

Chinese Christian Communities in Germany

Gotthard Oblau

Numbers

Among Germany's population, one out of a thousand is a Chinese. With an overall population of roughly 82 million, there are approximately 80,000 registered nationals of the PRC plus almost 5,000 Taiwanese passport holders.¹ Including an additional 10,000 Chinese who were naturalized within the last decade,² plus an unknown number of ethnic Chinese from other countries like Vietnam, Malaysia, or Indonesia, one may reckon with over 100,000 Chinese migrants and immigrants in Germany. Not counted are undocumented immigrants whose numbers are unknown but who could most probably be found in the field of gastronomy.

One or even two per thousand is not a significant proportion, especially as the Chinese seem to be distributed rather evenly across the country. There are no Chinatowns in Germany. Only major universities are places of Chinese concentration, since more than a quarter of all Chinese in Germany are students in tertiary education. Among the foreign students who are registered at state-run German universities and were not raised in Germany, the number of PRC nationals alone stands at 23,140.³ With almost 13 % of

1 As of 31 Dec. 2009, Germany's population included 79,870 PRC nationals and 4,670 Taiwanese passport holders, according to the Federal Office of Statistics (Statistisches Bundesamt) in Wiesbaden.

2 Naturalization of PRC nationals, and Taiwanese passport holders in brackets (Federal Office of Statistics):
1,311 (83)
1,133 (97)
952 (63)
1,136 (58)
1,092 (55)
1,172 (54)
1,194 (36)

3 www.wissenschaft-weltoffen.de, as of 1 Jan. 2009.

(1) Total number of students registered at Germany's universities: 2,025,307

(2) Total number of foreign students not raised in Germany: 180,222 (= 8.9 % of line 1)

(3) Students from PRC and Taiwan not raised in Germany: 24,251 (= 13.46 % of line 2 / = 1.2 % of line 1)

(4) Numbers of university students from only PRC not raised in Germany:

1998	4,773
1999	5,054
2000	6,179
2001	8,745
2002	13,523
2003	19,374
2004	24,095

all foreign students, they are by far the strongest national group among those who enter Germany's universities from abroad.⁴ An interesting location of Chinese concentration is Erlangen, a small city of 105,000 in northern Bavaria, with about 300 Chinese students registered at Erlangen-Nürnberg University and scores of Chinese families whose breadwinners are employed by the Erlangen-based company Siemens.

Protestant Chinese Networking

During their stay in Germany, a significant number of the Chinese students in Germany are at one point or another exposed to Christian religion and some sort of church life. According to my own estimates based on a research project conducted in 2006,⁵ of the approx. 26,000 Chinese men and women studying at German universities,⁶ between 1,000 and 1,500 will be baptized before their return to China. The major Christian agents behind it are neither established German churches nor Christian student programmes targeting foreigners but Bible groups and Christian communities run by Chinese themselves. For most Chinese who become Christians in Germany, their conversions are the result not of a transcultural encounter but of an immersion into a kind of Chinese transit space within Germany.⁷

2005	25,987
2006	26,061
2007	25,651
2008	23,983
2009	23,140

- 4 Foreign students who completed their secondary schooling outside Germany and are now registered at German universities (private institutions not counted), according to country of origin, in absolute figures and in proportion to their total number:
- | | |
|----------|--------------------|
| PR China | 23,140 (= 12.84 %) |
| Russia | 9,740 (= 5.40 %) |
| Poland | 9,401 (= 5.22 %) |
| Bulgaria | 9,162 (= 5.08 %) |
| Turkey | 6,711 (= 3.72 %) |
| Ukraine | 6,324 (= 3.51 %) |
- 5 Gotthard Oblau, *Chinesische Studierende in Deutschland. Chancen christlicher Begegnung* (Chinese Students in Germany. Chances of Christian Encounters), published by EMW (Association of Churches and Missions in Germany) in cooperation with the China Information Desk, Hamburg, April 2006.
- 6 In addition to the 24,251 PRC and Taiwanese students registered at German universities, there are Chinese students enrolled in non-university language courses and in private universities. The private Essen-based "Fachhochschule für Organisation und Management (FOM)" alone currently has about 470 students from PRC.
- 7 As of late, first field research has been undertaken to describe and analyze this phenomenon. Dissertation projects are under way, e.g. by Shen Qilan on mission strategies of a Chinese Christian community in Leipzig and by Johanna Lüdde on conversions as coping strategies in a Chinese church in Germany [in the meantime Johannes Lüdde's dissertation has been published electronically at Leipzig University: Johanna Lüdde, "Die Funktionen der Konversion chinesischer Studierender in Deutschland zum Christentum (protestantischer Prägung) am Beispiel einer chinesischen christlichen Gemeinde in einer deutschen Großstadt," Dissertation, Leipzig: Universität Leipzig 2011]. Shen Qilan has documented, among others, the following conversion narrative which in many aspects is typical for the way in which young Chinese intellectuals become Christian believers today:
Miss F. is from an atheist family in China, her father a Communist Party member. While studying in Leipzig (Germany), she meets a Chinese Christian student who talks to her on a train and invites her to his Chinese church. Miss F. finds the worship service not particularly attractive but enjoys the contact with other Chinese students in this community. She visits a Bible study session in the home of the Chinese pastor. Though he and his teaching do not leave any significant impression on her, she treasures the Bible he gives to her as a welcome present. While she is advised to

On the Protestant side, Chinese Christianity in Germany displays a low degree of institutionalization. It can be seen as a movement with great fluidity and flexibility so typical for international students and young migrant families, who constitute the overwhelming majority of participants in these groups. Congregations, Bible study groups, or house churches may emerge and vanish as insular entities. Most of them, however, are part of loosely knit networks. So far, I have found three different such networks, including one large-scale and prominent evangelical network and two pentecostal denominations,⁸ plus a number of independent charismatic groups.⁹

The FMCD-centred Evangelical Network

The evangelical network deserves special attention, since I believe it to be a globally unique phenomenon.¹⁰ At present, it comprises local churches led by Chinese pastors in 12 major German cities, in addition to 65 Chinese Bible study groups spread over all of Germany. They all function in Chinese, some even bilingually in Mandarin and Cantonese. As an educated guess, their activities involve up to 2,000 Chinese Christians and seekers at any given time, most of whom are students or young academics.

The network is centred around a German-run association known under its initials “F.M.C.D.,” which stands for “Freunde der Mission unter Chinesen in Deutschland” (Friends for the Mission among Chinese in Germany). Its major undertaking is the running of a Chinese Christian mail-order library based in Hannover. With over 2,000 titles,

start her personal Bible studies with the Gospel of John, she reads the New Testament from the beginning instead, immersing herself in the Gospel of Matthew. Later, she recounts what happened to her during her private Bible reading: “After several times, I read Bible at home and read how Matthew wrote about not to worry about tomorrow. He said, take a look at the lilies in the wild land, how did they grow up. Because my English name is Lily, I felt this was said to me when I read this. I cried suddenly. I didn’t know why. I was so moved and cried very grieved. I decided to believe that night. – For me it was not that somebody preached to me, or I heard something and moved so I began to believe. I was totally touched by the Bible, and I decided to believe” [quoted from an unpublished manuscript by Shen Qilan]. For Miss F., the personality and teaching of the pastor is not decisive for her conversion. He is only instrumental in creating the space and opportunity for Miss F. to get hold of a Bible. Her personal turning event is directly caused by her individual encounter with the script of the Sermon on the Mount.

Miss F.’s conversion has consequences for her relationship with her family back in China. Her parents are divorced, and her father remarried when she was in Junior High School. From the start, Miss F. had rejected her stepmother. After her conversion, she writes a long letter from Leipzig to her father in China, asking him to forgive her hateful attitude toward his wife. Deeply moved, her father forgives her and sends copies of the letter out to all his relatives. Realizing that his daughter’s encounter with Christianity in Germany has restored her sense of traditional Confucian family values, he welcomes his daughter’s entry into this foreign religion.

- 8 The True Jesus Church, a Pentecostal denomination which originated in China in the 1920s, has developed into a global Chinese denomination, with three local churches in Germany (Hamburg, Heidelberg, Schwalmatal). Addresses are published under www.tjc.org.
- The Chinese Christian and Missionary Alliance Church has two churches in Germany (Berlin, Dortmund). It is linked to the Christian and Missionary Alliance, an originally interdenominational and intercultural alliance inspired by the Holiness Movement. The Alliance was founded by the Presbyterian pastor Albert Benjamin Simpson (USA) in 1887.
- 9 Such groups include the “Lord Glory Mission for the Chinese” in Hamburg with a branch in Frankfurt; the “Erlangen Great Commission Chinese Christian Church”; a Chinese sub-group within the international “Zentrum Lebendiges Wort” (Centre of the Living Word) in Bonn; and a Chinese outreach programme of a Korean Assemblies-of-God-inspired church in Duisburg (Gotthard Oblau, *Chinesische Studierende in Deutschland*, pp. 137-167).
- 10 A detailed report and analysis in Gotthard Oblau, *Chinesische Studierende in Deutschland*, pp. 80-96.

it is the biggest Chinese lending library outside Asia. Books, which apart from Bibles and Bible commentaries include a great variety of spiritual, apologetic, and counselling literature focussing on Christian faith, family life, career, sciences, and the like, are purchased from Christian publishing houses in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, USA, and increasingly also from mainland China. With a data base of over 5,000 clients, the library lends out more than 3,000 books per annum.

There are several factors which may be instrumental for the success of the F.M.C.D. and its network:

1. A Network with an Inculturated Structure

The institutional part of the structure, the F.M.C.D. at its centre, is deliberately kept very lean and is no more than a supporting tool for a loose network involving a multitude of volunteers and professionals who are not part of a hierarchy or institutional control system. A sense of community, which shapes Chinese social life in so many ways, is here nurtured by a Christian belief in brother and sisterhood, leading to mutual trust and the feeling of spiritual belonging.

2. A Network with an Inculturated Mission

The library represents an inculturated mission to Chinese intellectuals. It is through literature that Chinese scholars allow their minds to be shaped, and it is Chinese literature that helps Chinese readers to feel at home in a foreign land.

3. A Network with a Face

The founder of the association and the driving force behind the entire network for its first 30 years was a German Lutheran pastor with strong leadership qualities, 12 years of experience as a missionary in Taiwan, and easy fluency in Mandarin Chinese. With his sense of calling and boundless commitment, Rev. Siegfried Glaw gave the work a face and inspired countless volunteers. As a non-Chinese, he was an ideal mediator bridging the Chinese frictions and divisions of which he was not a part. As a proven friend of China and elderly pastor, he was accepted by the Chinese as father figure, leader, counsellor, and adviser.

4. A Network Following Chance and Opportunity

The network was never really planned or conceptualized. It simply emerged and grew by responding to demands and by seizing opportunities. When Rev. Glaw and his family happened to be on furlough from Taiwan in 1978, he was asked by local city officials to help with the care for newly arrived ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam. As a result, a diaconical support network and a number of Chinese Bible groups were in place when shortly afterwards China started to send scholars and students to Germany under its new policy of opening and reform. Almost like a company, the network has adapted flexibly to changes and new challenges, avoiding red tape and cumbersome institutional processes.

5. A Network with Unbureaucratic and Faithful Financial Support

Financially, the work has been possible through the faithful and life-long employment of Rev. Glaw by the German branch of the China Inland Mission (ÜMG), which showed vision and courage when it redirected his assignment from a territorial overseas mission to an ethnic ministry within Germany. Additional funding has come from a wide support network of private donors.

6. A Focussed Global Network

The network is of a distinctly focussed nature, concentrating on the dissemination of Bibles and Biblical knowledge, the enhancement of Christian dialogue and evangelism, and the establishment of Christian communities. At the same time it operates globally within the international Chinese Christian diaspora, making use of international contacts for the collecting of Christian literature and the recruiting of speakers for its conferences and pastors for its churches.

Catholic Programmes

Programmes of a Catholic background include Chinese congregations in München and St. Augustin under local diocesan administration, annual Chinese-German student conferences organized by the China-Zentrum St. Augustin and local cross-cultural activities run by the Adam Schall Society in Aachen and Cologne. Though limited in scope, these programmes represent an important and interesting contrast to what the F.M.C.D. and its network stand for.

While the F.M.C.D. emphasizes evangelism and its related communities reach out to the non-Christians among the Chinese, the Catholic Christian congregations primarily serve the needs of those who are already Christians. While F.M.C.D.-inspired activities result in the establishment of almost purely Chinese communities, thereby creating a Chinese culture in exile, Catholic programmes expose Chinese students and immigrants to the culture of their host country and help Germans relate to Chinese people living in their midst, thereby promoting a genuine cross-cultural dialogue. As such, Catholic initiatives represent an implicit Christian spirit or address Christian religion as part of an encompassing European culture, whereas evangelical programmes tend to limit themselves to matters of worship, Bible, and doctrine.

More should be done. With strengths combined and resources put to work, more could be achieved. The presence of the future elite of China in today's Europe is a great challenge and a unique opportunity to work for world peace and foster the harmony of a global humanity in its process of growing together.