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The Tree with Good Fruit or Bad Fruit: An Evaluation of the House Church Movement and The Three-Self Patriotic Movement in China

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George Fox University

**The Tree with Good Fruit or Bad Fruit:
An Evaluation of the House Church Movement and
The Three-Self Patriotic Movement in China**

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of George Fox Evangelical Seminary
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Divinity

George Fox Evangelical Seminary

by

Jiying Song

Portland, Oregon

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Abbreviations

CCC	Church of Christ in China
CCC/TSPM	The China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement
CCJ	Church of Christ in Japan
CIM	China Inland Mission
CPC	Communist Party of China
HCM	House Church Movement
LMS	London Missionary Society
NCCC	National Christian Council of China
NCCU	North China Christian Union
RRA	Regulations of Religious Affairs
RTT	Reconstruction of Theological Thinking
TSPM	Three-Self Patriotic Movement

Abstract

This thesis is a research on the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the House Church Movement (HCM) in China. These two movements have produced two church systems in China: the Official Church and the Underground Church. With the method of “China-centered,” I present Christianity as a world religion and explore its development in Chinese society. In chapter 1, I explain the motivation of this research and the methodology I utilize in my approach to Chinese church history. I give a general historical background in chapter 2 and divide the Chinese church history into five eras: the preparation for Christianity (before the 1800s), the construction of Western Christianity (the 1800s to 1900), the emergence of Chinese Christianity (1900-1949), the deconstruction of Christianity (1949-1979), and the reconstruction of Chinese Christianity (1980-today). In chapters 3 and 4, I focus on the last three eras and present these two church movements beginning with the TSPM, and then the HCM, discussing key events and figures along the way. In order to present and evaluate Chinese church history as objective as possible, I include the points of view from Chinese authors in mainland China and overseas, believers from the TSPM and the HCM, the State and the CPC, as well as Western scholars from Europe and North America. Through this research, I find that the TSPM and the HCM have a common ground despite their theological differences and disagreements. Both of them have been contextualizing Christianity and turning it from a foreign religion into a Chinese religion.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Methodology

The study of Christianity in China is becoming more necessary and urgent. From a Western perspective, both increased academic research into “world Christianity” and the dramatic revival of Christianity in China are driving this resolve.¹ However, as a house church member from China, I perceive it more as an exploration of our own family tree. The President of China stressed that “a balance should be struck between material progress and the progress of morals and culture, and the later should be integrated into all aspects of society.”² This is a new opportunity for Chinese Christians to come together to spread the gospel in a broader way with more freedom. The opportunity does not just come from the speech of the President talking about moral progress and values in public; in fact, it more naturally comes from the fast rise of materialism and the crises it triggers, including the corruption of morals and the hunger for belief. When people become rich, they start to find out that money cannot fix everything. While the period of Mao as god is gone and the era of money as god is fading, it leaves a huge black hole in the Chinese belief system, and therefore the search for faith is much greater than ever before. There is an urgent need for bringing a more balanced evaluation of Chinese Christianity.

Broadly speaking, there are two church systems coexisting in China: the Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Church as the Official Church, and the unregistered

1. Daniel H. Bays, preface to *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H. Bays (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), viii.

2. Jingping Xi, “President Xi Jinping’s Speech for Guiding Ethic and Cultural Progress, Feb 28, 2015,” http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/01/content_19683672.htm.

Protestant Church as the Underground Church, which in general is illegal and gathers underground.³ I, as a house church member in China for more than eighteen years, have been told that the Three-Self Church has limited, obstructed, and opposed our house church's expansion. Most of what I have heard or wanted to hear is that the Three-Self Church is full of modernists who are not true believers. Although Wang Mingdao from the Underground Church and Ding Guangxun (K. H. Ting) from the TSPM cannot represent the full theological conflicts between the House Church and the Official Church, their theological difference is highlighted by Wang's pamphlet, *We, Because of Faith*, published in 1955. In this pamphlet, Wang claimed that Ding and the TSPM were the "party of unbelievers" and he called for "true believers and unbelievers to divide."⁴ According to Wang's view, they were modernists who "preached another gospel that had exchanged the kingdom of God for a lesser kingdom of social improvement."⁵

3. For more form of churches in China, see Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, "Christianity in Contemporary China: an Update," *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 278-279; Carsten T. Vala, "Pathways to the Pulpit: Leadership Training in Patriotic and Unregistered Chinese Protestant Churches," in *Making Religion, Making the State: the Politics of Religion in Modern China*, ed. Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 113-117.

I will mainly talk about Protestant Underground Church, for more information on Catholic Church in China, see Richard Madsen, "Catholic Conflict and Cooperation in the People's Republic of China," in *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*, ed. Jason Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin (Washington, D. C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 93-106; Jean-Paul Wiest, "From Past Contributions to Present Opportunities: The Catholic Church and Education in Chinese Mainland during the Last 150 Years," in *China and Christianity: Burdened past, Hopeful Future*, ed. Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 251-270.

For information on Orthodox in China, see Fuk-tsang Ying, "Mainland China," in *Christianities in Asia*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 159-160.

4. Mingdao Wang, "We, Because of Faith," in *Documents of the Three-Self Movement: Source Materials for the Study of the Protestant Church in Communist China*, ed. Wallace C. Merwin and Francis P. Jones (New York: Far Eastern Office, 1963), 103, 108.

5. Thomas Alan Harvey, *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church in China* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2002), 39.

However, is this the whole story? There are many conflicts when it comes to evaluating the House Church Movement (HCM) and the TSPM in China. In Wang's viewpoint, the debate was over essential Christian theology and Ding was a modernist allied to the Communist Party of China (CPC). From Ding's point of view, Wang did not care for patriotism, anti-imperialism, or Christians unlike himself.⁶ According to American scholar Philip Wickeri, this fight is between fundamentalism and modernism, and "fundamentalism is a common response to modernity in many religious traditions, but it is always a reactionary rather than a creative response."⁷ Thus it was Wang who shut the door for dialogue while Ding offered the possibility for different Christians to work together.⁸

The fight and reaction between these two church systems are still common in China today. They see each other as the bad tree with bad fruit that should be cut down and thrown into the fire. But as Christians within the church, should we examine the tree closely before we judge it as a bad tree and try to cut it down? As a house church member, I have my own bias and assumptions. I have to acknowledge and try to curb my own emotional, experiential, and rational barriers in order to be as objective as possible. We can only make critical judgments and form creative ideas after we have done objective historical investigation.⁹

6. Philip L. Wickeri, *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K.H. Ting and the Chinese Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2007), 121.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 62.

My objective in this thesis is to examine different viewpoints of the TSPM and HCM without judging either on the basis of their theological positions. I will introduce the historical background of these two movements, and then evaluate them from different points of view, such as insiders, outsiders, opponents, and the State. With historical investigation, comparing and contrasting, this thesis will help people from different standpoints understand and even appreciate each other. It will be a big step forward if this thesis can bring people from these two church systems into dialogue, and even cooperation, rather than separation and fight. We need to work together in today's China as Chinese Christians in order to grow more in discipleship and extend our own mission in our own region.

As an interpreter of this particular conflict within Chinese Christianity, I have certain advantages and disadvantages with regard to my methodology. First, I am Chinese with Chinese-language skill and first-hand experience. Based on this, my first approach will be "China-centered."¹⁰ I am going to use Chinese perceptions of our own problems, pay attention to Chinese historical development, and reflect Chinese history in our own terms rather than in terms of Western expectations. I will begin my study with Chinese problems set in a Chinese context.¹¹ I will stand as a Chinese, use Chinese sources, and evaluate Christianity in China as a Chinese religion. Over the last five centuries, Europeans have spread Christianity. However, Christianity is not a uniquely European religion. Our investigation begins with the assumption

10. For fully discussion of this approach, see Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), xlii-lix, 149-198.

11. Ibid.

that Christianity is a world religion and not a Eurocentric one. As Bays emphasizes, Christianity has become thoroughly Chinese and it is part of the Chinese social picture.¹² Using the “China-centered” approach, I will go back to some Chinese-language sources and examine them, as well as the comments made about them by English writers. I will bring different Chinese perspectives into this thesis, such as Chinese authors in mainland China, as well as other writers from Europe and North America. I will put Chinese Christianity at the center and bring in different points of view.

Second, I am at a disadvantage as well. Having been a house church member for more than eighteen years, I can hardly avoid my empathy and bias. Thus objectivity must be my goal and I hope to stick firmly to it. On the one hand, many house church participants assume that the State Church is endorsed by the CPC and therefore their theology as well as social, political, and organizational aspects is problematic.¹³ Chinese scholar Xiaheng Xie regards this as “overemphasiz[ing] the influence of church-state relations on the theological correctness and organizational structure of the Three-Self churches.”¹⁴ On the other hand, some people romanticize the Chinese Church as “a symbol of Christian resistance against the one-party state.”¹⁵ Professor Joseph Tse-Hei Lee argues that we need to understand this romanticization by

12. Bays, preface to *Christianity in China*, ix.

13. Xiaheng Xie, “Religion and Modernity in China: Who Is Joining the Three-Self Church and Why,” *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 1 (December 1, 2010): 92.

14. Ibid.

15. Lee, “Christianity,” 304.

considering the political and ideological needs of the CPC.¹⁶ I definitely think that we need to overcome this overemphasis and romanticization.

In order to be as objective as possible, I will bring different points of view from insiders, outsiders, opponents, the CPC in mainland China, as well as observers from overseas. I will not seek to draw a conclusion about whether the HCM or TSPM is right. Instead, I will ask some “objectivizing questions,”¹⁷ such as, “What positive and negative influences have HCM and TSPM brought to Chinese society?” and “What do their proponents and opponents think about these influences?” There is no history without interpretation. Meanwhile, we do have hard data that needs to be interpreted and critically examined.¹⁸ I will utilize the “China-centered” approach with objectivity through my research and evaluation.

16. Ibid.

17. Bradley and Muller, 50.

18. Ibid.

Chapter 2

Historical Background

In order to understand the tension between the Official Church and the Underground Church, their origins and historical development should be reviewed first. I will draw a broad picture of Christianity in China and focus on the Official Church and the Underground Church after the 1950s.

Different scholars divide the development of Christianity in China into different stages. In his study of the regional development of Protestant Christianity in China, Chinese Christian Scholar Fuk-Tsang Ying has divided it into three stages: 1807 to 1918, 1919 to 1949, and 1950 to 2004.¹⁹ He also illustrates the stages of 1949 to 1957 as “control, struggle, and unity” and 1957 to 1966 as “struggle and elimination” in his analysis of the CPC policy on Protestant Christianity.²⁰ In addition, Ying gives a broad and general summary of Chinese Christianity beginning with Nestorianism coming into China.²¹ Western missionary George Patterson uses some important historical events as the watershed and he calls the establishment of the New China in 1949 as the end of an era.²² Professor Daniel Bays perceives the period of 1900 to 1937 as the growth of independent Christianity in China and 1960 to 1979 as a period without any

19. Fuk-Tsang Ying, “The Regional Development of Protestant Christianity in China: 1918, 1949 and 2004,” *China Review* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 89.

20. Fuk-Tsang Ying, “The CPC's Policy on Protestant Christianity, 1949–1957: an Overview and Assessment,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 89 (September 2014): 898-899.

21. Ying, “Mainland China,” 150-151.

22. George N. Patterson, *Christianity in Communist China* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1969), 40.

overt religious existence.²³ Wickeri uses Ding Guangxun as the main historical figure of Chinese Christianity and arranges historical events around Ding's life.²⁴

No matter which approach one takes, our purpose is to help the reader understand the historical background in which the various authors are presenting Christianity in China. I divide the development of Christianity in China into five main eras: before the 1800s, the 1800s to 1900, 1900 to 1949, 1949 to 1979, and 1980 to today. I see the first era as the preparation for Christianity in China. The second one is the period of missionaries and the construction of Western Christianity in China. The third era marks the emergence of Chinese Christianity. Some independent underground churches as well as the idea of three-self came out of this period. The year 1949 saw the establishment of People's Republic of China and the beginning of the reign of communism. This has made the thirty years after 1949 as a period of the deconstruction of Christianity. The Reform and Opening Up era in China has started from 1980, which is the last period as the reconstruction of Chinese Christianity.

Before the 1800s: Preparation for Christianity

It is uncertain when Christianity first came into China, but American historian Kenneth Scott Latourette claims that it is from the T'ang dynasty (618-907).²⁵ However, a breviary of the Syrian Malabar Church says, "By the means of St. Thomas [the Apostle] the Chinesses and

23. Daniel H. Bays, "The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900-1937," in *Christianity in China*, 307-308; Bays, preface to *Christianity in China*, viii.

24. Wickeri, *Reconstructing*, vi-vii.

25. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Pub. Co., 1970), 48, 51.

Aethiopians were converted to the truth...By the means of St. Thomas the Kingdom of Heaven flew and entered into China.”²⁶ Archæus, Archbishop of Seleucia from 411 to 415, and Silas, Patriarch of the Nestorians from 503/505 to 520/523, created metropolitan sees in China. French missionary Evariste Régis Huc argues that this is a proof of dating the Christian faith in China from the time of the Apostles since they would not create a metropolitan without a flourishing church.²⁷ In addition, there had already been maritime trade routes and the Old Silk Road overland between Persia and China since the fifth century C.E.²⁸ It is very likely that the early followers of Jesus carried the gospel along such routes. Thus, the possibility of a pre-T’ang period Christian presence in China cannot be completely ruled out, even though Latourette regards this information as of later origin and thus untrustworthy.²⁹

The faith the Nestorians brought to the T’ang emperors was called “*Jingjiao*” (“Luminous Religion”). The finding of a *Jingjiao* stele in the ancient capital of the T’ang dynasty gave reliable proof of the presence of Christianity in China. The stele was erected in 781, which told the coming of Bishop Alopen with the Sutras and Images in 635 and also mentioned the translation of the Scriptures. In 1908, two almost complete pieces of Nestorian writings in

26. Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia Before 1500* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 265.

27. Ibid.; Aubrey Russell Vine, *The Nestorian Churches* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 80; Evariste Régis Huc, *Christianity in China, Tartary and Thibet* (New York, P.J. Kenedy, 1897), 1:42, 43.

28. Samuel N. C. Lieu, "Nestorians and Manichaeans on the South China Coast," *Vigiliae Christianae* 34, no. 1 (March 1, 1980): 71; Gillman and Klimkeit, 309; Michalēs S. Kordōsēs, *T’ang China, The Chinese Nestorian Church and "Heretical" Byzantium: (AD 618-845)* (Ioannina, 2008), 304-306; Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 1:290.

29. Gillman and Klimkeit, 267; Latourette, 48, 50.

Chinese were discovered at the Dunhuang Stone Cave in Shazhou, an ancient town about 100 miles away from the present caravan road to the ancient capital. The first Christian church in China was built with funds from the emperor's own treasury in the capital Chang'an, the largest city in the world in 638. Soon after the emperor's death, persecution of Nestorians began in 698. After an Imperial Edict in 845, Nestorianism was expelled from China together with many other religions. The Nestorians came back to China with the Mongols in the thirteenth century, but the dissolution of the Mongol empire in late fifteenth century marked the end of Nestorianism in China.³⁰

Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), a Jesuit, acquired premises for his mission at Nanking in 1599 and at Peking in 1601 and published his book *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (Tianzhu shiyi)* in Chinese in 1603.³¹ He witnessed the conversion of Xu Guangqi (1562-1633) and Li Zhizao (1565-1612), who became the pillars of the early church in China.³² Before long the Chinese Rites Controversy broke out. In 1722 the Kangxi Emperor of the Qing dynasty banned all Christian evangelization in China as a reaction to the papal bull of 1715 from Rome.³³ Thus the era of the preparation for Christianity in China ended.

30. Moffett, *A History of Christianity*; Samuel H. Moffett, "Earliest Asian Christianity," *Missiology* 3, no. 4 (October 1, 1975): 415-430; John Foster, *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty* (London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York, Macmillan, 1939); Toshikazu S. Foley, "Translating Biblical Texts into Chinese: the Pioneer Venture of the Nestorian Missionaries," *Bible Translator* (July 1, 2008): 113-121; Yoshiro Saeki, *The Nestorian Monument in China* (London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1916).

31. Cf. R Po-chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City : Matteo Ricci, 1552-1610*, (Oxford; New York : Oxford University Press, 2010).

32. Mary Laven, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit encounter with the East* (London : Faber and Faber, 2011), 206-208.

33. David Bentley Hart, *The Story of Christianity: An Illustrated History of 2000 Years of the Christian Faith* (London Quercus, 2011), 209; Ying, "Mainland China," 150.

The 1800s to 1900: Construction of Western Christianity

In the nineteenth century, Christianity came back to China in the form of Protestant missions, along with Western colonial expansion, “a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other.”³⁴ Christianity was branded as *Yangjiao* (Foreign Religion) and rejected by the Chinese culturally, socially, and politically.³⁵

The arrival of Robert Morrison in Macau in 1807 marked the beginning of the construction of Western Christianity in China. Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to reside in China, was sent by the London Missionary Society (LMS). He translated the Bible into Chinese and compiled a Chinese-English dictionary. He and his colleagues baptized only ten Chinese, but he laid the foundations for future work.³⁶ Even though he never overcame his sense of the superiority of Western culture, he continued to live among the Chinese and “gained a profound respect for Chinese culture, language and some of the people.”³⁷

By 1840, Protestant missionaries, most of them with a background in the Evangelical Awakening, had a humble beginning in China. They baptized less than a hundred Chinese. However, just as Morrison had done, they had begun the acquisition of the Chinese language and culture. The Bible and other literature had been translated into Chinese and literature about China was being produced in English as well. Dictionaries and other materials were being prepared to

34. Patterson, 85.

35. Ying, “Mainland China,” 150.

36. Latourette, 211-213.

37. J. Barton Starr, “The legacy of Robert Morrison,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22, no. 2 (Apr. 1998): 73.

serve later missionaries to China. Hospitals and schools were founded.³⁸

However, the pressure of foreign trade on China and Western expansion under the impulse of the Industrial Revolution inevitably led to war between the West and China. The treaties of the First Opium War (1839-1842) and the Second Opium War (1856-1860) made possible the foreign penetration of China by Western culture and subsequently Christianity. Missionary, official, and commercial foreign communities arose in the treaty ports.³⁹ The English Methodist J. Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission (CIM) in 1865, and he was perceived as the prototype of the successful faith missionary, respected by generations of Chinese.⁴⁰ In 1899, the Boxer Rebellion broke out and Christians in China encountered severe persecution. This uprising was anti-foreign rather than anti-Christian. Missionaries as well as Chinese Christians were regarded as devils and traitors to be killed.⁴¹ In 1900, The Battle of Peking ended with another treaty between China and the Eight-Nation Alliance. Besides the compensation paid for war reparations to the Western nations, this treaty guaranteed the freedom and safety of Western Protestants in China.⁴² Starting from Morrison's ten Christians in the early 1800s, the number of communicants exceeded 100,000 soon after 1900.⁴³ Under the unequal

38. Latourette, 226-227.

39. Ibid., 270,281.

40. Dana Lee Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Chichester, U.K.; Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 61.

41. Latourette, 507.

42. Ibid., 522-526.

43. Ying, "The Regional Development," 66.

treaty system, the Western missionary societies had been growing rapidly in China. However, interwoven with imperialism, Christianity in China had to face a huge challenge for the age to come.

1900 to 1949: The Emergence of Chinese Christianity

After 1900, the mission societies became much more diverse, with dozens of new groups established and many independent missionaries coming to China entirely on their own. Some independent churches grew outside the mission churches as well as within them.

Within mission churches, the Three-Self Movement, although it was not organized, aimed at making Chinese Christians responsible for “self-management, self-support and self-propagation.”⁴⁴ German missionary Karl Gutzlaff founded the Chinese Union in 1844 with the principle that Chinese Christians themselves—not foreign missionaries—could convert China’s millions.⁴⁵ The goal of “three-self” was pursued more systematically from the formation of the China Continuation Committee after the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910. This committee was reorganized into the National Christian Council of China (NCCC) after the National Christian Conference held in Shanghai in 1922. Out of the conference of 1922, the Church of Christ in China (CCC) was founded with a great degree of Chinese leadership and responsibility. Delegates, representing about 30 percent of the Protestant community, attended

44. Bays, “The Growth,” 308.

45. Jessie G. Lutz and R. Ray Lutz, “Karl Gutzlaff’s Approach to Indigenization: The Chinese Union,” in *Christianity in China*, 269.

CCC's first assembly held in 1927, and most of them were Presbyterian or Congregationalist.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, a different sector of Chinese Christianity, "independent of foreign missions, autonomous in operations, and indigenous in ideas and leadership," came into being after 1900.⁴⁷ First, there were several federations, made up of independent churches, which had come out of mission churches and become self-supporting and self-governing. Two of them were noteworthy. One was The China Christian Independent Church (*Zhongguo Yesujiao Zilihui*), started in Shanghai, which had over one hundred member churches by 1920 and drew mostly from the urban middle class. The other was the Chinese Christian Church (*Zhonghua Jidujiaohui*), centered in the Shandong province and organized as early as 1912. One of the leaders of this federation was Zhang Boling, founder of the Nankai University.⁴⁸

Second, there arose some indigenous church organizations or movements, such as the Pentecostal The True Jesus Church (*Zhen Yesu Jiaohui*) in 1917, The Jesus Family (*Yesu Jiating*) in 1927, The Little Flock (*Xiaoqun*) in 1923, and The Spiritual Gifts Society (*Ling'en hui*) in the 1920s.⁴⁹

Third, there were also some individual traveling evangelists, such as Wang Mingdao (1900-1991), who started Christian Tabernacle (*Jidutu Huitang*) in 1925 and was famous for

46. Bays, "The Growth," 308; Ying, "The Regional Development," 68; Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 109-111.

47. Bays, "The Growth," 309.

48. Jessie G. Lutz, "China and Protestantism: Historical Perspectives, 1807-1949," in *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, ed. Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 189; Bays, "The Growth," 310-311; Bays, *A New History*, 96-97.

49. Lutz, "China and Protestantism," 192; Bays, *A New History*, 129-135; Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (UK: Monarch Books, 2006), 59-65.

refusing to join the TSPM; Dora Yu (Yu Cidu, 1873-1931), the earliest Chinese woman evangelist, who had great influence on Watchman Nee and the group gathered around him; and John Sung (Song Shangjie, 1901-1944), who returned to China after a religious and psychological crisis in Union Theological Seminary, became a zealous evangelist, and joined the Bethel Band in 1931.⁵⁰

Chinese Christians were still under the shadow of the West, even after the establishment of the NCCC and the CCC, because of their personal ties to missionaries, financial dependence on foreign funds, and limited access to theological education. During the Japanese Invasion (1937-1945), many missionaries left China, and the ones that did not go were either circumscribed by the Japanese authorities or put into internment camps. The foreign funds were cut off. Thus the three-self movement grew directly out of the occupation and the realignment of roles in the Protestant community. Meanwhile, the True Jesus Church, the Jesus Family, and the Little Flock had significant growth during this period in both occupied and unoccupied China. They reached people by providing them food and shelter. In addition, the unforeseen population movements (around fifty million people) and resettlement to the west during the war also spread the gospel to a wider geographical range than ever before.⁵¹ In the first half of the twentieth century, the number of Chinese Christians reached 1,000,000 in 1949.⁵²

50. Lutz, "China and Protestantism," 189-192; Bays, "The Growth," 310-311; Bays, *A New History*, 96-97, 129-135, 135-138; Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 59-65.

51. Bays, *A New History*, 141-146; Xi Lian, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010), 179-182; Timothy Brook, "Toward Independence: Christianity in China under the Japanese Occupation, 1937-1945," in *Christianity in China*, 317-337.

52. For the number of Christians in each denomination in China at the years of 1949 and 1950, please see Ying, "The Regional Development," 77.

1949 to 1979: Deconstruction of Christianity

In 1949, the People's Republic of China was established and the reign of communism began. According to Mao Zedong and his Marxist-Leninist philosophy, "religion was the opium of the people and should be eliminated through internal struggle."⁵³ This set the tone for the CPC who believed that "the eradication of religion would happen naturally after the realization of a socialist society."⁵⁴

To the CPC, Christianity is different from other religions because they perceive it as "the tool of cultural invasion of imperialism."⁵⁵ The goal of the CPC was to server its relation with imperialism and to ensure that the Chinese ran the Church. There were more than 1 million Chinese Christians in 1949. In order to win over the majority and strengthen the work of the anti-imperialist united front, the Preparatory Committee of TSPM was established in 1951 and the Committee of TSPM was founded in 1954. The TSPM was chaired by Wu Yaozong, a "pro-communist and American-educated theologian," but actually led by the CPC.⁵⁶ The slogan for the TSPM was "Love Country, Love Church," and in that order.⁵⁷ The three-self formula, having emerged from the nineteenth century, was carried out around anti-imperialism:

53. Robert, 91.

54. Ying, "The CPC's Policy," 893.

55. "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu tianzhujiào jidujiao wèntí de zhìshì" ["CPC Central Directive on the Issues of Catholicism and Protestantism"], in *Jiànguó yilai zhōngyào wénxiàn xuǎnbǎn* [*Important Documents since the Founding of the Nation*], ed. Zhonggong zhongyang wénxiàn yánjiushi (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang wénxiàn chubanshe, 1992), 1:408, "被帝国主义用为对我国进行文化侵略的工具。"

56. Robert, 91; Ying, "The CPC's Policy," 889.

57. Leslie T. Lyall, *Come Wind, Come Weather: the Present Experience of the Church in China* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960), 27.

self-government meant “wipe out imperialistic influences”; self-support meant “reject all further [imperialistic] appropriations”; and self-propagation meant “get rid of imperialistic poison and preach the true gospel.”⁵⁸ In 1958, the TSPM began to execute monolithic leadership over the Church and all denominational organizations were ended.⁵⁹

Struggle and elimination went to extremes during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). From the early 1960s to 1979, overt religious practice in China was essentially nonexistent. Both the Underground Church and the TSPM Church were shut down and Christians were persecuted severely. Mao Zedong’s wife proudly claimed, “Chinese Christianity was finished and belonged in the History Museum.”⁶⁰ These thirty years after the founding of the New China marked the deconstruction of both Western Christianity and Chinese Christianity. The seeds of the gospel were buried underground and awaited a new age to come.

1980 to today: Reconstruction of Chinese Christianity

The revival of Christianity in China after China’s Reform and Opening Up in 1980 has caught the world’s eye. From the first 10 believers baptized by Morrison in the early 1800s, the number of Chinese Christians had reached 100,000 right after 1900, 1 million around 1949, 3 million in 1982, and 16 million in 2004.⁶¹ Official statistics of religious believers by the Chinese government are generally conservative because they only include registered adult believers and

58. YaoZong Wu, “Y.T. Wu’s Report to the July 1954 Conference in Peking,” in *Documents of the Three-Self Movement*, 85-95, “彻底肃清帝国主义影响,” “拒绝一切外国津贴,” “肃清帝国主义的毒素, 传扬纯正的福音.”

59. Ying, “The Regional Development,” 81.

60. *The Cross: Jesus in China* (China Soul for Christ Foundation, 2003), DVD (Vision Technology, 2003).

61. Ying, “The Regional Development,” 81-82.

exclude underground church believers. British diplomat Tony Lambert revised the number in 2004 to 21 million based on his private interviews with local TSPM leaders. Still many unregistered house church believers were not included.⁶² The revival shows that the religious tolerance of the CPC had impressively evolved.

Within the thirty years after 1980, there were more than eighty documents on religion published by different levels of the government. Article 36 of the new Constitution, adopted at the fifth National People's Congress in 1982, distinguished freedom of religious belief from freedom of religious activity. It claims: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. ... The state protects normal religious activities."⁶³ The word "normal" is impossible to define. Thus the freedom of religion is narrowed down to the freedom of belief, and the government preserves the flexibility of regulation.⁶⁴

Document 19, issued by the CPC in 1982, still holds the idea that religion will eventually disappear from human history. However, they accept that it will not die out within a short period and rule out using coercion in dealing with it. The CPC perceives that their basic task is to unite all the people in order to construct a powerful socialist state. They set ideology and belief as secondary issues while maintaining basic political and economic welfare of the masses as primary. Thus, the CPC has adopted the basic policy toward religion as one "of respect for and

62. Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 225-233.

63. Article 36, in *Constitution of China*, 1982.

64. Hong Qu, "Religious Policy in the People's Republic of China: An Alternative Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 70 (May 2011): 441-442.

protection of the freedom of religious belief.”⁶⁵ It calls for the *unremitting* propagation of atheism and the prohibition of religion’s intervention in the affairs of state, schools, or public education. Religion is not permitted to “oppose the Party’s leadership or the socialist system, or to destroy national or ethnic unity.”⁶⁶ All national religious organizations, including the TSPM, should follow the CPC’s and government’s leadership. These organizations should act as bridges for the CPC to win over, unite with, and educate religious people. Party members are forbidden from becoming religious believers or taking part in religious activities.⁶⁷ However, this is tolerated in some places under certain circumstance.⁶⁸

The policy on religion has not been dramatically changed since 1982, but it has evolved progressively and religions are perceived more as agents for the peace and harmony of society. In 2005, Regulations of Religious Affairs (RRA), the most comprehensive administrative regulation on religion in China, has come into practice. It is significant because it shows that the government has made steps forward toward a society ruled by law.⁶⁹ Having perceived religion’s long-term existence and positive value, the state uses RRA to protect the right of citizens to enjoy freedom of religious belief and to “guard against religious chaos and religious

65. The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, “The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country’s Socialist Period, Document No. 19,” *Chinese Law and Government* 33, no. 2 (March 31, 1982): 22.

66. *Ibid.*, 23.

67. *Ibid.*, 17-34.

68. For details, see Qu, 438-440.

69. Qu, 444.

infiltration.”⁷⁰ Jiang Zemin, the Chairman of China, said in 2001, “religious freedom and church-state separation should not be used as excuses to abandon or break away from the state’s administration of religious affairs.”⁷¹ This sets the tone that the principle of religious administration will possess higher priority over the principle of religious freedom.⁷²

Under the regulation of the central government, provincial, municipal, and county governments can construct their own regulations on religious affairs, taking into consideration local situations and special needs. The ambiguity in the regulations and laws gives the local governments more flexibility in their administration. These contribute to the variety of Christian situations in different regions of China. We cannot draw a general conclusion, representative of the whole nation, from the experiences or witnesses in one place. This makes the evaluation of Christianity in China more complicated. For instance, one American pastor shared that his experience of preaching in a Chinese non-official church in Guangdong Province went well. Another American pastor told me that he spoke at a house church in Yunnan Province and that later the police took the house church pastor away.⁷³

Different political climates also have influence on the situation of the Underground

70. Fuk-Tsang Ying, “New Wine in Old Wineskins: an Appraisal of Religious Legislation in China and the Regulations on Religious Affairs of 2005,” *Religion, State and Society* 34, no. 4 (Jan 2006), 363.

71. Zemin Jiang, “Lun zongjiao wenti” [“Discussion of Religion”], in *Jiang Zemin Wenxuan [Selected Documents of Jiang Zemin]*, ed. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian bianji weiyuanhui (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2006), 3:386, “不能以宗教信仰自由和政教分离为借口, 放弃或摆脱国家对宗教事务的管理.”

72. Ying, “New Wine,” 364.

73. For foreigners participating religious activities in China, refer to “Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens within the Territory of PRC,” promulgated as “Decree No. 144” by the State Council of the People’s Republic of China on January 31, 1994.

Church. One house church had been gathering in a commercial building for several years and had not been interrupted by the government. In 2014, before the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Protest on June 4, this house church, along with several other churches in the same building, was shut down and the leaders questioned or intimidated by the police. They held their worship in a hotel several times and went back to their original place one month later.

After a thirty-year deconstruction of Christianity, the Reform and Opening Up have allowed the seeds that were underground to sprout and spread. The reconstruction of Chinese Christianity is taking place in China under the reign of communism.

Chapter 3

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement

Chinese people have their own natural pieties and ceremonial forms in honor of their ancestors, Confucius, or *Shang-ti* (the Heavenly Emperor, or God). During the Chinese Rites Controversy, the papal bull of 1715 from Rome to the Kangxi Emperor of the Qing dynasty banned all the traditional Chinese rites and even forbade Christians to refer to God by any traditional Chinese name, such as *Shang-ti* or *Tien* (Heaven). This ban resulted in the Emperor prohibiting all Christian evangelization in China.⁷⁴ This cultural conflict has not disappeared, even today. Meanwhile, Christianity, connected with wars and unequal treaties in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is still held in suspicion by the CPC and many Chinese people. Perceived as a foreign religion, Christianity would not develop naturally by itself, but would have to grow against the wind. Missiologist Wilbert Shenk points out that nothing is unique in Christianity as a foreign faith when compared with Buddhism and Islam, which did not originate in China either. It is the violent way in which Christianity was brought back to China in the nineteenth century that shaped the way of Chinese Church.⁷⁵ Christianity, interwoven with imperialism, was perceived as the tool of cultural invasion. Thus the three-self movement, free from imperialism, took place inevitably and finally led to the only legal leadership for Chinese Protestants.

74. Hart, 209.

75. Wilbert R. Shenk, "The Origins and Evolution of the Three-Selfs in Relation to China," *International Bulletin Of Missionary Research* 14, no. 1 (January 1990): 31-32.

The TSM during the Emergence of Chinese Christianity

Shenk argues that the indigenous church concept originated in William Carey and his Indian Serampore church, which stated, “It is only by means of native preachers we can hope for the universal spread of the Gospel through this immense continent.”⁷⁶ It was later developed into “Three Selves: self-supporting, self-governing, and self propagating” by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in the 1850s.⁷⁷ In China, the Three-Self Movement started within mission churches and was promoted by both missionaries and Chinese Christians in the nineteenth century.⁷⁸ Early in the twentieth century, Chinese Christians realized that in order to survive, the Church in China should “sever herself from foreign missions backed up by unequal treaties and gunboats.”⁷⁹ With gratitude for the service of many missionaries and the frustration of denominations in the West, at the National Christian Conference held in Shanghai in 1922, they called for “an indigenous Church which will present an indigenous Christianity.”⁸⁰ And they also appealed to all the Chinese Christians to unite through “systematic giving,” “persistent practice,” “religious education, an adequately trained leadership, and devoted personal work” to attain the goal of three-self.⁸¹ In the constitution of the CCC, the union and independence of the

76. Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin Books, 1964), 265.

77. Shenk, 28, 29.

78. Bays, “The Growth,” 308.

79. Shenk, 32.

80. Frank Joseph Rawlinson, Helen Thoburn, and D. MacGillivray, eds., *The Chinese Church As Revealed in the National Christian Conference* (Shanghai: The Oriental Press, 1922), 502.

81. Ibid.

Chinese Church were the main goals: “to unite Christian believers in China, to plan and promote with united strength the spirit of self-support, self-governance, and self-propagation, in order to extend Christ’s Gospel, practice his Way of Life and spread His Kingdom throughout the world.”⁸² However, the Chinese Church was still young and weak, and especially dependent on foreign funds.

During the Japanese Invasion, Chinese people were suffering under military violence, including the young Chinese Church and Christians. Canadian historian Timothy Brook has done a thorough research on the CCC in Nanjing during the wartime period. He divides the eight years of Japanese Invasion into three phases: the period of military assault (1937-38); the period of accommodation to Japanese rule (1938-41); the period of subordination to Japanese rule (1942-45).⁸³

From 1937 to 1938, the violence of the Japanese Invasion of Nanjing was repeatedly carried to the extreme. During this period, the Japanese army tended to respect Western foreigners and Christian churches. Because of this privileged position, many people flooded to churches for protection or refuge. Most Christian work was impossible to carry out, other than providing safety, medical care, and disaster relief. The service of the Church won the gratitude and admiration of many local people who were previously hostile or indifferent toward it. In the midst of great terror, the Church was earning its place in Chinese society. As a Canadian medical

82. “Constitution of the CCC,” pt. 1, art. 2, *United Church of Canada Archives*, quoted in Brook, “Toward Independence,” 319.

83. Brook, “Toward Independence,” 323.

missionary said in a letter, “The Christian religion is now regarded more and more as a religion of the Chinese.”⁸⁴ Meanwhile, congregations were perishing through starvation, massacre, and the breakdown of morals. The Church found it impossible to move toward self-support because of the disordered economic life of the people. The Japanese wanted to control China and Asia, and their ultimate goal was to remove the Western presence from Asia. “They would like to disrupt all good relations between us and the Chinese, so that they may work their own plans,” said an American missionary early in 1938.⁸⁵ The Japanese policy during this time was that religious freedom should be respected as long as “it did not interfere with Chinese solidarity with Japan and Manchuria.”⁸⁶

During the period of accommodation, with the goal of building the New Order of the Orient and the desire of making the Chinese into “good citizens,” the Japanese organized the missionaries of all religions. For Christians, they formed the Sino-Japanese Christian Association (*zhongri jidujiao xiedinghui*) and the Japan-China Christian Federation (*zhongri jidujiao tongmeng*) in 1939, and some branches in different occupied areas before or after 1941.⁸⁷ They also planned the restructuring of some Chinese churches, founded joint associations, and even

84. Ibid., 323-325.

85. William Burke, *A Letter to James Burke*, Shanghai, 29 Jan. 1938, Robert W. Woodruff Library, quoted in Brook, “Toward Independence,” 326.

86. Brook, “Toward Independence,” 327.

87. Ibid., 327, 333; Fuk-Tsang Ying (Fuzeng Xing), *Chongtu yu Ronghe: Jindai Zhongguo Jidu Jiaoshi Yanjiu Lunji [Conflict and Coalition]* (Taipei: Jidujiao Yuzhouguang Quanren Guanhuai Jigou, 2006), 109-110.

dispatched some Christian immigration groups from Japan.⁸⁸ They understood that to change Chinese religious organizations and customs overnight would only backfire, but they also did not want Christianity in China to become so strong that it could serve as a cover for anti-Japanese activity. More and more they felt that the success of the New Order in East Asia was impossible with the influence of foreign missionaries. A passive policy of limiting foreign mission influence began, with the ultimate goal of forcing them out, which could not be achieved until the Attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. For the Japanese army, it was not Christianity that bothered them, but its “continuing susceptibility to foreign direction and control.”⁸⁹ With the weakening link between foreign missions and the Chinese Church, self-propagation and self-governance were forced upon Chinese Christians. The Church was growing, within occupied and unoccupied zones, and it seemed to be in a “favorable situation,” until the picture changed after 1941.⁹⁰

When the Pacific War started in 1941, the Japanese army put foreigners into concentration camps or exchanged them for Japanese nationals. Christian work could go on under close Japanese watch as long as Chinese Christians could prove that they were free of foreign influence. The Church of Christ in Japan (CCJ) was formed in 1941, because of the pressure of union put upon Protestant churches in Japan. They brought the constitution of the CCJ as a model for the union of Chinese churches. For the Japanese, this union was not for the sake of Chinese Christians, but carried the hope of having a unified Protestantism amenable to

88. Bingsan Xu, “Ribei Jidujiaohui Zhanzheng Zeren Chutan,” [“Preliminary Study on the War Responsibility of Japanese Christian Church,”] *Kangri Zhanzheng Yanjiu [The Study of Anti-Japanese War]*, no. 1 (2009): 38.

89. Brook, “Toward Independence,” 330.

90. Ibid., 328-331.

the hegemony of their occupation.⁹¹ The League for the Promotion of Church Union in North China (short as League, *huabei jidujiao lianhe cujinhui*) was established in April 1942 and later reorganized as the North China Christian Union (NCCU, *huabei zhonghua jidujiao tuan*) in October 1942.⁹² In its declaration, the League appealed to all churches in China “not to rely on Anglo-American for survival, but to develop independence, and unite different denominations, in order to spread the gospel, self-support, self-govern, and self-propagate.”⁹³ The goal of union and independence was echoed once again, though under the scrutiny of the Japanese army. The League collaborated with, but also challenged, the army. Many Chinese Christian leaders supported a Japanese-imposed church union because they hoped to gain something good for a united church in China, but a union not on Japanese terms. With hope for the future and the desire of “preserving an inner liberty,” these people were still perceived as collaborating with the enemy, especially in the eyes of Christians who had withdrawn into western China.⁹⁴ Wang Mingdao, a strong resister to the NCCU in the occupied zone, did not join it and amazingly survived under the pressure of the Japanese army. We will return to him when we look at the House Church Movement (HCM). The Japanese controlled not only the institutions of the Chinese Church, but also the theology of Christianity. Every religion had to surrender to the principle of Shinto. In the Japanese catechism, the belief of God as creator of the world and the

91. Ibid., 331-333.

92. Ying, *Conflict and Coalition*, 108-121.

93. Ibid., 115, “勿赖英美图存，走向自立途径，并联合各宗各派，促进布道事功，自立自养自传。”

94. Brook, “Toward Independence,” 334.

belief of a final, divine judgment of all history were not allowed.⁹⁵ However, the NCCU resisted and insisted on putting them into its creed.⁹⁶

During these eight years of war, churches, schools, hospitals, and social service centers were bombed and burned. The Church was scattered, pastors were killed, and many Christians moved inland into unoccupied zones. Missionaries left and foreign financial funds were cut off. It seemed impossible that the destruction and the suffering the war brought would have any positive impact on the young Chinese Church. A summary of conditions circulated by the CCC in 1946 declared: "From the surveys made thus far, we find discouraging features, ruin and devastation, many ardent church workers have given their all and are no more, others have lost their homes or their possessions. Yes, a few, it must be confessed, have succumbed to hardships and dangers and thereby lost their faith."⁹⁷ It was as devastating as all other wars. In Bays' opinion, the NCCC and the CCC withdrew to western China and were not "terribly effective" during the war.⁹⁸

However, according to Chinese Christian scholar Lian Xi, the NCCC "characteristically sought to infuse Christian ideals and morals into the fight for national survival."⁹⁹ Brook perceives this period of Japanese Invasion not as a disruption of Christianity in China, but as a

95. Richard T. Baker, *Darkness of the Sun: The Story of Christianity in the Japanese Empire* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947), 38-39, 85-86.

96. Ying, *Conflict and Coalition*, 148.

97. H. H. Tsui and A. J. Fisher to Secretaries of the Cooperating Boards, 11 May, 1946, *United Church of Canada Archives*, quoted in Brook, "Toward Independence," 335.

98. Bays, *A New History*, 145.

99. Lian, 181.

force to shift the Chinese Church from “externally dependent, mission-oriented, and mission-dominated” in the “direction of independence, union, and Chinese control.”¹⁰⁰

American Professor Frank Price also sees gains from the ashes. Christianity was no longer under the umbrella of unequal treaties. Price recorded the words of a Chinese bishop: “Once Christianity was an invaders’ religion, ...now it is an invited religion.”¹⁰¹

The Three-Self Movement was forced upon the Church during the war like a child forcibly weaned from its mother. The Christian Church served the wounded, the refugees, the orphans, and many people in need during the war. It gave people hope and strengthened them in their sufferings. During the eight years of occupation, the Christian Church earned a place in Chinese society; it grew with more self-propagation and self-governance since the missionaries were compelled to leave; the cutting off of financial resources from abroad strengthened its self-support; union was pressed upon the Church. The hardships and changes that Chinese Christianity underwent during the war have contributed something positive to its development. The goal of three-self had been discussed, proposed, and written into the constitution of the CCC, but it suddenly was forced upon the Chinese Church by the war and grew directly out of occupation. Church union and independence were developed, even though still at the beginning stage. Now we will turn to the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in the second part of the twentieth century.

100. Brook, “Toward Independence,” 318.

101. Frank W. Price, *China, Twilight or Dawn?* (New York: Friendship Press, 1948), 50.

The TSPM during the Deconstruction of Christianity

As Chinese Professor Ying has summarized, from 1949 to 1957 the CPC's policy on Protestant Christianity was "control, struggle and unity."¹⁰² The main purpose of the CPC policy concerning Christianity was to ensure that they would support the new government and that their links with foreigners would be cut off.¹⁰³ Enlai Zhou, Premier of the New China, said in April 1950, "religion must sever its relationship with imperialism" and "religions in China should be run by the Chinese."¹⁰⁴ He and other officials had four conversations with nineteen Protestant leaders in May and the *Christian Manifesto* was discussed and agreed to. In the summary of the four conversations, Zhou expressed the desire for cooperation and mutual respect between atheists and theists.¹⁰⁵

British scholar Bob Whyte sees the *Christian Manifesto* as a response to the CPC's clear demand for the Chinese church to "break with its past and identify with the new"; its publication in July 1950 was regarded as the unofficial beginning of the TSPM.¹⁰⁶ The preface of the Manifesto clearly responded to Zhou Enlai's speech in 1950 concerning the task of Christianity:

102. Ying, "The CPC's Policy," 898; for detailed historical background of this period, see Bob Whyte, *Unfinished Encounter: China and Christianity* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1988), 194-254.

103. Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23.

104. Enlai Zhou, "Fahui Renmin Minzhu Tongyi Zhanxian Jiji Zuoyong de Jige Wenti" ["Several Questions on Developing the Positive Function of the People's Democratic United Front"], in *Important Documents*, 1:186, "宗教要同帝国主义割断联系," "中国的宗教应该由中国人来办."

105. Whyte, 215-216; Enlai Zhou, "Guanyu Jidujiao Wenti de Sici Tanhua" ["Four Conversations Concerning Religious Questions"], in *Important Documents*, 1:224.

106. Whyte, 217-8.

resisting imperialism and building a Chinese Church managed by the Chinese. It was signed by 417,389 Chinese Protestants by 1954.¹⁰⁷

In August 1950, the CPC's first official policy on Christianity was "not to help [Christians] develop and be against its imperialist influence."¹⁰⁸ The CPC was to protect religious freedom, while carrying out patriotic propaganda, in order to turn Christianity "from imperialist instruments into religions run by the Chinese."¹⁰⁹ In October 1950, Chinese forces crossed the Yalu River and entered the Korean War. The CPC started the "Resist America, Aid Korea" campaign, which raised the tide of anti-imperialism and intensified the CPC's control over the whole nation. Under this tide, by the end of 1950 missionaries were forced to leave China and thus ended the age of missionary endeavors in China.¹¹⁰ In December 1950, the CPC issued instructions for dealing with the cultural and educational institutions, relief agencies, and religious organizations with American subsidies. The goal was to take over all these organizations and cut off their relations with any foreign country.¹¹¹

The next year in March, the *CPC Central Directive on Active Advocacy of Religious*

107. "The Christian Manifesto," in *Documents of the Three-Self Movement*, 19-20; Philip L. Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China's United Front* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 131-133; Bays, *A New History*, 158.

108. "CPC Central Directive on the Issues of Catholicism and Protestantism", in *Important Documents*, 1:409, "应当不帮助他们的发展，并反对其中的帝国主义影响。"

109. Ibid., "由帝国主义的工具体变为中国人自己的宗教事业。"

110. Patterson, 45-53; Wickeri, *Seeking*, 131-133.

111. "Zhongyang guanyu chuli jieshou meiguo jintie de wenhua jiaoyu jiuji jiguan ji zongjiaotuantu banfa de zhishi" ["Instructions for Dealing with the Cultural and Educational Institutions, Relief Agencies, and Religious Organizations with American Subsidies"], in *Zhongguo gongchandang xuanchuan gongzuo wenxian xuanbian* [Selected Documents on the Propaganda Works of the CPC], ed. Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu bangongting and Zhongyang danganguan bianyanbu (Beijing: Xuexi chubanshe, 1996), 3:159-161.

Reform Movement came out and patriotism moved to the center of the three-self movement. It was raised up as the goal as well as the method of this new three-self movement.¹¹² The slogan, “Love Country, Love Church,” represented a Chinese Christianity that would be “both anti-imperialist and responsibly independent.”¹¹³ The CPC instructed some progressive Christians “to interpret religious doctrines in a correct and realistic way in order to prove that loving country and practicing religion are not contradictory and a kindhearted believer should love his/her motherland *first*.”¹¹⁴ Later in 1951 the Preparatory Committee of TSPM was established and chaired by Wu Yaozong. In December 1953, the achievements of the work on Christianity between 1950 and 1953 were reported: all Christian foreign missionaries had been deported and the foreign mission system had ended; foreign funds had been basically cut off; Christian schools, hospitals, and relief agencies had been taken over; and there was a significant reduction in Protestants and Catholics.¹¹⁵

During this period, the New China had to strengthen its own power and struggle against imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism. Thus “struggle” and “unity” became the

112. Cf. “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jiji tuijin zongjiao gexin yundong de zhishi” [“CPC Central Directive on Active Advocacy of Religious Reform Movement”], in *Propaganda Works*, 3:186-190, “现在应着重爱国主义,” “启发他们的爱国心,” “进行爱国的教育”; Ying, “The CPC's Policy,” 891.

113. Wickeri, *Seeking*, 115.

114. “Zhongyang guanyu xuanchuan zongjiao gexin yundong shi ying zhuyi buyao kuoda zongjiao shichang de zhishi” [“CPC Central Directive on Not Expanding the Religious Market during the Propagation of the Religious Reform Campaign”], in *Propaganda Works*, 3:199, “对宗教教义, 作某些正确的合乎实际的诠释, 说明爱国与信教并不矛盾, 一个善良教徒首先应热爱自己的祖国.”

115. “Guanyu Quanguo Zongjiao Gongzuo Huiyi de Baogao” [“The Report at the National Conference on the Work of Religion”], in *Propaganda Works*, 3: 765-767.

main focus of the work of the united front of the CPC.¹¹⁶ Against this tide, grassroots Christians all over the nation began to raise the question about how to reconcile their faith with the new social reality.¹¹⁷ The assumption by many Christians that they have no need to be involved with politics was being challenged.¹¹⁸ According to Tse-Hei Lee, in an authoritarian society the state equates religious identification with political and ideological disloyalty.¹¹⁹ There is a saying, “One more Christian, one less Chinese.”¹²⁰ Union, defined as liberation from Western denominationalism, and independence, free from imperialism, were demanded by the CPC.¹²¹

The CPC changed the intensity of the struggle and the magnitude of unity after 1957 and the period of “struggle and elimination” (1957-1966) arrived.¹²² The most significant event for Chinese churches was the unification of 1958. That year marked the nationwide Great Leap Forward and the people’s communes. In this social context and with the principle of “large in size and collective in nature,”¹²³ the TSPM launched this unification in order to force Christian unity and to better use personnel and buildings.¹²⁴ “Unification meant the wholesale abandonment of ritual differences between the denominations and the curtailment of many

116. Ying, “The CPC’s Policy,” 886.

117. Wickeri, *Seeking*, 249.

118. Whyte, 218.

119. Lee, “Christianity,” 304.

120. Shenk, 33.

121. Brook, “Toward Independence,” 337.

122. Ying, “The CPC’s Policy,” 898, 900; for detailed historical background of this period, see Whyte, 255-304.

123. Wangzhi Gao, “Y.T. Wu: a Christian Leader under Communism,” in *Christianity in China*, 347.

124. Richard Clarence Bush, *Religion in Communist China* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1970), 231.

activities.”¹²⁵ A typical example is the article of union from the TSPM upon the churches in

Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi Province:

There shall be a unified worship program,...

The hymns used in worship shall be unified,...

All books used in the interpretation of the Bible shall be examined and judged,...

Only teachings favoring union and socialism shall be used...

There shall be no more teaching about the Last Day, or about the vanity of this world...

Belief and unbelief shall not be made an issue in determining marriage questions.

The Little Flock shall abolish its women’s meetings, its weekly breaking of bread,... and its rule against women speaking in the church...

The Salvation Army shall give up all its military regulations...

The Seventh-day Adventists shall abolish their daily morning prayers.¹²⁶

Sixty-five churches in Beijing were reduced to four as a result of unification, and two hundred in

Shanghai were cut to twenty-three.¹²⁷ *Tian Feng* (Heavenly Wind), started by Wu Yaozong in

1945 as a liberal Christian journal, stopped publication in 1964.¹²⁸ By the end of 1963, there

were no theological seminaries open except the one in Nanjing, although with half a day per

week of political study.¹²⁹

Struggle and elimination went to extremes during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

From the early 1960s to 1979, overt religious practice in China was essentially nonexistent.

Some groups gathered privately and did so in isolation, without access to books and teaching. All

religious staff persons were forbidden to engage in religious activities, church buildings were

125. Gao, 347.

126. “Unification of Worship,” in *Documents of the Three-Self Movement*, 184.

127. Whyte, 267.

128. Ibid., 188, 284.

129. Ibid., 285.

destroyed or confiscated, believers' homes were ransacked, their religious books were burnt, and some were persecuted to death. Christians were the main target of the persecutions. "We had no Church but the Church in our hearts," one Christian later said.¹³⁰ There were stories of people facing death without losing faith. And there were stories of people denying their faith and betraying fellow Christians. For the majority, the Cultural Revolution was a time to bend with the storm in order to survive. The Chinese people suffered much during these years, and Christians suffered with them. Perhaps for the fourth time in Chinese history, Christianity was breathing its last breath.¹³¹ As Chinese scholar Gao puts it, "Master, you should have come earlier. It's too late. He [Lazarus] is dead."¹³² The Chinese Church was ill and dead during these thirty years. The TSPM was founded and later banned. These years were a severe trial to the Chinese Christians.

However, as Chinese Bishop Ding Guangxun has said, "What we were blind to was that when we were weak and dying, life was in the offing."¹³³ The Chinese Church was learning to sustain itself in new and informal ways. Ding observed that "the major positive development after 1957 was the growth of Christian meetings in homes."¹³⁴ The hope had not gone even after the unification, which can be seen from a letter by a Chinese church, dated 20 September 1959:

130. Ibid., 292, 296.

131. Ibid., 296-8.

132. Gao, 96.

133. K. H. Ting, *God is Love: Collected Writings of Bishop K. H. Ting* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries International, 2004), 120.

134. Whyte, 270.

At first glance it would seem that the Church in China has no hope. But in fact the opposite is the case. We who believe in God also believe that all the vicissitudes of life are governed by God. He will fulfill his will and raise up a united church, which is what our Lord prayed for. Just as God long ago used Cyrus, so today he is using Chairman Mao to cleanse his Church. He will raise up a Church which will not be the Church of any one person (some pastor), but of all believing people... I believe that his church on earth will grow and prosper.¹³⁵

From above we can see that the independence of Chinese Christianity was demanded by the CPC. As a newborn regime, it needed to strengthen its power and struggle against any potential enemies. Its policies were constrained by the state's concerns of national security and perception that Christianity was associated with imperialism.¹³⁶ The particular connection between Christianity in China and Christianity in the West became the government's target. Thus the rulers forced the three-self movement upon the Church. The cutoff was carried out quickly, thoroughly, and systematically. The Church was left in the hands of Chinese alone. The three-self movement under the banner of patriotism was spread out over the nation. TSPM leaders claimed in 1954 that the main achievement of the TSPM was that imperialistic control had been fundamentally cast off.¹³⁷ They did not see Christianity as antagonistic toward Communism and believed that the TSPM would liberate Chinese Christians from foreign control. Some Chinese mainland scholars hold that TSPM leaders were sincere Christians, but naively thought that cooperation with the CPC was possible.¹³⁸ In Chinese Hong Kong scholar Leung's words, the

135. Ibid., 269-270.

136. Ying, "The CPC's Policy," 898, 900.

137. "Letter to the Churches," in *Documents of the Three-Self Movement*, 98.

138. Philip Yuen-Sang Leung, "Conversion, Commitment, and Culture: Christian Experience in China, 1949-99," in *Christianity Reborn: the Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004), 95.

cooperation between the TSPM and the CPC resulted in a “nationalization of churches similar to the nationalization of private industries and educational institutions.”¹³⁹ Gao, a former Professor of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, sees that the TSPM contributed to the survival of the Protestant church in China.¹⁴⁰ Whyte also points out that the TSPM, for all its mistakes, still “represented the one real hope that the Church could not only survive the storm but emerge from it in a form appropriate to a constructive existence within a post-revolutionary society.”¹⁴¹ However, Chinese mainland scholar Yihua Xu maintains that the collaboration of the TSPM’s leaders with the CPC was “a product of the liberal theological training and experience in social activism” and that their efforts “have largely failed.”¹⁴² In the 1950s, Wang Mingdao fought openly against the TSPM, criticized them on theological grounds, and regarded them as unbelievers.

Meanwhile, the CPC forced the union of churches. The TSPM used union as a tool to free the Chinese Church from Western denominationalism. In this process, some Chinese Christian leaders were engaged in designing an organic union of all Protestants in China. According to Wu Yaozong, the leader of the TSPM, after the unification, the number and setting of churches had been adjusted to meet people’s needs, church work was unified, and the Christians were able to enjoy a normal religious life with contentment and happiness.¹⁴³ American scholar Francis Jones

139. Leung, 91.

140. Gao, 347.

141. Whyte, 400.

142. Yihua Xu, “‘Patriotic’ Protestants: The Making of an Official Church,” in Kindopp and Hamrin, 119-120.

143. Bush, 233.

claims that through worshipping together, the breaking down of “the nontheological psychological barriers that so often separate Christians of different sects” became possible.¹⁴⁴ As a result, Chinese Christians did sit down around a conference table for the discussion of union.¹⁴⁵

In contrast, Gao claims that unification was an opportunity taken by the CPC to subjugate evangelicals.¹⁴⁶ Western professor Richard Bush points out that it was “suspected by people outside to be a further sign of control of religious affairs.”¹⁴⁷ Whyte reminds us that although many Chinese Protestants desired an ending of denominational differences in the past, the unification was carried out as political interference in church affairs and had alienated many from the TSPM.¹⁴⁸ However, Lambert points out that it was used by God to create a condition in Chinese society “from which the Church was to re-emerge invigorated in new, largely de-institutionalised forms.”¹⁴⁹

The independence and union of the Chinese Church were demanded by the CPC and carried out by the TSPM during this period. We have to distinguish the CPC and the TSPM and take their historical concerns into consideration before we evaluate the TSPM. First, the CPC and the TSPM had different interests. As Ying mentioned, the CPC was concerned for national

144. Francis P. Jones, *The Church in Communist China: A Protestant Appraisal* (New York: Friendship Press, 1962), 160.

145. Ibid.

146. Gao, 348.

147. Bush, 231.

148. Whyte, 269.

149. Tony Lambert, *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 10.

security and unity. They suspected any organization or individual associated with foreign powers, especially the West. For leaders of the TSPM, this connection to the West was not their main point, but they had to play their roles under the leadership of the CPC. They had their own understanding of church independence and union, as pointed out by scholars above. Secondly, during this period, the CPC believed that religion would be eradicated in a short time. They carried out their religious policy of limiting the development of religion. Especially after 1958, the tendency toward eliminating churches took over and unification became a disguise to reduce churches. We should not confuse the CPC's eradication of religion with the TSPM's desire for church independence and union. The TSPM exercised the muscles of the newly weaned infant Chinese Church and preserved her strength to recover after she fell down. On this point they were successful and their efforts contributed to the later development of the Chinese Church. However, the TSPM also failed because their efforts at reinterpreting the Scripture and collaborating with the CPC widened the gap between grassroots believers and the Official Church. They could not save themselves from the storm of the age.

The CCC/TSPM during the Reconstruction of Chinese Christianity

After China's Reform and Opening Up in 1980, generally speaking, the China Christian Council and the TSPM (collectively known as CCC/TSPM, *lianghui*), under the leadership of the CPC, were the "only state approved national religious organizations for Protestant Christians."¹⁵⁰ By the mid-1980s, the CPC had basically abandoned the view that religion was the opium of the

150. Lauren B. Homer, "Registration of Chinese Protestant House Churches Under China's 2005 Regulation on Religious Affairs: Resolving the Implementation Impasse," *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 1 (2010): 51; for the thorough administrative structure of the Chinese Protestant church, please see Hunter and Chan, 63.

people. The primary concern of the State regarding religion had shifted from eliminating religion to using religion to stabilize society. The former Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs of China, Ye Xiaowen, said, “Harmony and peace are what the world needs now. People turn to religion and pray for peace, since religion always advocates peace.”¹⁵¹ Christianity was perceived more as agents for the peace and harmony of society rather than the tool of cultural invasion, as long as it went against neither the CPC’s leadership nor national unity. In the early 1990s, the CPC officially introduced the slogan of the “mutual adaptation of religion and Chinese socialism.”¹⁵² Jiang Zemin defines adaptation as “requiring them [the religious people] to love country politically, support socialism and support the leadership of the CPC, and to reform religious systems and teachings which are not adaptable to socialism, and to serve socialism by using certain positive factors in religious doctrine, rule and ethics.”¹⁵³ At a national United Front work conference in 2000, Jiang acknowledged that religion will “exist in socialist society for a long-term” and its disappearance “may take even longer than the disappearance of

151. Xiaowen Ye, “A Message of Peace and Harmony from the East to the West,” in *Pilgrims and Citizens: Christian Social Engagement in East Asia Today*, ed. Michael Nai-Chiu Poon (Adelaide: ATP Press, 2006), 18.

152. Fuk-Tsang Ying, “Mutual Adaptation to Socialism: TSPM and Church-State Relations,” *Concilium: International Review of Theology* 2008, no. 2 (2008): 72.

153. Zemin Jiang, “Gaodu Zhongshi Minzu Gongzuo he Zongjiao Gongzuo” [“Ethnic Minority and Religious Work Must be Taken Very Seriously Indeed”], in *Xinshiqi Zongjiao Gongzuo Wenxian Xuanbian [Selected Documents on Religious Affairs Work in the New Era]*, ed. General Research Team of the Documentary Research Office of the Central Committee of the CPC and Policy and Regulations Department of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council (Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 1995), 254-5, “要求他们在政治上热爱祖国, 拥护社会主义制度, 拥护共产党的领导; 同时, 改革不适应社会主义的宗教制度和宗教教条, 利用宗教教义、宗教教规和宗教道德中的某些积极因素为社会主义服务。”

class and the state.”¹⁵⁴ This is quite a breakthrough in the CPC’s treatment of religion.

The State and the CPC realize that “religion has three characteristics: long-term nature as its basis, mass nature as its key, and complex nature as its uniqueness.”¹⁵⁵ With “long-term nature as its basis,” religion cannot be eradicated overnight and mutual adaptation of religion and Chinese socialism should be a long-run task. “Mass nature as its key” suggests that the mass of believers should be included and regarded as a positive force in society. “Complex nature as its uniqueness” attacks any potential political power behind religion that has the goal of cultural invasion.¹⁵⁶ Based on the understanding of these three characteristics of religion, the State and the CPC identify four guidelines for religious work: “actively guiding religions to adapt to socialist society; implementing the policy of religious freedom correctly in an all-round way; administering religious affairs according to the law; and insisting on the principle of independence and self-governance.”¹⁵⁷ Thus mutual adaptation is the important framework for understanding the relation between religion and politics in China. And the CCC/TSPM has taken on the role of reforming Chinese Christianity in order to make it adaptable to socialism. In 1998 at the Jinan Conference, the CCC/TSPM passed a resolution “to strengthen the force of the work of reconstructing theological thinking so that theological thought will be better adapted to

154. Zemin Jiang, “Jinyibu Kaichuang Tongyi Zhanxian Gongzuo de Xin Jumian” [Further Develop the New Prospects of the United Front Works], in *Selected Documents of Jiang Zemin*, 3:150, “宗教...在社会主义社会也将长期存在,” “宗教走向最终消亡...可能比阶级和国家的消亡还要久远.”

155. Ying, “Mutual Adaptation,” 75.

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid., 76.

socialist society.”¹⁵⁸

In order to understand the Reconstruction of Theological Thinking (RTT), we have to take a close look at Bishop Ding Guangxun. As the head of the CCC/TSPM from 1980 to 1997, he is one of the most prominent figures in TSPM’s theology. He was born into a Christian family in 1915, had been educated at an Episcopal university in Shanghai, and got his master’s degree at Union Theological Seminary. He was ordained in 1942 and became an Anglican bishop in China in 1955. He was once a leading figure on the Student Christian Movement. Impressed by Wu’s liberal theology, he appealed for a theology of political liberation over the evangelical gospel. In 1951, Ding published his first theological article and stated that the Church had failed, but that the CPC had succeeded under the banner of Chairman Mao.¹⁵⁹ He was the principal of China’s only national seminary and his theological viewpoint became the blueprint for the reconstruction of theology in TSPM churches. Chinese Christians have to pass an exam based on his writings if they want to get into a Chinese seminary.

During the thirty years after 1980, the reconstruction of Chinese Christianity inevitably involved toning down religious doctrines that were not adaptable to socialism. According to Ding, it was necessary to renew old theological thinking, something that mainly comprised two aspects. The first is the relation between belief and unbelief. A religious affairs cadre observed that some Christians treat the difference between belief and unbelief as a fundamental and absolute

158. Ibid., 83.

159. Cf. Xinyuan Li, *Theological Construction or Destruction? An Analysis of the Theology of Bishop K. H. Ting (Ding Guangxun)* (Streamwood, Illinois: Christian Life Press, 2004), 11-23.

opposition, which stirs up hostility toward unbelievers as well as the CPC. The view that unbelievers will all go to hell gives unbelievers the impression that believers are narrow-minded and hate the world. Wang Mingdao's appeal to divide true believers and unbelievers still has strong influence among Chinese Protestants. The second aspect of renewing old theology relates to the eschatological tendencies of religion. Secular authorities perceive eschatology to be a negation of the world and harmful to the values of social stability and economic development. Because of these understandings and concerns, some theologies must be altered in order to adapt to socialism.¹⁶⁰

Ding proposed the concept of the "Cosmic Christ" as early as the 1980s. He points out that Christ's love fills the whole cosmos and love is the most important component of the nature of God. The love of God transcends people's belief and the Holy Spirit also works in the lives of unbelievers, including atheists. Christians should not condemn others or accuse them of not being saved. Ding believed that atheism could be compatible with the work of the Cosmic Christ and that people with different faiths could work together in many ways. "God's saving work is not coterminous with the boundary of the Church."¹⁶¹ In order to further alleviate the contradiction between faith and unbelief, Ding has advocated "Ethical Christianity" in 1996. He claims that Christianity must become an ethical religion, not just because of the requirement of

160. Ying, "Mutual Adaptation," 79-81.

161. K. H. Ting, "The Cosmic Christ," in *A Chinese Contribution to Ecumenical Theology: Selected Writings of Bishop K. H. Ting*, ed. Janice and Philip Wickeri (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 97.

Christian doctrine, but because of the requirement of the CPC and the State.¹⁶² Ye Xiaowen wants more Chinese people “to learn about the valuable ethics embodied in the Bible.”¹⁶³ Ding also proposed the slogan of “running the Church well,” which reflects the vision of leaders of the CCC/TSPM for building up the Church “in a spirit of love and mutual respect.”¹⁶⁴ He urged the CCC/TSPM to practice mutual respect for conservative Christians; at the same time, he reached out to conservative and sectarian Christians to persuade them to participate in the CCC/TSPM. He was only partially successful and heavily criticized by many.¹⁶⁵ Thus Ding has lessened the tension between faith and unbelief by emphasizing love and work.¹⁶⁶

Meanwhile, the CPC and the State adopted pragmatism in their policy on religion. After realizing the long-term existence of religion and recognizing the positive social function of it, they adapted to religion as well. They allowed people freedom of religious belief and protected normal religious activities.¹⁶⁷ They reformed it and shaped it in order to serve the interests of the Party-State, promote social stability and unity, and advance economic development. They never gave up their administrative control over religion.¹⁶⁸ Jiang points out that it is wrong to restrict

162. K.H. Ting, “Zai Zhongguo jidujiao diliujie quanguo huiyi shang de jianghua” [“Greetings to the Sixth National Chinese Christian Conference”], *Tian Feng* (February, 1997): 2-3, “不但是我们的宗教信仰所要求于我们的，也正是我们的国家，我们的党所要求于我们的。”

163. Ye, 17.

164. Wickeri, *Reconstructing*, 372.

165. Ibid., 373.

166. Ying, “Mutual Adaptation,” 82-3.

167. Article 36, in *Constitution of China*, 1982.

168. Ying, “Mutual Adaptation,” 83.

normal religious activities or eliminate religion through administrative means. Neither is it right to leave the problems within religion unchecked.¹⁶⁹

Wickeri speaks to the positive side of CCC/TSPM influence. Ding “pressed for the freedom to print Bibles, open seminaries, train new leaders, and reclaim churches that had been occupied during the Cultural Revolution.”¹⁷⁰ In the four years since 1980, the CCC/TSPM had reestablished an institutional-church presence in China. More than 4,000 churches were newly built or reopened, 17,000 meeting points had been organized, 2.7 million Bibles had been printed, and 10 seminaries or theological training centers had been established.¹⁷¹ He also spoke out for house church gatherings and supported them being able to worship in their own way, as long as they followed the TSPM principle. He initiated the establishment of the Amity Foundation, a Christian organization serving society and making Christian involvement and participation more widely known.¹⁷² In 2012, some leaders of the Chinese Church celebrated the printing of 100 million Bibles by the Amity Foundation; 60 million have been distributed in mainland China.¹⁷³ Through the efforts of the CCC/TSPM, the successor of Ye Xiaowen agreed that “religion is no longer to be treated as an alien body in socialist society.”¹⁷⁴

169. Jiang, “Further Develop,” 3:150, “企图用行政手段去限制正常宗教活动或消灭宗教，是错误的....但对宗教中出现的问题采取听之任之、放任自流的态度，同样是错误的.”

170. Wickeri, *Reconstructing*, 373.

171. Ibid., 263.

172. Ibid., 373-4.

173. “Celebrating 100 million Bibles printed in China,”
<https://www.unitedbiblesocieties.org/celebrating-100-million-bibles-printed-in-china/>

174. Ying, “Mutual Adaptation,” 76.

And yet, American Professor Carsten Vala speaks more negatively of the CCC/TSPM, especially in terms of leadership training. There are only twenty-four national, regional, and provincial TSPM seminaries in mainland China, with limited funding from the government and strict limitation on overseas funding. National regulations limit seminary applicants by age, which must be between eighteen and twenty-five years old (local seminaries may carry on with flexibility). After they pass entrance tests on the Scripture, regulations, and politics, the Religious Affairs Bureau may reject applicants because of their political background or relationship with unregistered churches. Once students graduate they often receive no salary from the TSPM, but rely on support from their local church. Thus with age barriers, educational standards, political considerations, the prospect of a life of poverty, and limited enrollment numbers in seminaries, not enough Christians can get a seminary certification. And without this certification, no believer can become a pastor for the State Church.¹⁷⁵

From above we can see that under the slogan of “mutual adaptation of religion and Chinese socialism,” CCC/TSPM leaders have lessened or changed some parts of Christian doctrine, willingly or reluctantly. They help spread the gospel; but they limit it as well. From Ying’s observation, “the development of religious or theological thought is thus inevitably being constrained by the secular forces.”¹⁷⁶ We will further examine different opinions over the RTT in the next chapter. However, the President of the China Christian Council Cao Shengjie sees this as

175. Cf. Vala, 104-105.

176. Ying, “Mutual Adaptation,” 83.

“a great opportunity for churches in China to contribute to building up a harmonious society.”¹⁷⁷

Just like bending to the Japanese army, Chinese Christianity bent to the CPC. Religion does not exist without a political or social environment. The privileged party tends to control religion in order to serve its own goal. It embraces religion with the hope that through religion people will become good citizens. Meanwhile, government leaders are afraid of any religious organization being so strong that it can disguise anti-ruler activities. With pragmatism and fear, the CPC allows religious freedom only within its control, and the CCC/TSPM has to play its own role in this political circumstance. We do need to examine thoroughly the theology of the CCC/TSPM, but we have to admit that the openness of the CCC/TSPM has brought Christianity into a broader social dimension within an atheist nation. When compared to the period of deconstruction, the CPC has adjusted its policy toward religion and given it more space to exist within the fences set by the CPC. The CCC/TSPM has built a better relationship with the State, but only by sacrificing some of its theology, which, again, has widened the gap between the Official Church and the Underground Church.

177. Shengjie Cao, “The Role of Chinese Christians in the Development of China,” in *Pilgrims and Citizens*, 151.

Chapter 4

The House Church Movement

As Jones and many others have observed, there are two wings of the Christian movement in China. One is the patriotic wing led by the TSPM, and the other is the individualistic wing identified as the House Church Movement (HCM). The battle of free churches against state churches is not unique to China.¹⁷⁸ In Chinese, the term *jiating jiaohui* means “House Church” and refers to the unregistered Protestant Church (Underground Church). House churches are the gatherings of evangelical Christians at their homes, rented places, farms, and fields. Usually house churches start at someone’s home, and then expand from there as more people attend. For instance, in northern China, there is a house church which started with seven people gathering at the pastor’s home in 1997. This church moved into a rented apartment six years ago with almost one hundred members. Three years ago, they began to have two services on Sunday because of the increase in members.

The HCM during the Emergence of Chinese Christianity

After 1900, some indigenous church organizations or movements came into being and several famous Chinese Protestant leaders appeared on the stage of Chinese church history. The True Jesus Church was a Pentecostal church established in 1917 by Paul Wei, a cloth dealer and former LMS member. The Jesus Family was first established in the Shandong province in 1927. The Little Flock was first organized in 1923 and led by Watchman Nee (Ni TuoSheng,

178. Jones, 110-111.

1903-1972) whose grandfather was the first Chinese Methodist pastor in the country. The Spiritual Gifts Society was centered in the Shandong province in the 1920s and the 1930s as a minimally organized Pentecostal movement.¹⁷⁹

Meanwhile, there were also some individual Christian figures traveling the nation to preach. Among them, Wang Mingdao (1900-1991) is best known for his resistance to authorities. He was born in 1900. His father died before his birth and his mother was a member of the LMS. He was baptized into the LMS church, educated in a school run by the LMS, and was once a YMCA activist. He experienced heartfelt confession in 1920, and was rebaptized by immersion in 1921. He was expelled from the Presbyterian school and lost his teaching job because of his rebaptism. After three years of studying and meditating at home, he started to preach in Beijing in 1924. He had his own church (Christian Tabernacle) in Beijing and distributed *The Spiritual Food Quarterly* (1927-1955) to reflect his theological viewpoint. He was a travelling evangelist and spellbinding preacher, and made speaking tours to many provinces from 1925 to 1950. During the Japanese Invasion, he resisted joining the Japanese-controlled Christian union and amazingly survived. From 1951 to 1954, he published numerous books against the TSPM, which finally led to his arrest in 1955. He was released one month later after intense brain washing, confessing his guilt of anti-revolutionary deeds. He returned to prison in 1958 when he claimed that his confession was made under duress. Finally he was released in 1980 after twenty-three

179. Lutz, "China and Protestantism," 192; Bays, *A New History*, 129-135; Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 59-65.

years of imprisonment.¹⁸⁰

Wang Mingdao's influence was at its greatest between 1948 and 1950.¹⁸¹ Most Western scholars have not given much attention to these years, but Ying presents a case study about Wang during the Japanese Invasion that helps us understand why his influence reached its peak after the war. In order to have a unified Protestant organization to control Protestants in occupied China, the Japanese army established the League and the NCCU in 1942 and forced all churches to join it. Wang's Christian Tabernacle remained independent, the only exception among all churches in Beijing.¹⁸²

Ying weaves together the historical events around the NCCU using Wang's journals and sermons in order to give an integrated view of the struggles of an eminent Christian from the HCM during the war. Wang had been facing pressure from the Japanese army as well as from some Chinese Christian leaders, even before the establishment of the NCCU. He recalled 1942 as the year "of walking in the fiery furnace for three hundred more days."¹⁸³ In January, the president of the League invited Wang to join the League. Wang refused, saying that there were false believers and preachers in some churches and true believers should not be mismatched with them. Besides this, the League was under the control of the Japanese. Later, he preached on the

180. Cf. Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), 97-134; Timothy Tow, *Wang Ming Tao and Charismatism* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1989), 17-20; Wickeri, *Seeking*, 164; Lian, 111-118; Bays, "The Growth," 314.

181. Whyte, 178.

182. Lian, 193.

183. Ying, *Conflict and Coalition*, 135, "在火窑中行走了几百三十日。"

story of Jeroboam and pointed out that Jeroboam's failure was because he wanted to protect his throne and was afraid of future danger. In April, Wang received an official document from the League to urge him to join them. This was the starting point of a formal confrontation between him and the Japanese army. That night, he compared his struggle to Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane. In his eyes, the League and the NCCU were like a defiled Babylon; joining them was against God's will. The next day he wrote a letter to the League with reasons for not joining them: Christian Tabernacle was self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting since it was founded and there was no connection with the Western missionaries; Christian Tabernacle should not unite with others of different beliefs for the sake of the purity of belief. In June, there arose different opinions within his church over whether or not to join the League. Some members accused Wang of being opinionated and dictatorial since the result of resistance could lead to prohibitions against the church. In October right before the establishment of the NCCU, the Japanese officer commanded Wang to join the NCCU; Wang rejected the offer. The next day, Wang preached on "the fear of others lays a snare, but one who trusts in the Lord is secure," and prepared for the closure of the church.¹⁸⁴ The NCCU was founded on October 15, 1942 and the Japanese army left Wang's church alone.¹⁸⁵

In occupied China, some HCM churches joined the Japanese NCCU, while others refused and were shut down. There are several reasons why Wang's church survived despite resisting assimilation. The reasons give us a clue to the tolerance of the government for some house

184. Proverbs 29:25, New Revised Standard Version.

185. Ying, *Conflict and Coalition*, 121-136.

churches today. According to Bays, Wang defied the Japanese authorities because he was fearless.¹⁸⁶ There is no doubt about Wang's fearlessness; there are not many who can do what he did. Lian Xi sees Wang's survival as "fortitude and a stroke of good luck."¹⁸⁷ British missionary Leslie Lyall regards it as God's Providence.¹⁸⁸ After a thorough study of Wang and the NCCU, Ying points out two more reasons. One is the system by which Wang's church was organized. Christian Tabernacle was an indigenous and independent church without any overseas fund or support.¹⁸⁹ It was one of the first fruits of the HCM in the early 1920s. Wang himself grew up under the influence of the LMS and was later expelled by the Presbyterian school in 1921. He was asked to lead several evangelistic and revival meetings in 1925, which marked the beginning of his career as an independent. By 1925, Wang had enough followers in Beijing to begin a congregation of his own.¹⁹⁰ This way of beginning a new house church is still typical in China today. The independence of Wang's church from the West dispelled some of the concerns of the Japanese army. Another reason for his survival is that some leaders in the League, including some Japanese, admired Wang as an iron man and bore with him. Most other church leaders did not get this kind of tolerance. At the same time, Wang made some nonessential compromises as well. For instance, he allowed the Japanese to check *The Spiritual Food Quarterly* before it was

186. Bays, "The Growth," 314.

187. Lian, 193.

188. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, 121.

189. Ying, *Conflict and Coalition*, 159-160.

190. Lian, 116-117.

published; otherwise, his journal would have been prohibited. Nonetheless, he was prepared to stop the journal at any time if the Japanese forced him to change its theology. Thus Ying admits that the complicated, triangulated relationships involving the church leader, the Japanese, and the NCCU/the League should be taken into consideration when analyzing his survival.¹⁹¹

On the one hand, Wang's faith in God did keep him safe (although this does not mean that others died because their faith was not strong enough). Wang was a prominent figure in the HCM, a nonconformist who has inspired many others to stand up and even die for their faith. On the other hand, the indigenous character of his church also contributed to his survival. There were no other indigenous churches that were left alone in occupied China. The survival of Wang's church during the Japanese Invasion is an exceptional case. But it has impact on Wang's reaction toward the TSPM in the 1950s and also reflects why the CPC tolerates some indigenous churches today.

The HCM during the Deconstruction of Christianity

In Chapter three, we discussed the social and political background for the thirty years after the founding of the New China in 1949. It had been a difficult period in which Chinese Christians were seeking to adjust to the new social and political realities. There is only limited information about the life of the local church during these thirty years. The departure of a large number of wealthy people and the confiscation of private factories, lands, and church buildings left many churches without enough financial support to function. Meanwhile, some churches,

191. Ying, *Conflict and Coalition*, 156-157, 161-162.

which had not relied on wealthy patrons, kept going, and some even saw an increase in income as peasant income improved because of land reform.¹⁹² We will take a look at the fate of several typical house churches and then focus on the battle between Wang and the TSPM.

After the publication of the *Christian Manifesto* in 1950 and the establishment of the Preparatory Committee of TSPM in 1951, a number of fundamentalist groups and individuals were singled out because of their refusal to cooperate with the CPC and the TSPM. According to the official document, the CPC perceived these Christians as “reactionaries” (*fandong fenzi*) organized by the imperialists.¹⁹³ The anti-TSPM groups or individuals became the main target of the Campaign to Wipe Out Hidden Counterrevolutionaries in 1955 and 1956.¹⁹⁴ Not all house churches were in opposition to the new political reality. The Chinese Jesus Independent Church led by Yongqin Xie cooperated with the TSPM and Xie became one of the TSPM’s leaders. However, it was difficult for many others, such as the Jesus Family, the True Jesus Church, the Little Flock, and Wang Mingdao.¹⁹⁵

The Jesus Family was founded by Dianying Jing and centered in Shandong province. It was a network of rural, self-supporting, Christian peasant communities. Jing and other pastors had virtually complete authority over it. And there were 141 communities in 1949. The Jesus

192. Whyte, 234-236.

193. “Zhonggong zhongyang dui zhongyang xuanchuanbu guanyu quanguo zongjiao gongzuo huiyi de baogao ji ludingyi tongzhi zai quanguo zongjiao gongzuo huiyi shang de zongjie de pishi” [“CPC’s central remark on the Propaganda Department’s conclusion on National Conference on the Work of Religion and Lu Dingyi’s speech”], in *Propaganda Works*, 3: 764.

194. Ying, “The CPC’s Policy,” 894.

195. Whyte, 240.

Family was thought to have an association with the CPC since it accounted for the largest number of initial signatories of the *Christian Manifesto*. However, Jing was arrested in 1952 and there were many accusations brought against him including sexual immorality and alleged links with the Nationalist Party (*guomindang*). The leader of the TSPM criticized the exploitative and hierarchical character of the group's social organization. Wickeri says that marriages were arranged within the Family and land reform was probably resisted, both of which were against the law and policy of the New China. Jing was sentenced to twenty years in prison and his church was reorganized and part of it was simply dissolved.¹⁹⁶

The orthodoxy of the True Jesus Church was dubious according to Whyte because it emphasized faith healing and the ecstatic nature of worship. Isaac Wei, the son of the founder Paul Wei, was arrested in 1952. His *Self-Examination* was published in *Tian Feng* in February 1952. Later, the leadership of the church was brought under the TSPM.¹⁹⁷ According to Isaac's words, the True Jesus Church had a Constitution, Rules of Order, and a Method of Work. There were ten thousand baptized members and a thousand pastors in its local churches. After his study in Beijing in the summer of 1951, he said that the eyes of his heart were enlightened. In his *Self-Examination*, he examined his thoughts concerning imperialism, feudalism, bureaucratic capitalism, and the three-self church. Based on his so-called "muddled" patriotism and "muddled" concept of the three-self, he called for a reformation in his church. This call for reformation meant signing the Manifesto, accepting the leadership of the TSPM, becoming a TSPM church,

196. Whyte, 240-241; Wickeri, *Seeking*, 160-162.

197. Whyte, 241.

studying *Tian Feng* weekly, and joining the denominational union.¹⁹⁸ His church continued its own life until it was singled out for attack in 1958.

The Little Flock was a fully independent Christian body and an urban-based group founded in Fuzhou. It was led by Watchman Nee, a prolific author and powerful speaker; some of his writings have been translated into English. His rejection of any formal denominational structure and his idea of one church in each geographical area gave rise to an extensive church network all over the nation. It had a membership of more than seventy thousand in 1949. Nee was accused of having organized the Little Flock to oppose the CPC and his church was thought to be anti-Communist. He was arrested in 1952 and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. He was severely and publicly criticized in 1956, which Whyte sees resulting from the need of the CPC to destroy Nee's authority within the Little Flock. Tse-Hei Lee claims that the CPC failed to control individual Little Flock members even though they arrested Nee and most leaders. The organizational network of the Little Flock was dismantled after 1956, but the local assemblies did not disappear. From the 1960s to 1979, the Little Flock operated at the grassroots level, since the TSPM and religious affairs ceased to function. These congregations were less vulnerable to state persecution because they were more self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting at the local level.¹⁹⁹

Wang's church was an independent congregation without any overseas connections.

198. Isaac Wei, "My Self-Examination," in *Documents of the Three-Self Movement*, 60-65.

199. Whyte, 241-243; Wickeri, *Seeking*, 162-164; Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, "Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China," *Church History* 74, no. 1 (March 2005): 92-93.

However, he became the main target of the TSPM since he firmly refused to join them. Through *The Spiritual Food Quarterly* he accused leaders of the TSPM of being unbelievers. His influence was so great that the tide of withdrawal from the TSPM swelled after 1955 and many Christians paid special visit to Beijing in order to learn from Wang.²⁰⁰ Whyte sees Wang's position rooted solely in theological criteria rather than political ones. Wang was not necessarily counterrevolutionary, but he was definitely anti-Communist: social reform was irrelevant in the light of the return of the Lord. His refusal of the TSPM opened himself to legitimate theological attack.²⁰¹ In his pamphlet Wang listed several serious theological differences with the TSPM that made it impossible for him to unite with its leaders, whom he called modernists. He said, "I believe the Genesis record about the creation of man [and woman]...I believe the Virgin Birth of Jesus; I believe that he died to redeem man [and woman] from sin; I believe that He rose bodily from the dead; I believe that He will come again; the modernist believes none of these truths."²⁰² Concerning these doctrines, Wu, the leader of the TSPM, proclaimed that the cross was "a demonstration of the power of God's love" (rather than a redemptive work), the second coming of Christ was "a form of poetic symbolism," and the virgin birth was an allegorical story.²⁰³ Thus Wang referred to the leaders of the TSPM as "modernists" who "with their lips confess

200. Fuk-Tsang Ying, "Geming shidai de fangeming: jidujiao wang mingdao fangeming jituan an shimo kao" ["Counterrevolution in an age of revolution: 'Wang Mingdao's Christian counterrevolutionary clique'"], *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History Academia Sinica* 67, (March 2010): 122.

201. Whyte, 243-244.

202. Wang, 109.

203. Ibid., 100-101. This does not mean that all the State Church members believe Wu's proclamations.

faith in the Bible and Christ but in reality they completely overturn the Bible and the Christ of the Bible.”²⁰⁴ In Wang’s eyes, they were the ones who “hope[d] to prove that there are no serious differences in faith which might be an obstacle to church unity and solidarity.”²⁰⁵ He insisted that “fundamentalism must oppose modernism.”²⁰⁶ Some scholars and members of the HCM see that “the debate between the TSPM and Wang Mingdao was no family feud but a life-and-death struggle between light and darkness, and between God and Satan.”²⁰⁷ This infighting has deeply influenced the relationship between TSPM churches and HCM churches.

In addition, the CPC had some similar concerns to the Japanese army over Chinese Christianity: to cut off the relations with the West and the missionaries, and to be self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting. Wang admitted in the 1990s that his failure in the battle against the TSPM was because he depended on the experience of his success in 1942 rather than on the trust in God.²⁰⁸ According to Whyte, his suffering was “the price paid by a Christianity that had never attempted to take seriously the context in which it was set.”²⁰⁹ This raises the question of how the Christian faith should be lived out in a socialist society.

Both Nee and Wang were regarded as sectarians. Wickeri says they held to “militant

204. Ibid., 103.

205. Ibid., 113.

206. Ibid., 103.

207. Leung, 96. 87-107

208. Ying, *Conflict and Coalition*, 168-173.

209. Whyte, 244.

separatism and theological exclusivism,” and were “apocalyptic and pre-millenarian.”²¹⁰ In Wickeri’s opinion, a key consideration for understanding the relationship between the sectarian groups and the TSPM is “the irreconcilability of many sectarian leaders.”²¹¹ Jones has compared Wang Mingdao and Wu Yaozong to George Fox and Oliver Cromwell, respectively. Wang was “battling for freedom of conscience in the face of the totalitarian demands of the state church” and Wu regarded “the imprisonment of such an individualist as a pious act.”²¹² Wickeri considers this metaphor only partly accurate. He understands the issue to be the conflict between different understandings of the Christian faith rather than a battle for freedom of conscience. According to Wickeri, the TSPM was insisting that there could be unity rooted in basic political principles without uniformity of belief, while Wang rejected any form of Christian cooperation and theological comprehensiveness.²¹³

Wang insisted on the separation of the belief and the unbelief. He refused to join the NCCU because he did not regard them as true believers. He stood firm on the teaching of Paul, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”²¹⁴ His convictions were well presented in his pamphlet *We, Because of Faith* published in 1955. Wang referred to TSPM leaders as the “party of unbelievers” and called for “true believers and unbelievers to divide.”²¹⁵ According to

210. Wickeri, *Seeking*, 155.

211. Ibid.

212. Jones, 110-111.

213. Wickeri, *Seeking*, 169.

214. 2 Corinthians 6:14a, King James Version.

215. Wang, 103, 108.

German scholar R. G. Tiedemann, “some independent churches were quite separatist and had almost no contacts with other Christians, Chinese or foreign.”²¹⁶ Wickeri says that Wang’s resistance sprung from his stubbornness and that “his fundamentalism could never become the basis for a creative Christian engagement in a socialist society in the 1950s or today.”²¹⁷ Wickeri goes further to say that Wang’s is “a faith which is opposed to any form of reconciliation with Christians who would hold a different point of view” and that he “rejected relationships with other Christians in the TS[P]M and formal organizational union of any kind.”²¹⁸ Thus, in their eyes, Wang is a narrow-minded fundamentalist.

Others, though, have different opinions of Wang. Bays’ research points out that from the late 1920s Wang spent about half of every year on the road leading evangelical and revival meetings in different churches, even though he had his own church in Beijing. Wang did not found new churches nationwide; instead, he worked closely with others.²¹⁹ Lian Xi also states that from 1925 to 1950, Wang preached in twenty-four of the twenty-eight provinces. The churches where he had taught belonged to thirty different denominations.²²⁰ In his pamphlet *We, Because of Faith*, Wang stated clearly that “each one of us has freedom of belief” and “we should respect the beliefs of others and others should respect our beliefs.... If someone believes another

216. R.G. Tiedemann, “Comity Agreements and Sheep Stealers: The Elusive Search for Christian Unity Among Protestants in China,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36, no. 1 (January 2012): 6.

217. Wickeri, *Reconstructing*, 122.

218. Wickeri, *Seeking*, 166, 167.

219. Bays, “The Growth,” 314.

220. Lian, 116.

religion or in no religion, we should not attack him.”²²¹ Thus Wang need not be regarded as a narrow-minded separatist. Still, Wickeri points out that even though Wang was willing to preach in other churches, he remained steadfastly independent in the matters of faith and order.²²² In addition to his respect of the beliefs of others, Wang also said, “this applies only to religious beliefs different from ours,” which means his mutual respect only applies between Christianity and other religions.²²³ It seems clear that Wang assumed that he was on the side of the truth and that all other Christians who were different from him were not, especially those he considered modernists.

The HCM during the Reconstruction of Chinese Christianity

After thirty years of severe persecution and deconstruction, there arose a thirty-year Christian revival in China. It came with a high price even during the Reform and Opening Up era. The CPC issued Document 19 concerning religious policy in 1982 and expected all Christians to accept some amount of governmental supervision under the TSPM. Worshiping should only be held in churches or meeting points registered with the TSPM. Throughout the 1990s pressures grew on independent house churches to register and to join the TSPM. Because of the ambiguity in the regulations and the erraticism in local governments’ administration, the practice of religious control and the situation of Christians have varied widely at different times and in different areas. Some house churches leaders were detained, arrested, beaten, or tortured. Many

221. Wang, 104.

222. Wickeri, *Seeking*, 164.

223. Wang, 104.

more were left alone. Christians in rural areas were persecuted while many urban house churches enjoyed a certain degree of freedom. Some house churches decided to register. For instance, in 1996, 174 meeting places of the Little Flock in Xiaoshan had been officially registered directly with the government without joining the State Church. However, many more house churches chose to stay outside of the TSPM.²²⁴

Some house churches, having been persecuted or dissolved during the Cultural Revolution, reemerged after 1980. The Jesus Family has experienced great difficulties in reestablishing their Christian communities in the 1980s and the 1990s. In spite of persecution, it still existed as an influential stream of the HCM and attracted millions of impoverished peasants and workers. In the spring of 1990, about one hundred national leaders of the Jesus Family managed to have a conference for five days in a village, despite police harassment. The True Jesus Church spreads nationwide with over one million members according to some estimates. They strongly emphasize daily prayer and vigorous evangelism. The Little Flock is flourishing in many cities and countryside areas as well. For example, in a county of the Zhejiang Province, they had about one hundred thousand members in 1998. The Little Flock congregations stand firm on the Scripture, close fellowship in small group meetings, and freedom from foreign control.²²⁵

In August 1998, *A United Appeal by the Various Branches of the Chinese House Church* was issued by ten major house church groups and signed by representatives of eight major HCM

224. Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 65-84.

225. *Ibid.*, 59-65.

groups outside of the TSPM. These leaders were convinced that the disunity between the HCM and the TSPM was threatening the witness of the house churches. The CPC and the TSPM put house churches under great pressure, disbanding meetings, arresting leaders, and fining believers. They appealed the State to cease persecution and open a dialogue with HCM leaders. Their seven-point appeal was:

- 1) We call on the government to admit to God's great power and to study seriously today's new trends in the development of Christianity...
- 2) We call on the authorities to release unconditionally all house church Christians presently in labor-reform camps.
- 3) There are approximately 10 million believers in the Three Self Church but 80 million believers in the house church which represents the main stream of Christianity in China. The Three Self Church is only a branch. In many spiritual matters it has serious deviations.
- 4) We call on the central leadership of the Party to begin a dialogue with house church representatives...to seek reconciliation, ...
- 5) We call on the government to spell out the definition of a "cult."... not just according to whether or not people join the "Three-Self."
- 6) We call on the authorities to end their attacks on the house churches...
- 7) The Chinese house church is the channel through which God's blessings come to China...²²⁶

The statement displays a confidence in God's sovereignty and providence. Meanwhile, without denouncing either the CPC or the TSPM, it shows the maturity of some house church leaders. It calls for dialogue and reconciliation instead of separation and isolation. It recognizes the TSPM as a branch of Christ's Church in China rather than a party of unbelievers. This statement embraces believers in TSPM churches as brothers and sisters in Christ. It transcends Wang's separatism and exclusivism and gives the hope of the union of Chinese Christians and

226. Ibid., 68; for a slightly different English version, see also David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2012), 293-294.

churches.²²⁷

In November 1998, leaders of four major house church groups, including the China Evangelistic Fellowship, held a meeting to declare their basic unity in Christ and draft a confession of faith. Their confession of faith covers the Bible, the Trinity, Jesus Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the last things. In Lambert's opinion, it represents the mainstream of the HCM in China, and stands firmly in the tradition of historic evangelicalism, with a unique Chinese flavor. It proclaims the headship of Christ over his Church and insists that the TSPM or any other authority not interfere in the spiritual matters of the Church. They also affirm their loyalty as Chinese citizens and refuse to use the Church as a political tool to subvert the Chinese government.²²⁸

These four major house church groups also published a statement on the government, the religious policy of the government, persecution, and why they do not join the TSPM. In this statement, they claim that they love the Lord, the Chinese people, and the State and that they are innocent citizens. They support the unity of the nation and the Constitution of China. They see leaders of the nation as established by God. Facing persecution, they do not complain or give evidence of a reactionary attitude or hatred toward the government. They do not register because the State regulations for registration are contrary to the principles in the Scripture: only in registered places are they allowed to conduct religious activities; only those who are certificated by the government are allowed to preach; preachers are limited to preach only within their

227. Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 67-69.

228. Ibid., 72-76; for the details of the confession, also see Aikman, 297-303.

assigned district; they are not allowed to preach the gospel to those under eighteen years old, nor to pray for the sick or exorcise demons, nor to receive fellow believers from afar, nor to have communication with churches overseas. Other reasons for not joining the TSPM include the differences between the HCM and the TSPM over headship, the establishment of church workers, the foundation, the path, and the mission of the Church. At the end, they appeal to the government to correctly understand their faith, to stop persecution, and release believers from labor camps.²²⁹ American journalist David Aikman sees these declarations as a new move on the part of house churches in China. HCM Christians want to make their cause known to the government, to the nation, and to the world. They want the government to know that they are not cults and the reasons they take up their position.²³⁰ Lambert comments that the HCM is clearly in the tradition of the Reformers and their successors. They commit deeply to Christ and his Word and there is a great emphasis on practical Christian living. From these declarations, the HCM ought not be denigrated as simplistic or merely stubborn. It manifests a robust evangelicalism, which has been hammered out in the face of persecution. For Chinese Christians, discipleship is costly.²³¹

Ying points out that although the CPC has renounced any intention of eradicating religion and has affirmed the freedom of religious belief, it still limits religious activities “out of concern

229. Aikman, 303-307; Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 76-80.

230. Aikman, 297.

231. Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 79-80.

for the security of the state and society.”²³² It is unwilling to grant autonomy to religious organizations. The CPC acknowledges no Protestant organization other than the CCC/TSPM; however, Western scholar Hunter and Chinese scholar Chan observe that the CPC also “limits, obstructs, and opposes its [CCC/TSPM’s] expansion.”²³³ Many Christians suspect that the CCC/TSPM is collaborating with the CPC to eradicate religion. Some Christians, having survived the Cultural Revolution, are convinced that the method of the CCC/TSPM is “restriction, utilization, and modification,” a description that first came from how the CPC was handling capitalist industry and commerce in the 1950s.²³⁴ These suspicions do not come out of thin air. For example, one elderly TSPM pastor was forced to retire because he refused to register baptismal candidates with the local government. He knew how these lists of names had been used in the past to punish believers.²³⁵ Another pastor quit the State Church because of three short critical sentences from his supervisor, who said, “I’m the head of the church. Children eighteen years and younger are not permitted to attend church. And when you preach, I must first approve it.”²³⁶ Later the rule against children in church appeared in *Document 19* in 1982, in which it says, “It will be absolutely forbidden to force anyone, particularly people under eighteen years of age, to become a member of a church.”²³⁷ In the eyes of many underground church

232. Ying, “New Wine,” 364.

233. Hunter and Chan, 139.

234. Cf. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64107/65708/65722/4444874.html>, “限制，利用，改造。”

235. Vala, 112-113.

236. Ibid., 112.

237. Document 19.

members, the TSPM is still made up of those whom Wang names “unbelievers.”²³⁸

Along with the House Church movement, the TSPM is also reconstructing its theology, but under the slogan of the “mutual adaptation of religion and Chinese socialism.” Even though the RTT was officially promoted under his authorization in 1998, as early as the 1980s Ding started to reform its theology in order to harmonize Christian theology with socialism and Chinese culture. From the concept of the Cosmic Christ to Ethical Christianity, many people, especially believers from the HCM, regard his theological reconstruction with suspicion. The goal of his reconstruction is to make Christian theology more indigenous and contextual in China, while remaining in accord with the Scripture and historical doctrine. However, two major debates have emerged within the HCM. The first is whether the RTT is suppressing theological fundamentalism. Aikman points out that “ostensibly, the goal was to rejuvenate theological inquiry in China and move Chinese Christianity beyond...theological conservatism.”²³⁹ In fact, he agrees with American evangelical scholar Jason Kindopp that the RTT is “a transparent counter-attack against evangelicals” and that it reflects the wide gap between a TSPM backed by political authority and a church body that holds a strong traditional theology.²⁴⁰ According to Ji Tai, who was dismissed from his position as associate dean in Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Ding is an unbeliever and his intention is to fight fundamentalists and evangelicals,

238. For an example of against the TSPM in detailed arguments from an underground church member, please see Yigeng Xin, *Xin Yigeng Wenji* [Collected Writings by Yigeng Xin], <http://blog.boxun.com/hero/shehewenji/>.

239. Aikman, 173.

240. Jason Kindopp, *The Politics of Protestantism in Contemporary China: State Control, Civil Society, and Social Movement in a Single Party-State* (George Washington University, 2004), 292; Aikman, 173-174.

and eventually diminish fundamentalist theology altogether. Chinese scholar Jieren Li in Sweden disagrees with these evangelical scholars. He sees Ji Tai's criticism as based on his experience in the RTT. He also points out that Kindopp and Aikman's judgment confuses Ding's method with his intention. Jieren Li is convinced that the most important goal of the RTT is to develop a Chinese contextual theology rather than to suppress fundamentalism.²⁴¹

The second debate is around whether the RTT is changing theology or changing faith, especially by downplaying justification by faith. According to Jieren Li, Ding's emphasis on harmony, love, unity, cooperation, and reconciliation between Christians and non-Christians actually reflects his cultural identity of Confucianism. He argues that the manner in which Ding downplays justification is driven by his political concern of stability and unity in society and his theological heritage from Anglicanism. Jieren sees this infighting between the TSPM and the HCM concerning justification from the perspective of the difference between Anglican and Reformation teachings. For the Reformers, personal justification is by faith alone. From an Anglican perspective, justification is indeed by divine grace, but never completely through faith alone. It involves human sanctification, which, according to Ding, could be understood as a meeting point between Christianity and Confucianism.²⁴²

According to Wickeri, Ding adopted pragmatism and has worked for a better church and society in a situation of limited possibilities. He has always been a loyalist and patriot to the

241. Jieren Li, *In Search of the Via Media Between Christ and Marx: A Study of Bishop Ding Guangxun's Contextual Theology* (Lund, Sweden: Center for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund Univ., 2008), 321-325.

242. *Ibid.*, 329, 343, 352.

government. He tried to create space for the Church to work within, not against, the political structures. His theological reconstruction of mutual adaptation played down the tension between believers and non-believers, and gave more attention to the Church's social involvement. He created the space for different people to cooperate and work together despite differences in faith and ideology.²⁴³ With the efforts of its leaders, the TSPM was able "to function as a mass organization of Protestant Christians in China" on religion freedom.²⁴⁴ For instance, although Chinese Christian philanthropy is still restricted by the government, Xiaheng Xie points out that TSPM churches can still improve church facilities and reach out to society.²⁴⁵

According to the view of the opponents of the RTT, such as Ji Tai and many other believers from the HCM, the purpose of the RTT is not only to meet the demand of the State to establish a socialist religion, but also to attempt to destroy the fundamental faith of Christianity.²⁴⁶ Chinese biblical scholar Xinyuan Li notes that the TSPM expressed their subservience to the State with the slogan, "to build a unified spiritual and secular theological thinking in order to ensure the harmony between the Church and socialism."²⁴⁷ In Xinyuan's eyes, the theology of Ding is "the thinking of the devil." Ding and other leaders of the TSPM are in danger of leading many astray to become increasingly ungodly. Xinyuan appeals to Chinese

243. Wickeri, *Reconstructing*, 372-5.

244. Wickeri, *Seeking*, 195.

245. Xie, 92.

246. Jieren Li, 333.

247. Xinyuan Li, 84.

Christians to be on guard “if certain religious persons favored by the Communist government should proactively lead religion to ‘adapt’ to certain ideologies, and thereby dilute or even eliminate our fundamental beliefs.”²⁴⁸

In my opinion, both the statement of faith from the HCM and the RTT from the TSPM reflect the theological thinking of their respective social and political circumstance. This topic is much harder in a society dominated by atheism and suspicion of religion. The efforts made by the HCM and the TSPM demonstrate the adaptation of Christianity in Chinese society and the transition of Christianity from a foreign religion to a Chinese religion. Chinese Christians, whether in the HCM or the TSPM, are shifting a socially and politically irrelevant theology to a sociopolitical and contextual theology.

248. Ibid.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

From this research and the case study of the TSPM and the HCM, we can see that the question of how the Christian faith can be lived out in a particular society continues to challenge Chinese Christians. During the war, both the TSM and Wang Mingdaos had to choose whether to collaborate with or resist the Japanese army. After the New China was founded in 1949, they had to face the same challenge in the presence of the CPC. In the last thirty years of Christian revival in China, the TSPM and the HCM still live under the shadow of collaboration and resistance. They accuse each other of being bad trees with bad fruit that should be cut down. The inner conflict within the Chinese Christian community has never stopped, the conflict between the collaborators and the resisters, the conflict between the modernists and the fundamentalists, the conflict between the conformists and the nonconformists, and the conflict between the Official Church and the Underground Church. Christian theology and faith neither comes out of thin air nor lives in a vacuum. All Christians have to live in a particular political and social circumstance and face the limitations within that circumstance.

Conflicts and differences are not entirely negative; some are necessary. The arguments concerning Christian theology take place all through Christian history. Without arguments and disagreements, the Christian faith would lose its identity and dissolve into the cultures, religions, and social ideologies around it. Arguments are necessary for a creative and energetic faith system. With enormous energies focused on examining and refuting Gnostic theology, early Christian

leaders and thinkers developed orthodox Christian doctrines. Thus Orthodoxy was born out of conflict, and it has been carried on in conflict as well. For instance, Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity were not settled until the fourth ecumenical council at Chalcedon in 451. However, when Martin Luther came, he rejected the belief in divine impassibility and claimed that God did suffer and die.²⁴⁹ Wang Mingdao called for the separation of belief and unbelief, based on Paul's teaching in 2 Corinthians. At the same time, Ding appealed to all the people of different beliefs to work together; he built his argument on the foundation of Christ's love. With the same faith and the same Scripture, and living in the same society, they came to different conclusions and living standards. Christianity cannot be a set of fixed doctrines with totally unambiguous interpretation for all people at all times and in all places. Arguments and conflicts are not only necessary, but also natural.

Although it is natural and necessary to have conflicts and disagreements, we should still be careful about how to handle those conflicts. Many Christians see different ideas and theologies as dangerous and even heretical and therefore hold an intolerant attitude toward those who disagree with them. They treat others as enemies rather than brothers and sisters in a big family. Calvin was an early Reformer. His conflict with Michael Servetus, who had attacked the doctrine of the Trinity, is an extreme example of how some Christians have handled disagreements. Calvin, enraged by Servetus' defense of his position, argued forcefully in favor of Servetus' execution. Finally Servetus was burned at the stake and Calvin wrote in his letter, "For

249. Olson Roger, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 235.

I do not disguise it that I considered it my duty to put a check, so far as I could, upon this most obstinate and ungovernable man, that his contagion might not spread further.”²⁵⁰ In Calvin’s mind, he was defending the truth, not killing another fellow Christian. Wang Mingdao was definitely an obstinate and ungovernable man in the eyes of TSPM leaders. Wang survived twenty-three years of imprisonment, while many other Christians died in the labor camp or prison. If the political authority had backed Wang, what would he have done to unbelievers within the Church? We cannot agree with the way Calvin handled his conflict with Servetus. However, if we were in their political situation, what would we do? We need to defend the truth, but what is our principle and what is our bottom line?

Furthermore, we are actually practicing moral dualism when we name people collaborators or resisters. Brook argues that the simple polarity of collaboration and resistance is not helpful for understanding people’s experience during the Japanese invasion.²⁵¹ It is not helpful for the study of contemporary Christianity in China either. When we pick up terms like these, we have already involved ourselves in a moral conflict; thus it is almost impossible to analyze a case dispassionately. As Ying emphasizes, there were some scholars during the war who were neither patriotic nor disloyal, but stayed in the gray area in between. For instance, some people chose to cooperate with the Japanese in order to have the opportunity to open schools for youth.²⁵² According to Wang, there is no middle area or common ground, because

250. Hart, 193.

251. Cf. Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1-31.

252. Ying, *Conflict and Coalition*, 148-149.

“what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?”²⁵³ He would rather that the church be shut down than cooperate with unbelief. God asks us for faith rather than works; however, Jesus still teaches us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves and sends us out like sheep into the midst of wolves.²⁵⁴ How to keep the balance is a question for today’s Chinese Christians as well. We should not name TSPM members as collaborators and HCM believers as resisters. What we need to do is to find a common ground and have some dialogue.

Throughout my research, one theme keeps coming back again and again, both within the TSPM and the HCM: to build a three-self church. During both wartime and the thirty-year persecution, the goal of three-self had been forced upon TSPM churches and HCM churches. The authorities desired the independence and union of the Church, and it was mainly about being free from the West. For today’s Chinese Church, both the TSPM and the HCM, the goal of three-self is no longer to be free from imperialism, but to build a Chinese Christianity. At this point, they are on the common ground. Chinese Christians have to answer the question of how to live out their faith in a socialist society. One main task of theological development is to interpret theology in order to make sense of the circumstances in which we are living. The RTT from the TSPM and the faith statement from the HCM are telling the world that Chinese Christians are answering this question, even though it may not be mature or perfect. Wickeri points out,

253. 2 Corinthians 6:14b, KJV.

254. Matthew 10:16, NRSV.

“Chinese Protestants have been seeking the common ground while reserving differences, and they have succeeded in establishing Christianity as a Chinese religion.”²⁵⁵ However, how do we define a Chinese Christianity? Does this require the union of the Church in China? How do both movements keep Christianity alive in an atheist society without losing their faith identity? From this study we can see that we are raising more questions than we can hope to answer. We need further study of Chinese Christianity, especially its contextualization, for the sake of inclusion, not exclusion, cooperation rather than separation, indigenization and globalization. It is not our duty to judge the tree good or bad, or to judge the plant as wheat or weed, because Jesus said, “Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time *I will* tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”²⁵⁶

255. Wickeri, *Seeking*, 290.

256. Matthew 13:30, NRSV.

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