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Zhao Bixiong

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Meeting-points at San Ming Steel Plant, Fujian

by Zhao Bixiong

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San Ming is a nationally designated "civilised" city in Fujian, and San Ming Steel Plant is an important part of the city. What is the situation of Christianity in this particular environment? This is an interesting question. I was commissioned by the United Front Department and the TSPM for a field enquiry which took place from August 9-19, 1989. This article presents the results of the survey for the use of those immediately concerned.

(1) Statistics

(a) Baptisms in the last few years
(the figures are not complete in some instances)

before	1985	27
	1985	16
	1986	20
	1987	17
	1988	8
	1989	7
	Total	95

(b) Gender ratio

Men	22
Women	73
Total	95

(c) Profession

Workers (active)	71
Workers (retired)	7
Cadre (retired)	1
Teacher	2
Working at home	12
Others	4
Total	97

(d) Education

Illiterate	28
Primary	40
Junior secondary	17
Upper secondary	9
University	1
Total	95

From the above statistics it can be seen that the Christian Community at San Ming Steel Plant is not very big. The number is growing yearly but the increase is not very fast and there are signs that it is slackening.

As to its composition, there are more women than men, the educational level is comparatively low, with most of the members from the rank of workers. There is also a definite proportion of household members but very few from other professions. This tallies with the research results from most other places.

(2) Activities

Worship takes place on Sundays in the Mei Lie District where the steel plant is situated. However there are two other meeting-points at the plant. The first meets on Friday and Sunday evenings and the other on Thursday and Saturday evenings. Recently a third one was established with two evening activities. Therefore a Christian at San Ming Steel will have at least three occasions per week to attend a religious gathering and this fits in with the two or three-shift schedule of the plant. Since there are sufficient occasions to satisfy their religious life there has never been any conflict with the work schedule.

Moreover, since the meeting-points are nearby and the communities are small, the relationships between the members are very close. For this reason they have never experienced any foreign infiltration or activities by "independent preachers" who did not belong to the patriotic organisations. This is very favorable to maintaining stability.

(3) Leadership

At each of the meeting-points at San Ming Steel Plant there are two to three leaders, two of whom are more important. Because of the influence of leaders on the communities it is useful to provide a profile of them below:

Shi Jinlai: Shi is a worker of the hot press forge section of the department of machine repairs. Recently he also became an officer of the workers' union. Shi entered the factory in 1958, became deputy chief of a production line in the 1970s and chief in 1984. Except for 1986 when he had to take a longer sick leave, he was evaluated a progressive worker every year either by the whole factory or by his branch. In 1985 he was rewarded as a "progressive production worker in the construction of the 'Two Civilisations'".

Shi came into contact with Christianity in 1983 and was baptised in 1985. At present he is responsible for a Christian meeting-point in the plant and active in the Christian patriotic organizations of the city.

Lin Qinguo: Lin is a worker of the No. 2 smelting section of the plant. He is in charge of the preliminary preparations for the steel-smelting furnace, which is a heavy responsibility. He has to work irregular hours depending on how the previous smelting progresses. In order to speed up the process he never rests from inspecting the progress of the work despite the hot summers or cold winters. In 1978 he received a head injury during a work accident and he suffers from constant migraine since then, but he never took any sick leave. For many years he was evaluated as a progressive worker.

Due to the example of the leadership, quite a few of the Christians were also evaluated as progressive workers even though the Christian community is very small. Some of them received the honour many times and year after year.

(4) The impact of Christian activities

The impact of Christian activities in San Ming Steel Plant can be seen in two areas: (a) the love and friendship among Christians, and (b) the improvement of human relations between persons and in the families. In the course of our enquiry we discovered many of such cases; we shall relate a couple of typical ones below:

Zhao Taixiang, a worker at the No. 2 rolling mill of the plant, and his spouse Li Shanxia had an accident. As a result their livelihood became a problem and both were very depressed. For the last few years the church and the Christians constantly supported them with financial assistance and regular visits. This has earned the praise of many people.

A female worker and her husband led an unhappy relationship for eight years. Finally she started the procedures for a divorce. However she was converted by Christians at that moment and after reflection she became better tempered and paid more attention to the family. In the end she withdrew the demand for divorce and harmony returned to the family. This naturally touched the emotional cords in people's hearts.