthwaite MD, a medical missionary and head of the Chefoo mission, and to whom she was devoted.

The Douthwaites survived the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 – 1895, in which Arthur Douthwaite distinguished himself by his care of the Chinese wounded. The letters show Constance, always a perceptive observer of people and events, mature from a devout but naive young girl, to a capable mother, teacher and administrator. They also show, with great honesty, the heavy toll, physical and emotional, that China took on women like Constance, whose life was cut short when she died in 1896 after the birth of her fourth child.”

Published by Little Knoll Press. Available from [www.littleknollpress.com](http://www.littleknollpress.com), from booksellers and from Amazon (ISBN: 978-1-9164846-0-3), price £20.00. Limited number of copies available from the author [sheilammclure@gmail.com](mailto:sheilammclure@gmail.com) price £17.00.

.....

## **Postscript – themes and tensions as FCC looks to the future**

### **Black lives matter**

In 2020, we in the West have learned that ‘Black Lives Matter’ (BLM). Within the British Isles, this movement has made us reflect on our past, and the various times at which British people did not regard black people with the appropriate honour, welcome and dignity.

Two thoughts arise from this in relation to the relationship between Britain and China:

- 1) Using the lens of BLM, it is easier for British Christians to look back with sympathetic understanding on the way Chinese people were exploited by Britain through the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Opium trade. This abuse was reinforced by the use of British military power. The resulting trade was productive for Britain, but unjust and degrading for China. To the extent that this abuse of power also gave access by British missionary personnel to China is therefore a cause of some embarrassment.
- 2) That said, many of these same people entering China from overseas gave themselves in sacrificial lives of service. And they made it their priority in many cases to hand over the Gospel to local ownership and leadership – in similar ways that the first evangelists did in Britain.

So British and Christian history in relation to China is a mixed story – shame and glory stand side by side. So, in our relationships with the church in, and the people of, China, we will listen carefully when we are challenged about what ‘we’ did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Likewise we will be attentive when our Chinese friends express their anger at what they perceive ‘the west’ is doing now. But as we work through these uncomfortable encounters, with their uncomfortable memories, FCC members can also work hard at developing the kind of mature and mutual relationships with the Chinese church that, thank God, is now possible ... a mature and mutual relationship that is also the explicit aim of the Chinese churches themselves. And within the security and privacy of such a relationship, some of life’s greater challenges can, perhaps, be identified and explored. As one commentator urges, British people are used to a ‘name and shame’ culture whereas China (and much of East Asia) is used to dealing with issues more relationally, more privately – thereby helping friends to save face, but also to grow in mutual understanding.

### **The ambition for a Zero carbon world**

Environmental concern is shared by many people in today’s global village. FCC has taken one step forward in 2020 by supporting the Yunnan Waste Management project this year.



But we also gladly and gratefully acknowledge the stated ambition of China's leader, Xi Jinping (on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2020) of working through 'peak carbon' in 2030 towards carbon neutrality by 2060. Such an announcement is something we can gladly support, with the hope that East and West (politically, and as churches) can thereby find some common ground for the future in undertaking what we might call 'care for creation'.

Friendship and air travel? But international friendships, while they can be sustained at a distance, are made and developed face to face. To that end, it is to be hoped that overseas travel becomes possible again soon. The problem is that such travel is just what we are trying to limit if we are serious about carbon neutrality.

.....

### **Appendix:**

FCC was set up to 'advance religion in Britain and Ireland by providing a means of friendship, information, mutual encouragement and understanding between Christians in Britain and Ireland, and Catholic as well as Protestant Christians in the PR China.'

To achieve those objects, FCC will

- maintain a prayer fellowship with China;
- arrange two way visits to / from China;
- encourage churches in the British Isles to develop their interest in China.

By consulting the Annual Reports for 2018 and 2019, a common pattern can be discerned whereby FCC undertook community projects, developed the English language through the Summer English Programme (SEP), supported Theological education by mutual visits, and sustained & developed relationships (old and new) through face to face meeting – thereby also keeping abreast with the changing situation for the church in China.

In 2020 Covid-19 has curtailed travel, and meant that other planned programmes were cancelled. Also (and for a number of reasons) the long-running and valuable SEP came to a natural end in its current format. Nonetheless, the current report indicates where the volunteer nature of FCC has allowed members to respond flexibly to changed circumstances – including an attempt to recapture an earlier connection with and understanding of the Roman Catholic churches in China.

The attached 'Prayer Calendar 2020-2021' is commended to all members for our use, while we await the opportunities for renewed face to face / in-person meeting with our Chinese friends.

If as members you have your own links with longstanding Chinese friends, the committee would be glad to know their news.