CHINESE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

1979 to 2006

Marvin D. Hoff
Editor
To Joan, the love of my life,
who faithfully and successfully cared for our children and our home
during my at least annual trips to Asia, especially China, since 1969
The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America

The series was inaugurated in 1968 by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America acting through the Commission on History to communicate the church’s heritage and collective memory and to reflect on our identity and mission, encouraging historical scholarship which informs both church and academy.

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Epilogue
Chinese Theological Education: 1979 to 2006,
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Marvin D. Hoff, June 2008
Marvin D. Hoff received his college education at Northwestern Junior College, Orange City, Iowa, and Central College, Pella, Iowa. He received the M. Div. degree from Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan; the Th.M. from Princeton Theological Seminary; and the Doctorandes from the Theologische Hogeschool, Kampen, the Netherlands. Central College awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1987.

Hoff is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature, the American Society of Missiology, and the International Association of Mission Studies.

He is an ordained minister of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America and has been married to Joan Beth Rozendaal since 1958. He has served as pastor of the Rea Avenue Reformed Church, Hawthorne, New Jersey (1961-65), and the Reformed Church of Palos Heights, Illinois (1965-1969 and 1981-1985). During a twelve-year period of service on the national staff of the Reformed Church in America, he served as secretary for Asian ministries, secretary for operations, and secretary for operations and finance. From 1985 to 1994 he served as president of Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan.

From 1969 to 2006 he served as a trustee of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia, representing the Reformed Church in America. Beginning in 1977 he was the part-time executive
director of the foundation and held that position full time from 1994 to 2006.

The foundation maintains program relationships with more than one hundred theological institutions in South East Asia through the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia located in Manila, the Philippines. With the reopening of Chinese theological institutions in the 1980s, the foundation established partnerships with Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and the member theological seminaries of the China Christian Council. The foundation also relates to the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, the Christian Conference of Asia, and the World Council of Churches.
Foreword

The needs of nations and of ideologies have long imprinted themselves on our perceptions of the church in China. Those who, like myself, grew up during World War II, knew that we were on the side of the Chinese against the Japanese. That China was personified by the beautiful, charming, Christian, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, usually photographed in New York or Washington D.C. We heard about General Chenault’s Flying Tigers, but nothing of Mao’s Communists, who also were fighting the Japanese, nor did we hear anything of internal struggles and corruption within territory nominally held by Chiang.

While it seldom made headlines in local papers, throughout the 1920s and 30s the nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists under Mao were at war with each other and with the aspirations of various warlords. The missionaries almost always sided with Chiang’s Nationalists against the Communists for two very strong reasons even apart from political ideology. First, Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang were Christians, whereas Communists were atheists. Second, most Reformed Church missionaries served in territories usually under the control of the Nationalists. That made the Communists the invading army as battles surged back and forth, with all the destruction that entailed.
For example, in May of 1929 the mission hospital at Leng-na was gutted, and Dr. Clarence Holleman was taken captive by the Communist troops. He managed to escape and after a month was able to rejoin his family. Despite the destruction of his hospital, Holleman reported that he was treated kindly by the soldiers, and “suffered no more hardship than they did themselves.”

With the ending of World War II, missionaries returned, as did the conflict between Nationalists and Communists. At first, the areas in which Reformed Church missionaries served were secure. They continued to promote Chinese direction of the church, including the placement of missionaries. Their emphasis upon the “three-self movement” of governing, financing, and propagating was beginning to bear fruit. However, by 1947 civil strife was broadening, and by late 1949 in Amoy (the center of Reformed Church missions), the Communists had defeated the Nationalists. Nonetheless, at first (with exceptions) missionaries continued to function in schools, hospitals, and even seminaries, with “little or no interference.”

However, in June of 1950 war broke out in Korea, with the United States sending troops to battle the Communists. At the same time the U.S. increased military and economic aid to the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek on Taiwan. The United States intervened further on the side of Chiang against the Communists by placing the Seventh Fleet between the mainland and Taiwan to prevent the Communists from extending their control. If all that wasn’t enough to convince the Chinese Communists of where the United States stood, it opposed the entry of the Peoples Republic of China to the United Nations.

The result was that missionaries of United States citizenship were not only aliens but enemies. Nonetheless, all of the Reformed Church missionaries were allowed to leave China by 1951.

In his valuable history, The Reformed Church in China, 1842-1951, Gerald F. De Jong makes this concluding observation: “It is interesting to note that during the first few years after 1951 the board tended to look upon...various assignments [to other Asian nations] as a form of ‘lend-lease’ arrangement, always holding out the possibility that these missionaries might someday return to the Chinese mainland should the bamboo curtain ever be sufficiently raised to allow such a return.”

2 Ibid., 315.
3 Ibid., 324.
4 Ibid., 342-43.
Relations between the United States and China continued to deteriorate, with Communist China supporting North Korea and the United States troops supporting the South. The McCarthy era Communist witch hunts contributed to demonizing the Chinese, and with their Cultural Revolution, a disastrously flawed ideology which wreaked starvation upon millions and the virtual destruction of the economy, Chinese Communists seemed to be living up to all their detractors said of them.

In the 1970s, when the results of the Cultural Revolution became so disastrous that they necessitated a shift of policy, a gradual thaw began in which contact could once again be made with the church in China. It was with understandable caution that the church in China began to make contact with the church in the United States. An initial formal contact was made in 1979 by Bishop K.H. Ting, to the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA), of which the Reformed Church in America and nine other denominations have been a part. Since that first contact, the foundation has had continuous contact with Chinese theological education.

The Reformed Church in America’s presence in China, which had spanned 109 years and seen service by 153 missionaries, was in this new period represented primarily by one man, the Reverend Dr. Marvin D. Hoff, the foundation’s executive director. Hoff, a minister of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America, was executive director of FTESEA, part time from 1977 and full time from 1994 until 2006. He lived out the hope that concluded De Jong’s book on behalf of the Reformed Church and the ecumenical North American Christian community.

Upon the conclusion of his service, a festschrift was published in Hoff’s honor, Partnership in Training God’s Servants for Asia, Essays in Honor of Marvin D. Hoff, edited by Sientje Merentek-Abram and A. Wati Longchar. The honor in which Hoff was held is apparent in the foreword and thirteen essays in the book, and it is aptly summed up on the dust jacket by the Reverend Wang Aiming, a vice president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary: “Marvin, for us, is one of the humble and respected pastors. During the past many years, as the Executive Director of the FTESEA, Marvin has very efficiently promoted theological education in China, especially the program of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.”

(AFTESEA and FTESEA, 2006).
Nyambura J. Njoroge, then executive director of Ecumenical Theological Education in the World Council of Churches, adds, “Marvin has a profound understanding of partnership in a world that has become dangerously competitive. I am sincerely grateful to God for this opportunity to work with a seasoned and dedicated theological educator and committed ecumenist.”

This volume, as it follows the FTESEA’s relationship to the church in China through the reports of Hoff and others, chronicles a new relationship with a church that by a miracle of the Spirit grew to an incredible size while separated from the West and under Communist rule. Some of the many Chinese Christians who incurred traumas during this period have found them impossible to overcome. Those who remain unregistered frequently suffer harassment, as did the Reformed Church’s afscheiding Dutch ancestors in the mid-nineteenth century. And it must also be acknowledged that, in the vastness of China, the new government policies of religious toleration are exercised with varying degrees of conformity. The result is that the story of the church in China that is told in the United States is often still one-sided, possibly pervaded by political animosities as well. This is especially dangerous as economic relationships with their accompanying tensions grow between the two countries. The perception that the Chinese government has a policy of persecuting Christians can only contribute to poisoning relationships between the two countries. Hoff’s book documents how what was once a policy of persecution has become an official policy of tolerance, and in many ways support, of the Christian church in China. It is a reality of which Christians in the United States must become aware.

In this carefully documented volume, we can follow the story of a church emerging from persecution and struggling to be theologically and pastorally faithful in the midst of incredible growth. It is an account which must be read by those who would properly assess the contemporary Chinese church.

Donald J. Bruggink, General Editor
The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America
Introduction

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage;

—Richard Lovelace 1618-1657

As an eight-year-old boy, I heard the Reverend Henry Veenschoten quote the above poem in the Barnard Reformed Church in Charlevoix, Michigan. Veenschoten quoted it in 1944 to describe his recent imprisonment by the Japanese in China. Although I had been taken to church all of my life, these are the first words from a worship service that I remember, and I remember them vividly. Maybe my memory of them became a portent for my long relationship with Christianity in China.

In 1969, as the secretary for Asian ministries of the Reformed Church in America, I had the rare privilege of making more permanent the mission partnerships between the Reformed Church and the Church of Christ in China, Hong Kong; the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan; the Presbyterian Church of Singapore and Malaysia; and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, which the Reformed Church had established upon leaving China after the establishment
of the People’s Republic of China As a trustee for the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA), I listened with rapt attention to reports on visits to China by foundation trustees from Canada. Later, as the part-time executive director of the foundation, I received the first letter from Bishop K.H. Ting asking for books for the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary library. In 1982, I was the first FTESEA trustee to visit China after the reopening of the seminary and the churches.

So the publication of *Chinese Theological Education: 1979 to 2006* brings to a close the circle of awe and interest sparked in an eight-year-old boy about Christianity in China. Readers should be aware of two important things as they proceed: first, none of these documents has been edited or revised with the benefit of hindsight. All of them have been copy edited for uniformity, but no changes have been made in their content. All of them report on the historical situation at the time they were written. So the date for each piece is very important. Second, all of the reports and documents in this book have been circulated previously to the FTESEA network, which includes its trustees and many ecumenical Christians interested in China.

A great many people have kept the spark alive and greatly assisted my interest in the work of Christ in China. They have helped me in my observations and writings about Chinese theological education, especially those who have essays in this book. Among them are the FTESEA trustees and officers, and the many, many Chinese people I have had the privilege of meeting since 1980. While everything I have written has been tremendously improved by their help, all of the errors and inaccuracies in this book are my own.

In naming a few of those who have helped me, I will fail to mention some very important people; nevertheless, these I must name with great appreciation:

To my Chinese brothers and sisters in Christ, whose names appear in this book and who welcomed me graciously into their lives and shared generously with me the stories of their ministries.

To hundreds of colleagues and friends who offered their insights on Chinese theological education, especially those whose documents are in this book.

To Dr. Charles W. Forman, who, as the FTESEA chair, guided me wisely and graciously in my role as its executive director for so many years and who wrote, “Pioneering in International Aid: The Nanking Board and the Foundation for South East Asia,” for this volume.
To Dr. Ching-fen Hsiao and Dr. Gerald H. Anderson, who chaired the FTESEA successively during this period. Each of them provided me with creative insights and tremendous encouragement as I served the FTESEA as its executive director and as these materials were written and collected.

To all of the FTESEA trustees who served during this period. Their questions and insights greatly enriched my understanding of the work of Christ in Chinese Theological Education and significantly improved my reports on Chinese Theological Education.

To Donald Bruggink for graciously and persistently urging me to gather these China reports and publish them and for his foreword.

To Dr. Daniel Bays for his essay, “Reflections on Christian Visitors to Post-Mao China: Historical Baggage and the Baggage of History,” which introduces the reader to Christianity in China during this period.

To Martha Smalley and Joan Duffy at the Yale Divinity School Library and Geoffrey Reynolds at the Western Theological Seminary Archives in the Joint Archives of Holland, Michigan, who generously provided me with copies of all the documents I requested from their archives for this book.

To my Chinese and North American colleagues who have given me permission to include their reports/essays in this volume.

To Dr. Donald Bruggink, Dr. George Brown, Laurie Baron, and Russell Gasero, editors par excellence.

To my children and grandchildren: Jean Marie Hoff, Gretchen Rozendaal Hoff and her twin Isaac Wilkens Hoff (deceased after one week), and Carolyn Wilkens Hoff; David Hoff and Sally Davis with their children, Nathaniel Robinson and Isabella Robinson. All of them have encouraged me in my travels and always welcomed me home.

To my wife, Joan Rozendaal Hoff, to whom I have dedicated this volume, who has since the beginning of our relationship been an encouraging, inspiring, and loving companion.

Marvin D. Hoff