

SUPPORTING ARTICLE

Online Theological Training

Forty Years of Growth of Liangyou Theological Seminary

By [Luke Cheng](#) · Oct 09, 2023 · Topic: [Education](#) · Issue: [ChinaSource Quarterly, Autumn 2023](#)



Liangyou Theological Seminary (hereafter referred to as Liangyou Seminary) is a training program developed by the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC) in 1982. Starting as a broadcasting program, Liangyou Seminary is now an educational institute with over twenty thousand students registered and four thousand graduates. Its forty years of development have witnessed God's guidance and work.

The Beginning

In the 1980s, China opened its doors to the outside world. Churches began to meet again, and the gospel could be spread more freely. However, the spiritual condition of the church at that time could be summarized in one phrase: “A yard wide but an inch deep.” On the one hand, the gospel ministry of the church flourished, the church grew, and the number of believers increased. On the other hand, many believers were not deeply rooted in the truth, and their spiritual condition was worrisome. It was easy for heretics to harass the church and steal away believers. Many house churches lacked pastors, and most of the pastors lacked basic theological training, making it difficult for them to effectively pastor churches and shepherd believers.

FEBC’s workers felt the great need for Chinese Christians to be pastored, and pastors to be trained, especially in rural areas. In 1982, they founded the Rural Bible Institute, an on-air training ministry to help Chinese churches train volunteers, workers, and pastors through broadcasting and media. In the absence of Chinese theological reference books at the founding of the ministry, the institute’s teachers labored writing down lectures on each subject, line by line. These courses were then delivered by fluent Mandarin speakers as they were broadcast to China through the medium wave radio station of FEBC. They pastored tens of thousands of hungry believers and helped many preachers and workers in the church.

Renewed Academic Structure

From 1982 to 1991, the Rural Bible Institute was only broadcasting training courses via radio. There was no formal academic structure for admitting students, nor was there any examination provided for the courses. The academy mainly taught through broadcasting and nurtured believers through the use of letters. In response to the needs of urban believers, the Rural Bible Institute was renamed Liangyou Theological Seminary in 1991, and in 1992, Liangyou Seminary began its undergraduate diploma program with students enrolling and taking exams.

In 1995, the program was changed to a two-year program with the goal of training lay pastors and evangelists as good shepherds. Later on, Liangyou Seminary added the Volunteer Training Program, and in 2003, the Advanced Program was added to strengthen the training of the undergraduate program and to meet the needs of church volunteers and

graduates. In 2011, these two programs were optimized into the Foundation Program and Advanced Diploma Program. In October 2017, the Foundation Program was expanded into the Navigation Program to equip more young believers and nurture a new generation of successors for the church.

From Broadcasting to Webcasting

In the early days, Liangyou Seminary relied mainly on medium wave and short wave radio to broadcast theological training courses to the audience, and the students listened to the programs over the radio. The advantages of broadcasting are obvious as it is hard to entirely block out programs and requires only simple receiving equipment. However, the effectiveness of broadcasting depends on the area, time, and interference. There were many places in China, especially in big cities, where there was radio interference and noise, and the programs could not be heard clearly by listeners. Meanwhile, when a listener missed a program, he would not be able to listen to it later. It was also difficult for listeners to listen to programs repeatedly if they did not understand them.

When internet access became common, Liangyou Seminary also began to utilize the internet and digital media, recording training courses and establishing an online training platform to increase interaction with students. In 2005, Liangyou Seminary launched its webcasting service which allowed listeners to listen to courses, download lectures, and communicate with the seminary. In 2011, Liangyou Seminary's website was launched, and has been continually improved. It allows students to register, listen to courses, and hand in assignments online. Through these digital media and online platforms, students' listening has become far more effective. All of the courses are free of charge on the internet, so students can not only see the course syllabus conveniently, but they can also listen to courses over and over again when it is most convenient for them. They can also receive timely feedback on their homework from seminary teachers.

Online Self-Learning and Global Access

With the rise in popularity of smartphones, in 2018, Liangyou Seminary developed its own app, called Liangyou College, which allows students to listen to lessons anytime, anywhere. The app has added multiple-choice questions to the Navigation Program so that new believers and young believers can listen to these customized courses and measure the effectiveness of their learning.

In response to the changes and challenges of the times, in 2022, the seminary launched the Universal Undergraduate Program and the Universal Advanced Program. Liangyou Seminary is gradually transforming into an online self-learning platform. It provides multiple-choice questions for each course so that students can freely organize their study plan according to their own time and use these questions to measure their learning effectiveness. It also opened courses for public use so that any church can use their courses to train their own church workers and preachers.

Impact on Global Christian Leadership

After forty years, there are nearly twenty thousand students who have enrolled in Liangyou Seminary's programs, and countless believers have listened to its courses without registering as students. The theological education and pastoral training provided by the seminary have contributed greatly to the establishment and development of churches in China and have nurtured generations of Christian leaders and pastoral workers for Chinese churches around the world. The students of Liangyou Seminary come from all over the world, from those who never had the opportunity to go to school to university professors and professionals who are well-educated. With such students, the teachers have taught without discrimination, tailoring the teaching to each student's needs, and nourishing them with care. We have heard testimonies of preachers listening to sermons preached at Liangyou Seminary, recording them, and then preaching them to believers. At a time when there was a severe lack of resources and theological training, the courses of Liangyou Seminary have, to a certain extent, served as a theological standard due to the trust of the audience in Liangyou Radio.

Shaping Tomorrow's Ministries: The Future of Online Theological Training

Now that the number of Christians in China has grown to tens of millions, the focus of gospel work in China has shifted from evangelism to equipping and training. The need for theological training in China is not decreasing but increasing. In many third- and fourth-tier cities or rural areas, pastors are often tentmakers, and they cannot afford to leave their ministries to attend training. In times of relaxed policies, many overseas theological training ministries subsidized the training needs of pastors to a certain extent. Now, with a tightening policy, it is difficult for overseas organizations to freely conduct training. Because of the three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the church's acceptance of training through the internet, as well as familiarity in using various soft- and hardware, has risen dramatically. Training resources have also become more and more abundant on the internet. For these reasons, online training is becoming increasingly important to pastoral training in Chinese churches.

Certainly, online training needs to be adjusted according to the changing times and the needs of the church. Pastoral training needs to be extended from the simple teaching of biblical-theological knowledge to the edification of spiritual life and the transmission of ministry experience. Therefore, online training needs to be integrated with fellowship and discipleship. Furthermore, the curriculum, coursework, and methods of measuring teaching effectiveness need to be adjusted according to the trainee's level of education. Finally, online training should be coordinated with local churches so that the content of the training is close to the needs of the churches.

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Luke Cheng was born and raised in east China. After he graduated from college, he went to Canada to pursue graduate studies in engineering. He heard the gospel in a

Bible study group on campus and became a follower of Jesus Christ. After finishing his PhD in computer engineering, he ...[View Full Bio](#)

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