

Encounter with Scripture transforms Chinese scholar

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—Tao Lu never saw a Bible until he arrived in the United States to study advanced computer engineering.

That's not unusual in China, where Tao grew up, even though his father taught English in a major city. The Chinese Christian movement may be growing rapidly amid periodic crackdowns, but it has yet to reach hundreds of millions of people in the vast communist nation.

"Not only did my father never mention the Bible to me, but as far as I can remember, my high school and college English teachers never talked about it either," said Tao, 30, now a doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Va., where he lives with his wife and 2-year-old daughter.

One of his English textbooks mentioned Christmas and Christianity as a part of "Western festivals," but that was about it. Tao wasn't hostile toward Christianity or any other religious faith; they just seemed irrelevant to his life.

"Marxism is the dominant philosophy of China," he explained. "Believing in God was beyond my understanding and even considered ridiculous. I didn't try to seek God, because I didn't realize that I was a sinner or that I needed a Savior. You tell me there's a God? Unbelievable."

When Tao arrived in Richmond, he sought out a Chinese Baptist church and began attending a Bible discussion group near the university—but only to practice his English and socialize with other Chinese.

Or so he thought. The more he read the teachings of Jesus Christ, the more intrigued he became.

He was amazed by Jesus' command to "love your enemies and do good" to them. The question Jesus asked in Luke 6:41—"Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that in your own eye?"—challenged him to stop judging others so harshly. He was moved deeply by Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:28-32 not to be anxious about personal needs, since God arrays the lilies of the field in grandeur and loves people much more.

"These teachings are not only persuasive; they are beautiful!" Tao said

But becoming a believer is not easy for a modern Chinese scholar.

"If Christianity is correct, that means the things we learned in China are wrong," he said. "They are two totally different systems."

One claims atheistic Marxism is the answer; the other claims Jesus is Lord, he observed.

Tao studied apologetics. He examined the lives of the disciples before and after Jesus' resurrection. He read *From Pagan to Christian*, a book by Lin Yutang, a renowned Chinese author who embraced faith in Jesus. He systematically listed the teachings of Jesus and found he agreed with all of them.

He also experienced the love of God in the lives of people who had befriended him— a pastor at the Richmond church where the Chinese fellowship meets; a Christian couple who welcome and mentor Chinese students at Virginia Commonwealth University; and a Christian lawyer, Jim Fiorelli, who volunteered time weekly to help hone his English. Their textbook—the Gospel of John.

“He was obviously a very sharp guy,” Fiorelli recalled. “He was ready to grab hold of the truth. There’s almost no substitute for giving someone the chance to read Scripture, think about it and talk through it. If you can get people into the word (of God), to read it for themselves, the word will speak for itself and go deep into a person’s heart.”

The time came for Tao to make a decision. In June 2015, he made it. He prayed with his pastor friend, committing his life to Jesus, and immediately shared the news with the couple who welcomed him and with Fiorelli, who led him through a series of lessons on assurance of salvation.

“Now I realize that it was the Holy Spirit’s work that helped me finally decide to follow Jesus,” Tao reflects. “It was not based purely on my rational, logical consideration. There was also emotion. I knew that I was a sinner. I believed that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died for me and his blood cleansed my sins, and I accepted Jesus as my Savior. I was sure that I had eternal life.”

Meanwhile, his day-to-day life changed radically. He hungers for prayer and has seen his prayers answered. He helped lead his wife to faith in Jesus. Their marriage grew stronger. His studies are more fruitful. And he is discipling other young Chinese believers in Richmond.

Whether Tao returns to China or stays in the United States, he’s now a committed follower of Christ. There are hundreds of thousands of other international students like him on U.S. campuses, waiting for someone to tell them spiritual truth, Fiorelli observed.

“So many here are open to being reached,” he said. “There’s nothing more fulfilling than seeing people like Tao come to Christ and grow in their faith.”