

Volume 1, Issue 2 (December 2024)
ISSN 3049-9704

Journal of Religion

and Public Life



OCRPL
Oxford Centre for
Religion and Public Life



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Forging New Directions for Theological Education in China: The Vision and Mission

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Abstract: I examine the formation and division of the Chinese Protestant church in mainland China from a historical perspective to illustrate the unbalanced status of theological education unfolding in the Chinese house church and the Three-Self church. I articulate how this prophetic vision and action has forged a new direction, restoring balance to theological education so that on its own terms, the house church could be empowered and strengthened to transform itself, the local community, and the broader society. My hope is that through this reflection, Christians from the Global South—Chinese Christians in particular—will come to recognize the significant role of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life.

Keywords: Theological Education, Protestant Chinese House Church, Protestant Three-Self Church, Chinese Context, OCRPL, Shepherds Academy

Introduction

The more I have become involved in the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life (OCRPL), the more deeply I have come to appreciate the profound vision and mission which this organization offers theological education at various levels for church leaders across the Global South. This appreciation derives from my personal journey and understanding of the importance of equipping church leaders to work effectively. In this article, I draw from the historical context to highlight the present plight of the Chinese Protestant house church—particularly the lack of leadership properly equipped to shepherd church members and defend them from heresy.² With the rapid development of Christianity in China over the past few decades, this shortage of trained Christian leaders has grown more severe.³ This especially applies to the house church, which has embraced anti-intellectualism and has rejected theological training programmes offered through the official seminaries.

The house church uses anti-intellectualism as a protection strategy against the rational and scientific teachings of the Bible. Considering Chinese protestant church history, today's house church is a prototype of early Chinese independent churches like the Little Flock and the True Jesus Church. It is a stronghold of fundamentals in

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terms of theology and faith practice that sought to dismantle early Western missionary control in China missions and, later, the Chinese government's regulation of ecclesial matters. The house church holds a higher view of scripture being the authoritative Word of God, believing the miracles depicted in the Bible; and it has disregarded institutional training programmes since they began. In its view, early Western missionaries tended to adapt traditional Christian beliefs to a modern intellectual context to emphasize the significance of reason and experience over biblical and doctrinal authority. From the house church perspective, Western theological training breeds disbelief and skepticism, turning people away from a stronger, biblically oriented faith.

Consider the case of John Sung's (宋尚节) and Wang Mingdao's (王明道) interactions with Western Christians. Sung miraculously experienced a baptism of the Holy Spirit and started to preach the gospel fervently to his peers and in lectures when he was a seminarian at Union Theological Seminary (UTS) in New York. However, his passion for evangelization was perceived as a loss of his mental faculties, and the seminary authorities thus confined him at Bloomingdale Hospital as a psychotic.⁴ Likewise, Wang believed in a biblical indication that baptism was by immersion and insisted on conducting immersion baptism even though he himself was baptized by sprinkling. This caused the Presbyterian Mission School in Baoding that Wang worked for to dismiss him and withdraw an offer to sponsor his theological study in London.⁵ The cases of these influential Chinese leaders contribute to Chinese Christian conservatives' inclination toward personal or communal Bible study and their refusal to receive institutional theological training.

The historical fundamentalist-modernist dispute plays a vital role in the rejection of theological training programmes offered through official seminaries in mainland China. When the People's Republic of China was established, the government appointed the prominent Chinese liberal theologian, Wu Yaozong, to form the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) with the goal of uniting Chinese churches to ensure a new nation and eliminate foreign influence. But Wang Mingdao disagreed with Wu's liberal biblical-theological position—shaped by Social Gospel at UTS—and publicly labeled Wu an unbeliever. Wang therefore refused to affiliate with the TSPM under Wu's leadership.⁶ The disagreement between Wu and Wang resulted in a split, where the Three-Self church became recognized for its liberal Biblical views

⁴ Song Tianzhen (宋天真) ed., *The Journal Once Lost* (失而复得的日记) Beijing: Tuanjie Press, 2011 (北京: 团结出版社, 2011), 34-43.

⁵ Wang Mingdao and Ying Fuk-tsang (王明道与邢福增), *Wang Mingdao's Last Words* (王明道的最后告白) Logos Ministries Ltd., 2013 (香港: 基道出版社, 2013), 132.

⁶ Wallace C. Merwin and Francis P. Jones, comps., *Documents of the Three-Self Movement* (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 1963), 99-114.

while the house church staunchly stood by its fundamentalist understandings. To this day, the two types of churches have operated separately and are facing a widening schism. Consequently, the majority of house churches seek no reconciliation with the Three-Self church and repudiate any theological programmes offered through TSPM-dominated seminaries.

Filling the Gap: Shaping Grassroots and Elite Theological Education

Historical trauma leading to repudiation of institutional training has left house church leadership in a vulnerable position. Before the 1990s, the impact of the first two generations of leadership resonated with their congregations because of their enigmatic influence and charisma in keeping everyone aligned with their faith. However, the younger generations of leadership lacked the same kind of influence even though they inherited the same ideas and more traditional practices. Compounding that challenge is the ever-evolving Chinese ecclesiastical landscape, which now includes congregation members of various types such as Generation Z and overseas returnees. While these congregants publicly declare their Christian faith, they are embedded in a rugged individualist mentality and have succumbed to secularization. Preaching the gospel to and mentoring such congregants is tremendously challenging for church leaders, who are often ill-equipped to provide guidance. The recent COVID-19 pandemic accompanied by the demand for pastoral care has further exacerbated the issue.

In coping with these challenges, some leaders had the foresight to seek basic biblical training from Radio Liangyou (良友电台),⁷ while a few even traveled to Southeast Asia or Hong Kong for residential theological study (myself included). Despite these opportunities, the limited resources failed to address the substantial need facing a variety of churches across urban and rural areas. Considering the limitations of these overseas theological programmes per se, they are designed for cultivating local Christians in their contexts and are not positioned to serve the same purpose for those from other ecclesiastical contexts. In addition, three other factors looming large for student access include high tuition fees, competitive admission entry, and language barriers. For example, most seminaries in Hong Kong require applicants to have either a TOEFL or International English Language Testing System score and a secular bachelor's degree for admission. However, most programmes are conducted in

⁷ Wu Jianli (吴剑丽), *Before the Bamboo Curtain was Raised: A Study of Letters from Mainland Audiences of Liangyou Radio, 1959-1983* (大门重开前后的中国教会：良友电台内地听众信件研究（1959-1983） Taiwan: Chinese Christian Literature Council and Research Center for Chinese Christianity of Chung Yuan Christian University, 2022 (台湾：台湾基督教文艺出版社与中原大学基督教与华人文化社会研究中心), 2022.

Cantonese rather than English (note that Mandarin and Cantonese are totally distinct spoken and written languages). These barriers have locked out potential Mandarin-speaking seminarians, successful grassroots leaders in particular, from theological education.

Stepping up to the challenge, the OCRPL and its undergraduate department, The Shepherd's Academy (TSA), have contributed a massive improvement in accessibility and quality of training for Christians of the Global South. Although these educational institutions work together, they serve different roles to offer various levels of focused programs. As the work of both OCRPL and TSA covers a variety of global churches, I highlight their unique contributions to the Chinese church in this article. The uniqueness of the OCRPL and TSA originates from the vision of Prof. Sookhdeo; being an experienced and prophetic Christian priest, he has perceived the importance of theological education as an indispensable element of the Christian mission. This vision and revolution grew out of his two-fold experience with ministry and academia. From ministerial experiences, in 1993 Prof. Sookhdeo and his wife, Rosemary, founded Barnabas Aid to give aid and practical support to persecuted and suffering Christians across the majority world, the Global South in particular. Through numerous travels to underprivileged Christian communities they saw that Christianity is young, Christians exist as a minority in the midst of other majority religions in many non-Western countries, and many new Christians find themselves in church leadership positions as soon as six months after their own salvation experience.⁸ These insightful observations resonate with my personal experience, as I come from precisely the same context. Turning observation to action, Barnabas Aid funds TSA to facilitate basic training through a bachelor's programme for these fledgling shepherds.

TSA's approach is based on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as presented in the Gospels. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-18) who leads, provides, cares, protects, multiplies, trains, and understands His sheep.⁹ The pedagogical philosophy accordingly conveys the seven characteristics of the Good Shepherd, ensuring church leaders and disciples of Jesus follow His example and become faithful shepherds of the church. Apart from pastoral formation, the programme also encourages engagement in the local mission context to shape missional leadership. In sum, the biblical basis for such theological education intends to provide a balance to academic theological work for students, which inhibits those who perhaps lack formal academic training from accessing the TSA program. In contrast with other existing

⁸ Patrick Prof. Sookhdeo, "A Note from the Executive Director of Oxford Center for Religion and Public Life," in *The Shepherd's Academy Handbook for Collaborators 2021-2022*, 4.

⁹ Prospectus for The Shepherd's Academy.

institutions, TSA's work is distinguished by six major programmatic merits: affordability, accessibility, applicability, credibility, availability, and flexibility.

For affordability, each credit costs US\$7, and each level of the programme is 40 credits (US\$280) without any accreditation fees; this reduced cost allows more believers to access theological training. For accessibility, TSA operates programmes via an online learning management system while utilizing discussion forums, video chat, or other forms of teacher-student interaction as a vehicle for spiritual, ministerial, and theological reflection. For applicability, TSA employs biblical applied knowledge to interact with each cultural and socio-political context, as well as respond to local and global issues. TSA is accredited by the European Council for Theological Education and recognized by seminary counterparts across the world. To improve availability by bridging language barriers, course content is written in English and then translated to the students' native languages so they are able to engage fully with the material. Finally, for flexibility, TSA allows learners to progress at their own pace, moving from achieving credits for a Certificate in Ministry to a Diploma to, ultimately, a Bachelor's degree. Prospective students who are undecided about fully committing to the programme or who only want to take stand-alone coursework are welcome to take courses to get a taste of the theological instruction offered by the programme. Overall, this bachelor's programme aims to shape learners' personal and ministerial formation toward the image of Jesus Christ, a path widely welcomed and recognised by Chinese Christians. Robust enrolment proves this to be so—the programme is not formally advertised, but instead is known through various theological networks.

Prof. Sookhdeo's academic experience includes serving as British Director of the Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity and founder and chair of the Westminster Institute in Washington, D.C.. Over the years, he has witnessed the voicelessness and powerlessness of the Christian minority from within a diverse, multifaith society. Prof. Sookhdeo channels his deep concern for their dignity and religious freedom into his teaching practice to "advance a global understanding of religion in public life and to educate people through degrees at all levels for contextual Christian ministry and service."¹⁰ His answer to this need was developing further the already existing work of OCRPL to uplift underprivileged Christians across the Global South. Current degree programmes integrate rigorous academic study with students' real-world experiences, priming them to confront challenges in the workplace, communities, and broader society.

¹⁰ Chris Sugden, *An Introduction to the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life*.

In the Chinese context, Christians are a religious minority group existing within a multireligious society, according to the Pew Research Center.¹¹ Their status places them in a difficult position for connecting Christian faith to the workplace, wherein they witness God’s mission and ministry manifesting in such a critical place while they stay passionate about sharing the gospel and bringing Christian values to work. The OCRPL graduate programmes fit perfectly into that context and encourage Chinese Christian professionals to dive into this new topic. The term, “professional”, here refers to those who have acquired solid knowledge and special skills in a particular field. These professionals desperately desire well-trained pastors of a similar background in order to forge meaningful connections and conversations within congregations situated in Chinese metropolitan areas. Responding to this calling, one brilliant Chinese doctoral candidate in the OCRPL programme has taken up this mission. This female student is a senior urban church leader and professional, working for a German company in China. Serving more than 600 Christian professionals always reminds her that the workplace is a critical sphere of life in which both ministry and pastoral care should take place. Her study provides a means of not only equipping herself, but also leveraging her knowledge of linking scholarly skills with vocation to nurture more like-minded congregations and sharpen their ministerial skills.

Aside from the merits of the OCRPL and TSA programme, their success equally hinges on effectively delivering the curricula to Chinese students. To overcome the most important linguistic obstacles, a Chinese department was established at the OCRPL, ensuring that Chinese Christians could get a quality education at any level. Due to the extra cost and effort involved, this approach is rare in Western institutions, which require non-English-speaking prospective students to pass a foreign language exam before applying. Two key concerns drive the attempt to achieve authentically contextual theological training through breaking the language barrier. First, the programmes are designed as learner-centered curricula (as opposed to subject-centered), in which students are active agents for constructing knowledge and actively participate in discussion—as such, the programmes would fail without language proficiency. Language and culture are also intricately intertwined, as language is used to maintain and convey culture, and culture is created and shaped through language. In other words, having materials and lectures in the learner’s mother tongue minimizes difficulty in theological studies. Students and teachers who speak the same language and carry a shared culture can comfortably engage in conversation in and outside class. My seminary experiences in Hong Kong were deeply affected by these two aspects, so I emphatically agree with the ways these barriers are being addressed. In my first semester, for example, I was struggling to learn Cantonese from scratch,

¹¹<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/08/30/christianity/#:~:text=Recent%20change%20in%20Christian%20measures> (accessed on October 10, 2023)

which was the language of instruction at the seminary, while also learning ancient Hebrew. The linguistic burden at the time was too much, and I had to drop out of the language programme in my second semester because of these tremendous challenges.

The second concern relates to the importance of faculty connection with their students, since it can be more difficult if they do not come from the same ecclesiastical background, which contributes to potential conflict in the learning environment. To address this, an interdisciplinary group of Chinese tutors has been assembled who bring scholarly focus from various areas of the theological curriculum. These tutors not only have advanced academic qualifications but also have ministry experience and even continue their pastoral ministry practice. With this faculty team makeup, students can experiment with their theological engagement with practice through curricula under the guidance of their teachers. In our current programme self-evaluation, we have found that students started developing integrative habits of “practice to theology to practice”, and in-class discussion, and they even go beyond the classroom to bring this practice to the church.

Significant Contributions: A New Theological Education Promoting Christianity True to the Chinese Context

In my view as a theological educator and practitioner from the Chinese setting, the freshly designated TSA and OCRPL programmes can make significant contributions to both the house church and the Three-Self church. These programmes may contribute to changing the churches' dual perceptions of the gospel and thus pave a holistic way—emphasizing both personal and social salvation—toward bringing spiritual life and transformative mission together into the family, community, and broader society. As noted earlier, the two different schools of theological forces influenced by Western missionaries and their theological education caused the split between the Three-Self and house churches. The division and theological positions still remain—many Three-Self churches maintain their liberal understanding of the gospel and God's mission to the world, thus inspiring most churchgoers to endorse the idea of bettering society and building a heavenly kingdom on earth. The current successor of Wu Yaozong and Bishop Ding Guangxun strives to carry out their theological legacy of building a prosperous China by cultivating Chinese people with Jesus's moral character.¹² In contrast, the majority of house church congregations still focus more on evangelization and being “born again”, but less so on the value of regenerating the community and

¹² Five-Year Planning Outline for Advancing the Sinification of Christianity (2018-2022). <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/outline-of-the-five-year-plan-for-promoting-the-sinification-of-christianity%E5%BC%882018-2022%E5%BC%89/> (accessed on October 10, 2023)

society—their conservative biblical views lead them to centre on the single goal of personal salvation and being ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ. This theological and practical dichotomy largely ignores God’s comprehensive salvation—the transformation of personal, communal, and socio-economic relationships—but holistic education offers a remedy that can reshape God’s disciples to participate in the fullness of the work of the triune God.

A Christian education is, by its nature, a continuous formation process in which Christians are confronted with and transformed by the gospel, and is both individual and social in nature.¹³ Most importantly, it is part of the way that the church engages with the individual, family, community, society, nation, economy, and religion to respond to the spiritual and social results of the gospel. With a holistic Christian education, a believer’s one-way thinking of their faith practice is constantly challenged. Although old habits are hard to break, taking part in the four-year TSA bachelor’s programme to learn with a fellow cohort of peers, discuss well-designed readings, listen to each other’s knotty questions, and offer constructive responses can reinforce a comprehensive understanding of Christian personal and social responsibility. Furthermore, a Christian education always extends beyond the classroom to family education, churchly catechetical training, and Sunday school as a critical part of nurturing young and adolescent Christian enterprises. This means both home and school become significant institutions for nurturing believers, and hence formally training both laity and clergy, as well as reshaping their holistic perspectives of evangelism and social action to impact this world, can prove fruitful.

This theological education can also contribute in another dimension: preparing Chinese Christians to engage critically in Sino-Christian theology (汉语神学运动 or “Sino-theology”) in Mainland China and Hong Kong. This type of theology emerged from a Chinese intellectual and cultural movement in the late 1980s and has sent many academic scholars diving into deeper conversations with traditional Chinese culture and articulating a reflective theology using the Chinese language.¹⁴ Many participants in the movement identified themselves as Christian scholars rather than Christian theologians or practitioners, and most were self-named “cultural Christians” who were not associated with the church—embodying an important cultural trend in contemporary China. With Sino-theology’s growing influence in academia and the public realm, a group of Churches raised a serious question of whether Sino-theology should be considered a theology because theology is broadly defined as the study of

¹³ Stephen O. Maitanmi, “Reflections on Christian Education,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, vol. 28, iss. 2 (2019): 91.

¹⁴ Lai Pan-chiu and Jason T. S. Lam, “Retrospect and Prospect of Sino-Christian Theology: An Introduction,” in Lai Pan-chiu and Jason T. S. Lam, eds., *Sino-Christian Theology: A Theological Qua Cultural Movement in Contemporary China* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 1.

God, God's character, and God's actions in relation to the world and human beings under God's revelation.¹⁵ Given this definition, theology cannot simply refer to an academic discipline or religious study—it requires faith to pursue understanding and discerning Christian truth and God's Word and action in the world, or as Anselm of Canterbury famously put it, "faith seeking understanding". However, with their lack of theological knowledge and academic background, these churches are unable to go further to voice their perspectives and elaborate their basic disagreement in terms of Christian belief with scholars' focus on humanistic values in Christianity.

Meanwhile, the Chinese church missed a great opportunity to win back some souls and leverage the movement to address scholars' fundamental misunderstanding of Western Christianity—viewing Christianity as mere equivalence to Western civilization. Because most scholars appreciated rather than criticized Christian faith and culture,¹⁶ and some even created Christian favour in China through their work,¹⁷ they remained outside the institutional church. The movement declined in the early twenty-first century but gave birth to the current Sinicization of Christianity movement endorsed by the Chinese government. This new movement aims to indigenize perceived Western Christianity into Chinese Christianity, keeping Western political power from penetrating Chinese people and society. Indigenization of Christianity in any sociopolitical and religiocultural setting might not necessarily be unjustified given the history of Christianity's involvement from Early Christianity to today's world Christianity. But taking this approach amid the current geopolitical tensions between China and the United States allows it to be appropriated to a particular context to serve either party's political causes, with Christian truth being obscured or distorted as a result. But Christian theological education can mitigate this problem by empowering Chinese Christians to develop a synthetic Chinese theology that keeps the essence of God's message while taking all the aspects of context seriously.¹⁸ Following this approach, the OCRPL student research on this synthetic model is positioned to enrich the scholarship of Chinese academia.

Furthermore, developing a synthetic Chinese theology undergirded by theological education can go a long way toward strengthening Christianity's roots in Chinese soil. The Cultural Revolution nearly eradicated religion and culture, yet economic development since the 1980s has awakened old cultural and religious traditions and even produced folk Buddhism—a new form of Buddhism popular in China. Confucian

¹⁵ This information came from my field trips to Chengdu, Beijing, and Hong Kong in 2006 and 2007.

¹⁶ Jason Lam, "Is Sino-Christian Theology Truly 'Theology'?" *Problematizing Sino-Christian Theology as a Public Theology*, *International Journal of Public Theology*, vol. 14, iss. 1 (May 2020): 100.

¹⁷ Liu Xiaofeng and Leopold Leeb, *Sino-Theology and the Philosophy of History: A Collection of Essays* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), 1-2.

¹⁸ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 89.

values are still highly regarded in families, and are manifested in the Chinese government structure. In contrast, the Christian minority represents only a small fraction of the local population and must struggle to make outreach work within this multireligious context. If Christian churches are to have effective outreach in this situation, they must draw new theological insights into a synthetic Chinese theology as they enter into dialogue with other religious groups.

However, a self-protective mentality holds Christian fundamentalists back from such an interreligious dialogue. A majority of TSA students in the World Christianity course discussion, for example, have said they consider interreligious dialogue a time-consuming and pointless approach to sharing the gospel with other faith believers. Only when a Buddhist convert student shared her personal experience of how she turned to Christianity after she was approached by Christians did other students realize a dialogue is not in vain. Her touching testimony of how that single outreach by Christians transformed her life resonated deeply with both me as an instructor and the rest of the students. Such learning experiences are best provided by these safe educational environments where students can genuinely exchange their perspectives to help overcome previous biases. Teachers' active involvement can also encourage students, as the convert further called for her classmates to take a step toward believers of different religions and understand that this step can be realized through friendly interaction and sharing religious experiences. Personally, I see great potential for TSA to foster and continue a rich conversation on this topic, which can amplify the voices of Christians from other cultures and enrich the Body of Christ.

Lastly, from an apologetic perspective, the current programmes can arm Chinese Christians with solid biblical-theological knowledge to defend against cults and heresy. With the rapid growth of Christianity in China over the past three decades, other heterodox groups and communities have increased in parallel. Eastern Lightning (东方闪电), also known as the Church of Almighty God, represents perhaps the most dangerous heresy facing the Chinese church, as it has mainly targeted Christian communities. It emerged from Henan province, which produced both renowned prophets and heretics in the early 1990s, and teaches that Jesus has returned to earth and is living as a Chinese woman.¹⁹ Yang Xiangbin (杨向彬), the female leader of Eastern Lightning, claims her "Christian belief" is biblically evidenced in the book of Matthew (24:27),²⁰ in which Jesus talks about His future return to earth: "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashed as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." In this verse, although Jesus clearly states that His return will be in

¹⁹ Emily C. Dunn, "'Cult,' Church, and the CCP," *Introducing Eastern Lightning*, vol. 35, No. 1, Jan 2009, 96.

²⁰ Du Xinyu, "The Men Who Lost Their Wives to 'Eastern Lightning'," <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1006609> (accessed on October 10, 2023).

male form, Yang interprets the verse as speaking to her and revealing that she is chosen to be the “female Christ” that is to carry out the mission of preaching “the gospel” to the Chinese people.²¹ Unlike other loosely scattered cult groups, Eastern Lightning has a solid organizational structure and maintains a large number of organized mission groups across China, “suggesting a significant capacity for mobilization and organization across time and space.”²² Additionally, its religious activities involve high levels of commitment: larger groups gather three times per week for two-hour sessions while smaller groups gather daily. With this commitment and capacity, Eastern Lightning has gathered three to four million members, though the Chinese Ministry of Public Security and the house church have publicly identified Eastern Lightning as a “cult” in an effort to alert Protestant Christians in particular.²³

Taking a close look at Eastern Lightning and other cults such as The Shouters Sect (呼喊派), it should not be surprising that varieties of cults and heresies continue to arise within the church, as has occurred throughout history. Jesus knew this and warned His disciples that thieves, robbers, and strangers would steal His sheep (John 10:1-6). Imitating the role and work of Jesus, Christian leaders should protect their members from false doctrine and false teachers; likewise, lay people also should be aware of the danger, stand firm to oppose heresy, and neither be deceived nor compromised. To assist with this task, Christian education plays an equally vital role; it gives Christians the necessary means to investigate and comprehend false teachings more accurately while also earnestly pursuing truth. They should keep in mind that even without Eastern Lightning, other heresies might infiltrate the church, overturn doctrine, and even attack the fundamental truth.

Conclusion

Theological education is one of the most critical enterprises for the Chinese church—the flourishing of the mission and faithful witness of Christianity in China are closely related to implementing theological education in this unique context. Ever since the rapid growth of Christianity in China, the ecclesiastical landscape has changed, which demands that potential church leaders with diverse backgrounds be equipped to fit into congregational settings. Urban churches are more self-consciously responding to the disadvantageous circumstances, while pastors and Christian leaders lack the resources needed to access related training. Although established universities and seminaries offer programmes in religious and theological studies, often goals are

²¹ Eastern Lightning sources do not indicate the female identity of Christ, but Yang and her followers tell people so.

²² Emily C. Dunn, “‘Cult’, Church, and the CCP,” *Introducing Eastern Lightning*, 102.

²³ Cao Li (曹莉), Zhaoyuan Blood Case Brings into Public View the Case of the Reincarnation of the Almighty God (招远血案让全能神教再入公众视野), *The New York Times* (Chinese edition), June 3, 2014.

focused on academic achievement and remain divorced from the vision and mission of the church. Some seminaries are committed to Christian theological education for the church, but they lack qualified teachers who can produce intended outcomes for the students. Amid these programmatic limitations, the geographic challenges and decentralized characteristics of the Chinese church render residential education impossible. But a new form of theological education—the online programmes of the OCRPL and TSA—perfectly bridges the gap and can remedy these deficiencies. Looking to the future of the Chinese church, to train not just clergy but leaders and workers in all categories on a larger scale, theological education needs to take place on Chinese soil through this new generation of educators. This new vision has been smoothly undertaken and fully appreciated; its legacy will be honored and remembered by the Chinese church in generations to come.

Disclosure Statements

The author has not reported any potential conflict of interest.

The author has not reported the use of generative AI in the research for and preparation of this paper.

This research received no specific funding.