
Christian Publications in China

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Christian books are currently being produced in China by three types of publishers: (1) the China Christian Council, (2) seminaries and provincial Christian councils, and (3) non-Christian publishers, such as university or secular presses and the Religion and Culture Press of the government State Administration of Religious Affairs.¹ A summary of this publishing effort, much of which is unknown in the West, may yield useful insights into the needs and interests of the church in China today.

China Christian Council

Between 1979 and 2001 the China Christian Council (CCC) published 104 books on subjects of interest to Christians, including devotionals (33 titles), Bible commentaries (24), histories of the church in China (16), Christian themes treated by the fine arts (14), and books on theology (10) and church ministry (7). In addition, the CCC has also published audio and video products.²

Of the 104 titles, 28 are Christian works by authors outside of China. Some of them are Chinese translations of Christian classics, and some are authored by overseas Chinese Christians. Among them are such time-honored Christian classics as *Streams in the Desert* by Lettie B. Cowman, *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, and *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. Two of them are works by Seventh-day Adventist Ellen G. White. The majority of these 28 titles are by evangelicals, especially overseas Chinese evangelicals. The best-selling authors on the CCC publication list include Zhou Lian-Hua, former senior pastor of Grace Church in Taiwan, Kou Shi-Yuan of Family of Christ, and Zheng Guo-Zhi of Campus Crusade. The Chinese translation of Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church* and a few titles of John Stott's *Bible Study Series* have also been well received by Chris-

tians in China. Some CCC-published books are reprints of works by Chinese fundamentalist authors in the 1930s and 1940s, including Jia Yu-Ming's eight-volume *Essentials of the Bible* (*Sheng Jing Yao Yi*), a Bible exegesis series with a strong commitment to dispensationalism and a typological methodology.

The CCC is the only legal Bible publishing agency in China. Between 1981 and 2001 the CCC, through Amity Press in Nanjing, published over 28 million copies of the Bible. Efforts have been made to produce a variety of Bible editions and Bible study reference works, including the dispensational Scofield Reference Bible and, starting in 1991, the Chinese Study Bible (by Rock House Publishers), the most popular footnoted Bible among overseas Chinese Christians. In addition, the CCC has also published the Chinese Chain-Reference Study Bible (by the China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong), Today's Chinese Bible, the Chinese translation of the *New Bible Commentary* (by IVPress), and the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* (by Christian Communications Limited in Hong Kong). The Chinese Bible with leather cover and zipper is marketed as a gift edition, and English-Chinese Bibles are published for the educated, especially college students and young English-literate professionals. These various editions illustrate the commitment of the CCC to reach specific target groups.

CCC publications about the history of the church in China have dealt with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. These books, especially the more recent, feature testimonials about Christian contributions to the general society, as well as theological discussion of the relationship between Christianity and society.

Seminaries and Provincial Christian Councils

Up to 1998 Chinese seminaries and the Christian councils of several provinces have published a total of 133 titles. Nanjing Seminary, which during this period published 55 titles, is inter-

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ested in works that are more academic, primarily textbooks for seminarians, church workers, and students in their correspondence program. *Nanjing Theological Review*, published semiannually, is the most scholarly theological academic journal published in China. Yanjing Seminary in Beijing has published a total of 10 titles, mostly academic works.

Provinces with the greatest numbers of Christians have been the ones whose Christian councils have published Christian works, specifically, the Christian councils of Jiangsu (44 titles), Zhejiang (13), Fujian (6), Jiangxi (3), and Shanghai (2). Most of these publications are devotionals or books of sermons, including some by authors outside of China. For example, the Jiangxi Christian Council published Billy Graham's *Peace with God*.

Non-Christian Publishers

The Chinese government State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) has compiled a list of all books on Christianity published by non-Christian publishers in China from 1978 to 2002. The list contains 382 titles, either authored by scholars and researchers from secular universities or research institutions, or translated directly from Western classics. The publishers include China Commercial Press, Sanlian Press, Dongfang, and other secular Chinese publishing agencies. SARA is also active in publishing books on Christianity under Religion and Culture Press, its own imprint. Its titles include Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. Though these titles are mainly scholarly works, we find evangelical classics such as Cowman's *Streams in the Desert* and James Reid's *Facing Life with Christ*. It is noteworthy that *Streams in the Desert* was published by both CCC and secular publishers, which indicates its broad appeal in China.

In 1999 secular presses published 33 books on Christianity in China; 48 were published in 2000, and 37 in 2001. The volume of publications on Christianity indicates continuing strong interest in Christianity as a topic for discussion within academic circles in China.³

Concluding Observations

In roughly the last two decades, then, we see that over 600 titles were published in China on the subject of Christianity. Furthermore, we can say that overseas input to Chinese publications on Christianity is possible, not only for the CCC and its publication agencies but also for secular scholars and researchers.

Publishers in Hong Kong and the United States (e.g., David

C. Cook) are working in cooperation with the church in China to produce more Christian books.

The market in China for Christian books is strong. Most publishers we spoke with have said that Christian publication is a lucrative business in China. The demand is so great that secular publishers have been enthusiastically entering the market. Whereas the CCC sells its products at cost, secular publishers charge three or more times the price for comparable books. In Hong Kong, the center of Christian publications in Chinese, a print run of 5,000 copies is considered successful. In China, 20,000 copies is the minimum number needed to go to press.

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Most Christian publications in China sell over 100,000 copies, and many titles sell well beyond that figure. The best seller is always the Bible. In the year 2002 alone, 2 million copies were printed and distributed.

Some Christian topics are poorly covered in Chinese publications. For example, there is a lack of publications on topics of practical theology such as counseling. There are still not enough books to meet the practical needs of the believers.

Overall, the theology of Chinese Christian literature leans toward fundamentalism, reflecting the missionary influence of the 1930s. The majority of books published for the church in China are conservative, which reflects the market. Many books published sixty years ago are still best-sellers.

Although there has been much discussion about theological construction in China recently, little has been published on this subject except some articles in periodicals.

We praise the Lord for the hunger for Christian literature evidenced in China today and for the publications being made available in China. We are grateful that the church in China is moving ahead to meet the challenge. And we are glad for the level of cooperation with authors and presses outside China, which enhances the mix of Christian subjects and titles available to the Chinese reading public.

Notes

1. Used by permission of Christianity in China, copyright 2002.
2. The CCC is an independent national organization of Chinese Christians for church affairs that is recognized by the government. It is neither a church council in the usual sense nor a national church. The CCC views itself as an umbrella organization serving all Protestant Christians in China. According to its constitution its purpose is to unite Christians in China and to help churches to develop their ministries (1) in conformity to the teachings of the

- Bible, the Three-Self principle, and patriotism, (2) in accord with the rules and regulations of China's churches, and (3) in accord with China's laws.
3. Titles of Christian interest published by the three types of publishers discussed above may be found at www.christianityinchina.org. Under Archives, select China Contours. At bottom of page, click on Newsletter Articles Table of Contents. Then select Christian Publications in China, by Wing Pang.

