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The Understanding and Teaching of Diakonia in China

A study of Christian Social Service in the Social Service Department of
CCC, Amity Foundation and Churches in China

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Preface

The thesis is the mandatory, final part of the two-year Masters program at The Norwegian School of Theology. When I started thinking about this thesis I was a masters student in diakonia at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong. During that year I found very little information about the diaconal work in China. I therefore decided to write a masters thesis on the subject, to get a clearer understanding of how diaconal work could make a difference in a changing Chinese society.

I would first and foremost like to thank my advisor Knud Jørgensen for his dedication, good advice, constructive feedback and valuable input.

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Thanks to all informants I have interviewed, for opening your churches and inviting me to your workplaces. You made me feel welcome. It has been exciting to work with you, and I wish you all good luck in your diaconal work!

Kjeller, 15 mai 2013

Lene Birgitte Bjølverud-Rødningsby

Summary

Diakonia is the “gospel in action”. It points to the very identity and mission of the Church, and calls for action as a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for the creation. This thesis focuses on the understanding and teaching of diakonia in China, which is in a process of development. From a situation where the Chinese government did not want the church as an active part of the community, the churches are currently on their way to play a more active role within social work. This thesis is a study of the Christian Social Service in the Social Service Department of China Christian Council, Amity Foundation and Churches in China. The research is about their understanding of diakonia and its theological foundation, and how this finds expression in their self-understanding, education and relationship with society. Answers to these questions were found by traveling to different parts of China over a period of five weeks in October and November 2012. This study is based on relevant literature, conference papers and interviews with China experts and people working in organizations, provincial councils and churches.

This thesis presents information about relevant theory related to the understanding of diakonia, the history and the development of social work in China. Traditional Chinese values and today’s Harmonious society have been given attention in order to further investigate Christianity’s impact on the Chinese culture and society.

The survey shows that the informants find their inspiration for doing diaconal work in the New Testament. The organizations believe that diakonia is the gospel in action, and consider diaconal work as something that could be done by churches, organization and individuals. The church and provincial councils refer to different diaconal activities, both organized and institutionalized, to describe diakonia. Social work is seen as important to the majority of the informants. They are concerned about the society and their “neighbor”, but there is a difference in where they draw the line for whom they choose to call their neighbor. The informants’ goals by engaging in diaconal work are to help people, but the study finds that the churches lean more towards evangelism than the organizations do. According to the informants the political environment in China is good,

and the government encourages them to engage in social work. The churches in China express a need for diaconal training, but today there exists no formal diaconal education in the theological seminaries.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANS	Amity News Service
CCC	China Christian Council
CCP	China Communist Party
PRC	Peoples Republic of China
RAB	Religious Affairs Bereau
SSD	Social Service Department
SARA	State Administration of Religious Affairs
TSPM	Three Self Patriotic Movement
YM/WCA	Young Men's/ Women's Christian Association

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1 Introduction

1.1 Reason for chosen topic

Diakonia in China is in a process of development. From a situation where the Chinese government did not want the church as an active part of the community, the churches are currently on their way to play a more active role within social work. The reason why I chose this topic is that I think it would be interesting to learn more about CCC Social Service Department (China Christian Council), the Amity Foundation's and the churches understanding of diakonia and how they teach this within their setting.

Two years ago I went to Hong Kong to work as a volunteer. During this period, I travelled to China on vacation. I became very fascinated by this country and its people, so I decided to go back the following year to study diakonia in Hong Kong. During the period in Hong Kong, I learned about the history of Christianity in China, but little about China's diaconal history. I therefore decided to study this further and write a master thesis on the subject. In a large country like China, often called the Middle Kingdom, how can diakonia change a society and people's attitudes and values?

During a sermon at Tao Fong Shan, a paper written by Gao Shining, a Research Fellow at the Institute for the Study of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, was quoted. This paper explains how Christians in China have impacted the society they live in with their social efforts and engagement. This paper gave me the inspiration to investigate further. Gao Shining writes:

“ In todays China, it is common for Christians to present good examples, and many live according to their faith without any other purpose. In such a society with the decline of social ethos and the “collapse” of ethics, the good behaviors of most Christians recognized by more and more people are very prominent and have become a window through witch the Chinese society has known and understood Christianity” (Gao Shining, 2011)

Many Chinese have become Christians after observing attitudes, lifestyles and social engagement of Christians. I therefore think it is exciting to learn how the Christian organizations and the churches in China can affect people's attitudes and values.

I have chosen to write my master's thesis about the understanding and teaching of diakonia in the CCC Social Service Department, Amity Foundation, provincial councils and churches. I have therefore chosen to write about the development of diakonia in China, but most important - how far the churches have come in their diaconal understanding today. How aware are they of their role as diaconal agents?

In connection with this thesis I have travelled to China to do interviews with people who know the church-based diaconal work of the actors mentioned above. Because of the increasing interest of diaconal work in China, and the work with diaconal projects, there has emerged a need for diaconal education and training. This is a challenge for a church that is still working to find out who it is (ecclesiology), and where there is still a great need for pastors to lead congregations.

During the interviews I have focused on the diaconal actors understanding and teaching of diakonia and how this is viewed by society. I will focus my study on their perception of the concept of diakonia, and in which way this is rooted theologically in the congregations.

1.2 Research question

My research question is as follows:

How do diaconal agents at different levels in China understand the term diakonia and its theological foundation, and how does this find expression in their self-understanding, education and relationship with society?

Because of the lack of literature on the diaconal work in China, the basis for this study are interviews with China experts, the management of the China Christian Council, Amity Foundation, people that work within the provincial councils and churches in China, diaconal students in Hong Kong and other key persons with knowledge of the topic.

The Chinese word for diakonia is: 社關服侍 (shè guān fú chí), which means Society-Care-Service. The word diakonia is a new concept in China and because of this, most of my informants will find it difficult to relate to this term. Other informants are familiar with the concept of diakonia, but think of it as a western concept more related to the Lutheran church. I have therefore chosen to use the words Christian Social Service instead of diakonia in my interviews and interview guides. Since the two organizations have chosen somewhat different approaches to their social service, I have chosen to focus on their understanding of the term diakonia, self-understanding as diaconal agents and to what extent training and education is given to nourish and inspire continuing Christian social service.

1.3 Definition of the research area

Because of the size of China, the many organizations and differences types of social services, I have chosen to limit the research to two organizations, two provincial councils and two churches.

Organizations:	The CCC Social Service department
	The Amity Foundation
Provincial Councils:	East provincial council
	West provincial council
Churches:	East China Church (City church)
	West China Church (City church)

Table 1: Research area

The emphasis of this thesis deals with the actors understanding of their social service as Christian social service. How conscious are they about this aspect in their work with church-based diakonia? Has this awareness made them more visible in the community?

The interviews are a big part of the material in this thesis, and the organizations thoughts about diakonia and its theological grounding will be based on this material. The diaconal actors thoughts about how they are viewed by society will be covered in this thesis, and it is therefore important to be aware that the answers are primarily based on the informants' own views.

I have divided the empirical material under six sub-headings.

- Diakonia and its theological foundation
- Reasons for focusing on diaconal work
- What is the difference between diakonia and other social work
- Christians' involvement in social service – do Christians see it as important?
- The teaching of diakonia
- The government's and society's view of Christian social engagement

1.4 Presentation of organizations, councils and churches

1.4.1 The Amity Foundation

The Amity Foundation was founded in 1985 on the initiative of Chinese Christians, headed by Bishop K.H Ting and with the support of interested groups. Currently there are almost 100 staff members in Amity. Amity's Chinese name has two characters that serve as the basis of the name: 爱 and 德. The first character means "love" and is in reference to the verse in 1 Corinthians 13:13, "*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love*". The second character forms the words for "morality" and "ethics." (The Amity Foundation, 2013)

Amity aims toward developing China's public welfare, and do this by running projects like:

- Orphan fostering and education
- Social welfare and social service
- Public health and HIV/AIDS prevention
- Community development
- Environmental protection
- Disaster management
- Church and social services

Up to now, Amity projects have benefited more than ten million people in 31 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in China.

The Amity Foundation	
Vision:	<i>More abundant life, improved social justice and bettering the world.</i>
Purpose:	<i>Abiding by the principle of mutual respect in faith, Amity builds friendship with people at home and abroad. Through the promotion of holistic development and public welfare, Amity serves society, benefits the people, and contributes to world peace.</i>
Goal:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>• To contribute to China's social development and openness to the outside world.</i><i>• To make Christian involvement and participation in meeting the needs of society more widely known to the Chinese people.</i><i>• To serve as a channel for people-to-people contact and ecumenical sharing of resources.</i>

Table 2: Vision, purpose and goal of Amity

As my thesis deals with church-based diakonia, I have chosen to focus on the project: Church and social services.

(CCC/TSPM Social Service Department, 2011)

Church and social service

Amity serves as a bridge between the Christian Church and society. The Church and Social Service Unit of Amity cooperate with Christian churches to launch social service programs. By strengthening the ability of workers in church-based social service programs and improving the efficiency of social service programs, they provide new means of participation in social work for Christian churches. Through Amity's capacity-building training they seek to improve the Church's initiative for social service and strengthen the capacity for management and implementation of projects. Currently they are involved in social service projects in 8 provinces in China.

1.4.2 The Social Service Department of CCC/TSPM

The Social Service Department was established in 2003. It is located in China Christians Council's offices in Shanghai, and currently there are **three employees** in the Social Service Department, including the Deputy Director. The Social Service Department (SSD) provides financial support and skill development for grass-roots churches in China.

The SSD annual report of 2011 states that SSD cooperated with local organizations in 17 provinces and autonomous regions throughout China to help carry out various diaconal projects. These projects are primarily situated in the central and western areas of China. In addition, they work to create positive partnerships with major domestic and foreign organizations.

The Social Service Department (CCC/TSPM Social Service Department, 2011, p. 5)	
Purpose:	<i>Practicing our faith to live the life Christ gave us.</i>
Goal:	<i>Advocate new ideas, promote resource sharing and contribute to ecumenical value.</i>
Strategy:	<i>Research, education, demonstration and grass-roots service.</i>

Table 3: Purpose, goal and strategy of SSD

The five pillars of the Social Service department

- Supporting education
SSD support students from poor backgrounds by subsidizing their learning and living cost so they can continue to stay in school. They also support the reconstruction of school buildings.
- Medical and health
SSD provides free medical assistance and dental care in poor areas in cooperation with the local churches. SSD supports centres for drug addicts and people with AIDS and informs and advises on drug treatment and AIDS prevention. They also donate wheelchairs and medical equipment.

- Disaster management
SSD supports and assists earthquake relief work, by donating emergency supplies. They were involved in funding of reconstruction of five churches.
- Community development
SSD arranges information training/seminars about rural diseases, prevention of diseases, women's health, and legal rights of migrant workers, general agricultural production technology and drinking water projects. SSD also arranges training sessions about nursing home care for elderly.
- Church ministry
In 2011 they conducted a study of the current situation of the Sichuan church's awareness of social service ministry work. SSD arranges church social service ministry development training in care for the elderly, hospice care, family support and volunteer management.

1.4.3 The Councils and Churches

The **East China Church** is situated in a city in the central part of China. It is a young church, opened in 2002.

The **East provincial council** and the theological seminary are closely connected to the church, and their offices are located inside the church administrative building. Both the seminary principal and the general secretary of the Eastern provincial council is involved in the church ministry as pastors, and both give lectures at the seminary. Many of the seminary students serve and join the daily morning and evening church services.

More than 2000 people attend their five weekly services, Sunday schools and their various fellowship groups. There are 26 persons working in the church; most of them trained pastors. In addition, the church has a large number of volunteers.

The **West China Church** is situated in a city in the western part of China.

The church was founded in the beginning of the twenty first century, and the **West provincial council** is located in the same building as the church. The church has 26 employees, consisting mostly of pastors, elders and 10 administrative employees.

Every Sunday, more than 5000 persons attend their three services, and every year an average of 800-900 people are baptized. The church arranges activities like Sunday school and different kinds of fellowship groups, and about 300 people work as volunteers to help with these activities.

Both churches are Three–Self Churches, which means that they are a part of the China Christian Council. Together with the China Christian Council, the TSPM form the only state-sanctioned (registered) Protestant church in The Peoples Republic of China.

1.5 Previous research, the thesis' relevance and usefulness

As mentioned earlier the word diakonia is a new concept in China. As far as I know, no previous research has been done regarding the diaconal work and nature of the church in China. The organizations and churches are in the beginning of their planning of its diaconal work, and it has therefore not been easy to find literature and information on this subject. My wish and hope are that this study may be a relevant contribution to the organizations efforts to understand themselves as diaconal agents as well as to their work with the organization and development of diaconal education.

1.6 Structure

Presentation of the structure of the thesis:

Chapter 2	Relevant theory related to the understanding of diakonia, the history and the development of social work in China. Traditional Chinese values and today's Harmonious Society have been given attention in order to further investigate Christianity's impact on the Chinese culture and society.
Chapter 3	Methodical reflection where the choice and implementation of the method are presented.
Chapter 4	Presentation of the empirical findings and the content of the interviews.
Chapter 5	Empirical data discussed and analyzed. The research question is the basis for the analysis.
Chapter 6	Thesis ends with a conclusion.

Table 4: Structure

2 Theory and background information

In the following I will present theory related to my research question. This chapter provides necessary background information about theory related to the understanding of diakonia and its biblical perspective. It also covers the history of the diaconal work in China, the Chinese Church, and Christian influence on traditional Chinese values.

2.1 The understanding of diakonia

The Greek term “diakonia” as used in the New Testament is usually translated as “service” (Oftestad, 2009 p. 65) According to Jørgensen the term “diakonos” (servant) does not mean servility, but rather, a person who has been given an important task. This task could be to be a messenger, a “go-between” and pathfinder in carrying out the call of the church in the world (Jørgensen, 2011 p. 61)

Diakonia is grounded in the faith of the Triune God. Diakonia can be seen as a connection between your faith and your social engagement, according to Sven-Erik Brodd. The term “social action” was earlier used to describe this activity, but is now found too narrow to cover the entire term. Diakonia, however, creates a link between Christian faith and the motivation, which gives meaning to serving people in need (Brodd, 1999 s.3)

Nordstokke writes that:

“Diakonia is a theological concept that points to the very identity and mission of the Church [...] another is practical implications in the sense that diakonia is call to action, as a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation” (LWF, 2009:8).

Different denominations have a different understanding of the content and tasks of diaconal services. I have chosen to focus on the Lutheran understanding of the term.

Example: The Church of Norway’s definition of diakonia.

”Diakonia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the **Gospel in action** and is expressed through loving your neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice” (Church of Norway, 2013)

Table 5: The Church of Norway’s definition on diakonia

2.2 The biblical perspective on diakonia

One can find many scriptures in the Bible related to caring for others, fighting for justice, and solidarity with the weakest people in the society. Two examples are Isaiah 58.6-7 and Matthew 25.34-45. We can also see this in Jesus’ preaching and in His actions.

We can read about Jesus’ relationship with the sick and the outcast in several places in the New Testament. Jesus showed **compassion** and was not indifferent to people’s pain and suffering. He also showed a different kind of **authority** and power. Oftestad (2009) states that: *Diakonia is the heart of the gospel, provided by Jesus Christ* (p.88). In the Bible Jesus reveals himself as a servant and shows the disciples what true service is. This is illustrated in the story of Jesus washing the feet of his followers. He turned everything upside down by saying:

“ ... *whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Matt. 20:26- 28).

This shows Jesus’ disciples another way to exercise power, through serving others. He demonstrated a different kind of power, not exercising power over someone, but power *for* someone (LWF, 2009 p.31).

2.3 Diakonia – an essential part of the church’s work

Diakonia is expressed in many ways:

- Individual diakonia (the diaconate of all believers)
- Organized diakonia (done by organizations)

- Institutionalized diakonia (hospitals, etc.)
- International diakonia (response to human suffering in a global perspective)

Because of the nature of this thesis I have chosen to focus on the organized diakonia in the congregations. LWF (2009) says that in order for diaconal work to be systematically done and be a part of the life of the church, one needs structures and leadership. (p.48).

In the LWF (2002) document, *Prophetic Diakonia "For the healing of the world"* (p.10), they say that: *"The church can never be reduced to its diaconal work, but diakonia embodied in different ways in different situations according to the specific needs of the context, is always a part of the life of the church"*. The term diakonia in recent years has gained importance, and expresses an important dimension of the church's call to respond to challenges in today's world. LWF (2009) says that diakonia is related to the church's identity and structure, both in daily life and in its very nature (p.28).

The role of the deacon has changed over time. Acts 6:6 tells the story about the seven Greek men, and how they have been regarded as the first church deacons. Luke describes the task of these deacons as taking part in distributing food and serving at the table (Collins, 2002). By installing these men, it led to an understanding that these activities should be an integral and prioritized part of the church's work. LWF (2009) writes that: *"they were full of the Holy Spirit"*, which was a reminder that the Holy Spirit, who has given life to the Church, also is the blessing power of its diaconal lifestyle (p. 28).

According to Oftestad, diakonia belongs to the Church and is an organic part of the nature of the church (2009 p.107). Diakonia finds expression in being part of the nature of the church and in the way it presents itself in daily life, plans and projects.

LWF claims that diakonia is an important part of the identity of the church and cannot be reduced to an activity by certain committed persons or made necessary by external social conditions. Diakonia is related to what the church celebrates in its liturgy and announces in its preaching. They mention three expressions that make the communion (koinonia) visible. These are: Proclamation – Service – Celebration (LWF, 2009, p. 29). These are

related to each other, and are the key to diaconal identity. Without this, diakonia runs the risk of becoming nothing more than regular social action, and loses its spiritual worldview.

The celebration of the Holy Communion announces God's unconditional love in Christ and the inclusive nature of God's diakonia. Nissen (2008) says that since the beginning of the congregational diakonia, visiting people and hospitality has been two of the most important tasks. It relates to opening up towards our neighbors and welcoming them into our communities, especially Holy Communion.

Oftestad (2009, p.112) uses a passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians to underline this: *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:28).

The **purpose** of diaconal action can be found in In Mark 12:31: *"Love your neighbor as yourself"*. LWF (2009) writes that responsible diaconal service will contain both short-term and long-term objectives, which means (p.42)

1. Immediate action to alleviate human suffering (short-term)
2. Working against oppressive structures / causes of suffering (long-term)

Diaconal action, understood as integral to the Church mission in today's world, is also conditioned and challenged by concrete contexts. In order for diakonia to be relevant one has to read the signs of the time and the context, which one operates in. LWF says the analysis of the context has to be critical, raising questions and revealing assumptions. Diakonia also connects the reading of the contexts to the reading of the Holy Scriptures (2009: 13).

2.4 The uniqueness of diakonia

What makes the social work of the church different from other social work? Olav Fanuelsen (2009) writes that the Christian perspective of diakonia is reflected in its unique character, which is not in the practices of the caretaking, but in its spirituality, and the spiritual and liturgical framework within which the caretaking takes place (my

translation). Fanuelsen (2009) writes that in practice this means that humanity, view of knowledge and values together form the foundation and the interpretative framework for the actions of caring.

An example: For a Christian who is in a care situation, there must be a connection between the professional insight on a reasonable plan and the insight one gets through the Christian revelation. One can also say that the revealed Word will be an interpretative framework for the professionalism we consider important to meet people's care needs. When Christian social service is exercised on the basis of this insight, we can say that the foundation of caring, its content, and various forms represent a specific Christian caring ministry (Fanuelsen, 2009, p. 155;my translation).

2.5 Training for diakonia

When diaconal work becomes organized, the education for diakonia becomes more urgent. According to LWF (2009), all training should be incorporated with the foundational principle that *“all diaconal work will incorporate action beyond charity, and not distinguish between “we – the helpers” and “they – the helpless””* (p.75). Every community has gifts and abilities that contribute to diaconal response. Theology is an integral part of diaconal training, but diakonia is not always an integral part of theological education. LWF says that this element quite often is lacking in pastoral training. As a result, in many places, the church leadership does not have the needed qualifications for understanding and organizing diaconal work fully (2009 p.79).

2.6 Diakonia and proclamation

In China evangelism is not allowed outside the official church. Church members are permitted to evangelize only those people who enter the church. Evangelism outside the church is illegal. The government now encourages religious organizations' engagement in charitable activities. LWF (2009) writes that one of the greatest challenges in diaconal work is to establish a good and responsible relation between diaconal work and proclamation. Although there is no open evangelism, diaconal action gives witness to Christian love and care for others. All actions communicate a message (p.84). Over the

years we have seen that religious practice may have become a tool for manipulating people, especially in situations of weakness and suffering. Example: Rice Christians in China. We are here dealing with unequal power relationships. Nissen (2008) says that the goal of evangelism is to win followers to the Christian faith. This is not the goal of diakonia (p. 24). Diaconal work is service to the neighbor in need and cannot be an instrument for evangelizing people. In such cases diaconal action would then become a strategy with the goal to combine human care activities and proclamation so that people might become Christians.

Diakonia should not become some form of manipulation or marketing “trick” for making people come to church. At the same time, one cannot say that diaconal work has no links with proclamation. As mentioned before, diakonia is a part of the church’s koinonia and will also have elements of proclamation and witness, but through life and actions. What is important is to **acknowledge diaconal action as meaningful in itself**. Diakonia does not need to be justified by other reasons. Diakonia must be unconditional and respect the integrity of each person (LWF, 2009: 87).

2.7 The history and development of Christian Social work in China

The Chinese society has a rich history for participating in charity work. As we will see later in this thesis, Chinese charity is often associated with the emphasis on mutual help offered along strict clan and family lineages, often associated with Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. The Christian mission, which focused on a different type of charity, “helping a stranger”, gained a foothold in the early 20th century. At this time, charitable work was important in its effort to give relief to the poor as well as building and operating hospitals, orphanages and schools. (C. Fielder, 2012, p. 106)

People in today’s China enjoy greater religious freedom than before. People have the freedom to believe, as long as the Communist Party feels that they still have control. (Jørgensen, 2009) Due to China's special political environment regarding practice of religion, I have in the following pages chosen to mention the greatest changes in policy

since the early 1900s until today. I consider this important as it has a significant impact on the church and Christian organizations' possibility for social involvement.²

The foreign missionary organizations' diaconal work has been the main source of social service work in China, in the period up to 1949. Strandenæs (2006) writes about the development of school and medical mission, and institutional diakonia in China and how it first really escalated in the late 1800s. Foreign missionaries had through their activities defined new areas that eventually had to be the society's responsibility, such as areas where the families were not able to cover a responsibility themselves. The population's health and education had always been the responsibility of the family and this meant in practice that it was only wealthy families that could afford housing, food, health care and education. Strandenæs expresses that "*The missionaries had a clear consciousness that the medical missionary work was a basic fundamental pioneer work that would be a model for humanitarian work in China and ensure sustainable development*" (my translation). (Strandenæs, 2006, p.178) As early as in 1877 there had been diaconal topics up for discussion at a Protestant missionary conference in Shanghai. Themes about various forms of oppression and actions promoting human rights in the country were discussed. Similar conferences were later held in various provinces in the years that followed.

In 1912, the Nationalistic folk movement in China increasingly demanded that education and future health care should be the nation's own responsibility. By building, organizing and running institutions over the years, the mission's work had prepared the grounds for the government. The government could eventually manage to take over and operate the institutions by themselves. (Strandenæs, 2006, p.172) During the Chinese Revolution, when the Communist Party of China established the PRC in 1949, the responsibility of social welfare was transferred to the state. They established a socialist welfare system providing social services through a centrally planned economy. After 1949, the CCP policy was to minimize religions while, at the same time, replacing them with Marxism as the only valid ideology. (Peng, 2005) This policy was a heavy blow for the Chinese

² See appendix 1.

Church. As the government was officially atheist, they viewed religion as symbol of feudalism and foreign colonialism. In 1954 The Three Self Patriot Movement was founded, which meant that the church was being run by the state and should be open for the government's control and influence. (Harbakk, 2004)

During the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976) all churches were closed. Most missionaries had left the country and the government had overtaken what was left of the social work done by missionaries. C. Fiedler (2012) says, as a result of this, charity was discouraged: “*During the Cultural Revolution charity became condoned as “a decoration of the ruling class used to cheat people”. This view persisted well into the 1980’s resulting in a significant diminishing of the traditional system of “relational charity”*”(p.116).

Ernst Harbakk, former missionary in China and Asia Secretary in Areopagos, talks about the period after the reform and opening.

...in the larger cities, gradually large congregations emerges in the beginning of the 80's. But they were not allowed to start with anything called diaconal work [...] it was statutory that one could not conduct any social humanitarian work, school activities or elderly care.
(Interview, 13.09.12)

Some years later, in 1979, Deng Xiaoping a politician and reformist leader of the Communist Party of China initiated China opening to the outside world. In 1982, **document no. 19** (Overmyer, 2003) was issued. This was a religious policy document, and a part of Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening policy permitting “normal” religious activities and religious organizations under the supervision of the government. The churches in China re-opened and the government officially restored the TSPM after thirteen years of non-existence.

Wickeri (2007) writes in his book “*Reconstructing Christianity in China*”, about Bishop K.H Ting, an Anglican bishop and one of China's most important church leaders. Bishop Ting's theology shaped his views on how the church should relate to the society. In his role as a church leader, Ting's approach to mission was contextual. He wished and

worked for a greater social involvement for the churches, and he had a desire to make Christianity Chinese. In November 1998 the TSPM/CCC held a meeting in Jinan, Shandong Province, where, in the opening speech, Ting presented his views on the theological reconstruction. Knud Jørgensen (2013) says: *“Instead of justification by faith he stressed what he called “justification by love”. The works of love justifies, whether you are inside or outside the church. The Church's task was therefore, he argued, to educate people to be good citizens and not primarily to call to repentance“* (p. 4) The government endorsed theological reconstruction for it fitted with the broader agenda of the adaptation of Christianity to socialism.

Within the framework of RAB (Religious Affairs Bureau), CCC and TSPM it was not possible for Christians to play a more active role in society. According to Wickeri, the reforms of openness created new ways for Christian-initiated involvement in society. In this period (1984-85) Hu Qiaomu, a member of the Central Committee of the CPC, begun to encourage religious groups to get involved in social welfare. (Wickeri, 2007, p. 272) These political changes made it possible for Christians to be involved in social welfare activities. The Churches in China did not have the financially means and recourses to take this kind of initiative, and they were now searching for a way to do this by receiving support from abroad. As an answer to this, K.H Ting and Han Wenzao started the planning of setting up a social welfare organization initiated by Christians. On the 19th of April 1985, the Amity Foundation was established in Nanjing.

In *Bridge*, a magazine issued by the Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre³, one can find one of the first articles about the forming of the Amity Foundation. Han Wenzao, the Director of the preparatory staff of the Amity Foundation, read the statement given on the formation of the Amity Foundation in Nanjing before the press in Hong Kong on March 21, 1985.

“We come before you today to announce our intention of forming a foundation for the purpose of promoting health, education and social service

³ Later called: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and culture.

projects in the Peoples Republic of China. This new undertaking, to be known as the Amity Foundation, is being created on the initiative of Chinese Christians. It represents the first time since 1949 that Chinese Christians citizens will join hands with friends in our nation and all around the world to create organization specifically designed to serve the humanitarian needs of the broader society". (Wenzao, 1985, p. 7)

He continued by saying: "...local and individual initiatives are encouraged in the struggle for social modernization. This makes possible greater cooperation between religious believers and non-believers in an atmosphere of unity, stability and social progress". (Ibid)

At the time of commitment to form Amity, their concerns were three-fold:

1. To play a more active role in the nation's social development
2. To make Christian involvement and participation more widely known to the Chinese people
3. To strengthen the ecumenical sharing and resources and international people-to-people relationships (ibid)

To start with, Amity supported existing institutions in China, and recruited teachers from overseas church agencies to serve in Chinese institutions of higher learning (ibid). Amity started funding church-run social service projects in 1986.

Wickeri writes that; "*To demonstrate that Amity was a Christian-initiated, but not a church-sponsored, organization, Ting and Han recruited both Christians and non-Christian board members*". (Wickeri, 2009, p. 275)

In 1991 the CCP issued Document nr.6 (Academic, 2011), which increased the control over all religious activities. Li Peng, the Premier of the People's Republic of China from 1988-98, wanted a strict control of the religions, but Jiang Zenim, the former General Secretary of the Communist Party of China from 1989 to 2002 had a more relaxed attitude towards the matter. Overmyer (2003) writes that Jiang Zenim called for an approach that included tolerance towards religious organizations, and spoke about the

recognition that religion affects the masses of a billion people. Resolutions of religious issues would have significance for national stability, ethnic unity and the promotion of socialist culture. (p. 15) With the liberations of religious policy under Jiang Zemin, the church now had more space for engaging in activities. (Carino, 2003) From the mid 80's until early 2000, writings about diaconal work and thoughts regarding the topic appeared in the Magazines *Bridge* and *Amity News Service*⁴. An article in *Bridge* describes the Guangzhou Love Social Service Centre, created by CCC and Guangzhou Three Self Committee. The author (Guangzhou Love Social Service Centre) describes their purpose like this:

“The Guangzhou Love Social Service Centre is one of the important ways we can practice the teachings of Jesus: “not to be served, but to serve”. We desire not only to make a contribution to the modernization of the country, but also to provide ways for our greater presence and involvement in the peoples’ common tasks, thereby changing the image of Christians among the Chinese people.” (Guangzhou Love Social Service Centre, 1985, p. 17)

Moreover, one can see that in 1990, the seminars began to take interest in the fields of social services. *Bridge* (1990) writes that the Fujian Seminary didn’t regard theological education as the one and only important area of study, but they also encouraged the students to participate in social work. On Women's Day, the students had to participate in social service work, and the Health Centre at the seminary established a health clinic to provide free treatment to passers-by.

In April 1995 *Amity News Service* publish an article about the increasing number of church-run social services in China. They could report that churches in China had over the last years become re-involved in social service work. This became visible during a seminar initiated by the Amity Foundation, where church representatives from 23 provinces attended. Most of the church-run projects were small, and it was geared towards the poorest people in Chinese society. During this seminar, the participants expressed that the church’s service to society had strong moral dimensions in a time of capitalism. The issue of some Chinese Christians being more concerned about personal

⁴ Magazine published by The Amity Foundation. Later called: Amity Newsletter.

salvation, instead of helping others, was discussed. It was decided to publish a column about this in *Tian Feng*, the CCC's church magazine, to report on the development and service work of Amity, local churches and individual Christians. (Amity News Service, 1995, 4.2) Yangzhen Middle School in Longguan, Zhejinag Province was the biggest church-run project founded by Amity at that time.

The good works of Christians have been highly appreciated over the years, by both individuals and the society. Kari Harbakk, former Project coordinator in Areopagos and missionary in China tell a story from her own experience of doing diaconal work in China, working with the Amity Grandma Project:

I remember when I worked a bit with orphanages in China. One time I was there, I saw all these busy ladies, young girls who worked at the orphanage. Many of them didn't have much education or skills. At that time it was regarded as low status work. *"If someone did not want their children, what value did these children have to the community?"* [...] Sometimes, when I sat there, and saw how busy they were, I thought... *"Ahh...That little girl there should sit on someone's lap and have someone to talk to. Imagine if they had had a grandmother!"* One of my friends in the Amity Foundation, which wasn't a Christian, thought it was a very good idea [...] we have to get a nurse and a doctor that also could help. *"Fantastic, He said. But we HAVE TO get Christians, they are much better."* He, who wasn't even a Christian himself, said that. (Interview 13.09.12)

In 1997, one of the largest church-run hospitals in China could be found in Huainan City, Anhui Province. The local Christian council founded Guangji hospital in 1994 with the objective of being "salt and light" to the surrounding society. Many of the hospital's doctors and nurses were Christians, and the hospital became known both for the quality of care and the warmth and commitment of its staff. Many retired doctors from other hospitals offered their services for free at this hospital. *Amity News Service* reports that all staff at the hospital, Christians and non-Christians, met every week for a one-hour Bible study. (Amity News Service, 1997, 6.1/2)

"A church that wishes to be salt and light must be a church with a social agenda. This attitude, nothing new for most Western Christians, is still rather radical in the Chinese

Protestant church.” This was written the *Amity News Service* in 2001 (Amity News Service, 2001, 3/4). The church in China had up until that time been either too poor to engage in social service work or had been merely uninterested. In *Tian Feng*⁵, the writer Xiao Anping speaks about this and about the necessity of this attitude to change. He expresses that only through involvement in the society can the church be salt and light. Through these activities, the church has been welcomed by society and helped create a better image of the church. In the same issue of *ANS*, we can find an article; *Stop being bad stewards of God’s Creation!* written by Feng Hao from Guangzhou, found in the *Tian Feng*’s February edition. This article points to the Christian’s responsibility of taking care of the environment, as another aspect of being involved in society. By referring to the book of Genesis he reminds the readers about each living creature’s special place and value within creation. “*The nature we live in is a part of God’s creation and as such, we ought to love and protect it*”. (Amity News Service, 2001, 3/4).

In addition to Amity Foundation and social services done by churches there is one other organization worth mention in this context. As one of the oldest Christian organizations in China, The YMCA/YWCA has been actively involved in social service work over the years. “Not to be served, but to serve“ is the general motto of the YMCA movement. American Christian missionaries founded the first Chinese YMCA, in 1895. They opened fitness centers, started literacy classes for women, and during the wartimes years they sheltered refugees. Later on, YM/WCA work ranged from musical education and youth activities, homes for the elderly and a re-employment service center to one of today’s projects, Home of Grace, a Center for people that suffer from mental disabilities and minor impairments (Nanjing YM/WCA, 2013). Today the YWCA in Nanjing runs a mobile medical team in cooperation with the church. The mobile medical team does consultations inside the church, and the church helps organize this. They also provide English instruction for the poor children in the community.

⁵ Church magazine of the China Christian Council, only issued in Chinese.

Li Enlin, General Secretary at Nanjing YWCA, says this about the church involvement in the community:

Usually the government and society regard Christians as good people. They say they are always trying to do something good for others. That is a common reflection from the society, usually because at home the Christians behave better than the others. [...] And also they try to help their neighbors, and the neighbors will see they are Christians, that's why they are doing these good things for us. (Interview 01.09.12)

In *Amity News Services* 11th Issue, Jin Wei, then acting General Secretary of the YMCA's of China and Vice Chair of the National TSPM Committee, writes about the newly established Social Service Department of the National CCC/TSPM:

After the Seventh National Christian Conference, the National CCC/TSPM Committee established a Social Service Department. This carries an important message: In the 21st century, the Chinese church will express its social values in a more pronounced way vis-à-vis this transforming society and the church will take on the responsibilities of caring about the society and serving the community. We believe that love to the community is the continuation of God's love for us. In living out Christian deeds through social service, more people will come to realize that Christianity spreads truth, good and beauty (Wei, 2002, 11/12)

A few years before this, Bishop K.H Ting had already recognized the need for the Church to be more involved in social work. Christians should not only be Christians in their hearts, but also express their faith through actions. He suggested that Christianity should further develop ethical teaching regarding the close relationship between the Gospel and social service, as social services provided by the church was still a rare sight in China (Rongwei, 2003, 1/2).

Rev. Deng Funcun, Director of the newly established Social Service Department, spoke about the plans for the department in an interview in 2003. He said that the Christian faith is not only expressed through worship, but also through social services. After the rebuilding of churches, the engagement in social service was growing among the

churches. As a result of this there had emerged a need for a national department to promote and provide guidance. These were the plans for the Social Service Department according to Deng Funcun:

1. Starting by promoting the idea of social service among Christians through the magazine *Tian Feng*
2. Raising local funds and support for projects
3. Working in partnership with churches overseas
4. Educating church members on social service so that Chinese society will know more about Christians and Christianity

He continued by saying that the SSD should function as a bridge between the church and society, but should not implement projects by themselves (Carino, 2003).

Nine years later, in 2011, The Social Service Department did a case study of the Churches in Sichuan. This was a study of the situation and the demands of the social service carried out by CC/TSPM of Sichuan Province, Chengdu City, Luzhou City Dazhou City and the service ministry agencies connected to the churches. (CCC Social Service Department, 2012)

The findings of this study showed that:

- People support, trust and recognize the church's work
- The professionalism in social work in the churches needs to be improved There is a shortage of professionals in social work in the church
- The organizational structure is poor. The leaders of the social work in the churches are part-time employees who are not able to focus 100% on social work. In addition to working with this they have many other responsibilities in the church.
- The government praises the church social work and wants to support the church work within the laws

- The church's understanding of social work/diakonia is too narrow. Diaconal work can include much more than the work that is done today.

During the focus group interviews, church staff said that it is important to conduct social work to influence the economy and society. It improves the church's reputation. They also mention the importance of distinguishing between social work and preaching, and adhere to the law. They believe that faith without action is a dying faith, and understand social work as a way to share the gospel and engage the grassroots. The churches wanted to extend the work, but did not have enough resources and no strategic plan. As for education, there are major deficiencies in training and education in diakonia in China today.

2.8 Traditional and contemporary values in China

Doing research on a topic related to values, religion and culture evokes a need to understand the environment, in this case China. I have therefore chosen to take a closer look at the value system of the Chinese people and how that system has been important to their thinking regarding society and relationship between people.

2.8.1 Values in China today

Gerda Wielander writes that as a student in China in the 1980's she rarely came across the word "love" in daily conversations. *"Today "love" is much more evident in China; the character is commonly used in advertising, and as a word it has entered common parlance."* (Wielander, 2011, p. 119) Also the government and the official discussion have discovered this word, and are using it in the context of building a Harmonious Society. The word used in Chinese is the term aixin, (愛心), and is understood to mean "compassion" or "kindness".

Building a harmonious society is probably the most popular political slogan in China today. Regarding this, Gerda Wielander (2011) refers in her article *Christian love and china's harmonious society* to Guohan Ai, a professor of Writing Arts at Rowan

University. He says that the building of a Harmonious Society is rooted in traditional Chinese culture and an interpretation of Confucianism's open-minded side, but believes there are even more references to Marx, Mao and Deng Xiaoping. "*Confucianism is important only insofar as he was a key influence on the formations of Chinese Marxism in the first place, but the building of Harmonious Society does not constitute a re-evaluation or re-discovery of Confucianism.*" (p. 121)

In October 2006, the CCP passed a strategic document called "Chinese Communist Party Central Committee's Resolution on Major Issues of Building a Harmonious Society." This document says:

A Harmonious Society is one with democracy and the rule of law, equality and justice, honor and love, a society which is full of vitality, stability and order, and is environmentally friendly. (Wielander, 2011, p. 120)

Hu Jintao's Harmonious Society was a direct development of Jiang Zemin's and Deng Xiaoping theory of the socialist spiritual civilization. The goal was to create a moral civilization that would raise the people's political consciousness and morality by promoting revolutionary ideals and discipline without giving in to foreign ideas. New folk heroes and old ideals were put forward as examples and inspiration to the people. An example of this is Lei Feng, a soldier of the People's Liberation Army of China, portrayed as a model citizen because of his selflessness, modesty and devotion to Mao.

Confucianism plays a major role in Chinese culture and its value system, both in creating a harmonious society and also as one of society's most important philosophies next to Taoism and Buddhism. Confucius was a thinker, political figure, educator, and founder of the Ru School of Chinese thought. In his book *Confucian Thoughts*, Tu Wei-Ming (1985) mentions five important relationships:

1. Ruler-minister
2. Father-Son
3. Husband-wife
4. Elder brother-younger brother
5. Friend-friend

Confucius wanted people to see these relationships as one large family where responsibilities were mutual. The Chinese view of the human being tends to see the person in the context of a social network rather than as an individual. To be human is to love all human beings while managing these **five virtues**: Respect, tolerance, trustworthiness in word, diligence in action, and kindness.

There are limitations within the five relationships mentioned above. Wielander (2011) writes that a researcher at the Haidian Institute of Social Science, Zou Xingming, says that related to these five relationships, “the hierarchy of love” is based on blood relationships, and implies that love for the family is greater than love for the person next to you in the street. He argues that this is still stronger than other concepts created to form a Harmonious Society. Fai Xiaotong (1992) describes the individual related to the society as circles on the surface of the lake when a rock is thrown. Each individual is in the center of their own circle, and then the next circle represents your relationships. Each circle indicates a layer of emotional and moral distance. Fai states that in the traditional Chinese system of morality, there was no concept of love comparable to the one in Christianity, that is, a universal love without distinctions.

Some believe that the human preoccupation with money is the reason why many people do not care about strangers outside their circle of relationships which are in need of help. In China solidarity is traditionally reserved for those we know. Deng’s official encouragement and legalizing the pursuit of individual wealth has given rise to a mentality bent on getting rich. This has made it difficult to give moral guidance.

According to Katrin Fiedler: “*Confucianism or socialism creates groups of “insiders” who are perceived as deserving of help, and “others” who are excluded from it*” (Fiedler, 2012, p. 169). Strangers are not included in the Confucian worldview. In later years there has been a change in China. Xunxian Yan (2009) writes that after the Sichuan earthquake, there has been a rise of universalistic moral values. The compassion towards strangers done by thousands of volunteers involved in relief work after the Wenchuan earthquake is observed as different from the compassion of traditional China. It is more similar to the Good Samaritan in the Bible, where human solidarity is more important than social, economic, and geographic and racial differences.

2.8.2 Christianity's impact on the Chinese culture and society

There is an academic debate going on in China where they are trying to determine what kind of values the future Chinese society should be built on. Harbakk (2004), claims it is mostly the traditional values of Confucianism, but in order to be relevant it has to adjust to the reality where the people live today and relate to the transcendent reality. By transcendent reality I mean aspects of life that are outside or above the limit of what humans can comprehend. This is where Christianity has something to offer the Chinese society, which Confucianism is lacking.

Philip Wickeri (2012, p. 3) writes that over the last years, theology and religious studies in China have grown quickly. Religion represents an alternative to secularization and secular values and it fills a spiritual vacuum. He mentions three types of characteristics of Christianity which could promote harmony in China, and I have chosen to highlight one of them; the Christianity whose mission is one of social involvement and cultural engagement and an active participant in society. This means, according to Wickeri, that Christianity should have an emphasis on social service, education and advocacy.

Katrin Fiedler (2012) writes that the great earthquake of 2008 provoked an outstanding outpouring of help. Much of the help, both practical as well as financial aid, was channeled through NGO's, many of them faith based. This is creating a new culture of helping and volunteering. She says: *"Into this space moves Christianity with its strongly communal nature both in doctrine and practice"*. (p.169)

As mentioned earlier, due to the government's interest in encouraging religious philanthropy in recent years, a variety of church-initiated organizations are involved in social services that benefit Chinese communities all over the country, whatever their ethnic and religious background. K. Fiedler (2012, p. 174) says that this means they are offering their help to people outside the realm of the immediate "family of strangers" in the congregation.

Fielder has found two social mechanisms by which Chinese Christians make strangers into persons deserving their generosity:

1. The adoption of “sisters and brothers” as “family members”; the congregation becomes a part of the traditional extensive family
2. Change in trust induced by Christian faith. Christians see other Christians, even if they don’t know them, as particularly trustworthy and thus worthy of help. Christian faith can become a new or alternative source of trust and social capital.

She continues by saying: *“I do think that the Christian worldview of strangers as “neighbors” has the potential to change anonymous situations, and that with the spread of Christianity, more and more Chinese will come to adopt a different attitude towards total strangers.* (Katrin Fiedler 2012, p. 176)

The resources of Christianity, as well as China’s other great religious traditions, have much to offer to help find a way out of China’s current social crises. China’s society today is not harmonious (Madsen, 2012, p. 9). The temple associations in China are reviving and are able to provide services which the government is not able to provide. As an alternate way to exceed the limitations of the local family or temple associations, the Christian associations present themselves. In China, most Christians are relatively poor, and most church organizations have only modest funding. Christianity has been excluded from wealth and power in today’s China, which has been good for the spiritual integrity of the churches.

During the Cultural Revolution, the government persecuted Christians. Because of this, and due to continuing government restrictions, many Chinese Christians are defensive, feeling weak and vulnerable. Many are reluctant toward engaging in the society and seek a faith that is oriented toward personal salvation rather than social activism. Because of bad experiences, many are afraid and do not dare to reach out to help a stranger. There has been a violation of trust in others. Madsen writes that sometimes the Christian experience of prayer and worship can lead some Christians to “reach beyond themselves and be ambassadors of trust in a fearful world.” (Madsen, 2012, p. 16) This can lead other

Christians to become aware of their responsibility toward all people, both inside and outside the church.

According to Katrin Fielder (2012), religion seems to play a special role in motivating people for long-term generosity. Christianity helps to change existing patterns of trust and social capital and makes it possible to be generous to total strangers (p.164).

3 Method

In this chapter I will explain the method I have chosen and explain the choices that I have made. The thesis is based on empirical data, and the starting point is my research question (a research question is a question designed to indicate the purpose of the survey). The chapter also addresses the challenge of interpreting and making meaning of other peoples' understanding of a term. My own standpoint related to the theme will be introduced, and the research process will be described.

3.1 Choice of method

By doing this survey I have sought to understand how the diaconal agents at different levels in China understand diakonia. To achieve the best possible understanding of their thoughts and reflections, qualitative methods are recommended. Alan Bryman writes that qualitative research is a strategy, which emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collecting and analyzing of data (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). The advantage of this method is that it allows for a greater flexibility regarding questions, when surveying the interviewees.

Semi-structured interviewing is used so that the researcher can keep more of an open mind about the contours of what he or she needs to know about, so that concepts and theories can emerge out of this data (Bryman, 2012, p. 12).

Interview is often used in addition to written material. The relatively unstructured nature of the semi-structured interview guide allows for detailed questions related to various parts of the study's research question.

At first I had trouble finding written material on the topic. As a result of the interviews I obtained material which addressed the issue that was of interest to the study. The study is based on relevant literature, conference papers and interviews with experts on China and people working in organizations, provincial councils and churches.

3.2 Qualitative interviewing and selection of participants

Prior to the interviews, I prepared a semi-structured interview guide (See appendix 2).

All participants were asked the same set of questions, with the exception of some additional questions to the organizations. The benefits of developing an interview guide is that it helps in remembering questions, and every participant gets equal opportunity to express their views on the topic. A semi-structured interview offers open question, with the possibility of elaboration. Asking all the participants the same questions also made it easier to summarize answers. Their responses to the questions show that all participants have the same close relation to the topic. Some work or have worked closely with the diaconate in China, while others are more familiar with the context in which the diaconal work takes place. This was a conscious choice on my part, when I needed more background information about the context.

Sampling of areas and participants is a common strategy in qualitative research. My approach to the sampling method can be categorized as “snowball sampling”. Snowball sampling is a technique in which I as the researcher initially sample a small group of people relevant to my research question, and these participants suggest other participants who have experience or knowledge about the topic I wish to investigate (Bryman, 2012, p. 424).

The participants I interviewed had in common that they were in one way or another connected to, or had knowledge of, diakonia in China. In collaboration with my advisor I came in contact with people who knew a lot about the subject, which led me to new participants. I sent out requests by mail (see appendix 3) to churches I wanted to visit and conduct interviews in, but faced great challenges in either not getting any response or the fact that recipients did not speak English. This problem was solved gradually. Through acquaintances, I came in contact with church staff in China that spoke English. Some of the participants were not contacted in advance of my arrival in China, but were asked after having been recommended by the churches.

All in all, I interviewed 16 people. I chose to do research in two churches, two provincial councils and two organizations. The result was that I interviewed:

- Five persons with knowledge of the church and social work in China
- Five pastors from the churches
- Two pastors in the provincial Councils
- Two employees in Amity
- Two employees in CCC

3.3 Challenges

What is lost in translation?

Cross-language qualitative research occurs when a language barrier is present between researchers and participants. The language barrier is frequently mediated through the use of a translator or interpreter. (Squires, 2009) One of the challenges I met during my interviewing process was the use of an interpreter, which I used in three of my interviews. The interpreters worked in the church, and were familiar with the context and theological terminology. By using an interpreter I could not be sure if the meaning of my questions was interpreted and translated with the same content and meaning as I had wanted to convey. I could also not be sure if the interpreter conveyed the participant's thoughts in such a way that their opinion could be clearly understood. This was reinforced by the fact that the interpreter I used was not used to speaking English, but had enough knowledge that we could have a conversation on the topic. The use of an interpreter may threaten the validity of the study. There could be inconsistency between what the participants meant and what I have perceived as their reflections and thoughts.

In my interviews I asked whether the participants knew the word diakonia. Diaconal theology is European in a way, so for me it was important to not impose imported categories when on the participants. During my stay I tried to refrain from seeing things with Norwegian eyes. I have my western views, which I was aware of, but I tried to push them aside. It was important for me to experience the context which the church and the

organization live in and try to understand some of their challenges, which are quite different from the challenges Christians and churches in Norway experience.

3.4 Implementation of the qualitative interviews

All participants received information about the study by mail-asked to participate in an interview. The information consisted of the thesis title, and what I would like to learn more about. Audio recordings were made of all interviews and all participants were asked if they were okay with this. They were informed that recorded conversation and the interviews would be anonymous. One of the participants specifically asked that her name and others involved in her answers should not be made public. The purpose of the study was explained before each interview.

The majority of interviews were conducted in October 2012 and took place at the participants' working places in China. Two of the interviews were conducted by mail. One of the interviews was done via Skype, and the Norwegian participants were interviewed in their homes. All participants felt more "at home" than I did. Each interview lasted about one hour.

Participants in the organizations consisted of two men (CCC) and two women (Amity).

Participants in the provincial councils consisted of a woman and a man.

Participants in the churches consisted of four women and one man. Other participants consisted of three men and two women.

Total: 9 women and 7 men

3.5 Reliability and validity

Validity means that the study should have credibility and transferability. Bryman (2012) says that this is done by ensuring that research is carried out according to good practice, and that the investigator has correctly understood the social world in which the survey has been conducted. The fact that all interviews are transcribed word-for-word makes it possible to reproduce the participants' own statements. In the presentation of the empirical findings, I have tried to be as faithful to the participants' own words as

possible. In some places I have removed some words to make the sentences flow better, but I have been careful when doing this so it did not change anything in the statement's meaning. The fact that all interviews are transcribed makes it possible to reproduce the participants' own statements. Some of the challenges I met regarding interpretation have already been dealt with in point 3.3.

The findings were discussed and summarized in a final conclusion.

Qualitative findings tend to be oriented around the uniqueness of the social world being studied (ibid). Could my study be transferred to another context? I believe that the political situation and the history of the church in China make the church relationship with society unique. Investigating the understanding of diakonia and its diaconal activities could be transferred to another setting, but because of the lack of diaconal understanding embodied in CCC's or Amity's plans, I believe that the findings cannot be transferred automatically to another context.

Reliability means that the study should be dependable. No study on the understanding of diakonia in China has, to my knowledge, been conducted earlier. Therefore, it has been difficult to find similar research done in other contexts. I have therefore chosen to compare the survey responses from organizations, provincial councils and churches. If it is possible for others to confirm my findings, it will be shown by future surveys.

4 Empirical findings in the interviews

Amity Foundation and the Social Service Department of the CCC in Shanghai are both involved in diaconal work and diaconal training of the province's councils and churches in China. To get a clearer picture of the interviewee's thoughts and reflections and a better overview of the empirical material, I have chosen to divide the material into six sections. This follows the structure on the next page, where you can see which level the interviewees belong to and which role they have within their own context.

Section 1: Diakonia and its theological understanding

Section 2: Reasons for focusing on diaconal work

Section 3: The difference between diakonia and other social work

Section 4: Involvement in social service – do Christians see it as important?

Section 5: The teaching of diakonia

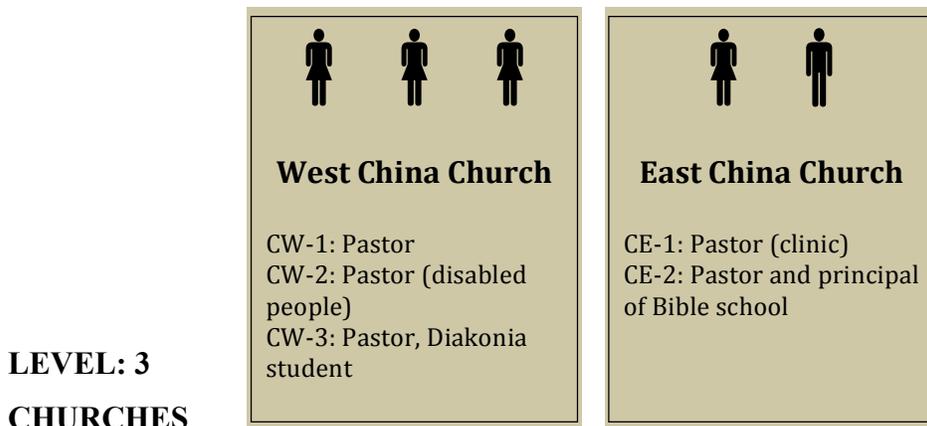
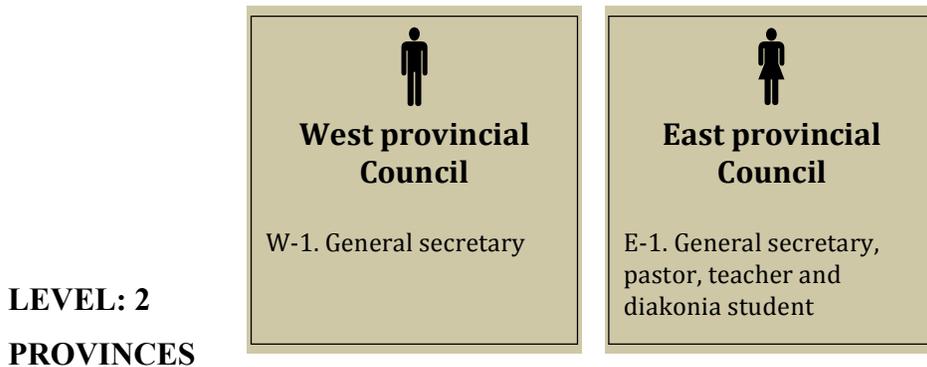
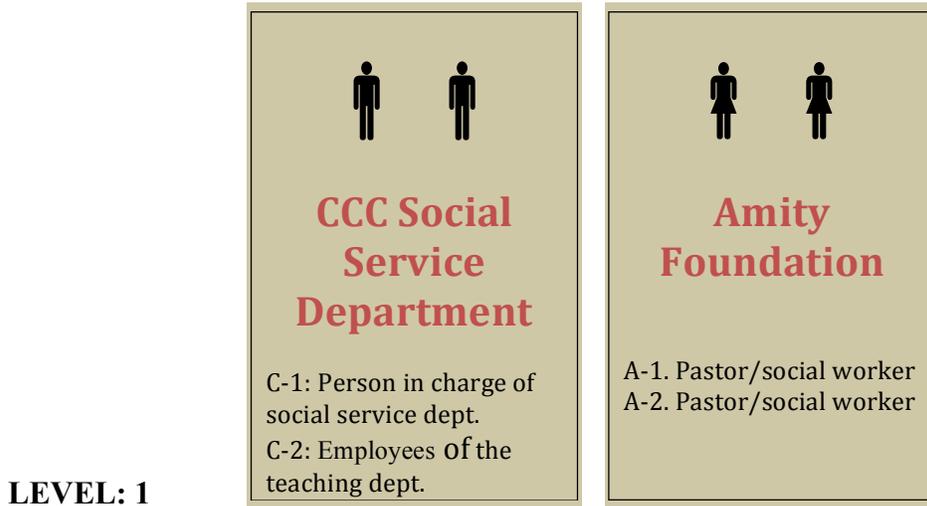
Section 6: The government's and society's view of Christian social engagement

Because some of the interviewees would like to remain anonymous I have chosen not to use any personal, provincial or church names, but have used the first letter of the organization or geographical area to distinguish between them. Where there are multiple interviewees within each church or organization I have given them numbers.

For example: Amity person 1 = A-1, or East China Church person 3 = CE-3

Each section is based on the interviewee's statements about his or her own understanding and practice of Christian social work. Point 4.6 is not based on direct information from the government or the church members, but is the interviewee's personal understanding of the situation.

OVERVIEW



4.1 Diakonia and its theological foundation

4.1.1 The understanding of diakonia in the organizations

The theological foundation and understanding of diaconal work within both the Social Service department and Amity have their basis in the New Testament. They refer to different scriptures, but they are all found within the gospels. They all believe that most church members and leaders in China are not familiar with the term diakonia. According to both organizations, the term diakonia equally belongs to churches, organizations and individuals. SSD and Amity both explain diakonia as the practice of your belief, and their goal is to show God's love by doing social work. They have similar opinions about the gospel as not only evangelization and saving souls, but that the gospel is also about the actions.

Amity Foundation

A-2 describes Amity's theological foundation like this:

....the most important thing we emphasize on is, Jesus himself [...]we don't only do the teaching of Jesus, but what Jesus is doing [...] and also inspiration from what Jesus said; You should imitate me, as I imitate my Father (A-2).

I interpret this as a scripture reference from John 13:15 which says: *"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."*

Before informant A-1 began working in Amity Foundation, her knowledge about diakonia was based on what she had read in a book about medical theology. Her perception of diaconal work was connected with the work done by deacons in the churches. In Amity she learned about diakonia, its content and the different facets of the diaconal ministry. She discovered that diakonia does not only belong to the churches, and the goal of diakonia isn't to evangelize in the traditional sense of the word. She believes that some people understand diakonia as a kind of mission, and not as social service work. Informant A-1 finds this perspective of the term diakonia interesting, but chooses to refer to Amity's understanding of the concept diakonia:

We think diakonia is responsible for the church calling, God wants us to show his love, without goals [...] God did not want this hand give you a bread, this hand give you the gospel. This is wrong. Because God loves us, we love the people (A-1).

Informant A-1 believes that Amity at an early stage used the word diakonia. Informant A-2 does not think of the idea of diakonia as a new concept in Amity, but the term is new. In Amity's past, many church leaders have worked in the organization. They have been good role models, and the employees have been influenced directly from their thinking. A-1, A-2 and the Amity team are continuously working towards a better understanding of the term diakonia.

Amity has organised diaconal training in several churches around China, and as a part of this training their participants learn about the term diakonia. Amity describes their social service and diaconal work in a way that informant A-1 finds very helpful.

Diakonia is love in action; it's a kind of living faith, a kind of action for our faith [...] Amity is Love in Action (A-1).

According to A-1 there wasn't any Chinese translation for the word diakonia. During their search to find a way to translate diakonia into Chinese they discovered a small book from Hong Kong about the subject, at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary which contained a good translation of the word diakonia.

The Chinese word for diakonia is: 服侍圣, pinyin: (fu shi sheng gong)

Translated into English it means: Service – holy - work.

Social Service Department of the CCC

The verse: "*Giving is more blessed than receiving*"¹¹, hangs on the wall in the Social Service Departments office in Shanghai. These are the same verses that are used in the whole organization of China Christian Council.

¹¹ Acts 20: 35 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Informant C-1 perceives diaconal work as a vital part of the church's work. The SSD uses the New Testament as their basis to serve, with the desire to imitate the actions of Jesus. Informant C-2 supports this by underlining diaconal work as important, and a part of the gospel. The gospel speaks not only about saving souls and the spiritual life, but also about serving people and supports this by saying: "... *the greatest love is to do the least thing*" (C-2), and I interpret this to be a verse from Matt 25: 40: "*The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*"

Informant C-1 says that they haven't any paper that says what diakonia is, but in their pamphlet, they explain diakonia as an action that comes from their belief, and a part of their belief. Preaching is important, but action is just as important (C-1).

If we leave that action; that means that our preaching is empty (C-1).

Informant C-2 mentions both Amity and SSD when I ask about the word diakonia. I interpret that C-2 regards diakonia as social service done by Christian organizations and churches. CCC started their social service work at the beginning of the new century. The leadership changed, Bishop Ting and Dr Han Wenzao stepped down, and were replaced by a younger Christian leadership. Their understanding of diakonia, as a part of the church ministry, started a process of developing a department of social service that should have its focus on diaconal work through the churches (C-2).

C-1 heard the word diakonia for the first time when he was in Denmark, participating in a diakonia course. At that time he regarded diakonia as the social service work of the church, but this has changed.

.... for me I think diakonia, this word is, it is a feature of church. It means whether it comes from a church organization or it comes from individual Christians, I think both can be called diakonia (C-1).

4.1.2 The understanding of diakonia in the provincial councils

The theological foundation and understanding of diakonia, in the provincial councils, can be found in Matthew 20: 28.

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Both provincial councils understand the word social service, but are not familiar with the term diakonia.

East provincial council

E-1 says that she knows the word diakonia, after the translator explains it to her in Chinese. Her father was a pastor, and she heard about this term from her parents when she was young. There were many people coming to their house, sick and in need of help. Some of them lived in their home for a long time.

E-1 works within the Christian ministry of the social service department in her provincial council. When she is asked to describe the provincial Christian social service or diaconal work she mentions:

- Service for the orphans
- Service for the poor
- Catastrophe and relief work-

They have a plan for their social work but it is simple and not very detailed.

An example: In church they have a group of people who have a special concern for the orphanages. This group is responsible for visiting them, bringing them gifts and helping them with their needs (E-1).

In E-1's church and provincial council, they have heard about the concept of Christian social service, but she believes that their understanding may not be comprehensive. Some Christians do understand what it means, but to most Christians it means that they should

serve people, and help them if they are sick. She also mentions that many Christians do not understand that they also should care for the people outside church - the non-Christians.

West provincial council

The west provincial council does social service by carrying out different kinds of projects. W-1 has never heard the word diakonia before, but understands the term Christian social service. W-1 categorized their social work into five groups:

- Education program, which includes scholarship project, teaching aids project and English training project.
- Disaster relief program, which includes earthquake relief, drought relief, flood relief and landslide relief, etc.
- Medical program; includes the mobile clinic, inpatient care, hospice care, leprosy care and village doctor training.
- Construction program: new church construction, old church repair or rebuilding, rural road construction.
- Other services like planting crops, raising livestock, etc.

Informant W-1, in the west provincial council says that as a follower of Christ, they should learn to serve others and love one another. In addition to the verse from the Bible motioned above, W-1 also mentions two other verses he thinks are related to Christian social work. These are from Matthew 22:37 – 40 and from 1 John 4:21:

To love God is the first and greatest commandment and the second is to love your neighbour [...] All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

4.1.3 The understanding of diakonia in the Churches

The word diakonia is unknown to all the individuals interviewed, except for CW-3. They all understand the meaning of the word, when it is explained in Chinese, but have difficulties giving examples of their church social service work without me first giving them some examples. The informants from both churches say that you can find the grounding for social work in the Bible. One informant from the each of the two churches mentioned Matthew 20:28 as their theological foundation for their church work.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

The churches haven't established a social service department in their church, but are cooperating closely with the provincial council's social service departments. They do not have employed personnel that are fully dedicated to social service work, but some employees have special responsibilities for certain groups in the church.

East China Church

In addition to the passage in the Bible already mentioned, the two informants in the East China Church mention a passage from Matthew 25:40, which says: *Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.*

When they felt hungry Jesus fed them. That means to serve. Jesus died, that is the highest, to serve. So we should follow Jesus and serve (CE-2).

They regard this as the theological foundation of their church's social work.

In the East China Church they have a variety of different diaconal services.

- Fellowship for blind people
- Home and hospital visits
- Visit orphanages and elderly homes
- Fellowship for disabled people
- Food distribution for poor people during holidays

- Farming and planting
- Westward Fellowship (Concern for the western part of China)
- Clinic - health care
- Helping poor students

CE-2, one of the pastors, mentions their fellowship for blind people. Once a week they meet in the church to worship, pray and sing hymns. They do this for their spiritual life. Every Chinese New Year the church prepares food for the poor so that they also can celebrate the holiday. The church members visit the orphanage and the elderly home, and when a member of the church is sick, a pastor will visit them. CE-2 tells about a visit to the hospital (CE-2);

...we do not go just to have a look and a talk, but also to pray. Some patients feel disappointed, but Christians they are different. Even if they have big physical problems they don't feel sad. They are happy, and even sing hymns. That influences the other patients (CE-2).

A fellowship called Westward is a group of people who are concerned about the poor areas in the western parts of China. There are few churches and Christians in these areas and the fellowship group visits these western areas, prays and shares the gospel with the people there, and carry out some social work. The church also visits poor areas to help the farmers with planting and farming (CE-2).

The church runs a clinic, in cooperation with an organization connected to the government. The organization, the church and the clinic cooperate to help the poor students in the area. All of them spend time together to celebrate holidays and festivals, and it is a network that covers two provinces, according to (CE-1).

The Religious Affairs Bureau Department in China encourages the churches to do more social work to benefit the people. The provincial council job is to focus on church work. According to CE-2, the provincial council regard social work as a part of this. The general secretary of the provincial council is currently studying in Hong Kong to improve her theology and social service skills.

Church-run social service work is new for them, but they have a person in charge of this. For this kind of position, they use the title Teacher, not Deacon. They have a work plan, but did not give me any details.

West China Church

The term diakonia is a bit different in China, but the content and the meaning have to do with social work. The West China Church has no plan for social service; they just do it! CW-1 believes that diaconal work is grounded in the Bible. She does not go into details, but mentions Acts 6 as an example.

Their general concept from the Bible is that the Christians should help people in need, love people and love God. CW-2 believes that God's love is the same for everyone, and by reading the Bible they easily understand this: "*I think it is not so special*" (CW-2).

According to pastor CW-1, the church does not divide clearly between worship and social work. CW-3 says that diakonia is a new subject in their church, and is therefore very little understood from a theological perspective. They do not have a systematic study or teaching of diakonia in her church. Her understanding of diakonia comes from the verses in Mark 10:45: "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"

In the West China Church's diaconal services:

- Fellowship for disabled people
- Hearing-impaired fellowship
- Sunday school
- Activities in summer and winter
- Visit elderly home and orphanages
- Visit poor and homeless people and bring them to church
- Giving financial support
- Food distribution for poor people during holidays
- Collect garbage (environment)
- Participating in relief work after the earthquake

The western provincial council has a social service department, and their office is located inside the church building. Therefore, some of the church social service is incorporated in the provincial council's work. When there was an earthquake in Sichuan in 2008, the provincial council organized the support to the disaster areas, and the church organized some church members to support the victims. The members of the church followed the instructions of the provincial council department. In the disaster areas they provide support to both Christians and non-believers.

Within the church they have different fellowship groups. Pastor CW-2 is responsible for three groups for disabled people. One of them is called the Angel Fellowship. Some of the work they do is helping them read the Bible, teaching them how to get a job and helping the disabled beggars to rent a house.

We sometimes go to the community to help the poor people, and every year in the middle autumn festival we go out to look for the beggars and give them gifts with fruits, moon cakes and the Holy Bible [...] and invite them to come to our church (CW-2).

Pastors CW-3 is currently studying diakonia in Hong Kong. She describes the diaconal work as divided into activities inside and outside of the church. Inside the church they have different kinds of fellowship groups and outside the church they have established homes for the elderly that include both Christian and non-believers. CW-3 understands diakonia as a way the Christian can get involved and be a part of the society. It is to be a Christian witness and she describes diakonia as the gospel in action, which means to help people with their needs, just like Jesus did.

We are the light and salts of world, - get into the crowd (CW-3).

Today the social service of the church is initiated and organized by the church. The church will appoint someone from the fellowship group to be in charge of different types of social work. CW-1 says that the volunteers do not have special training, except the fellowship group for the disabled.

For this we have a pastor in charge of the disabled people fellowship, a pastor from this church. The pastor organize volunteers to go outside to visit the disabled people and tell them about the salvation, and guide them to come to the church. They also give them some care and every week they bring someone to the church (CW-1).

They used to have a care-giving place for the elderly, but because the church didn't have professional personnel, the care-giving place was subcontracted to a family church.

4.2 Reasons for focusing on diaconal work

4.2.1 The organization's reasons

Amity Foundation

In Amity's staff meetings, they discuss the term diakonia to get a deeper understanding about what diakonia really is. Since Amity has expertise in this area, the churches invite them to help them create plans and implement new diaconal projects. In the process Amity also assists them with the social ministry and training of staff. The churches' expressed need for training to carry out diaconal projects is what gives A-1 inspiration for doing diaconal work (A-1).

A-2 believes that the most important task of diaconal work is to develop a deep understanding of what the diaconal ministry really is, and equip people with the skills to do social service through the churches. The churches want to do a good job, and need more professionals and experts that can lead the work.

Another important aspect is to highlight the Christian's involvement in society.

Amity's mission is to build a bridge between the church and the society. We want to encourage the church to participate in the social service work. Amity's social work wants to show a true Christianity to the society (A-1).

Amity Foundation encourages the churches to do more social service work. According to A-1's understanding, Chinese people think that practice is more important than ideas, thoughts and concepts. She wants the churches to put emphasis on actions, and expresses it like this:

I think diaconal work is a very good way for the Chinese church to show the Christian truth. God does not live in the Bible, God does not only live in heaven, God is living in your life. This is a living God (A-1).

Some years ago, Amity and a provincial council established a fund. A couple of years later the Tibet areas were hit by a big earthquake. In just one week churches donated over 1 million Yuen for these areas, through this fund.

You know, when the people heard this message, they were very surprised. The church is different; the church is a very strong power to help the people (A-1).

Amity's goal is to build a social service model, and A-1 wishes that the modern ideas of church development should come to China. They would especially like to know more about the concepts of diaconal work, how to develop diaconal work and what kind of diaconal work they can do. In this way more people could experience what the church is doing.

Social Service Department of the CCC

The society is dramatically changing in China. Some people are getting rich, others are getting poorer, and the economical gap is increasing. Because of this, C-2 believes the most important task for diaconal work in China today is to manifest God's love and justice through their work (C-2).

Through our hand, - that's the calling of God [...] You can't say that we became rich, and forget the others. That's the calling from God, that's the way to manifest the justice by God. God is justice. (C-2).

For both conservative and liberal churches in China, C-2 thinks the reasons for participating in social service work is to win the people. If that is not the result, they will give up. The Social Service Department tries to give help and service first, and only in this way can people understand the Christian love. C-2 says it isn't the size of the action that matters as long as you do it in the love of Jesus and continue to help people.

C-1 believes that one of the reasons for doing diaconal work is church involvement in society. The church should not be isolated from the outside. Another reason is the complaints the SSD gets from different provinces and Christian Councils, about wanting to improve their institutions like elderly homes, clinics or hospitals. The SSD tries to connect with other agencies specialized in social work or church diakonia in China and Hong Kong. C-1 says that as a national organization they need to support more, or cover more of the church-run social services.

Lately the Social Service Department has tried to shift their focus from constructing buildings into training and developing social service skills. Because sustainability depends on management, C-1 believes that these skills are more important than construction of buildings.

4.2.2 The provincial council's reasons

East provincial council

E-1's reason for wanting to participate in social service work is due to her discovering that diaconal work contributes to the development of the church. E-1 grew up in a Christian home. Her father was a pastor, and from an early age she was interested in church work, educating Christians, establishing churches and so on. In 1998, there was flooding in the area she lives in. She got to know a Foundation that works with this kind of disasters and asked them if they could send a representative. They sent one person, a woman. The church wanted her to travel to the disaster areas as a church representative to work together with the foundation, but E-1 was unwilling to do this kind of work. The woman inspired her to change her mind.

I felt like that sister, that lady, she loved the Lord a lot. And she loved the poor people. She identified herself a lot with the poor people. Very patient, [...] and considered their pride (E-1).

She changed her mind when she understood that the church could be an important part and an influence in the society, by being engaged in social work in the community. So from being passive, she became active. The most important task of Christian social work

is, in her opinion, to follow God's will, to know what He wants us to do, and equip other Christians so that they can go out and serve. Her goal for social service work is connected with the vision of the foundation she cooperates with.

By the church, through the church to help the poor, to care for the whole person, and the whole person's development (E-1).

West provincial council

The provincial council's reasons for focusing on diaconal work, is related to their theological foundation for social work:

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many¹².

These are the words that inspire them to do social service work and show their faith and love in action and service. W-1 says that when you go to the poverty-stricken area and see the people in need, you will be longing to be a helper for them. He believes the most important task of their Christian social service is to help people in need to be self-reliant and to love one another (W-1).

4.2.3 The churches

East China Church

What inspires them to do social work are the people they meet through the church. His wife started the church social work by having all the ministers join together to talk about the church social work. As a church they should not only take care of the members' spiritual life, but also their physical and material needs. At the same time, they also want to share the gospel with people (CE-2).

We want more people to come to church and believe in Jesus Christ. To get better, we also get reborn. That is a new life inside, a spiritual life. I think because we love the Lord, we love the people [...] we should follow Jesus, serve

¹² Matthew 20: 28.

the Lord. Not to be served, but to serve.” “You know, we need more people to be good people” (CE-2).

When CE-1 started to study theology 8 years ago, she had planned to teach or work in what she describes as the normal activities in the church. At that time there was no link between church and social work. Due to the economic improvement in China the church now has the possibility to help the local people to do social work. In her third year of study, she saw a new and different path for her life. When she graduated, many of her classmates had questions about her work in the clinic. As pastors they felt obligated to save souls and to share the gospel in the traditional way. CE-1 believes her job is basic work and a different kind of church work. Every task is important, but the most important task in their social work is to show love. When people see what they are doing, they see that they are different and recognize them as Christians.

CE-2 emphasizes the role of the Christians as citizens in the society, and believes the main goal for the social service is to build the church social consciousness.

The church should take responsibility for society. The Church does not only mean the chapel or the building. The church is the people, the people called to God. This people come together in church, and the people have responsibility for the society. The society; that is people (CE-2).

After the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, the organization she cooperates with helped the poor churches to rebuild their churches. To rebuild one church costs 72 000 RMB, - they rebuilt many, which means that the churches, by donating money, are aware of their social responsibility.

West China Church

According to CW-2 the most important part of the social service is to preach the gospel to the poor people. Just because they are poor in material things, they should not be poor in spirit. In addition they would like to help the poor people and the beggars get a job. CW-1 shares the same opinion as CW-2:

According to the social diakonia, it is to guide the people to come to Jesus. The purpose is of course that we as Christians, we expect the people to come to Jesus when we do this social work we will expect people to see the difference between the common social workers and diakonia. They see the difference (CW-1).

CW-3 believes that to serve is the foundation and the most important part of the Christian faith. This is the reason for participating in diaconal work. It is God's calling and mission for the Church.

4.3 What is the difference between diakonia and other social work?

The organizations, provincial councils and churches all believes that their faith as a basis for their social service work is what distinguishes them from other social work organizations.

4.3.1 The organizations

Amity Foundation

A-2 thinks that the terms diakonia and social work, fall within the same category, but their foundation is different. She believes that some people may think that diaconal work is emotionally based or initiated by a good heart, but in her opinion, it based in one's responsibility as a Christian. She says: *It is not something you choose - it's your calling, in order to remind people of their Father in heaven* (A-2).

Social Service Department of the CCC

C-1 believes that from the professional side there shouldn't be any difference between social work and diaconal work. He says that the biggest difference is that the Christian organizations should have their belief as the basis for the organization. *Their work is not just to make a living, but it is a call from God to serve people* (C-1).

C-2 believes that there are some similarities, but has a different perspective on the difference between diakonia and social work. He believes that the difference is that in the end, they have a mission. Jesus came not only to help our material life, but also our spiritual life.

They can't say they only do social work, without any mission. Since people know who they are and what they are doing, they will ask themselves where the love comes from (C-2).

4.3.2 The provincial councils

East provincial council

E-1 believes that the ordinary social work aims towards solving concrete material and physical problems. What makes the Christian social services different from other social work is the concern for the spiritual dimension of life, not only the material and physical part (E-1).

West provincial council

In the western provincial council they regard Christian social service as one of the ways "to be light and salt". Christian project beneficiaries share love with their neighbours after receiving love from others. In this way many can see the true love and "light". The difference between Christian social service and other social work is that it is done according to the Biblical principle and Christian vision and mission (W-1).

4.3.3 The churches

East China Church

In CE-2's opinion, to be a real Christian, you need to keep an open mind about people. Christians should not only serve other Christians, but everyone. Christians' care for other people improves the Christians' attitude and enhances their understanding of God's will. In addition to money, which other organizations also donate, Christians give the poor people attention and pray for them. Christians work with their hearts and with love, and comforts others with their actions (CE-1).

West China Church

According to CW-3, the professional skills are the same. The self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a role model, and God's love, are what makes them different from the non-Christians organizations. To illustrate the difference, I refer to a story told by CW-1:

A large company approached an orphanage, wanting to do social work and donate some money for the orphan. The management of the orphanage declined the offer, because they thought it did not help the children with what they really needed. The orphanage welcomes the church, because they come to share its love from God and help the children in the gift of self-esteem. In this way they are different.

4.4 Christians' involvement in social service – do Christians see it as important?

4.4.1 The organization's perception

Amity Foundation

Both in the cities and the countryside, Christians participate in social service projects and regard them as an important part of their Christian life. According to A-1 most Christians are not aware of this as diaconal ministry. In many villages, Christians play an important role in the social service work. This is helpful for the Church and is probably the reason why some people see Christianity as a good religion.

Even though some Christians see social service as a very important part of their Christian life, A-1 doesn't think most Chinese Christians are concerned about social problems in their community. In the past years, the church has gone through big sufferings and because of this, church members have felt that people don't respect and accept Christians in the same way others are accepted. As a result of this, older Christians do not think that the Christians should be involved in society. This contributes toward an attitude that since Amity is not church, some people believing that pastors shouldn't work in secular settings like Amity. A-1 and A-2 were criticized by many of their classmates after joining Amity:

Some people think that we should stay in the church. Only in the holy communities and don't enter the society. They are sinners, and we are the holies. We are saved by God (A-1).

Both A-1 and A-2 believe that this is an opinion that is generally reflected in the Chinese churches. A-1 used to think like this, but after working in Amity this has changed. Amity has many employees, and A-1 learned that although some of the employees are not Christians, they are very good people. In Amity, she learned that *all* people are created in the image of God. A-1 wants to let more people know that God wants us to serve people. A-1 and A-2 believe that God uses Amity, and this is the reason why Amity is still alive and flourishing in China. By working in Amity, A-1 and A-2 look at themselves as diaconal agents.

Social Service Department

C-1 believes that most Christians do not perceive social service as an important part of their life. Some Christians may have the tradition of thinking that the gospel does not have anything to do with serving other people. In C-1's opinion he thinks that if the churches considers social service as important, they would set up their own department.

In the Chinese tradition you put yourself in the centre, then family, best friends and then people on the outside. Christians are not an exception from this way of thinking, and some Christians choose to help only church members. C-1 believes some of these Christians feel they do not have the capacity to serve more than a few people, and choose not to prioritize the non-Christians. What complicates the situation is that the Chinese Christian belief is quite open, and therefore there is no clear statement that says what they should or shouldn't do. This makes it difficult to guide others, according to C-1. According to C-1, the theological research is not fully developed in China. Different people have different ideas, and they do not have a regulation or written confession of faith and doctrine.

This is our belief! We never say that, that's why different people have different understanding about it. In China we do not have this kind of certainty (C-1).

C-1 believes that for most people, the gospel is about soul saving, and does not have anything to do with social work. They refer to verses in the Bible to support these

opinions (C-1). C-2 confirms this, and adds that many Christians think that Christians and non-Christians should not work together. They avoid contact between Christians and non-Christians very clearly, and regard non-Christians as their enemy.

That is so wrong! Jesus walked among the non-Christians. They never worked only within the 12 disciples; they went out to the world. If you want to win the people, you have to go where they are, as Paul said (C-2).

C-2 describes the Chinese church in general terms as very conservative. The idea of doing social service work does not seem important to the churches. They emphasize more the personal salvation. He believes that they are in a process where the situation is changing. He sees this in the fact that more and more churches put emphasis on social service as a way to reach people. They understand that this is also a part of mission work; as a church they cannot be isolated from the outside world. CCC tries to open their eyes and minds to not only take care of Christians, your family, or the circle of relatives, but also reach out to the non-Christians. Gradually, more and more Christians understand that social service is an important part of their Christian life. In the beginning this way of thinking was rejected, and many regarded social service as non-spiritual (C-2). C-2 believes that some Christians took care of others, but suspects that their real agenda was evangelization. Nowadays this is changing.

Generally, C-1 would say that Christians are more concerned about the society than ordinary people. People outside the church describe Christians as more warm-hearted. C-2 says that more and more Christians start small groups, donate money, and visit poor areas to help, by themselves. One of the problems in the Chinese churches today, is the church leaders' strong focus on their own ministry. Many try to build mega churches, and raise their own salary. C-2 strongly disagrees with this practice and wants them to understand the situation for the many churches and Christians that are still living under quite different living conditions.

4.4.2 The provincial council's perceptions

East provincial council

E-1 believes that Christians see social service as important. It is not difficult to find people that would like to do this kind of service. When there is a job opening, more than 30 persons apply. For the applicants, this is not just a job, but it is Christian service, she emphasizes (E-1). E-1 believes that because of the church members' own need for care, they do not care enough for people outside the church. However, she emphasises, that there are many services aimed at non-Christians initiated by individuals. They know this is what God wants them to do, and E-1 believes they are conscious and understand themselves as diaconal agents.

West provincial council

The western provincial council sees social service as an important part of their lives:

"For we should be light and salt, and show our love by deeds. (W-1)

In W-1's opinion, Christians are concerned about social problems. The provincial council is understaffed and is dependent on work done by the local villagers. The provincial council is the coordinators, the promoters, fund-raisers, overseers, etc., but the local people are those who finally carry out the projects. W-1 believes that the Church is *for* the people and society. By participating in social service they demonstrate their faith in the society. The church should not "separate" from the society but take part in the society by doing social services. The church does not advocate being secluded; they advocate being included in the society.

4.4.3 The churches' perceptions

East China Church

CE-2 and CE-1 believes that some church members are aware that they are diaconal agents. They believe God uses them to serve and help people. By doing this, they are following God's will. Everything they do, they do for God's glory, not their own. When non-Christians see what they do, they understand that Christians do this for God.

To get more people involved in social service, CE-2 believe they need more teaching about the subject, and its importance. CE-1 believes that if the pastor teaches the Christians that according to the Bible, they should do social work, people will do as asked. CE-2 confirms this and says that peoples' interest in social work all depends on the pastor's interests and preaching. Some people understand the importance of Christian social service and are concerned about the society; others don't. Since the churches in China have just started this kind of work, CE-1 believes they still have a long way to go before people see it as an important part of their Christian life.

CE-2 and CE-1 perceive the church members are concerned about the society. In CE-2 opinion, church members are more concerned about Christians and other churches. This differs from church to church. While some churches believe they should help and are responsible for poor churches, other ministers are selfish and more concerned about their own church. In CE-2 opinion they should care for both church and society.

The church is universal, you know. One God. Christ is the head of the church. Churches should join together (CE-2).

West China Church

CW-1 thinks it is easy to get people in the church involved in social work:

People are very active and eager to be volunteers. Whether it is financially or giving their time and energy, people are willing to do social work (CW-1).

CW-2 agrees with this understanding. Many people would like to help the disabled people in the church, and CW-2 believes many church members consider social work to be very important. She wishes the church could participate in more activities, both inside and outside the church. The church wants people to experience God's love, and get to know Jesus. The first time the church arranged for the church members to collect garbage, 500 people from the church showed up. The church leaders were surprised; this means that people are active and eager to help.

4.5 The teaching of diakonia

4.5.1 The teaching of diakonia in the organizations

Amity Foundation

As a part of A-2's and A-1's work in Amity, they spend their time reflecting on and interpreting diaconal work in the context of China, Amity's theological thinking, and evaluating their projects. A-2 believes that Amity is a pioneer and the first organization in China to introduce practical theology, ideas about diakonia and teachers from abroad. The training workshops Amity provides are very helpful for the development of the Chinese churches' social work. Church workers and church leaders who work within the social ministries participate to learn how to expand the social work in their congregations:

In the past three or four years, we have organized a lot of training for the churches, including the church leaders, about the theology of diakonia. We invited some professors from overseas who had studied the diaconal work in their colleges. Last year, it was one diakonia professor from Norway, Dr. Kleiven (A-1.)

In the People's Republic of China there aren't any courses to introduce the subject of diakonia. According to A-1 and A-2, they didn't learn anything about the importance and understanding of the diaconal work in the seminary. Western countries have experience in diaconal ministry, but because of the different cultures, A-1 does not think that that they can use this experience directly. Through Amity's practice they try to find a Chinese way to do this:

When Amity was established [...] the bishop (K.H.Ting) talked to the people [...] Christianity must be concerned about social service. I think that is the first interpretation of diakonia. [...] when they first introduced diakonia to the Chinese people (A-2).

Every year, when new staff comes to work for Amity, the theological foundation of diakonia is presented to them. One doesn't have to be a Christian to work in Amity, but one should understand and accept the Christian background of the organization to join Amity (A-1).

Training workshops for the churches

Depending on who is teaching diakonia, Amity creates a new teaching plan before each session. The teaching is divided into three parts.

Part 1: The basic concepts of diakonia. Amity will invite a professor, sometimes foreign, to teach this subject.

Part 2: The biblical perspective of diakonia. Because of A-1's and A-2's theological background, they themselves teach about the biblical perspective of diakonia, and why they call it diakonia.

Part 3: Connecting theory with Amity's practice:

We will tell them what we did, how we did it, and how you can do it (A-1).

So far, they have organized more than three training seminars for the church leaders. According to A-1 they believe the training is very helpful. For many people this is the first time they hear about diakonia, and the first time to learn that diakonia also should be regarded as mission work: *Mission can be many things; our training can change their minds (A-1)*. As a result of this, many churches want to cooperate with Amity Foundation. They have been invited to more than 20 provinces and local church partners. According to A-1, Amity is a small organization and cannot meet all demands for diaconal assistance and help in China, and therefore encourages the churches by cooperating and supporting them in doing social service work. Amity educates, informs and encourages the churches, in order that the churches may do more diaconal work on their own.

In May 2012, Amity had its second International Ecumenical Conference. The theme was "Religious and Social Development: Building a Harmonious Society." Speakers from all over the world, with knowledge of the Chinese context, were invited to give lectures about this subject. The speakers were professionals and came from different overseas organizations and from seminaries in Hong Kong. The conference was open for everyone, which included the Catholic Church, leaders from CCC and provincial councils, YMCA from Shanghai and leaders from other religions.

CCC Social Service Department

C-1 describes the Social Service Department (SSD) as a supporting agency. It supports the churches financially, and it supports the training of the church staff. They spend most of their time and energy on this part of their work. C-1 believes that even though some congregations have understood the concept of social service work, this does not apply for most congregations: *“Only a few congregations understand its importance, and they do marvellous work”*.

Because of the size of China and all the churches, most of the grassroots churches usually do the training themselves. If the churches express a need for training, CCC has several ways of providing training for the church staff:

Option 1: Help the leadership to study outside the church, e.g. Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong

Option 2: Short-term courses, e.g. in Denmark for church leaders or pastors

Option 3: Training organized by the office in Shanghai

SSD strives to present their ideas of diakonia to the congregations. In 2012 they had five training seminars organized by the office in Shanghai, which is an increase over 2011.

Training seminars in 2012	
April	Capacity building training in Sichuan (Session one)
June	Nursing training, elderly homes in Sichuan
August	Capacity building training in Sichuan (Session two)
October	Management training, elderly homes in Hangzhou
November	Nursing training, elderly homes in Harbin

Table 6: Training seminars 2012

Example of training workshops for the churches

Session One:

- Christianity and basic ideas of social work
- How to understand church social service from the perspective of Christian thought and Chinese traditional culture
- The development prospects of church social service in the context of changing religious policy

Mr. Liu Binzhi, assistant professor of the Department of Social Work of Chongqing Normal University, analyzed the relationship between pastoral work and social work, recommended models of church social work, taught about the value of social work, relevant theories, social work methods and techniques, and social service fields that churches might expand.

Dr. Yue Qinghua, general secretary of Fujian provincial CC, combined Chinese traditional culture and Christian theological thoughts to understand church social service in China, and introduced social service theories within creation theology and salvation theology (CCC /TSPM Social Service Department , 2013).

Participants: 52 church leaders and lay workers.

Session two:

Dr. Wang Ruihong, assistant professor and the deputy director of the department of social work of East China University of Science and Technology gave a lecture about:

- Social transformation, social problems, social work and social administration
- Christianity and the ideas of social work
- Project management of social work and brand innovation

Mr. Shen Li, assistant professor of Shanghai Normal University, gave a lecture about:

- The situation and challenges of Chinese Christian social service, including the relationship between Christianity and social work
- China's reform and opening, and the development of the church
- The content and strengths of Christian social service

- Analysis of the future direction of social ministry

Participants: 45 pastoral staff (CCC /TSPM Social Service Department , 2013)

The SSD regards this training as very important for the churches. C-1 believes that their training is like ordinary training, but with more church perspectives. They often start their training workshops with a morning prayer, and invite a local pastor to talk about “today’s” subject. According to C-1 it is mostly the provinces or churches that take initiative to arrange this training. SSD provides teachers and funding, but to do this they have to take many things into consideration. To begin with, the churches have to have enough social services, and there has to be a willingness among the church leadership to really engage in social service. This is very important. C-1 says that in the future they would like to arrange a specialized nation-wide training that can benefit the church-run organizations.

When I ask if the SSD makes it a requirement that the churches should have social work, C-1 mentions Bishop Ting’s theological reconstruction in 1999:

Actually in the year 2000, or 1999, Bishop Ting put forward the theological reconstruction, and a little bit later they had some teachings in the churches about the social service, how to be a good Christian (C-1).

The Social Service Department was established after a national conference in 2002, organized by the CCC, and they use Bishop Ting’s theological perspectives in their training seminars. C-1 emphasises that the church has to do something and many provinces run their own social service department.

Since 2002 when the social service work started, it has spread from church to church, but also thru CCC’s information magazine *Tian Feng* (C-1). More and more young Christians understand social service as a natural part of a Christian life. According to C-2, the young people, that do not have much historical church baggage, feel more free and open, and engage in social service work in society.

4.5.2 The teaching of diakonia in the provinces

Both East and West provincial councils emphasize their theological foundation for social service, citing the verse in Matt 20: 28 “Jesus as a servant” in their teaching for church members and at staff meetings.

East provincial council

Their theological foundation is especially important when it comes to serving the orphans. Nobody cares for the orphans and the church has to teach them why they should care:

We often use the Bible passages; Jesus said to give a cup of water to the least of my brothers (E-1).¹³

E-1 is currently studying counseling and social services in a two-year program at a seminary in Hong Kong, because of the lack of courses in Christian social service work in the seminaries and Bible schools in PRC. According to E-1, CCC/TSPM does not provide any training for the provincial council. Usually they train themselves or get help from the foundation E-1 cooperates with. This foundation has employed ten Christians that offer training in social service work.

West provincial council

All staff members in the West provincial council are Christians who read the Bible and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. Their theological foundation is demonstrated by carrying out projects. The West provincial council has received lots of help, both financial aid and training, from the Social Service Department of the CCC. Sponsored by the Social Service Department, they conducted a social service seminar from the 15th to the 20th September 2012. Leaders from Religious Affairs Bureau, United Front Department, People’s Congress, Political Consultative Conference, leaders from Christian councils at all levels, and social service workers from all over the province attended this seminar.

¹³ Matthew 10:42

4.5.3 The teaching of diakonia in the churches

Both East China Church and West China Church take up themes related to diakonia in some of the sermons in their Sunday services.

East China Church

The pastors in East China Church regard social service work as important, but do not have the knowledge or the ability to do or to teach others about this kind of work. Christian social work is not a part of the curriculum in the seminary connected to the church. They hope that in the future they will have some courses in the subject, and have already started their theological thinking and practice:

When the ministers visit people, they also bring a few students. We let them join, and let them learn [...] by having some practicum (CE-1).

The provincial council and the CCC in Shanghai want the church to engage in social services. They have had meetings in different provincial Christian councils, where ministers join together to share experiences and invite a person to give lectures in social work. The CCC and Amity have provided some training in social work, but CE-1 believes the church or the provincial council do not have the ability or resources to do everything that is suggested. The provincial council has too few employees to carry out the work.

West China Church

In the fellowship groups they share stories from the four gospels, about Jesus helping people, and about how we can help others - the Bible requires them to practice love for other people. CW-1 believes that the communication of this contributes to and is probably the reason why the fellowship groups want to do social service work:

Jesus asked the blind man in Jericho: What do you want me to do for you? And then Jesus healed him. We can also lead people to Jesus, and they can get Jesus' help (CW-2.)

CW-3, who studies diakonia in Hong Kong, believes that, at this stage, it is not possible to do professional training in her church. She suggests that they should begin by teaching the concepts of diakonia in the sermons and maybe smaller lectures-

4.6 The government's and society's view of Christian social engagement.

4.6.1 The organization's perceptions

Amity Foundation

The government's attitude towards all religions has changed. A-2 says that if you can make a change for the better in society, you can achieve understanding and a good relationship with the government. A-1 and A-2 are interested in the new politics, mostly because of the religious background of Amity. The government is getting more and more open, and encourages the churches to participate in the social service. From the 17th to the 23rd September, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) initiated a nationwide Week of Religious Charity:

They now encourage all the religions in China to use the whole nation to create their own activities, their own service related to their own context. Today they see the positive side of the church – Christianity is not only foreign (A-2).

The government has a new policy: *Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Entities to Engage in Charitable Activities*; this is very helpful for the church development and the diaconal ministry. China is more open than before. The government has started to solicit Amity's services in some communities. They support Amity, pay for its services and prepare facilities for them to teach their experience and skills to the grassroots organizations:

This is a change. We are a FBO, and the government can now believe in this kind of organization to train the grassroots organizations. This is a big change after the policy has changed. We have more opportunities to do diaconal work, and the government also allows the churches to build their own foundations (A-1).

The number of young people who are eager to work in Amity is increasing every year, because of Amity's Christian background. People think that Christianity and its value

system create a good culture and that as a Christian, you are a good person. When Amity carries out fundraising in the society, people know that they are a faith-based organization and believe in them.

When A-2 visited a village, a local pastor told her that they just finished rebuilding a road, paid for by the government. When the road was originally constructed, the hired workers did the building of the road poorly. The government decided to rebuild the road and almost 90% of the countryside villagers said that the churches should take responsibility for the rebuilding. They considered the church members as honest and believed that they would do a good job.

Social Service Department

C-1 does not believe that the Christians can influence the government. However, Chinese Christians, Christian organizations and churches have inherited the tradition of the churches in the western countries and when they are doing social work, they try to do services that can be easily seen by the society. Christian organizations pay much attention to be professional, and compared with other religions in China, the Christians are the most professional when it comes to running elderly homes and hospitals. Because of this, Christians can easily be accepted by society. Gradually they have seen that the society has become more positive to the Christians. C-1 says that the government is more positive, not only to the church, but to all religions.

Because of Christianity's connection with imperialism, the image of Christians in China is still not good, according to C-2. Even if it is a long time ago, it seems like Christianity still is regarded as a foreign religion. The government still has some worries about whether Christians can be real Chinese. *"That is our context"* (C-2). However, C-2 does not think the young Christians experience this to the same degree as the older Christian people. The government's attitude towards the church has changed quite a lot and more opportunities are available. The government is stretching out their hands and invites the churches to participate in the social service work. *"At the moment the political environment is good"*, according to C-2.

4.6.2 The provincial councils' perceptions

East provincial council

E-1 believes the government is worried about the churches' involvement in social service, and they suspect that the church has other motivations for their engagement. The foundation E-1 cooperates with, has through the last 12 years achieved successful results in her province. From the beginning they agreed to only do relief work and not do any hidden preaching. E-1 believes that there has been a positive change in what society thinks about Christians. The Christians themselves also see diaconal work as important, and are positive towards contributing.

West provincial council

W-1 believes that many have become Christians after seeing the social commitment and love of the Christians. Both the society and the government speak highly of the church, as they see that the churches do good deeds. The society and government have changed their minds about Christians. They see that Christians not only read the Bible, but also put the teaching into practice:

They see that Christians are good people and well-educated people. In the past there has been a misunderstanding that only those who were poor, low educated and part of a minority ethnic group would like to become Christians. Now they see that's not true (W-1).

4.6.3 The churches' perceptions

East China Church

According to CE-2 there are many different opinions about the church involvement in social service work. Some non-Christians have a positive view of the church and Christians, because of their social commitment. Others, e.g. atheists, believe that the church is not needed, and do not support their work. Others look down on the Church because of its spirituality and connection with God.

The government wants to run the nation better and solve social problems, and they now encourage all the religious organizations to participate in social service work. According

to CE-1 the government supports the activities, but every now and then an official accompanies them to make sure that they do not evangelize.

West China Church

CW-1 says that the government and the church administration highly appreciate the social work done by the church. On Christmas Eve, the officials visit the church to join the celebration. Some years ago the city police leader visited the church's drug rehabilitation centre and was impressed by the work. He said that if one more church was built, they could build one less jail; there will be fewer criminals.

CW-2 thinks the government treats the Christians in a positive way, and in God's eyes, non-believers also do good deeds.

5 Analysis and discussion of the study's findings

In this chapter I will discuss the empirical findings in relation to my research question:

How do diaconal agents at different levels in China understand the term diakonia and its theological foundation, and how does this find expression in their self-understanding, education and relationship with society?

I have chosen to split the research question into two sub-questions and they will be discussed in light of relevant theory related to the subject.

1. What is the diaconal agents' understanding of and theological foundation for diakonia/ Christian social service?
2. How is this understanding expressed in their:
 - Self-understanding
 - Training and education
 - Relationship with society

No study on the understanding of diakonia in China has, to my knowledge, been conducted earlier. The church in China has not developed a plan for the diaconate or a definition of diakonia, and I therefore have nothing to compare informants' answers with. I have therefore chosen to compare the survey responses from organizations, provincial councils and churches. I have chosen to focus on what I consider the actors' most important reflections and thoughts on the topic, and have presented them by comparing the informants' answers.

5.1 What is the diaconal agents' understanding of and theological foundation for diakonia/ Christian social service?

In this section I will present the answers given by the diaconal agents about their understanding of and theological foundation for diakonia. What is diakonia? What distinguishes it from other social work? Why engage in diaconal work? By comparing the diaconal agents' responses I have tried to get a clearer picture of the similarities and differences in their diaconal understanding. The information given in this section will be

further discussed in the next three sections of the chapter.

Discussion and comparison

The findings in the interviews show that the term ‘diakonia’ is quite new to both organizations, but they are familiar with it. They believe that church members and leaders in China are not familiar with this term. However, A-1 says that even if the term is new, the idea of diakonia is not new.

When comparing the answers from the organizations, councils and churches one can see there is a difference in their understanding of the word and term diakonia. SSD and Amity both believe that diakonia is the gospel in action. According to C-1 in SSD, diakonia is a part of the gospel and a vital part of the church’s identity. Diakonia has many facets, and the organizations think that churches, organizations and individuals can all be actors in diaconal work.

The provincial councils describe diaconal work by mentioning their diaconal activities. The activities in the East Provincial Council can be regarded as organized diaconal work within the church. Most of the diaconal work in the West Provincial Council can be regarded partly as institutionalized diakonia, done by professionals, while the other activities are carried out in cooperation with the church members and categorized as organized diakonia.

During the interviews in the churches I found the word diakonia unfamiliar to the informants, except from CW-3 who is studying diakonia in Hong Kong.

Because of the newness of the term diakonia/Christian social work, CW-3 believes that it is very little understood from a theological perspective. CW-3 understands diakonia as the “gospel in action”. Both churches have difficulties mentioning Christian social work on a congregational level, and need examples to understand the nature of the church’s diaconate. They often begin by mentioning activities categorized as institutionalized diakonia done by nurses, teachers and so on, but after some explanation of the term I discovered that the churches have a large variety of diaconal work done by pastors and volunteers.

The organizations, I believe, have a good understanding of the nature of the diaconate and why they should engage in this kind of work. The organizations' informants have had some diaconal training by studying abroad (C-1) and have acquired knowledge about diakonia by being introduced to the subject at their workplace (A-1 and A-2). As far as I know, C-2 does not have any training in diakonia, but is familiar with the term. He doesn't work directly with diakonia on a daily basis. Diakonia has many facets, and the organizations think that churches, organizations and individuals can all be actors in diaconal work.

The survey shows that there is a clear consciousness among the agents about the biblical perspective of diakonia. They all point to passages in the Bible that are regarded as typical for the theological foundation of diakonia (See point 2.2). The passage most often referred to is from Matt 20:28 "*Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*", which they understand as Jesus calling them to serve people. This is closely linked to their desire to help those in need.

By comparing the informants' answers I find differences between the diaconal agents' reasons for engaging in diaconal work and the understanding of the nature of diaconal work. Olav Fanuelsen (2009) writes that care service is not exercised in a vacuum. In practice this means that humaneness, the view of knowledge and values together form a foundation and an interpretation framework for the actions of caring. He believes it is likely that diaconal spiritualities in the broadest sense have something to contribute. All informants say that by participating in diaconal work, they are following Jesus' example given in the Bible. Their faith is the basis for engaging in diaconal work, and is also what makes them different from others who engage in social work. E-1, CE-1 and CW-1 all mention the spiritual dimensions of the diaconate. They believe that the love of God is an aspect that separates diaconal work from other kinds of social work.

Fanuelsen (2009) writes that the Christian perspective of diakonia is reflected in its unique character, which is not about the practices of the caretaking, but its spirituality, and the spiritual and liturgical framework within which the caretaking takes place. The informants mentioned above believe that diakonia is more than providing material things

and helping people with their physical problems. People see that they are different and realize that they are Christians. The holistic view of the human being is brought forward, which is supported by diaconal thinking. *“The physical, mental, spiritual and social dimensions are all integrated in the wholeness of a person, and a person is more than the sum of its parts”*. (Diakonova University College, 2013)

I believe the provincial councils and churches do not have the full understanding of what diakonia is, and what kind of work is included in the term. This can easily be seen in their difficulties in giving examples of diakonia. I believe that their level of understanding the term diakonia is reflected by their amount of diaconal training. The churches and provincial councils have had a minimum or no training in diakonia, and I find their interpretation of the term ‘Christian social work’ too narrow. The exception is CW-3, who is studying diakonia in Hong Kong.

For diakonia to be relevant and prioritized in the churches, it has to be an integral part of the church and not reduced to an activity by certain committed persons or made necessary by external social conditions (LWF, 2009, p. 29). In the study I find a lack of willingness and ability to prioritize diakonia as a special service in the church: *“We are going to build a new big church so that is our kind of priority now”* (CW-1).

I draw this conclusion because I cannot see any clear direction or plan for their diaconal work. According to Oftestad (2009), diakonia belongs to the Church and is an organic part of the church’s nature (p.107). Diakonia expresses itself by being a part of the church’s nature and in the way it presents itself in daily life, in plans and projects. A possible explanation could be the lack of trained pastors in China, which makes it difficult to recruit individuals to engage in diaconal work.

5.2 Self-understanding

In the previous section I presented the understanding and theological foundation of the diaconal agents interviewed. This understanding will be discussed further in this section, with the purpose of exploring how this understanding manifests itself within their self-understanding. By self- understanding I refer to the diaconal actors’ awareness and ability

to understand their own actions. What kind of role do they choose to play in their line of work? What are their goals by engaging in diaconal work?

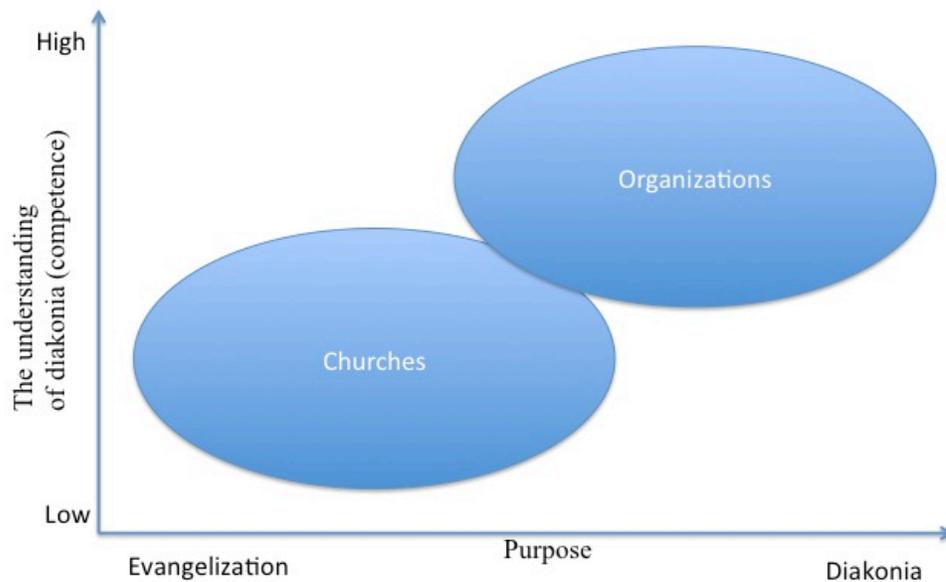
Discussion and comparison

Amity and SSD share the same goals for participating in diaconal work. They work towards building a bridge between the church and society. This is reflected in Amity's goals (see point 1.4.1). When people see faith transformed into actions, they will see the church as different and full of compassion. Amity's goal is to build a social service model and would like input from abroad about the concepts and development of diakonia. The organizations engage in training of church leaders, diaconal understanding and contribute by improving the churches' ability to do social work. The churches awareness about diakonia as mission is part of this. The organizations believe diakonia is the gospel in action, which makes it an integral part of mission work. SSD thinks the churches are not aware of this aspect of mission.

The councils' and churches' goals are quite different. E-1 has discovered that diakonia develops the church, and I think she means that when peoples see the good deeds done by Christians it attracts them to the church. Their goal is to help the poor, care for the whole person and the development of the person. The West Provincial Council's reason for engaging in diaconal work is their wish to serve people, and through their love in action they want to show their faith. When they see people in need they want to help them. Their goal is to make people self-reliant and to love one another. W-1 believes that Christians see social service as important, and by participating they can demonstrate their faith in society. By doing social service, they include themselves in the society. The churches and provincial councils' goal is to help people and they believe this is Gods calling.

An issue that caught my attention is the church's desire to spread the gospel. SSD believes that some Christians' goal, when participating in diaconal work, is to evangelize. This became very obvious after the interviews with the churches. "*We expect people to come to Jesus when we do this social work*" (CE-1). "*We want more people to come to church and believe in Jesus Christ*" (CE-2). Nissen (2008) says that the goal of

evangelism is to win followers to the Christian faith. This is not the goal of diakonia (p.24). Diaconal work is service to the neighbor in need and cannot be an instrument for evangelizing the people.



I have demonstrated the relationship between the diaconal understanding and purpose of the organizations and churches in the table (above). The previous section (5.1) shows that the churches' understanding of diakonia is low compared with the organizations. This is reflected in their view about the goal of diaconal work. As mentioned earlier, the Church workers have little or no diaconal education. I believe this is one of the main reason for their understanding of diakonia as a way to evangelize. It is important that diakonia is not reduced to being a tool to achieve a different goal. Diaconal work is meaningful in itself (LWF 2009: 79).

I will refer to CW-3's answers as an example of the effect of diaconal education. CW-3 has an understanding, which is closer to the diaconal understanding expressed in SSD, Amity and the Church of Norway.

5.3 Training and education

In this section I will examine how the diaconal agents' understanding and theological foundation are reflected in the training, based on answers from the interviews.

Discussion and comparison

The organizations have similar approaches to their training of church leaders and staffs, but A-1 and A-2 believe there are some differences. According to A-1, Amity was the first organization to introduce practical theology, ideas about diakonia and teachers from abroad to China. Accordingly, they have the knowledge and the longest experience in running diaconal projects. In their understanding, they should be responsible for developing skills for running diaconal projects. SSD could have the responsibility for training people in the theological foundation of diakonia.

To my understanding, SSD is considered a supporting agency, which provides churches with funding and theoretical training in social service. Amity, on the other hand, provides both theoretical training and practical support in setting up diaconal projects. According to A-1, many churches do not care who they get support from and in some cases they receive funding from both organizations.

Amity arranges training workshops for church leaders to help them acquire knowledge about how to expand their social work. This is found helpful. Many church leaders have not heard about diakonia before and that it could be regarded as mission work. Amity's training sessions cover these areas: **The basic concept of diakonia, the biblical perspective of diakonia, and diaconal practice**, which I believe reflects their diaconal understanding and their focus on diaconal work. Many churches would like to cooperate with Amity and invite them to visit their church. Amity educates, informs and encourages, and hopes the churches will do more diaconal work in the future. In May 2012 Amity arranged a conference about social work and China's harmonious society.

SSD believes that most congregations have not understood the concept of social work. Most of the churches do the training themselves, and SSD offers short-term courses, diaconal education in Hong Kong or training workshops to help them extend their understanding and knowledge of diaconal work. SSD does not require that churches

should have social work, but mentions Bishop Ting's theological reconstruction, and that his perspectives on the church relationship with society are used in the seminaries. In the future they would like to expand their training sessions to nationwide events. The requirement to be supported by SSD is that they have to be engaged in social services on a larger scale. Their training reflects their diaconal understanding and consists, among others subjects, of the following: **Christianity and the ideas of social work, the content and strengths of Christian social service and the relationship between pastoral work and social work.**

SSD and Amity often use the same teaches and experts in their training workshops.

According to C2-2 young people understand and engage in social service work. They do not have much historical baggage, and are more open towards the society. Both churches and provincial councils take initiative to arrange such training workshops, according to SSD. Amity does not mention provincial councils, but is approached by many churches that want to develop their diaconal ministry.

Unlike the organizations, the provincial councils do not provide any training for their churches. The provincial councils emphasize Matt 20: 28 in their teaching. People have to be taught why to care, and they use biblical passages to do this. The East Provincial council has not received any training from SSD, but is trained by a foundation or by their own selves. In order to improve their skills in social work, they have chosen to send E-1 for a one-year study in HK to learn more about social work. Currently they have too few employees to carry on the social work. The West provincial council had a seminar about diaconal work sponsored by SSD, and has received help from the SSD. W-1 says they are following the teachings of Jesus, by carrying out projects.

Both churches use themes related to diakonia in their sermons. The pastors in the East China church do not have the knowledge to teach about diakonia and it is not a part of the curriculum at the seminary. If they are required to be engaged in diaconal work they need more teaching. According to CE-2 the members do what the pastor teaches them, and people's interest depends on the pastor's interest. They have started some practical training in the seminary and are encouraged by SSD and Amity to do social work. SSD

has provided some training and they have had some meetings in other provincial councils where they shared experience and had lectures, but feel they do not have the resources to do this kind of work.

When I visited churches last fall I was invited to see their diaconal work. In the East China Church they arranged a day for the elderly people, where volunteers washed their feet and prayed for them. Over 200 old people from the church had gathered to take part in this event. The church and the volunteers did this to show them respect and the love of God. In the West China Church I got the opportunity to visit the Angel Fellowship. This is a group of people with different disabilities, one pastor and several volunteers. The person that participated in this fellowship group said it helped them to believe that they were unique people, that they had a value as human beings and that being part of this community had helped them both mentally and spiritually. I believe that even though these churches do not have any formal teaching in diaconal work, their actions are examples to be followed. This is of great value in itself.

In the fellowship groups in the West China Church they share stories from the Bible, about Jesus and that the Bible requires them to help others and show love for your neighbor. This is probably why they want to do social work. CW-3 believes that it is not possible to do professional training in the church at this time. As a start they could use the concepts of diakonia in Sunday sermons.

A-1 believes that it is not easy to find well-educated Christians to work in Amity. All the employees in their department are Christians, and they think it is necessary because you have to have a strong inner motivation to do this kind of work. A-1 believes Christians can stay longer, because of the hard work. *“You really have to be dedicated”* (A-1). Amity requires education and most of their staff have master degrees in social service work or something similar. 30% comes from overseas universities and about 60-70% have master degrees. *“Chinese Christians you know, in fact in China, the total of Christians do not have a very high education. We cannot easily find good Christians to join us”* (A-1).

LWF (2009) says that theology is an integral part of diaconal training, but diakonia is not always an integral part of theological education (p.76). This seems to be the case in in theological institutions of education in PRC also. Currently there are no diakonia courses in the seminaries or bible schools in the PRC. SSD regards diaconal training as very important for the development of the Church in China, but at the same time C-2, who works in the teaching department of CCC, says that they have not opened courses in diakonia at the seminary yet. He justifies this by saying that they need to train teachers to give lectures at the seminary first. So far they have sent 6 students to Hong Kong (Lutheran Theological Seminary) for the Diakonia program. They will continue sending students, if there are any candidates. As far as I know, three of the students are now back in their home churches after graduating from the seminary in Hong Kong. None of them teaches at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

What strikes me is the lack of training provided in the seminaries and bible schools, compared to the churches', provincial councils' and organizations' expressed need for education. As I mentioned before, one of the reasons could be the shortage of qualified pastors in China. They all want people to become Christians, and the organizations try to widen their perspective on what mission is. Diakonia is an integral part of mission work as long as it is not considered a means to an end. What C-1 sees as an obstacle in this regard is that Chinese Christian belief is quite open, and therefore there is no clear statement that says what they should or shouldn't do. According to C-1, this makes it difficult to guide others.

5.4 Relationship with society

In this section I will examine how the diaconal agents' understanding and theological foundation are reflected in their relationship with society, based on answers from the interviews.

Discussion and comparison

Over the last years the attitude toward religion has changed. The government is more open, and encourages the religions to participate in social service. In September 2012 the

State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) initiated a nationwide Week of Religious Charity.

Amity and SSD both believe this is helpful for the church development of diaconal ministry. As mentioned under point 5.1, the informants have a somewhat different understanding of the nature of the diaconate. The organizations understanding of diakonia is that it is about serving and helping people in need, and I believe this understanding of diakonia is easily accepted by the society.

Both SSD and Amity agree that young people have another attitude toward engaging in society than older Christian people. Young people are eager to work in Amity. SSD thinks that China has inherited the western tradition of doing social work that is easily seen by the society. They pay much attention to being professional, and they are the most skilled actors within social work compared to other religions. Because of this, Christians can be easily accepted by society. The number of work applicants is increasing every year because of the Christian background of Amity, and they believe that the Christian value system creates a good culture. Christians are regarded as good persons, and people believe in the faith based organizations. They believe Christians are more honest.

In analyzing the answers from the organizations, provincial councils and churches I find similarity between their opinions about Christians involvement in society. All informants agree that Christians see social work as an important part of their Christian life. The exception is informant E-1 in the East China Church, who thinks that the Christians still have a long way to go before they see social service as important. Another interesting finding is the diaconal agents' view of Christians' opinions about helping people in the community – the non-Christians. Most of the agents (except the West provincial council and West China Church) believe that Christians only participate in social work related to other Christians. A-1 justifies this by saying that many Christians are afraid of what is outside the church. Most Christians think the gospel is about saving souls. They regard social service as non-spiritual and look at non-Christians as “enemies”. This could have historical reasons connected to persecution of Christians, but also a theological explanation.

As mentioned earlier, Bishop Ting worked for a greater social involvement of the churches, and he had a desire to make Christianity Chinese by promoting the Theological Reconstruction. To my understanding, most churches did not agree with him. A-1 and A-2 states in the interview that many Christians believe that they should not be involved in the secular world.

In chapter 2, point 2.8.2 I mentioned Katrin Fielder's (2012) views on how the Christian belief can influence the Chinese culture and society. She says that the "*Christian worldview of strangers as "neighbors" has the potential to change anonymous situations and that with the spread of Christianity, more and more Chinese will come to adopt a different attitude towards total strangers*". I think that this also applies to the Christian view of society and their "neighbor". (p.176)

However, lately there has been a change towards more and more emphasis on social work within the churches and provincial councils, according to SSD. The East China church says it is easy to get people involved in social work. The society has become more positive towards Christians. C-1 believes that Christians are more concerned about society than others, and are described by others as warm-hearted.

Although the Government is more positive to all religions, they still have some worries about Christianity because of imperialism, according to C-1. When comparing the informants' answers I find different experiences of the society's and the government's view of the Christian engagement in social work. The East provincial council believes that the government is worried about the churches' involvement in society and suspects other motivations. The East China church says that there are many different opinions about the church involvement in social work. Some have a positive view, because of social commitment of Christians, but others think it is not necessary for the church. The Government encourages the engagement in social work, but sometimes an official has to accompany to make sure they don't evangelize. To me this indicates that there is still a mistrust regarding the Christians' motives for engaging in social work.

Overall, I find there is more positive feedback about Christians' engagement in society than negative, when comparing the informants' answers. Both the society and the government speak highly about the church, because of their good deeds. They have changed their minds about Christians, because they see that they are putting their teaching into practice. As an example, Amity mentions that the government now supports Amity and pays for their services. They want them to train grass roots organizations, and allow them to build their own Foundations.

More and more Christians are well educated, and they are important to the society's view of Christians, according to W-1. Christians see social work as important and want to contribute.

6 Conclusion

In this thesis I have examined the following research question:

How do diaconal agents at different levels in China understand the term diakonia and its theological foundation, and how does this find expression in their self-understanding, education and relationship with society?

The findings in the survey show that the organizations believe diakonia, 社關服侍 (shè guān fú chí) is the gospel in action. Diakonia has many facets, and they express that churches, organizations and individuals all are participants in diaconal work.

To describe what diakonia is, the provincial councils mention diaconal activities. They believe these activities can be both organized within the church and also institutionalized in diakonia done by professionals. The churches understand diakonia as activities categorized as institutionalized diakonia, done by professionals. I believe that the churches and provincial council view of what can be considered as diaconal work is too narrow.

The passage most referred to by the interviewees as the theological foundation of diakonia is from Matt 20:28: *“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”*. They follow Jesus’ example and cite their faith as the basis for engaging in diaconal work. This is also what separates them from others who engage in social work. C-1 in SSD says that diakonia is a vital part of the church’s identity.

The survey shows that the churches do not have any clear direction or plan for their diaconal work, which is important for giving priority to diaconal work in the congregations.

The organizations’ understanding of diakonia is expressed by engaging in diaconal work in order to build a bridge between the church and society. They hope that people will see the church as distinct from the rest of the society. Their role is to provide training for church leaders, develop diaconal understanding, and to improve the churches’ ability to do social work.

The East provincial council's understanding of diakonia is expressed in the belief that diaconal activities develop the church and attract people to church. Their goal is to help the poor, give care for the whole person, and the individual's development. The West provincial council's understanding is expressed in the wish to serve people, show their faith, and help people to become self-reliant and to love one another. They also want to see themselves as part of society. The churches express a desire to help people, but their answers show that they are more concerned about evangelizing. I believe this is an expression of their lack of understanding of diakonia and that diaconal work should be meaningful in itself.

The organizations' training reflects their diaconal understanding, and consists of subjects like:

- Amity: The basic concept of diakonia, the biblical perspective of diakonia, and diaconal practice.
- SSD: Christianity and the ideas of social work, the content and strengths of Christian social service and the relationship between pastoral work and social work.

The provincial councils use biblical passages when teaching people about why they should care about others. Both churches use themes related to diakonia in their Sunday sermons. In the fellowship groups in the West China church stories are shared from the Bible about Jesus, and the church teaches that the Bible requires them to help others and show love for your neighbor. Although there is a strong focus on diaconal training and education in the organizations, which they see as an essential part of the church's being, they have not yet opened courses in diakonia at seminaries.

A majority of the interviewees believe that Christian social work is an important part of their Christian life. The exception is informant C-1 in SSD and E-1 in the East China Church, who believe that Christians still have a long way to go before they view social service as important. When engaging in the community outside the church, the church members attitude changes when it comes to participating in social service. Most of the interviewees (except the West provincial council and West China Church) believe that

Christians only participate in social work related to other Christians. The SSD strongly disagrees with this practice.

In my opinion there is a gap between the organizations' and the churches' understanding of the term diakonia. This finds expression in their relationship to society, training and education, and self-understanding as diaconal agents (ref. diakonia vs. evangelizing). This also includes the local church leader's priorities when it comes to recognizing diakonia as a special service in the church. CW-3, diakonia student in Hong Kong and pastor in the West China church, is a good example of how diaconal education can change peoples' mindset related to the church's social work. This may contribute to Christian influence in society at a time when the political environment is more favorable than it has been for a long time.

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8 Appendix

8.1 APPENDIX 1: Political regulation of religion in China

Late Qing-dynasty -1949

Anti-religious activity motivated by domestic political concerns. The government did not directly prohibit or restrain religions from practicing their faith. (Peng, 2005)

Post 1949

After 1949, the CCP policy sought to minimize religions while at the same time replacing them with Marxism as the only valid ideology. (Academic, 2011) As government was officially atheist, they viewed religion as an emblem of feudalism and foreign colonialism. In 1954 The Three Self Patriot Movement was founded, which means that the church was being run by the state and should be open for the government's control and influence.

Culture Revolution 1966-1978

The Cultural Revolution led to a policy of elimination of religions; a massive number of places of worship were destroyed. All religions were forbidden and Christian activities were completely forced underground.

Document no. 19 (1982)

A religious policy that was part of Deng Xiaoping's 'reform and opening' policy, permitting 'normal' religious activities and religious organizations under the supervision of the government. The CCP recognized religious belief as a private matter. (Overmyer, 2003)

Document no. 6 (1991)

The rapid growth of religious activity triggered a conservative backlash in religious policy. The CCP increased their control over all religious activities. (Academic, 2011)

Revised document 6. (1993)

President Jiang Zemin called on authorities to 'take active steps to guide religions in a direction compatible with socialist society. (Academic, 2011)

Revised documents 6. (2001)

Jiang reaffirmed the religion policy in December 2001, in which he underscored the state's policy of containing religion's influence in society, actively guiding religion's development into conformity with CCP rule, and suppressing religious elements that resisted state control. (Academic, 2011) *

Harmonious Society 2006

President Hu Jintao presents his vision, described as a “scientific development concept which shifts China’s primary focus from a purely economic growth model to a more balanced, Confucian-style approach aimed at maintaining growth while addressing daunting social issues such as the wide gap between rich and poor, widespread environmental degradation, and government and corporate corruption”. (Tay, 2011)

2012

SARA and others published *Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Entities to Engage in Charitable Activities*. It supports religious organizations’ engagement in the following non-profit activities: disaster relief, disability assistance, care of the elderly, child care, poverty relief, school sponsorship, medical care service, environmental protection, infrastructure construction, and other legitimate and charitable activities.

*To achieve the state’s policy objectives, government and Party branches from the national level down to the municipal and district levels have issued regulations on religion. Broadly, regulations require venues for religious activity to register with the government and to submit to annual inspection. All religious clergy must receive government authorization before conducting religious activities. All religious activities must be presided over by a government-authorized professional, and must occur within registered venues.

Religious groups must submit all religious materials to the government for inspection. The production of any religious materials requires prior government authorization. Foreigners are forbidden from establishing religious organizations, recruiting adherents or conducting any other missionary activities. Members of the CCP are prohibited from believing in religion, or participating in any religious activities. Regulations typically offer vaguely worded but ominous penalties for violation.

8.2 APPENDIX 2: Interview guide

Interview guide

1. Is your church/congregation involved in any services to people within the congregation and to people in the surrounding society?
2. Do you have any plan for the Christian social service?
3. Where do you find your inspiration for social service?
4. What is the church main focus/goal for the social service?
5. Have you heard the word diakonia?
6. How does your church understand what the Bible says about diakonia/Christian social service? (How is the understanding of diakonia grounded theologically in your church?)
7. To what extent is this understanding implemented in your church training and education of staff? Do they have training and focus on this subject?
8. What would you say is the most important task of diakonia/ Christian social service?
9. What do you think is the difference between Christian social service and other good social service work done by non-Christian organizations?

10. Is it difficult to get church members involved in social work?
11. Do they perceive social service and care for others as an important part of your life as a Christian?
12. Do you feel that the church members are concerned about social problems in society / community, or is the social work primarily focused on church members?
13. To what extent do the church members think of themselves as diaconal agents? (Awareness of why they do what they do)
14. In which way do you think the church's involvement in social service affects the society's and the Government view on Christians.

8.3 APPENDIX 3: Letter to the informants

Dear

My name is Lene Birgitte Bjølverud and I am a student at The Norwegian School of Theology, and this autumn 2012 I shall write my master thesis about diaconal work in China. Dr. Knud Jørgensen, my advisor, sends his greetings.

The title of my thesis is: **The Understanding and teaching of diakonia in China.**

I choose this topic because I would like to learn more about:

- The development of diaconal work in China – historical.
- How diakonia is grounded theologically in China.
- How does the leadership in Christian churches in China understand the term diaconia?
- How aware are the church members that they are involved in diakonia?
- How do the diaconal attitudes of churches in China affect the people in China and their views of the Christian faith?
- Are there any plans to develop education programs and training opportunities in diaconal work in the churches?

Many Chinese people have become Christians after meeting Christian's attitudes, lifestyles and social commitment. Because of this I would like to learn more about how churches operate and how their work affects people's lives and beliefs.

Would it be possible to meet you and have a conversation about this topic in October?
It will be to a great help for me writing my theses.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours
Lene Birgitte Bjølverud

