



Study Journal in Hong Kong -- The Experiences of a Mainland Seminary Student in the Last 4 Years

@ Compiled by Yin Qing

Foreword

Earlier, during CCL's quarterly prayer meeting for ministries in China, I had an opportunity to meet a seminary student from mainland who has been in Hong Kong for the last 4 years. He shared his learning and internship experiences in Hong Kong with me. He started out by talking about facing language barriers, and the common phenomenon of low self-esteem among mainland students, then he moved on to talk about the internship opportunities afforded by Hong Kong churches, and the situation of mainland graduates returning to serve in church.

Pastor Zhao is from East China. Time flies, and this year will be the last year of his Master of Divinity degree course at a seminary in Hong Kong. While studying in Hong Kong, he experienced difficulties, but he has also learned things that he couldn't learn in the mainland.

Learning in Hong Kong: Difficulties, Opportunities!

1. Guessing the Content in Different Languages?

As a member of the post-90s generation, Pastor Zhao is young. And while being young is an advantage in learning languages, he still had to go through an accommodation period. "With Cantonese and Traditional Chinese characters, I can always guess and get the meaning. However, English is not easy. Many reference books are in English. These resources are precious and can't be missed. My desire is to understand the content of the

books. In mainland seminaries, the libraries keep a limited amount of theological and hermeneutical books. You seldom see such a wide variety of information. Studying in Hong Kong has really widened my theological horizons,” he explained.

“Actually, many of my classmates have already been pasturing churches in the mainland for many years. Owing to their older age, or because they come from the Central or Northern parts of China, they feel so frustrated because of the language barriers. Sometimes they cannot even understand what is being taught in class. But since it is a very rare opportunity for them to be able to study in Hong Kong, everyone treasure it. Through this learning experience, they could store up the resources they need in pasturing for the next couple of decades. Thus, our classmates help each other, and prepare Chinese study notes for those classmates who have lower levels of English,” he continued.

Pastor Zhao said that although language barriers were an obstacle, the atmosphere of discussion in seminaries and the exchanges with churches were rare learning opportunities. We understand that it is difficult to compare the theological resources between Hong Kong and the mainland, but hearing Pastor Zhao talk about the shortage of theological reference books confirmed the importance of supplying these literature resources to mainland workers.

2. Hong Kong is Dangerous?

“My mother once asked me, is it dangerous in Hong Kong, especially in Sheung Shui?” Media in the mainland often report that Hong Kong people do not like mainlanders, for example, the “Liberation movement” (光復行動).

Some students were

therefore afraid to go outside of the area of their dormitories when they first came to Hong Kong. Over time, they became afraid to speak out in public areas. They kept their heads down, as though they were inferior to local people. This was also because some were afraid of being discovered as mainlanders which may lead to discrimination.



CCL's quarterly prayer meeting for ministries in China (September)

Pastor Zhao joked that he was bold enough so that, even though he could not speak perfect Cantonese, he still talked to Hong Kong people and joined many different gatherings. As his classmates saw that he went out a lot, they also learned about Hong Kong and how safe it

actually is, from what he told them. What happened to him reminded us that, oftentimes, what happens in Hong Kong is seen as negative in the mainland (and vice versa). The truth is, what we can do is to respect and treat mainland visitors well. I believe that it will improve the impression we give to others step by step.

3. Will the Church Give an Internship Opportunity to Me?

This group of mainland students have one wish — to find internship opportunities at a Hong Kong church to gain practical pastoral experience. It is only through entering a church that what they learned from teachers in seminaries becomes “down to earth”. They can learn holistically about church management, small group ministry, division of teamwork, and more. This reinforces what they learned so that, after graduating and returning to the mainland, they will have greater confidence that what they learned can be put into practice. However,



even though the seminaries tried hard to connect with Hong Kong churches, the number of churches willing to offer an internship opportunity to mainland students is very small indeed.

Pastor Zhao said that he was very thankful that he could find a Hong Kong church that was willing to accept him as an intern. During his internship, not only did he gain a better understanding of pasturing believers and church management, he also gained many experiences, “I say to my classmates, the brothers and sisters in Hong Kong churches are very passionate. They care a lot about the needs of mainland churches. We had a wonderful bonding!”

His excited smile turned very serene. He said, “There are cultural and language differences between the mainland students and Hong Kong churches. When we serve as an intern at a church, it may bring some troubles as well, but can Hong Kong churches take this step to express willingness to the seminaries that they are willing to offer internship opportunities to mainland students? These opportunities will have a positive impact on our future pastoral service!”

Returning to the Mainland: Meeting Challenges!

1. Is Just Making a Living Enough?

In less than a year, Pastor Zhao is going to graduate and return to the mainland. His church is in East China, which is relatively wealthy. Its residents have a substantial wage, but this does not include pastors. Churches throughout the mainland, and not just in East China, have this notion that pastors must persevere through suffering. They cannot make too much money, just making a living is enough.

But Pastor Zhao forced a smile, “Where I live, the prices of goods are high. The prices at general chain stores and restaurants are comparable to those in Hong Kong. A pastor’s wage is simply not enough. When we get married and have children, when we are faced with expenses apart from meals, do we pray to God that He moves Hong Kong believers to give us more gifts when they come for short-term missions?”



After saying this, Pastor Zhao added quietly, “I used to be a teacher before I accepted my calling to receive theological training to prepare to be a full-time pastoral staff. I am waiting to graduate and return to the mainland, then I will get married. I am thankful to my fiancée, who is willing to accept this future life of financial lack.”

2. Adapt to Changes While Hoping in God’s Grace

“Serving God is not there... you must go to that prison, walk through the valley of tears; it is only through passing Marah that you can reach Elim.” When Pastor Zhao first came to Hong Kong, he heard some Christians singing the hymns in the *Canaan Hymnal* in Mandarin. The lyrics were touching, but what moved him even more was the idea that, with the changes in the mainland situation, the ever-shifting religious space and political considerations, not every church can be filled with Christians who can sing with all their hearts to praise God.

He understood that the church cannot and will not be detached from the environment in which it is situated. He hoped that church leaders would gain wisdom from the Lord to hold on to the Truth and adapt to new challenges. From his heart he said, “Don’t know what the future is like? I just know that I need to hope for God’s grace and adapt to changes!”

Conclusion

In the past, we often thought about “going” to the mainland to care for mainland churches and cultivate leaders. The truth is, many mainlanders have already “come” to Hong Kong. This allows more churches and believers to join in the ministry of nurturing and caring for them. Are Hong Kong churches willing to show “hospitality” to them? Can Hong Kong churches become platforms for equipping mainland seminary students?

Pastor Zhao’s homely sharing reminded us that we must pray for the seminary students who are finishing their training to return to serve churches in the mainland. We must pray for their financial and personal situations, their needs and challenges. Though we may not know what the future holds, we know that God is sovereign over everything!

Are You Willing to Take the Extra Step?

1. Pray for the mainland seminary students with regards to learning to adapt to the language, culture and lifestyle of Hong Kong.
2. Learn and understand more while you pray for the needs of the churches and church workers in China.

Books: the Silent Blessing!

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With God’s grace, we donated Christian literature to the libraries of six mainland seminaries and Provincial Bible schools in 2015. In 2016, we continued with our book-giving plan: “Pastoral Book Collections for Libraries of Mainland Seminaries”. In September, a supporter responded to our appeal and pledged to donate books for one seminary. In the latter half of the year, we started preparing Christian



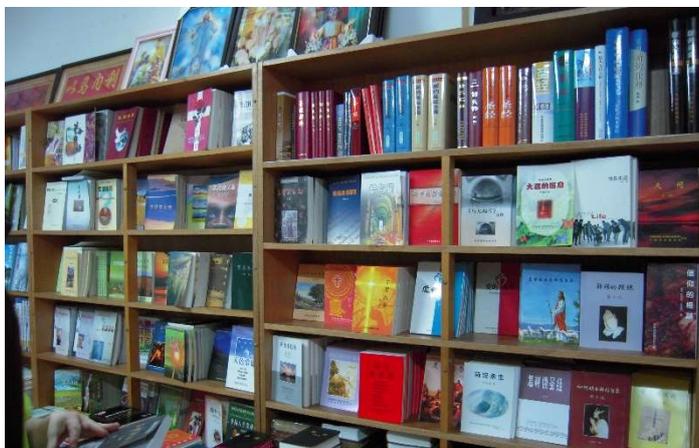
The empty bookshelves are waiting for us to fill!

literature for six other seminaries (in Southwest China, North China and South Central China), knowing that God will make His own provisions. The book-giving plan is scheduled for completion by the end of the year.

Knowing More About the Needs for Christian Literature

While working hard to raise funds, we also endeavor to gain an in-depth understanding of the needs for Christian literature among the seminaries. Here are some highlights:

Brother Zhou is a graduate of a Bible school in Southwest China and was called upon by God to become a pastor. He used to be the boss of a construction company with a handsome income. After he got off work each day, he would go somewhere to find excitement. However, he often felt more lost after he woke up the next morning. He later turned to Jesus and came



across the book *More Than A Carpenter*. The book enlightened him so such that he decided to seek God. His calling is to serve those businessmen with a similar background as him and help them find the true meaning of life. He will return to church to serve after graduation.

In cultivating future pastors, this Bible school plays an important role in pasturing believers in cities in Southwest China. The 30 or so graduates each year are trained not only in areas like sermon and church administration, but also in pastoral skills and Bible studies. Training materials on discipleship can help believers foster a healthy spiritual life. Are you willing to make an offering for giving books to this Bible school's library to support students like Brother Zhou?

Sister Liu is a graduate of a Bible training centre in East China this year. Earlier when she received the books donated to the graduates, she was moved to tears by the grace of God. She set herself the goal of reading the Bible three times in a year so that she can grow spiritually. Looking forward, she believes it is important to build her team through discipleship training and Bible studies. She aspires to serve the young generation with her team.

It will be best if more books can be acquired for the library in her training centre, in particular materials on discipleship or Bible studies. Through such materials, students can be better equipped to lead brothers and sisters in small groups to study the Bible.

There is another Bible school around the border in North China. The residents there are mainly the ethnic minorities. To maintain the area's stability, the government has put restrictions on the purchase of religious materials. The school is currently located at the suburban area, and lacks resources to move to the city. Its library has a collection of only a few thousand books. There are around 50 graduates each year and they will return to their hometown to serve after graduation.

Highlights of the Booklist

CCL plans to give 4,500 books, including more than 60 volumes in the category of "Theology and Bible Tools" with titles including *The Applied New Testament Commentary*, *The Bible-CGST Study Edition*, "Theology for the Church Series" including *The God of Extreme Mercy* and *God's Dwelling in the Marketplace*, and *The Living Word Curriculum Series* (15 volumes) and *3D Bible Study Series* (8 volumes).

In addition, there are more than 250 volumes in the category of "Spiritual Life and Church Ministry", including *Know Why You Believe*, *The WORD: A Homecoming Call*, *Church Conflicts: Socio-psychological and Pastoral Perspectives*, *Church Management Make Sense*, *Spiritual Leadership*, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose* and *The Call to Joy & Pain*, etc.



Please Join Us in Adding to the Book Collections

We believe that books in the "Theology and Bible Tools" category can help the seminary students set a solid theological foundation, while books in the "Spiritual Life and Church Ministry" category can assist students in renewing their spiritual life and learning about church management. In Hong Kong, the materials of Christian literature are plentiful, but such resources are scanty in mainland seminaries' libraries. Please pray for the needs of mainland seminary students: they need Christian literature. Let us join hands to help them!

A total of US\$54,000 is required for the 2016 book-giving plan: "Pastoral Book Collections for Libraries of Mainland Seminaries". We thank God for the 48% of that amount that we have already received from partner organizations and donors, but we are still short of US\$28,000. If you are touched to make an offering, please contact us for details, thank you.

Thank you for remembering, in the past few years, the needs of the several dozen mainland seminaries and their libraries. The book-giving plan this year has been expanded to cover graduates from basic level Bible training centres. Looking into 2017, we plan to help libraries of Bible training centres obtain more resources to respond to their keen demand! Please pray for us.

Prayers

1. Training for Mainland Seminary Students

In recent years, Hong Kong seminaries and Christian organizations have been offering continuous or intensive short courses for mainland pastors and seminary students, in order to enhance their theological knowledge. The next step will be the provision of a platform for mainland leaders to apply theological theories. May the Lord use Hong Kong churches as a platform for mainland leaders to learn and understand more about church management, small group ministry, division of teamwork, and the like.



2. The Succession of Literature Ministry



The experiences and insights of mainland Christians who grew up amidst difficulties after the Chinese Economic Reform are spiritual assets to mainland churches. These Christians are beginning to grow old so it is important to record their experiences in writing. However, gathering information and raising funds for publishing the materials are not easy. May the Lord guide the literature ministry so the

testimonies of the earlier generations of Christians can be kept and passed on as guidance for churches face a challenging environment.

3. Equipping Talents Through Christian Education

The second semester of CCL's Professional Diploma in Christian Education (Mandarin) course was completed at the end of October. It covered topics of educational theories, as well as communication and counselling. Thank the Lord for the participants having made it to Hong Kong for the course despite poor weather conditions, family obligations, heavy workload at their churches, and physical or emotional challenges. May the Lord help them practice what they learned and become trainers who can train others. May the Lord also open the door to further learning opportunities for them.



4. Being Cared for at an Old Age



Research by the China National Committee on Aging predicts that by 2020, there will be 42 million elderly people without the ability to look after themselves, and those aged above 80 will reach a total of 29 million. Old age, the loss of ability to self-management, empty nests, and living alone will mean rising demand for elderly services. China is not immune to the global problem of aging and most of the elderly

are living in rural areas. A huge wealth gap exists between urban and rural areas. Please pray for God's mercy for the elderly living in rural areas, that they will be looked after properly and live with dignity.

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