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CHINESE CHRISTIANITY SINCE 1949: IMPLICATIONS  
FOR THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF  
LATTER-DAY SAINTS

A Thesis

Presented to the  
Department of Asian Studies  
Brigham Young University

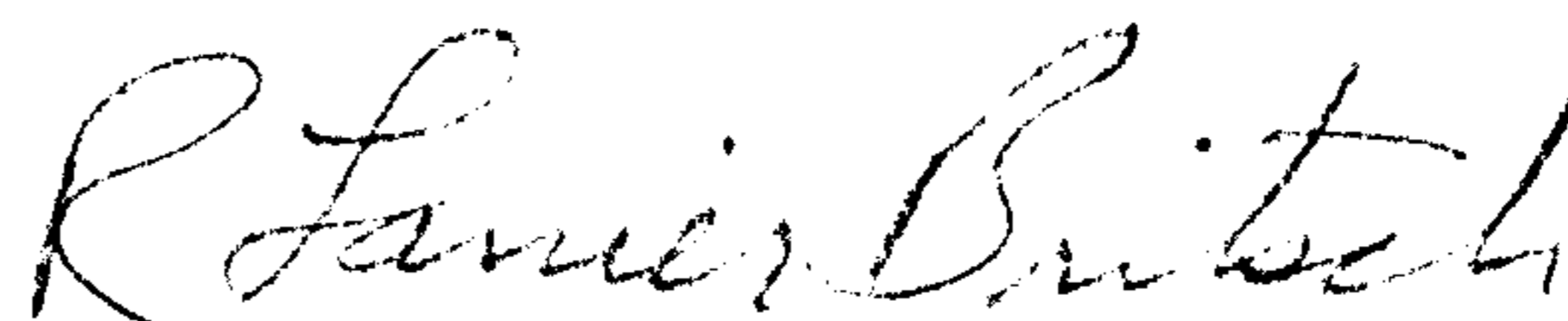
In partial fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by

Bruce J. M. Dean

August 1981

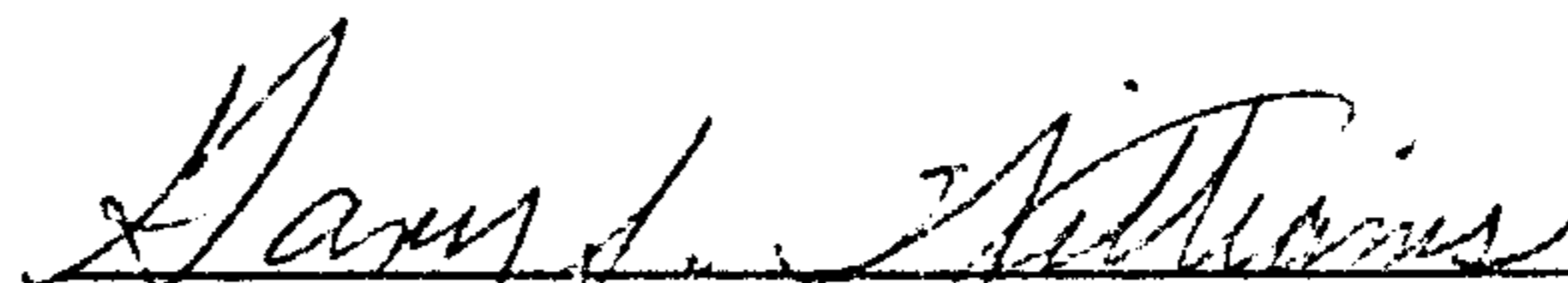
This Thesis, by Bruce J. M. Dean, is accepted  
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Master of Arts.



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Committee Chairman

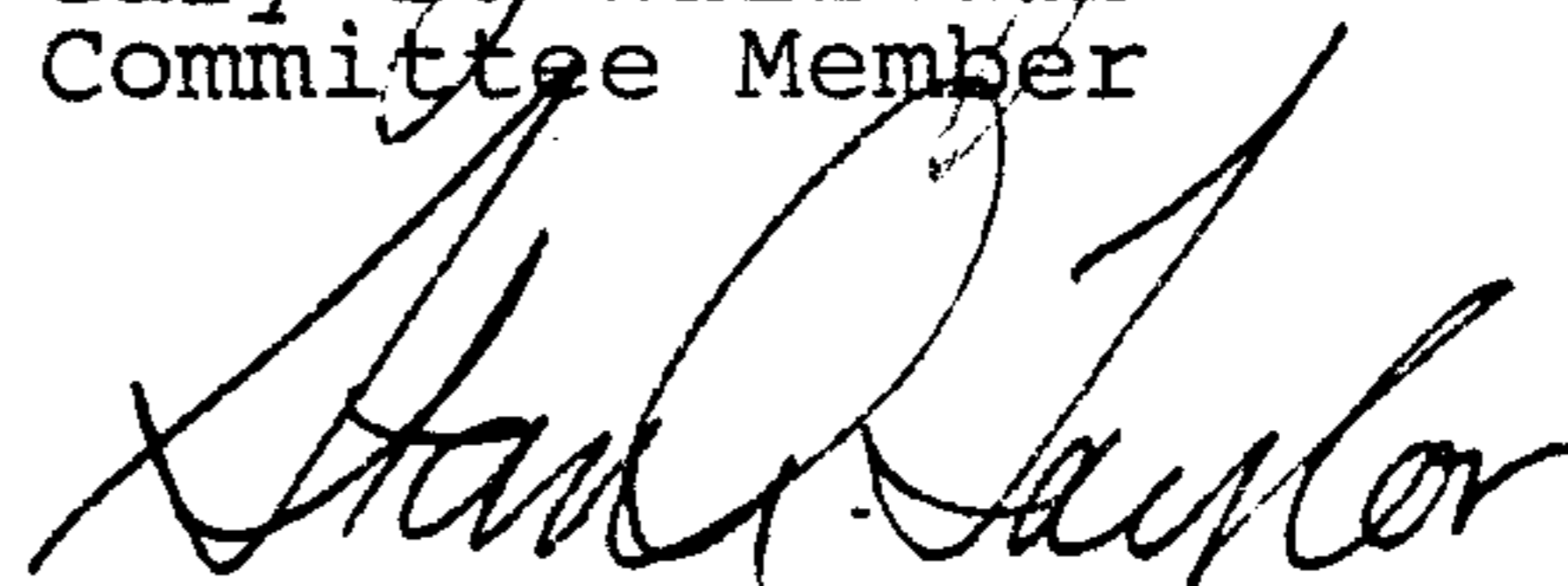


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## INTRODUCTION

The evangelization of China has long been a Latter-day Saint dream. Recently improved religious conditions in the People's Republic of China have intensified Latter-day Saint interest in China as a potential site for missionary work. This paper is written to help Latter-day Saints prepare themselves to take their message to the People's Republic of China. The history of Chinese Christianity since 1949 will be examined. Reasons for Christianity's survival and revival will be offered. Possible future trends for Chinese Christianity will be presented. Possibilities for Latter-day Saint missionary work in the People's Republic of China will be evaluated. The laying of necessary groundwork will be examined. Suggestions for the performance of missionary work in China will be considered.

Spencer W. Kimball, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has declared that the Spirit of the Lord is preparing the Chinese people to receive the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> As

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<sup>1</sup>Marvin K. Gardner, "Report of the Seminar for Regional Representatives," Ensign 8 (November 1978):101.

will be shown in this paper, Chinese Christianity's recent and remarkable renaissance has confirmed President Kimball's statement. There is now a great spiritual yearning among the Chinese people. Successive waves of missionaries throughout the centuries have planted the gospel in China. Its care has been taken over by China's post-1949 Christian community. It appears that this Christian community is now preparing China to receive the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Study of post-1949 Chinese Christianity is critical for Latter-day Saints if they are to teach all nations concerning the restored gospel. Missionary work in China is central to the fulfillment of this goal. However, it will not take place if the Mormon Church makes the same mistakes committed by Protestant and Catholic missionaries prior to 1949, mistakes which were seized upon by the Communists to subdue Christianity. Latter-day Saint missionary work may not take place until and unless The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proves itself willing and able to knowledgably adapt itself to Christian China's uniquely Sino-Marxian environment.

China's Christian community has adapted itself to a hostile Marxian setting. In so doing, it has gained a wealth of experience. It has much to teach

Latter-day Saints. How did Chinese Christians survive persecution? How do they so successfully spread their message despite concentrated opposition? Why have they succeeded? What do they do that Latter-day Saints should also strive to do?

Since 1949, Chinese Christians have travelled a difficult road. They have shown Latter-day Saints what portions of that road to avoid and how to successfully negotiate its toughest stretches. They have persuaded many of their countrymen to become Christians. Latter-day Saints should use their efforts as a basis to present Mormonism's message to China. Although Mormons have much to do to prepare themselves to fulfill this task, there is much that they can now do to preach among the Chinese people. This paper is prepared in the hope that it can help The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to proselyte among the Chinese people.

## CHAPTER I

### CHINESE CHRISTIANITY BEFORE 1949

#### Difficulties Faced by Christianity in Gaining Acceptance in China

Christianity has endeavored for most of the Christian era to penetrate China. Almost fourteen hundred years ago, the missionary A-lo-pen introduced Nestorian Christianity into Tang China. Although successful in gaining acceptance among the non-Chinese living in China at the time, Nestorianism failed to establish itself among the Chinese people. Nestorianism was fatally weakened by Confucian opposition: the Confucian-inspired proscription of 845 A.D. against Daoism and Buddhism also included Nestorianism.<sup>1</sup> Under the Mongols, Nestorianism re-entered China. It again failed to take root, save in China's foreign population. It did not survive the anti-foreign nationalism that overthrew the Yuan Dynasty.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christian Missions in China (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929; reprint ed., Taipei, Taiwan: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 53-58.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 61-65, 74-75.



In 1294, the first Roman Catholic missionary, John of Montecorvino, arrived in Cambaluc. His proselyting met with gratifying success, but Catholic efforts were largely confined to China's foreign community. When the Mongols were expelled from China, all traces of Catholicism disappeared.<sup>1</sup> The first permanent establishment of Roman Catholicism was not achieved until 1583, when the Society of Jesus successfully entered China.<sup>2</sup> Protestantism came to China only in 1807, with the arrival of Robert Morrison.<sup>3</sup>

These early Christian labors always encountered great difficulties. Vast distances between China and Europe inhibited missionary work. Travel was difficult. Journeys to China were computed in terms of years, not months or weeks. Foreign climates and diseases made missionary work difficult for the few who did reach China. Governmental resistance to missionaries entering China was pronounced. The Chinese people were both indifferent to and hostile to the Christian message. They viewed Christianity as a product of the barbarian, inferior West. The Christian message sought acceptance in a country that was extreme in its ethnocentrism. China's sense of cultural

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 65-74.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 211-12.

superiority caused the Chinese to view Christianity unfavorably.

Many parts of the world had accepted Christian teachings because they lacked a sophisticated, highly developed religious system of their own. For centuries, China had relied on a complex and sophisticated combination of ancestor worship, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Christianity was merely a late arrival in China. Christian exclusivism allowed only Jesus Christ as the Way. This was foreign to China's religious tolerance and relativism. Christianity sought answers to metaphysical questions. It was other-worldly in nature. It concentrated on the Kingdom of Heaven. It urged its disciples to be in the world, but not of it. It concerned itself with religious mysteries. On the other hand, Chinese religion was not metaphysically or eschatologically inclined. It was practical. Buddhism provided China with a system of metaphysics and other-worldly salvation, but it hardly changed the practical, this-worldly nature of Chinese religion. Animism, ancestor worship, and Confucianism still provided the life-giving spirit for Chinese religion.

While Christianity viewed itself as properly beyond the control of secular politics (and in Europe exercised great control over secular politics), the

Chinese had always perceived religion as a means to consolidate the stability of the state. Traditional Chinese religion was an extension of the state and subject to governmental control.<sup>1</sup> Any new religious order challenging the prevailing religion of China was viewed as a challenge to the authority of the state, and as a prime source of instability and rebellion.<sup>2</sup> Christianity therefore suffered from frequent proscriptions. Determined to spread their message, however, missionaries attempted to labor around such edicts. They thus confirmed official suspicions towards Christianity.

Christianity further suffered from periodic persecutions of varying intensity. The anti-Catholic persecutions of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the bizarre interlude of the Taiping Rebellion, the Boxer Uprising, and the anti-Christian movement of the 1920s all seriously hindered Christian labors.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert D. Baird and Alfred Bloom, Indian and Far Eastern Religious Traditions, Religion and Man: An Introduction, Part 2 and Part 3 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup>Latourette, pp. 17-18.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 156-84, 299-303, 507-518, 694-99.

Resistance to Christianity was further heightened by the means used by Christian missionaries to spread the gospel. Missionary efforts first began to bear considerable fruit in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, this success was based on provisions of the Opium War treaties. Although China had long resisted foreign influences, the treaties of 1842-1844 allowed foreign missionaries to proselyte in five port cities in Southeast China.<sup>1</sup> The second group of treaties was concluded in 1858. Along with the conventions of 1860, they allowed foreign missionaries to travel throughout the Chinese interior. The treaties of 1858 and the conventions of 1860 further required the protection of Christian missionaries and their converts. Extra-territoriality placed foreign missionaries outside the control of Chinese law.<sup>2</sup> All these treaty provisions were regularly invoked. While missionaries no doubt brought the light of Christ's teachings and genuinely converted many Chinese, Christian teachings nonetheless forced their way into China by dint of foreign military strength. As European countries sought to encroach upon China, foreign missionaries became agents of aggression when they

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 229.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 274-75.

represented their native countries in negotiations with the Chinese government.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity's mode of entry into China in the nineteenth century was in itself a major blow to China's national integrity and pride. Its enforced protection inspired many abuses. Aware of the protection offered to converts by the treaties, many Chinese joined the Christian churches, motivated not by belief but by the material benefits of missionary protection and patronage. Coming from the less desirable elements of the population, these "rice Christians" often aroused great resentment among other Chinese. "The missionaries were also disliked by the gentry-officials because of their interference in lawsuits on behalf of their converts, a practice followed especially by Catholic missionaries."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, conversion frequently followed legal disputes. The new "convert" joined a Christian church, knowing that he would be able to use his church membership to have the controversy decided in his favor, because a decision against him would

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 276, 475.

<sup>2</sup>Ssu-yu Teng and John K. Fairbank, China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey 1839-1923 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954; reprint ed., New York: Atheneum, 1975), p. 135.

be interpreted by his missionary patrons as anti-Christian persecution.<sup>1</sup>

In a country that regarded itself as culturally superior, the foreign missionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were themselves often guilty of cultural imperialism. Many missionaries condemned Chinese civilization as barbaric and in need of the civilizing virtues of Christianity. They did not acknowledge that there were positive elements in the Chinese culture, elements that harmonized with the teachings of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Lacking the cultural sensitivity of the Society of Jesus, these missionaries universally condemned ancestor worship as an evil, heathen practice.<sup>3</sup>

Churches were often outposts of the missionaries' native countries. There was little in the way of indigenous church architecture. Gothic spires of Christian churches towered above the landscape of some Chinese cities. There were few native religious hymns. Chinese Christians largely sang European religious

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<sup>1</sup>Allen J. Swanson, Taiwan: Mainline Versus Independent Church Growth (South Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, n.d.), pp. 49-50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-49.

<sup>3</sup>Latourette, pp. 428-29.

music translated into Chinese.<sup>1</sup> Converts were encouraged to adopt foreign cultural habits regarded by missionaries as part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In so doing, they were viewed by their non-Christian neighbors as being something less than Chinese.<sup>2</sup> Missionaries were often reluctant to turn control of their churches over to native converts. Because most churches were controlled by foreign mission personnel, they were regarded by Chinese as foreign institutions.<sup>3</sup> Missionaries usually enjoyed a standard of living higher than their converts could afford.<sup>4</sup>

Before the introduction of Christianity, China had had little religious conflict. However, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was frequent discord among different Protestant denominations. At times, there were internal disputes within churches.<sup>5</sup> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Catholicism suffered from rivalries among different missionary orders.<sup>6</sup> In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Catholics and Protestants worked independently of each other. There was an almost total lack of cooperation

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<sup>1</sup>George N. Patterson, Christianity in Communist China (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1969), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>Swanson, pp. 50-51.   <sup>3</sup>Patterson, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.   <sup>5</sup>Latourette, p. 771.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 111-19, 124-25, 135-40.

between them. These differences weakened Christian credibility in the eyes of many Chinese.

Even if missionaries managed to avoid all the weaknesses just mentioned, which contrasted so disturbingly with their message, they were still a highly visible reminder of Western penetration of China, and of all the problems and turmoil thereby inflicted upon China. The brutalities of World War One and the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles that ceded Shandong to Japan caused Chinese resentment of the West to boil over. An anti-Western movement began in China. Often the most visible representative of the West, Christianity was condemned as part of Western aggression. An anti-Christian reaction set in among Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s. This was strengthened by the increasing tendency of Chinese intellectuals to rely on science and Western secularism.<sup>1</sup>

The picture just presented is negative. It ignores the many positive contributions Christians brought to China. Many Chinese Christians were sincerely converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and received what they regarded as the blessings of

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<sup>1</sup>Swanson, pp. 33-34, 36.



of salvation. Protestant missionary work was often manifested in medical and educational ways. This greatly helped China to modernize at the close of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Despite all of Christianity's positive contributions, however, China's reaction to it was often one of objecting not to what was done or preached, but rather to how it was done or preached. The insensitivities and weaknesses of Christ's emissaries compounded the difficulties of persuading the tradition-bound, ethnocentric, and secularly inclined Chinese to accept Christianity.

Many people persuasively argue that Christianity failed in its evangelization of China. By 1949, only slightly less than 1 percent of China was Christian. Despite its help in modernizing China, Christianity largely failed to have any significant impact on Chinese life and institutions.<sup>2</sup> The area of greatest Christian influence, education, was severely restricted in its religious expression by

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<sup>1</sup>Latourette, p. 568.

<sup>2</sup>Spencer J. Palmer, Korea and Christianity: The Problem of Identification with Tradition (Seoul, Korea: Hollym Corporation, 1967), pp. v-vii, 23-24, 49-51; Joseph R. Levenson, Modern China and Its Confucian Past: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Anchor Books, 1964), pp. 155-64.

governmental regulations in 1928.<sup>1</sup> Christianity failed to integrate itself into the mainstream of Chinese life. It remained in a world apart.

#### Success Despite Difficulties

It can also be argued that Christianity was successful in China. Although missionary work was difficult, it was not without encouraging results. Through the efforts of the Society of Jesus, Catholicism had taken permanent root in China. Despite the rites controversy and the persecutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it survived. The opening of China to the West greatly expanded Catholic missionary efforts, and growth was rapid in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By 1949 there were 3,266,000 Chinese Catholics.<sup>2</sup> Protestantism, after a painfully slow beginning in the nineteenth century, expanded rapidly in the latter part of that century. The twentieth century witnessed even greater growth. By 1949 there were 1,811,700 baptized Chinese

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, Christianity in a Revolutionary Age: A History of Christianity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, vol. 5: The Twentieth Century Outside Europe: The Americas, The Pacific, Asia, and Africa: the Emerging World Christian Community (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 383-84.

<sup>2</sup>Swanson, p. 282.

Protestants and 823,506 communicants.<sup>1</sup> Chinese Protestants were represented in China's governmental, educational, and medical communities in far greater percentages than their portion of the general population.<sup>2</sup>

By the third decade of this century, China's Protestant and Roman Catholic communities were becoming considerably less foreign and more Chinese in nature. Native Chinese were increasingly ordained to positions of ecclesiastical authority. In 1949, there were 2,542 Chinese Catholic priests and 3,046 foreign priests.<sup>3</sup> In that same year there were 6,204 foreign Protestant missionaries, 2,155 Protestant Chinese pastors, 8,058 Chinese evangelists, and 2,396 women church workers.<sup>4</sup> Increasing numbers of churches were becoming financially independent of foreign mission boards. Local congregational government was on the rise. Churches that had been started by missionaries were more and more coming under the government of Chinese leaders.<sup>5</sup> Union denominations, such as the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>2</sup>Latourette, Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 391.

<sup>3</sup>Swanson, p. 282.      <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>5</sup>Latourette, History of Christian Missions, pp. 801-810.

United Church of Christ in China, appeared. They were a significant part of China's Protestant community.<sup>1</sup>

Efforts were being made to discard Western cultural baggage that had been mixed with the gospel of Jesus Christ. These efforts led to the rise of indigenously created Protestant denominations, with no connections to foreign Christianity. Indeed, these churches rejected the weaknesses of Western Christianity and sought to return to a pure New Testament Christianity. The True Jesus Church, the Assembly Hall Church, and the Jesus Family were the best known of these churches.<sup>2</sup> By 1949, indigenous Protestant churches comprised one fourth of China's Protestant community. They received no help from foreign missionaries or mission boards.<sup>3</sup>

As Protestantism helped China to modernize, many people embraced Christianity. It symbolized the West that they sought to emulate and to thereby strengthen China. The anti-foreign and anti-Christian movement of the 1920s had slowed Christian growth, but it was followed by more favorable conditions in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>4</sup> Although military, political, and economic turmoil hindered Christian activities, many

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 799-801.   <sup>2</sup>Patterson, pp. 69-76.

<sup>3</sup>Swanson, p. 284.   <sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-38.

people were probably led to seek Christianity as an answer to national and personal problems. In 1945, after several years of expulsion, exile, imprisonment, and restricted activity under the Japanese occupation, missionaries and Chinese church workers took advantage of their regained freedom to renew evangelical efforts. The future for Chinese Christianity looked bright.<sup>1</sup>

Reasons for Christian Optimism:  
A Religious Explanation

Believing members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints feel that the Lord is preparing all of his children to hear the gospel and to receive its blessings. As one of the major unreached areas of the earth, China has lately received particular attention among Latter-day Saints. The question is asked: in their desires to evangelize the Chinese people, have Latter-day Saints received divine help to prepare the Chinese people to accept the gospel? From a perspective of faith, the answer could well be yes. It can be argued that China, over the centuries, has been prepared by God to accept the gospel.

The brief history of Chinese Christianity just given finds an inspiring explanation in Silas Hong's analysis of the parable of the sower and the seed,

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<sup>1</sup>Latourette, Twentieth Century Outside Europe, pp. 395-96.

found in Matt. 13:3-9. Although this analysis is biased against Catholicism, it merits the attention of those who feel that Christian efforts to evangelize China, whatever their faults, have been divinely guided and will continue to receive divine guidance in the future.

The seed sown by the wayside, quickly devoured by fowl, allowing it no time to take root (Matt. 13:4), is compared to Nestorianism's initial entry into Tang China. The fowl are the Confucian-inspired proscription of 845 A.D. The seed that fell on stony ground, causing plants to grow up quickly, only to see those plants wither under the heat of the sun (Matt. 13:5,6), is represented by Catholic missionary efforts during the Yuan Dynasty. Success was initially gratifying, but Catholicism disappeared from China when the Yuan Dynasty was overthrown. The Christian seed had entered only the topsoil of China's foreign community, and not the deeper, stonier soil of native Chinese society. The seed that fell among thorns, causing the plants that grew up to be choked (Matt. 13:7), is likened to the Catholic efforts begun by the Jesuits in the late sixteenth century. This phase of missionary work achieved far greater success than any previous effort and reached the indigenous Chinese population. Catholicism was choked, however, by the jealousy

directed against the Society of Jesus by other Catholic orders, the notorious rites controversy, and the severe anti-Catholic persecutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While the Catholic Church of this era did not die, only the Opium War treaties allowed Catholic missionaries to rescue this struggling church. Finally, Hong states that the sowing of the good seed that bore lasting fruit (Matt. 13:8) was accomplished by the long, painful, and gradual establishment of Protestantism in China, beginning with the arrival of Robert Morrison in 1807.<sup>1</sup> The renewed Catholic efforts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries should also be included as part of the good, lasting seed. These efforts resulted in an expansion of the Catholic community from 200-250,000 adherents in 1800<sup>2</sup> to 3,266,000 in 1949.<sup>3</sup>

Each planting of the gospel seed resulted in a progressively better yield. By the end of the nineteenth century, Christianity had firmly planted itself in China's difficult soil. In 1945, that

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<sup>1</sup>Silas Hong, The Dragon Net: How God Has Used Communism to Prepare China for the Gospel (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1976), pp. 20-25.

<sup>2</sup>Latourette, History of Christian Missions, pp. 182-83.

<sup>3</sup>Swanson, p. 282.

seemed ready to bring forth a plentiful Christian harvest.



## CHAPTER II

### CHINESE CHRISTIANITY SINCE 1949

#### Communist Hostility to Christianity

In 1949, missionary optimism changed. Honey-combed with weaknesses, the Nationalist government collapsed. The Communists rose to power. Christian expectations and fortunes radically changed. Christian churches were confronted with a political authority that denounced all religion as unscientific, superstitious, and feudalistic. The Communists accused religion of exploiting the Chinese people. Such opprobrium was directed against Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Confucianism, and folk religions, as well as Christianity. But Christianity labored under especially incriminating disadvantages. Almost without exception, Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries had supported the Guomindang.<sup>1</sup> During the Civil War, some foreign missionaries had collected information on the

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<sup>1</sup>Patterson, p. 42.

Communists for their own governments.<sup>1</sup> Foreign missionaries were condemned because their native countries had committed aggression against China. Catholics were suspect because of the Vatican's strong anti-communism. American missionaries, the largest single element in the foreign missionary community, were particularly suspect because of American aid to the Guomindang. Chinese Christians were disliked by the Communists because of their association with and dependence upon foreign missionaries and mission boards. Missionaries and their converts were a vivid reminder of (and often participated in) the excesses perpetrated against China by Western nations during China's Hundred Years of Shame. These excesses solidified Communist hostility to Christianity.

While proclaiming the right to believe in religion and including freedom of religious practice in their constitution, Chinese Communists actively sought the subjugation and repression of Christianity. The Christian community sought to cope with the Communist challenge. Cooperation, surface accommodation, and stubborn resistance were all present in the response of Chinese Christians. 1949 marked the beginning of adverse circumstances for Chinese Christianity equal to

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<sup>1</sup>David H. Adeney, China: Christian Students Face the Revolution (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-  
varsity Press, 1973), p. 37.

and possibly greater than any of the former troubles it had experienced. Latourette states: "The capture of the mainland of China by the Communists, completed in 1950, brought Christianity its most serious reverses since the eighteenth century."<sup>1</sup>

Patterson places the situation in this perspective:

The battle of giants was joined. Asian Christianity and Asian Communism were about to be locked in a struggle to the death. The teachings of Jesus Christ and Mao Tse-tung could never co-exist. It was not simply two opposing ideological systems, two ways of life that were meeting; it was two diametrically opposed 'faiths.'<sup>2</sup>

Seventeen years of bitter struggle between the Communist government of the People's Republic of China and Chinese Christianity climaxed in 1966 with the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Organized Christianity ceased to function under the radical onslaught. Many people concluded that the Christian seeds planted in China's soil in the nineteenth century had failed to produce lasting fruit--had indeed been forcibly uprooted. Was Christianity, they asked, forever doomed to be a foreign institution never able to adapt to the harsh realities of the Chinese environment? The violent attacks initiated by the

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<sup>1</sup>Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 397.

<sup>2</sup>Patterson, p. xi.

Cultural Revolution against Christianity prompted many people to pronounce obituaries like the following:

The final page of the history of Christian religion in Shanghai was written on August 24.

On that day all the churches, active and inactive, whether conducted by their meager congregations or preserved by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Religious Cults, were stripped of all the crosses, statues, icons, decorations, and all church paraphernalia by the revolutionary students, wearing Red Guard armbands and determined to eradicate all traces of imperialist, colonial, and feudal regimes.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Struggle for Control

The Communists were not overt in their first moves against Christianity. Although many Catholics had been mistreated in Northern China during the Civil War,<sup>2</sup> and many rural churches had been closed and used to garrison Communist troops,<sup>3</sup> most churches in larger cities stayed open.<sup>4</sup> They continued to evangelize and to conduct religious activities. "Overt persecution

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<sup>1</sup>"Christianity in Shanghai Comes to an end," South China Morning Post (Hong Kong), 16 August 1966, p. 1, cited by Patterson, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>Latourette, Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 396.

<sup>3</sup>Patterson, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Mary Wang, The Chinese Church That Will Not Die (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Hodder Christian Paperbacks, 1971), p. 56.

on purely religious grounds was not part of [Communist] policy. They sought to avoid making religious martyrs."<sup>1</sup> Christian churches enjoyed relative freedom until April 1951.<sup>2</sup>

George N. Patterson recounts the statement of one Xi Zhongxun at the First National Conference on Religious Work held in Beijing:

He laid down the guidelines of approach to the religious problem: 'Outright prohibition is useless; it will only hurt our Party. . . . Religion is a form of social consciousness. If we prohibit it by administrative order, fanaticism will probably result, probably bringing with it religious riots. Therefore, if we are to destroy it we must do it gradually by other methods.'<sup>3</sup>

The national Religious Affairs Bureau was placed in control of all aspects of religious activity.<sup>4</sup> While scorned as an anachronism, religious belief still received official governmental tolerance (as did the option to abstain from and oppose religious beliefs).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Latourette, Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 397.

<sup>2</sup>Patterson, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 10. As told to Patterson by one Xiao Feng (pseudonym).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Donald E. MacInnis, Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China: A Documentary History (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 23.

Religion, though, was clearly regarded as a superstitious barrier to Socialist progress. The government therefore set up "re-education" programs to "help" Christians become converted to Socialist doctrine. These programs were particularly emphasized in universities, which were largely maintained by Christian churches.<sup>1</sup>

Such thought reform could reach very intense levels of pressure. Mary Wang quotes a letter from an unidentified priest in Robert S. Elegant's The Shape of Heaven:

The Communists pretend not to force or impose their position on us; they insist, repeat, insist again and again; always around, in and out--and back to the same statement; wearing us out, breaking us down until, unable to hold out any longer, one is finally prepared to say, 'Well, have it your own way!' But they won't accept it that way. What they want is for us to concede as if we had proposed it; as if we were finally convinced of what they have said and wished to surrender ourselves to their statements as if to our own self-imposed directive . . .<sup>2</sup>

Mary Wang herself was forced to undergo thought reform while a medical student in Shanghai.<sup>3</sup>

Many Protestants and Catholics were arraigned before people's courts and accused of being reactionaries and agents of imperialism.<sup>4</sup> The Area Handbook

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<sup>1</sup>Adeney, pp. 61-62.      <sup>2</sup>Wang, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-74.

<sup>4</sup>Latourette, Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 400.

for Communist China states:

They do not intend to make martyrs and leave a root of faith in the hearts of the common people. They fabricate cases against Christians and charge them with criminal deeds or counter-revolutionary activities.<sup>1</sup>

In 1950, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai met with four key Protestant leaders. He declared that the churches would have to purge themselves of all associations with foreign imperialism. At that meeting, Wu Yaozong, secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association, presented a document called the Christian Manifesto. It declared the intention of the Protestant churches to eliminate the imperialist tendencies in their midst and to support the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>2</sup> This Manifesto was distributed throughout Protestant churches in China. More than 300,000 Protestants eventually signed it.<sup>3</sup>

Once Protestants signed the Manifesto, writes Leslie T. Lyall,

As if by pre-arrangement, the local Communist cadres called on the local church leaders to

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<sup>1</sup>Frederic Chaffee et al. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 256.

<sup>2</sup>Leslie T. Lyall, Come Wind, Come Weather: The Present Experience of the Church in China (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960), pp. 15-16.

<sup>3</sup>Latourette, Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 401. Patterson, p. 47, says 400,000 people signed.

inquire their reaction.

'You agree, of course?'

'Yes!'

'Then why do you still welcome the presence and help of these foreign imperialist missionaries?'<sup>1</sup>

The government thus used the Christian Manifesto as a means of pressuring the Protestant churches to make missionaries unwelcome. As foreign missionaries and church workers left China, mission and church properties were expropriated without compensation. This included universities, secondary schools, hospitals, and mission facilities.<sup>2</sup>

Christian freedom was greatly reduced in April 1951, when the Religious Affairs Bureau summoned a large number of Protestant leaders to a "Conference on Dealing with Christian Institutions Formerly Receiving American Aid."<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this conference was to

. . . thoroughly, permanently and completely sever all relations with American missions and all other missions, thus realizing self-government, self-support, and self-propagation in the Chinese church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>pp. 16-17.    <sup>2</sup>Patterson, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>4</sup>MacInnis, p. 99. Self-government, self-support, and self-propagation were concepts ironically formulated by a nineteenth century Protestant missionary named Henry Venn. Owen Chadwick, gen. ed., The Pelican History of the Church, 6 vols. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), vol. 6: A History of Christian Missions, by Stephen Neill, pp. 259-60.



The Conference thus gave rise to what became known as the Three-Self Reform Movement. Protestants were to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. The Preparatory Committee of the conference was to direct this effort.<sup>1</sup>

To comply with the intent of the Three-Self Reform Movement, Protestant churches throughout China held mass meetings in which accusations and charges were brought against those labeled as reactionary and/or imperialist.<sup>2</sup> The accused were then pressured to renounce their crimes, to undergo re-education, and to prepare themselves to join the Three-Self Reform Movement.<sup>3</sup> The Communists thus were able to isolate and focus on those who opposed their "reform" of the Protestant churches.

As religious "reactionaries" were immobilized and removed from positions of influence, Communist-planted infiltrators were able to exert greater influence in the churches. The Area Handbook for Communist China notes: "They do not liquidate religious organizations, but they infiltrate and use the

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<sup>1</sup>Patterson, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 61-63; Lyall, pp. 29-37.

<sup>3</sup>Patterson, pp. 83-87.

organization to discredit and disparage religious activities."<sup>1</sup> Such doctrinally conservative concepts as the Second Coming, Doomsday, the Last Judgement, and the literal divinity of Christ as Savior were denounced by the Three-Self Movement as opiates that hindered rapid social reform.<sup>2</sup> Adeney quotes Wu Yaozong as saying "modernism must oppose fundamentalism."<sup>3</sup> Churches focused less and less on Christ and religious topics. They became forums for political discussions and concentrated on bringing their teachings into harmony with Communist principles.<sup>4</sup>

The nature of institutional Chinese Protestantism was radically changed. As summarized by Patterson, the decisions of the First National Christian Conference held in 1954 are illustrative:

Under the common aim of loving the country and the Christian religion, efforts should be made to promote the great unity of all Christian churches and their members and to carry further the self-government, self-supporting, and self-propagation movement. The differences in belief, system, and ceremony observed by different churches should be mutually respected.

Support the Draft Constitution of the People's Republic of China and strive together with the

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<sup>1</sup>Chaffee et al., p. 256.

<sup>2</sup>Adeney, pp. 91-93; Patterson, pp. 78, 91, Lyall, pp. 39-40.

<sup>3</sup>Adeney, p. 91.      <sup>4</sup>Patterson, p. 91.

people of the whole nation for the construction of a socialist society, value the right of freedom of religion stipulated in the Draft Constitution, guarantee no misuse of this right for activities against the interest of the people, promote patriotism and observance of law, and fulfill the duties of a citizen.

Call upon the Christians of the country for activities to safeguard the peace of the world and to firmly oppose the aggression of United States imperialism on China's territory of Taiwan.

Encourage the Christians of the whole nation to seriously learn patriotism, to be thoroughly purged of the remnant influence of imperialism and to differentiate between what is right or wrong, good or evil, to purify the churches.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Peking, China News Service, August 13, 1954.<sup>1</sup>

Following the brief interlude of "let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend," the government moved against church leaders (including several within the Three-Self Movement), who had used the opportunity to criticize the government.<sup>2</sup>

In 1957, a Three-Self Patriotic Committee was established. This became the official Protestant church organization in China.<sup>3</sup> Denominational differences were eliminated. The number of church meeting places was then severely reduced, supposedly to provide a more economical use of church properties. Beijing, which

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-93.

<sup>2</sup>Latourette, Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 401; Patterson, pp. 123-25.

<sup>3</sup>Patterson, p. 94.

originally had sixty-five churches, was left with only four. Shanghai went from more than two hundred down to only a few more than ten.<sup>1</sup> Religious staff and clergy were reduced in number. Those eliminated from religious work were then transferred to communes and factories.<sup>2</sup> In 1958, government regulations banned all religious services, prayers, and Bible readings, save those held in regular church buildings at times announced beforehand and with a representative of the State present.<sup>3</sup>

By mid-1958, in all of Beijing only five hundred people attended church. Before consolidation, each of Beijing's sixty-five churches had been well-attended.<sup>4</sup> This is representative of the change in church attendance throughout China.

In 1949, there were roughly one million communicant Chinese Protestants. Churches were healthy and growing. How were the Communists able to so easily remold the Protestant churches?

The fragmented nature of Chinese Protestantism prevented it from presenting a unified, strong response

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<sup>1</sup>Latourette, Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 403.

<sup>2</sup>Patterson, pp. 95-96.

<sup>3</sup>Latourette, Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 403.

<sup>4</sup>Patterson, p. 125.

to Communist pressure. There were many different denominations. Chinese Protestantism was also rather clearly divided into fundamentalist and liberal camps. Relations between the two camps were often hostile. Many liberals had hoped to adapt to the new Communist environment. While some openly favored the Communists, notably Wu Yaozong, it is probable that most submitted to Communist-directed changes out of a desire to maintain as much of their religious organizations and systems as possible. The fundamentalists felt betrayed by this and denounced those who compromised.<sup>1</sup>

Many Christians were undoubtedly weakened in their faith by dint of high-pressure re-education. As doctrine focused less and less on Christian issues that separated believers from the world around them (such as salvation, grace, the Second Coming, and the Last Judgement), more and more the churches dealt with how to fulfill the ideals of a socialist society. Documents of the Three-Self Movement provides excellent examples of the pronounced shift towards political

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-81, 117; Ralph R. Covell, "The Church and China: Building New Barriers?" Christianity Today 24 (25 January 1980):18.

secularism that took place in Chinese churches.<sup>1</sup> Many Christians left their churches, especially those whose religious convictions ran deep.

Because of this, the indigenous fundamentalist churches experienced sharp and dramatic growth in the first few years after 1949. The Christian Assemblies, the communal Jesus Family, the True Jesus Church, the Spiritual Food World-Wide Evangelistic Mission, and independent churches like the one pastored by Wang Mingdao in Beijing were uncompromising in their opposition to governmental pressures. They refused to cooperate with the Three-Self Movement.<sup>2</sup>

The Protestant religious situation eventually boiled down to a struggle between the Three-Self Movement and the indigenous fundamentalists. The latter had always been free of foreign control and could not plausibly be accused of sympathy towards imperialism. The government therefore sought other ways to subdue them. Anyone who opposed the Three-Self Movement was labeled as a reactionary.

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<sup>1</sup>Far Eastern Office Division of Foreign Missions, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Documents of the Three-Self Movement: Source Materials for the Study of the Protestant Church in Communist China (New York: Far Eastern Office Division of Foreign Missions, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>Patterson, pp. 69-81.

Ni Dosheng, leader of the Christian Assemblies and also a prominent businessman of pharmaceutical concerns, was sentenced in 1952 to fifteen years imprisonment as a capitalist and "multiple adulterer."<sup>1</sup> Jing Dianying, founder of the Jesus Family, was also arrested in 1952 and charged with being dictatorial and an adulterer. Leaders of the True Jesus Church were arrested. Their use of faith healing and speaking in tongues was judged "unscientific" and "harmful."<sup>2</sup> Wang Mingdao was arrested in 1955 and sentenced without trial to fifteen years imprisonment. Under extreme pressures of re-education, he wrote a confession and was released. Upon release, however, he denounced his action as a betrayal of his Christian faith and recanted his confession. He was re-imprisoned.<sup>3</sup>

As fundamentalist church leaders were eliminated, the government was able to exert sufficient pressure on their followers to cause them to finally join the Three-Self Movement.<sup>4</sup>

The People's Republic of China encountered greater difficulty in controlling the Catholic Church

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 119.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 119-20.

<sup>3</sup>Lyall, pp. 49-51.    <sup>4</sup>Patterson, pp. 119-20.

than they had with the Protestants. Conscious of their spiritual allegiance to the Vatican and spared the doctrinal and denominational divisions of Protestantism, Catholics presented a far more united front in response to Communist pressures. They were less willing to adapt to their new environment. The Vatican declared that only old age or illness would be grounds for missionaries to leave China. The Catholic Church expected its workers to stay in their assignments and function as well as possible.<sup>1</sup> Communist measures against Chinese Catholics were more severe.

In 1949, there were three million Chinese Roman Catholics. Out of twelve thousand Catholic clergy, more than five thousand were foreigners.<sup>2</sup> Patterson provides a statistical summary of Catholicism's misfortunes at the hands of the Communists:

By the end of 1952, 1,046 priests, brothers, and sisters had been expelled from China, leaving 787 foreign Catholic missionaries still in the country--524 priests, 210 nuns, and 53 brothers. Two archbishops and two bishops had died in prison, 14 more were in prison, 3 more were under house arrest, and 43 had been expelled. In 1951, 19 Chinese priests had been killed or had died in prison, and an unknown of Chinese lay and religious

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 48.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 100.



had died. In 1953 there were still over 300 Chinese priests imprisoned.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>China Missionary Bulletin, Hong Kong, Vol. V (January 1953), p. 1.<sup>1</sup>

Like the Protestants, the Catholics were soon pressured to become self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. Catholicism would be expected to purge itself of its imperialist associations. Missionaries were expelled. Catholic schools and universities were taken over.<sup>2</sup>

Catholic orphanages were subjected to particularly bitter attacks:

The story of Catholic orphanages in China illustrates more than any other the Communist concern to embarrass foreign personnel at any cost. Whereas hospitals were taken over without much fanfare, and the takeover of schools involved charges of espionage and cultural aggression against missionary teachers, the nuns who had worked in orphanages were in numerous cases accused of murdering children, selling their blood for transfusions, plucking out eyes, and eating the food intended for children.

In 1951 the Chinese government, represented by Lu Dingyi and seconded by Zhou Enlai, called upon Chinese Catholic leaders to promote the Church's

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 103.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Richard C. Bush, Jr., Religion in Communist China (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 91.

independence and its severance from imperialist ties. It was proposed that an Independent Catholic Church be established.<sup>1</sup> Catholics were urged to repudiate the Pope, and to denounce "foreign doctrine," "Western theology," and "cultural aggression." Lay committees were formed under governmental encouragement to control church worship, but both foreign and Chinese priests refused to cooperate. In 1951, in Chongqing, Father John Dong publicly defied these efforts. He was arrested.<sup>2</sup> Father Beda Zhang had been chosen by the government to head the Independent Catholic Church, but refused. He was imprisoned and tortured to death.<sup>3</sup>

These two incidents stiffened Catholic opposition, and the government left the Catholics relatively alone for the next several years, focusing first on the problem of Chinese Protestantism.<sup>4</sup>

In 1955, Bishop Ignatius Gong Pingmei, the strongest opponent of the Independent Catholic Church, was arrested along with "a large number of other priests and Catholic laymen."<sup>5</sup> They were accused of counter-revolutionary activity against the government.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Patterson, pp. 102-103.   <sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 103.   <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 104.   <sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 104-105.

The Communists then intensified their elimination of Catholic opposition to the Independent Catholic Church. From 17 June to 13 July 1957, Catholics and government representatives met in Beijing. They organized the National Catholic Patriotic Association. Archbishop Pi Shushi of Shenyang was elected as chairman.<sup>1</sup>

By the fall of 1958, the National Catholic Patriotic Association had consecrated ten bishops.<sup>2</sup> Pope Pius XII condemned the National Catholic Patriotic Association and the ordinations. The new organization responded with a protest that declared

. . . that all 'reactionary orders' and 'supreme excommunications' issued and enforced by the Vatican in the name of religion were 'worthless and invalid,' and affirmed the right of the Chinese Catholic Church to elect their own bishops, because 'the voice of the people is the voice of God.'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>The Catholic Church in China, p.i.<sup>3</sup>

The Communists continued to campaign against Catholics who were loyal to the Vatican and who opposed the Patriotic Association. Latourette states: "In 1958, presumably for unwillingness to conform, 80 priests, 20 sisters, and 400 laymen were reported to

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<sup>1</sup>Bush, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>Latourette, Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 399.

<sup>3</sup>Patterson, p. 108.

have been compelled to spend months under Communist indoctrination."<sup>1</sup>

### Christians Go Underground

By 1958, the People's Republic of China had made puppets of the formal, institutional Protestant and Catholic churches. Church attendance, once so large, had dropped to almost nothing.

After 1958, Christianity became a less formal operation. Underground churches, known also as "house churches," came into being. They continued to meet in small groups of people, to study scriptures, and to worship God as best they could. Patterson quotes Jack Chow's article in the 12 March 1962 issue of the Hong Kong Standard:

Although the visible and formal churches are dying out on the mainland, the invisible, formless, non-political and true ones are growing in number in Shanghai, Nanking, Peking and other towns and cities.<sup>2</sup>

These house churches carried out evangelical activities as best they could, given the constraints under which they operated and their need for secrecy. In so doing, they simply continued Christian efforts that had gone on since 1949. In the years following

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<sup>1</sup>Twentieth Century Outside Europe, p. 400.

<sup>2</sup>p. 130.

1949, evangelical activities actually intensified. Many Christians, realizing that it was only a matter of time before the Communists would liquidate the independent churches, took advantage of Communism's still-incomplete control and proselyted as much as they could. Leslie T. Lyall reports of successful missionary efforts throughout China, especially in the more remote areas such as Inner Mongolia, Turkestan, and Xinjiang.<sup>1</sup> Mary Wang, a medical student in Shanghai during this time, personally participated in vigorous witnessing activities conducted by local churches.<sup>2</sup> The larger cities enjoyed more religious freedom for a longer time than did the smaller cities and rural areas.<sup>3</sup>

After 1958, reports of hidden Christian consistently emerged from the People's Republic of China.

Patterson cites another example in Jack Chow's article:

. . . one of the arrivals in Hong Kong, the wife of a former professor at Peking University, belonged to a small prayer group of four Christian women prior to her departure from Shanghai. She says that there are many such small groups formed by people whose churches have either been shut down or taken over by the Communists. They meet irregularly but not infrequently at different homes for prayer meetings, Bible study, and fellowship. They have won many souls who have found God a great help in time of trouble. When they pray together

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<sup>1</sup>pp. 52-58.    <sup>2</sup>Wang, pp. 63-64, 76, 89.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

they do not kneel and their meetings, which have no form of any sort, are usually short because they do not wish to invite trouble.<sup>1</sup>

Although such clandestine religious activity could not seriously challenge the authority of the Chinese regime, the government was sufficiently troubled to publish its concerns:

Since 1963 at least fifteen major articles and scores of lesser articles on religion have appeared, almost all of them in the widely circulated secular press, not the religious press. . . . an editorial in Tien Feng [the publishing arm of the Three-Self Movement] (March 31, 1965), indicated that the Communist authorities were still far from being happy about the state of Christian witness in China.<sup>2</sup>

The 16 September 1966 issue of Christianity Today states:

But it is also noteworthy that in Communist China, amid the most oppressive form of national socialism, the church has not only survived but is spreading to the point of causing considerable concern to the Communist leaders. During the past two years newspapers and journals have carried widespread public debates on religion. In this highly regimented society, where the lives of people are organized and scrutinized at every level, officials are forced to admit that there are 'underground home congregations,' 'unpatriotic elements who hold religion above the state,' 'counter-revolutionaries with reactionary religious beliefs' (a term usually applied to 'fundamentalists'), and so on.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>p. 131.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 103-31.

<sup>3</sup>"Red Guards Spur Attack on Christian Remnant in Communist China," Christianity Today 9:30.

Although they were weak puppets of the government, the formal Protestant and Catholic churches suffered severely during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. In 1966 the Red Guards closed down and desecrated all churches. Adeney states:

Christians were humiliated. Bibles and other Christian books were burned. Christian homes were ransacked by zealous Red Guards eager to seek out and destroy everything connected with religious observances. The Christian population within prisons and labor camps increased. Those who had sought to survive through holding membership in the Three-Self Movement now found themselves obliged either to deny the faith or join with secret disciples in hidden cell groups.<sup>1</sup>

The Cultural Revolution forced clandestine Christians to go even deeper underground. One could no longer maintain a public witness, even in the watered-down Marxist context of the official churches. To remain a Christian was an act of courage. Bush provides a gruesome account of atrocities against Christians:

Boiling hot tea was poured on the head of an evangelist's wife while she, her husband, and the minister were made to kneel all night next to a fire fed by Bibles, hymnbooks, and religious materials . . . [by] Red Guard youths estimated to be from eight to twenty years old.

Letters from reliable sources tell of . . . an elder's wife [in South Fukien who] was falsely accused and dragged through the streets of one city; when she fainted the family were not allowed

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<sup>1</sup>p. 37.

to carry her to the former English Presbyterian Hospital. After some delay permission was granted to her older son to care for her, but she died shortly after.

Red Guard groups tore down the cross from the church in this same city, broke all the windows and forced the old pastor to kneel on the broken glass. Then he was shot.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>China Notes VI (July, 1968), 5.<sup>1</sup>

Such examples appear to be representative of what happened to Christians who were exposed during the Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution was the culmination of Communist attempts to subdue Christianity. Before 1966, subjugation had been attempted through accusation meetings, thought reform, and patriotic realignment of the churches. Although physical violence had occurred, it was the exception. The Cultural Revolution now sought to force people to renounce their faith through arbitrary church closures and physical abuse. "During the Cultural Revolution in 1965, the institutional church practically disappeared."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bush, pp. 258-59.

<sup>2</sup>David H. Adeney, "China: What's Ahead for Christians?" Christian Herald 102 (May 1979):34.



Chinese Christianity Since the Cultural  
Revolution: An Introduction

During the Cultural Revolution, many people seemed justified in their gloomy pronouncements concerning Chinese Christianity. Events that have occurred since the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution, though, have shown that Christianity has not only survived thirty years of governmentally-inspired Communist persecution, but has also begun to flourish in a major and sustained revival. In many ways the Chinese Christian community is perhaps stronger and built on firmer ground than before 1949. Not only was the good seed planted by Christian missionaries not uprooted, it was pruned and trimmed by difficulties, thereby making it stronger.

Those who proclaimed the failure of Chinese Christianity were perhaps premature in their judgments. Although they correctly criticized Chinese Christianity for its inability to become a mainstream influence in Chinese life, and for failing to reach broad segments of the Chinese population, their use of the word "failure" was too final. Although Christianity may have been only narrowly planted, it went deep. It has shown a remarkable staying power since 1949. Perhaps survival can be interpreted as success.

It certainly raises plausible hopes for success in the future.

Chinese Christianity was perhaps even helped by Communism. Communist demands that Chinese churches divorce themselves from financial and cultural dependence on Western churches forced Chinese Christians to more thoroughly sinicize themselves. Communist persecution also separated wheat from chaff in the churches. That which survived persecution was strong and healthy, without the many weaknesses that plagued pre-1949 Christianity. In its more sinicized form, it will perhaps have greater appeal for the Chinese people. Communist attacks against superstition and traditional beliefs have perhaps removed barriers that long prevented China's accepting Christianity. Character simplification and widespread use of putonghua, language reforms vigorously pursued by the Communists, will greatly ease communication problems in spreading the Christian message.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity has begun to exploit China's spiritual malaise in tentative ways. The jury is still out as to whether or not Chinese Christianity failed.

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<sup>1</sup>Silas Hong, in his book The Dragon Net: How God Has Used Communism to Prepare China for the Gospel, examines the implications of language reform for Christianity in great detail, pp. 80-90.

It can still fail. But as this paper will show, there is now much more reason to hope for Chinese Christianity's ultimate success in reaching large segments of the Chinese people, and in becoming influential in the life of the Chinese nation.

### Christian Revival

The liberalization that followed Mao Zedong's death has resulted in a surge of Christian activity in the People's Republic of China. China's newly revived Christian community, however, did not spontaneously spring up in the more fertile soil of liberalization. During the persecutions of the Cultural Revolution, committed Christians nurtured their faith in small groups. They gathered in clandestine, irregular, and informal meetings in believers' homes. As the Cultural Revolution waned, religious conditions began to improve. The need for Christian secrecy lessened.<sup>1</sup>

House church activity became less secret in the early 1970s. This was primarily in the coastal sections of southeast China (Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Fujian), where Christians had been the most

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<sup>1</sup>Adeney, "China: What's Ahead for Christians?" pp. 34-35.

thoroughly established before 1949.<sup>1</sup> In 1972 and 1973, groups of two hundred to three hundred people, mostly young, attended house church meetings in rural areas of southern Fujian. By 1974, upwards of three hundred to four hundred people were congregating together in Fujian. This was discontinued by the government. In that same year, in Wenzhou, it was reported that Christians were still meeting together in house groups. Young people were being converted to Christianity and were holding semi-annual retreats. In Zhejiang such retreats drew crowds of sixty to seventy people.<sup>2</sup>

Well into 1976, such meetings were dangerous. If discovered by governmental authorities, the participants were persecuted. In 1977, it was reported that Christians were still meeting in southern Fujian, weekly changing the location of their meetings.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to give an exact time when house churches and other forms of unofficial Christianity truly came out of the closet. By 1978, though, there

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<sup>1</sup>Blair Seitz, "The Church in China: An Interview with Jonathon Chao," New World Outlook, n.s. 40 (November 1979):28-29.

<sup>2</sup>Christopher Morris, comp., "Christianity in Mainland China: A Chronology," China and the Church Today 1 (March-April 1980):4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

was a great deal of open worship and fellowship. This rapidly accelerated in 1979 and 1980. By 1978, rumors began to surface that many Christian prisoners were being released in the Shanghai area. Reports in that same year from Tianjin indicated that Christians in that city were visiting Christian friends and relatives in other areas of northern China. In 1978, a Chinese emigré returned to China to visit her father. She discovered that her father preached to small groups in the Shantou (Swatow) area. These meetings were attended mostly by young people.<sup>1</sup>

Large amounts of religious material began to be clandestinely taken into China. Customs officials, with varying degrees of vigilance, have generally allowed these materials to enter China. "Professional couriers, who, by their many trips across the border are familiar with search procedures, make regular trips and turn Bibles over to contacts in Canton; these then pass on to church groups far in the interior by a kind of 'underground railroad.'"<sup>2</sup>

Religious broadcasts beamed towards the People's Republic of China also began to receive strong response. The Far Eastern Broadcasting Company received over

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.    <sup>2</sup>Covell, p. 16.

eleven thousand letters from within the People's Republic of China in response to their broadcasts in 1979.<sup>1</sup>

Wang Mingdao, a firm opponent of the official Protestant church, was released from prison in the first part of 1980.<sup>2</sup>

As the situation for the house churches slowly and gradually improved, the religious situation for the official churches also began to improve. Formal, public religious services of the National Catholic Patriotic Association began again in 1971. Three-Self Movement religious services resumed in 1972. These were regarded as a cosmetic designed for foreign consumption, following the thaw in Sino-American relations occasioned by Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972. To attend one of these services in Beijing, one had to register the Friday before the Sunday service. Attendance was quite sparse.<sup>3</sup> Donald MacInnis notes that in 1974 there were only two

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<sup>1</sup>"A Steady Flow of Response Mail From Mainland China Listeners to Christian Broadcasts Continues," Christianity Today 24 (22 February 1980):53.

<sup>2</sup>"Religious Thaw in China Produces Wang's Release," Christianity Today 24 (7 March 1980):52.

<sup>3</sup>David Adeney, "The China Watch," Christianity Today 19 (21 November 1975):10.

churches officially open in all of China. He states: "The Protestant service one Sunday that September drew only 17 worshippers, just three of them Chinese. There was no sermon, only a liturgy."<sup>1</sup>

From such timid re-awakenings, however, came the revival of the Three-Self Movement and the National Catholic Patriotic Association. M. O. Williams, Jr. states that the Three-Self Movement began to function again in 1977.<sup>2</sup> By 1978, the Religious Affairs Bureau was said to have been reactivated and an Institute for Religious Studies organized. Christians once again appeared in the ranks of Chinese governmental leadership. In 1978 and 1979, former churches underwent repairs and were re-opened.<sup>3</sup> On 6 January 1979, a consultative conference for religious leaders was called in Beijing. Sixteen days later, the Hong Kong Ta-kung Pao reported that the Religious Affairs Bureau in Shanghai had resumed operation.<sup>4</sup> It rehabilitated

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<sup>1</sup>"Religious Revival in China," Christian Century 98 (1 April 1981):346.

<sup>2</sup>M. O. Williams, Jr., "Protestantism in China Today," New World Outlook, n.s. 41 (February 1981):18-19.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Jonathon Chao, "Religious Opening?" China and the Church Today 1 (March-April 1979):1.

"800 religious 'patriotic personnel' of all religions after a major conference."<sup>1</sup> In February 1979, Kunming hosted a national conference on religious studies, attended by more than one hundred religious scholars and Religious Affairs Bureau personnel.<sup>2</sup>

In March 1980, the Standing Committee of the Three-Self Movement convened for the first time in ten years.<sup>3</sup> From 6-13 October 1980, the Three-Self Movement held its Third National Christian Congress. One hundred seventy-six representatives gathered in Nanjing from twenty-five provinces. All were Christians. This was the first national congress held in twenty years.<sup>4</sup>

This latter meeting was political in nature, in that it supported re-unification with Taiwan and efforts towards modernization and opposed hegemonism. However, there were indications that the Three-Self Movement was seriously attempting to establish its bona fides as a religious organization. The Congress vowed to defend religious freedom and to help the

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, p. 5.    <sup>2</sup>Chao, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Williams, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>"China's Three-Self Congress Makes Rehabilitation of Religion Official," Christianity Today 25 (2 January 1981):46.



government carry out its guarantees in this regard.<sup>1</sup> The Three-Self Movement has begun to impress foreign observers in the last two years with its religious viability. It now seems to be more than a rubber-stamp organization for Chinese governmental policy. MacInnis observes:

There is also agreement that both Catholics and Protestants have developed authentic new structures for reconstituting at local, regional, and national levels a self-supporting church that has its own integrity and is not dependent on either government or outside sources for funding and leadership.<sup>2</sup>

The Third National Christian Congress of the Three-Self Movement established a Chinese Christian Council. This is to implement the policies of the Three-Self Movement. Bishop Ding Kuangxun was elected as president of the Council.<sup>3</sup> Regional and local branches of this council are elected by church members.<sup>4</sup>

There are plausible reasons for the greater religious integrity of the official Protestant and Catholic churches. MacInnis refers to the "post-Cultural Revolution commitment by government leaders

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," p. 348.

<sup>3</sup>"Congress Makes Religion Official," p. 46.

<sup>4</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," p. 346.

to enforce constitutional guarantees of freedom of religious belief that were announced in 1979. The new legal code provides prison terms for officials who obstruct this freedom."<sup>1</sup> Such a commitment, made possible by the more moderate political environment, caused the Chinese government to refurbish the official churches:

The Chinese authorities, recognizing that believers had been alienated by a suppressive policy, decided to bring them back into the mainstream of national life. They need the Christians' full support in achieving national goals of construction and modernization. 'To do this,' comments Wing-on Pang of the China Research Center in Hong Kong, 'religion must first be granted recognition and disgraced religious leaders rehabilitated. Religion must then be organized and controlled so that its strengths may be channeled in the desired direction.'<sup>2</sup>

MacInnis further mentions that "Chinese Christians believe that the government's intention to implement and preserve religious freedom is genuine, and they are counting on this policy as they devote their efforts to restoring the full array of church activities."<sup>3</sup> Deng Xiaoping recently said: "I couldn't care less about

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>2</sup>"Congress Makes Religion Official," p. 46.

<sup>3</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," p. 349.

people's religious beliefs as long as they observe the law and work hard."<sup>1</sup>

The Protestant Nanjing Theological Seminary re-opened in March 1981. Five hundred students applied for admission. Forty-seven were accepted. There are now six universities in China with centers for sociologically-oriented religious studies: the first lecture at Nanjing University on Christianity drew one thousand people.<sup>2</sup>

The Three-Self Movement has begun again to publish Christian materials. In 1980, 85,000 complete Chinese Bibles and fifty thousand Chinese New Testaments and Psalms were published. The Nanjing Theological Seminary is preparing a new translation of the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

The Three-Self Movement is also beginning to end its isolation from Protestants outside China. In April 1981, Bishop Ding headed an official Chinese

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<sup>1</sup>J. Spae, Church and China: Towards Reconciliation? (Chicago: Institute of Theology and Culture, 1980), p. 52, cited by Donald MacInnis, "The North American Churches and China, 1949-1981," International Bulletin of Missionary Research 5 (April 1981):50.

<sup>2</sup>Richard N. Ostling, "Let a Hundred Churches Bloom," Time, 4 May 1981, pp. 54-55.

<sup>3</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," p. 347.

Protestant delegation to an Asian Christian consultation in Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup>

Catholics have also enjoyed revival. In the 25 January 1980 issue of Christianity Today, it was reported that a new bishop for Beijing had recently been ordained by the reactivated Patriotic Association. Beijing's bishopric had been left vacant for fifteen years. Fu Tieshan was unilaterally ordained. Negotiations had been entered into with the Vatican on this matter. They collapsed, however, because the Holy See insisted that it name all bishops for China.<sup>2</sup>

In May and June of 1980, Catholics met in Beijing. National, regional, and local structures were once again set up for the National Catholic Patriotic Association. A new primate was selected.<sup>3</sup> A Catholic Church Affairs Commission was created to

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<sup>1</sup>"An Official Protestant Delegation from China Took Part in an Asia Christian Consultation in Hong Kong Last Month," Christianity Today 25 (4 May 1981): 73.

<sup>2</sup>"China's Catholic National Patriotic Association--Regarded as Official by the Government but Deviant by the Vatican--Went Ahead and Consecrated the Bishop for Peking," 24:53.

<sup>3</sup>"Congress Makes Religion Official," p. 46.

formulate and direct church policy. A Catholic seminary is scheduled to open in Beijing later this year.<sup>1</sup>

Donald MacInnis, commenting on his visit to the Wuhan Catholic Diocese, noted several facts that are representative of a China-wide Catholic revival. In Wuhan Diocese, priests and nuns are leaving secular jobs and returning to religious work. Churches are being repaired. Five thousand people, many of them young, attended Christmas service in Wuhan. Christmas-time also saw eighteen baptisms. There are Bible study groups and catechism classes. Bishop Dong Guanqing said "many people have offered themselves as candidates for study in the new seminary."<sup>2</sup>

The renewed vitality of the official Catholic and Protestant churches has attracted many Chinese. Over one hundred Protestant churches and forty Catholic churches throughout China have reopened.<sup>3</sup> More churches open each month, and the rate is increasing. This has spread even to remote cities in the interior.

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<sup>1</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," p. 346.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 347.   <sup>3</sup>Ostling, p. 54.

Church services are packed; a high percentage of the congregations are young people under thirty.<sup>1</sup> Observers who have attended such services are impressed with their vigor. They note the religious integrity found in the sermons.<sup>2</sup> This year, thousands of Christians celebrated Easter on the Great Wall. Three thousand Catholics celebrated Christmas Eve mass in Wuxi in 1980.<sup>3</sup> The Protestant Western District Church of Beijing opened in July 1980. It "is also filled to capacity each Sunday."<sup>4</sup> This church recently baptized thirty-four people by immersion in one baptismal service.<sup>5</sup> The Protestant Ci An Tang in Guangzhou averages a total Sunday attendance of about two thousand people. Over half are under thirty. Such examples appear to be representative of China's religious revival. All areas of China are responding to the new appeal of the official churches.<sup>6</sup> Even Xinjiang is not excepted.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," pp. 346-48.

<sup>2</sup>"Worship and Prayer in Canton," China and the Church Today 2 (January-February 1980):4-5; Ostling, p. 54; Williams, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Ostling, p. 54.    <sup>4</sup>Williams, p. 17.    <sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," p. 348.

<sup>7</sup>Ostling, p. 54.

The official Protestant and Catholic churches are becoming significant and vigorous parts of Chinese Christianity. The unofficial house churches, though, have many more adherents than these official churches. House churches are throughout China, but are centered most heavily in southeast China.<sup>1</sup> They are often heavily rural in nature.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution did not affect the Chinese countryside nearly as much as it did the urban areas. This would have allowed rural Christian groups to maintain a stronger presence during persecutions, and to be in a stronger position for expansion under liberalized political conditions.

These house churches are generally left alone by the authorities.<sup>3</sup> Although southeast China enjoys greater freedom for churches, activities seem to be less open, more restricted, and more clandestine in the interior and northern regions of China. More than one thousand people frequently attend a single house

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<sup>1</sup>Seitz, pp. 28-29.

<sup>2</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," p. 346; Ostling, p. 54; Leona Choy, "Book of the Acts in New China," Global Church Growth Bulletin 17 (November-December 1980):69-72.

<sup>3</sup>"Congress Makes Religion Official," p. 47.

church gathering. "The most conservative experts say that [house churches now number] more than the 20,000 Protestant places of worship that existed in 1949."<sup>1</sup>

House churches are generally very loosely structured groups of believing Christians. They are fundamentalist in outlook and fervent in their evangelization. Their religion is highly emotional and exuberant. Prayer, Bible study, and Christian witness are emphasized.<sup>2</sup>

Ostling's article in Time reports "a peddler who lives in a rural area of Henan province claims that at each of three baptizing ceremonies in his commune over the past year, 300 to 400 people became Christians."<sup>3</sup> The man belongs to a loose network of house churches which are growing rapidly, especially in farm villages. Ostling further states: "Stories of conversions and whispered claims of miraculous healings spread from village to village."<sup>4</sup> MacInnis reports that the whole Wenzhou area has fifty thousand Christians. It has seen revivals sweep through whole villages and districts.<sup>5</sup> Paul Kauffman reports that

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.; Williams, p. 16; Choy, pp. 69-72; Ostling, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>p. 54. <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," p. 346.



the tribal people of south China, who before 1949 were receptive to Christianity, maintained their faith through the difficult years. They "are sharing in the general pattern of amazing church growth now common throughout the PRC."<sup>1</sup> He reports that tribal people meet in the mountain caves common to south China and that gatherings of more than two thousand people are "commonplace." Christianity is even spreading to previously impenetrable Tibet. Fifty Tibetans were baptized on Christmas Day, 1979.<sup>2</sup> Ted and Leona Choy, emigré Chinese Christians, made a recent trip to their native region in southeast China. They reported vigorous, flourishing Christian activity. In one area, baptismal services had to be cut back because they were attracting too much attention. The Choy's reported one account of two hundred baptisms in one week in one area.<sup>3</sup>

These are evidently not isolated instances:

The present unprecedented church growth in China began its acceleration shortly after the most violent period of the current regime, namely the Cultural Revolution. From 1969 onward, it is believed that millions of new believers have found

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<sup>1</sup>"Dramatic Church Growth in China," Global Church Growth Bulletin 17 (November-December 1980):76.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. <sup>3</sup>pp. 69-72.

their way into the Christian community. Totally disillusioned by the obvious spiritual bankruptcy of Maoism, they began to find reality and solace in Christ. By 1977, when China began to open its doors there was a definite growth pattern of the Christian community in every province in China. The best estimates place the number of Christians now in China at between 4 and 6 million.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity now enjoys much greater freedom in China. This increased freedom has allowed Chinese churches to experience vigorous growth. However, Chinese churches still suffer from significant limitations placed upon Christian activity. Evangelical activities cannot be directed towards government personnel or to people under eighteen years of age. Religious speeches cannot be given and printed religious materials cannot be distributed without prior approval from the Religious Affairs Bureau. Religious meetings and proselyting activities can be conducted only in approved church buildings. Contact with and/or financial help from foreign religious organizations is forbidden. Fortunately, observers say that these restrictions are not enforced uniformly. Some house church meetings, ostensibly illegal, are so large that they must be held in schools or other public buildings. This requires consent by local authorities, which is

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<sup>1</sup>Kauffman, p. 75.

given. It is also not illegal to listen to religious broadcasts. Although Bibles being taken into China in large quantities have been confiscated, it is allowed to take Bibles through customs. Significant restrictions still confine Chinese Christianity. However, they often seem to be enforced rather casually, allowing greater de facto freedom of religion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Congress Makes Religion Official," p. 46.

## CHAPTER III

### CURRENT TRENDS IN CHINESE CHRISTIANITY

#### Liberalization

Both within and without the pale of China's official churches, evidences of a sustained Christian revival in China are numerous and convincing. Forcibly cut off from outside help, Christians were forced to rely on their own resources, abilities, and faith. They experienced severe repression and survived. They are now rapidly increasing in numbers and in strength. In a way that the Communist government never conceived, they are now truly self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. The Communists were able to engineer the puppet-like collapse of the formal churches, but they were not able to prevent Chinese Christianity from pursuing its own course. The greater the repression, the deeper Christians went underground. They still maintained their religious faith. The increased religious integrity of the reconstituted Three-Self Movement and the National Catholic Patriotic Association, and the government's tolerance of the house churches indicate that the Communists have decided to allow the

Christian community to more fully exercise the prerogatives of faith. Repression has obviously failed. Bishop Ding Kuangxun explains why in simple terms: "In order to get religious people to take part in national reconstruction, they had to respect religious faith."<sup>1</sup> Donald MacInnis elaborates:

As for the government's reasons for the policy of allowing greater religious freedom, Xiao Xianfa, director of the Religious Affairs Bureau, candidly reflected the leaders' pragmatic views when he said that all of China's people, including religious believers, are needed for the program of modernization.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, if Christians cannot be beaten, then grant them freedom. Then they might help in tackling China's problems.

This attitude of the government assumes that religion will eventually die off on its own. Although religion showed more staying power than expected, it is still destined to submit to Marxism. Robert L. Niklaus elaborates:

This policy was summarized in the publication Renmin Ribao last year [1979]: 'Before people have thoroughly transformed their beliefs . . . we must recognize, permit and respect the beliefs of the masses of the people. This is in order to enable them to adopt the Party and government's propaganda and education during the "Three Revolution Movement," which concerns the social realities of the opposities of belief and unbelief,

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<sup>1</sup>Ostling, pp. 54-55.

<sup>2</sup>"Religious Revival in China," p. 349.

superstition and science, and idealism and materialism. In this way they will then arrive at the correct conclusion and throw off these kinds of spiritual shackles.

A Peking official sent to Shanghai to reassure church leaders put the government's policy more succinctly: 'We still believe Communism will overcome Christianity--but it may take 10,000 years.'<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the government of the People's Republic of China still explicitly opposes religion:

. . . the official Marxist view of religion has not changed, as can be seen from an article by Ren Jiyu, director of the Institute for Study of World Religions in Beijing (Peking): 'Therefore we can say religious theology on the one hand and science and revolution on the other cannot tolerate each other, just as religious theology on the one hand and social progress and historical development on the other hand cannot tolerate each other.' For these reasons, 'the abolition of . . . religious authority has become an important responsibility . . . in the democratic revolution.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ren Jiyu, "Investigate Religion and Criticize Theology," Kuang Ming Daily, Set. 27, 1977, in IDOC (International Documentation on the Contemporary Church), Bulletin no. 12 (December 1979), p. 17.<sup>2</sup>

Should Christianity become a significant enough presence in Chinese life that it belies Communist beliefs in its natural death, the People's Republic of China might well try again to subdue it, deciding that the temporary advantages of help from the religious

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<sup>1</sup>Robert L. Niklaus, "China: What Future Religion?" Evangelical Missions Quarterly 15 (October 1980):238.

<sup>2</sup>Donald MacInnis, "The North American Churches," p. 50.

sector are outweighed by any threat posed to Marxism by religion. For the present, however, China's leaders have decided that it is in China's best interests to tolerate religion.

China's official churches are profiting from this liberalization. In the 1950s, when they were simply a means for the government to subdue Christianity, they lost their adherents. Now that the government is attempting to use them as a relatively free channel for genuine religious expression, these churches are experiencing revival. The house churches are also profiting from governmental tolerance. Although their adherents would no doubt remain loyal should the government once again crack down on religion, liberalization has been central to their expansion and evangelism.

Problems and Conflicts in Protestantism  
and Catholicism

Some house church evangelicals also attend services of the Three-Self Movement, to maintain an evangelical witness within government-sponsored Protestantism.<sup>1</sup> This may bridge the tensions and distrust between the Three-Self Movement and the house churches. When the Three-Self Movement first reappeared, it sought "to require the house churches to

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<sup>1</sup>"Congress Makes Religion Official," pp. 46-47.

rejoin them."<sup>1</sup> Recently, though, Bishop Ding has recognized all house churches as a legitimate part of China's Protestant community.<sup>2</sup> He expressed hope that the Three-Self Movement and the house churches can cooperate.<sup>3</sup>

The tentative beginnings of harmony notwithstanding, however, many in the house churches remain apart. They vividly remember the liberal-conservative conflicts of the 1950s and the perversion of the formal denominations by the Three-Self Movement. Doctrinally conservative, they are suspicious of what they regard as the Three-Self Movement's liberalism. They can see the political elements that remain in the Three-Self Movement, but are reluctant to acknowledge the religious integrity the Three-Self Movement has gained. A deep gulf exists between these two streams of Protestantism.<sup>4</sup>

Protestants are not the only ones divided into official and unofficial groups of believers. Evidently

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<sup>1</sup>"House Churches in China Have Become More Public and More Numerous," Christianity Today 24 (7 March 1980):54.

<sup>2</sup>Ostling, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup>"Congress Makes Religion Official," pp. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



many Chinese Catholics have not yet accepted the National Catholic Patriotic Association. These Catholics remained loyal to the Vatican throughout all the persecutions; they have rejected those bishops ordained by the Patriotic Church. Only eight out of forty-one Catholic bishops in China were appointed by the Vatican. Ostling quotes one Chinese Catholic loyal to the Holy See: "Many of us grew up together and shared the sufferings of being Catholic. There isn't a single one who will go to a patriotic church."<sup>1</sup> Such Catholics conduct private services in their homes.<sup>2</sup> Ostling indicates that most Chinese Catholics have failed to accept the Patriotic Church.<sup>3</sup>

Although Catholicism has participated in China's religious revival, it faces special problems. Chinese Catholics are numbered by Niklaus at roughly two million today.<sup>4</sup> This is roughly two-thirds the number of Catholics in 1949, when Catholics outnumbered

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<sup>1</sup>Ostling, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>Frank Ching, "China Rejects Pope's Pick for Archbishop, Further Taxing Ties," Asian Wall Street Journal Weekly, 15 June 1981, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>p. 55.

<sup>4</sup>"China: What Future Religion?" p. 240.

Protestants almost four to one. The Protestant community is now twice the size of the Catholic community, numbering five million adherents.<sup>1</sup>

There are probably several reasons for this reversal. Catholicism is much more dependent on a formal church structure than is Protestantism. When their church was weakened and perverted by Communist control and finally collapsed during the Cultural Revolution, devout Catholics had few desirable options. Some expressed their faith through private worship at home. But this denied them important sacraments which are central to their faith. Catholics had no priests to conduct mass, bless the sacrament, and hear confession. Some Catholics associated with non-denominational house groups which diluted the distinctiveness of their Catholic faith. For both reasons, Catholic ranks suffered greater attrition. Nonetheless, many Chinese Catholics remained remarkably faithful during the most difficult years.

Even as the National Catholic Patriotic Association reasserts itself, it experiences problems caused by its dependence on a formal church structure. Thirty years of repression have seriously depleted the ranks of priests, nuns, and catechists. For more than twenty

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<sup>1</sup>Ostling, p. 55.

years no Catholics were ordained to the priesthood and no theological training was given. Beijing now has only ten priests to care for ten thousand Catholics. In the areas surrounding Beijing, the situation is worse. Only "one or two" priests serve twenty thousand Catholics. Almost all priests are over sixty.<sup>1</sup> MacInnis comments on the difficulties faced by the Catholic Church:

In many ways, paradox characterizes the Catholic Church in China today. For example, a strong and dedicated laity made survival possible during the years of repression; but now the primary role of the clergy and hierarchy is being revived. As a corollary, the survival of the church in rural areas through difficult years shows the grass-roots strength of the faith; yet the shortage of priests puts great strains on the sacramental life of believers.<sup>2</sup>

Isolated from world Catholicism, the Patriotic church still conducts mass in Latin.<sup>3</sup> It is more doctrinally conservative than the world church. It has ambivalent feelings towards the Vatican, but fearing the weakening effects of isolation, it desires reconciliation with it. However, it resents Vatican rejection of its unilateral ordinations. Many Chinese Catholics feel that had such ordinations not been made,

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<sup>1</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," p. 347.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 350.   <sup>3</sup>Ostling, p. 54.

the church would have lost the hierarchical continuity necessary for its revival.<sup>1</sup> MacInnis quotes a Chinese Catholic bishop who has remained loyal to Rome:

The future of the church looks hopeful now. But the cycles of politics and history are unpredicable. The way must be prepared to restore relations with the Vatican and with the church universal. We cannot abandon the church in China. If it remains totally isolated, little by little it will die . . .<sup>2</sup>

Such hopes for reconciliation between the Patriotic Association and the Vatican were clouded by the Patriotic Association's rejection of Pope John Paul II's appointment of Bishop Dominic Deng Yiming as an archbishop for Guangdong. When Bishop Deng's appointment was announced, it had been assumed that the Vatican had obtained tacit consent from the Patriotic Association. The Patriotic Association, however, denounced Deng's appointment as interference in the affairs of China's Catholic Church. This is a major setback to Pope John Paul II's attempts to effect a reconciliation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>MacInnis, "Religious Revival in China," pp. 349-50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 350.

<sup>3</sup>Ching, "China Rejects Pope's Archbishop," p. 2.

### Post-Denominationalism

Like the Catholics, liturgical "high" Protestant churches also suffered decline. But a significant portion of the pre-1958 Protestant community was "low" church, lacking in ritual, informal in structure, and lay in nature.<sup>1</sup> Many such churches tended not to consider themselves as denominations or as Protestant, but simply as Christians. Such churches were able to ride the waves of persecution with far fewer ill effects than the "high" churches. Their loose structures were far more suited to the requirements of informal underground worship than was the structure of the liturgical churches. Their fundamentalism also provided them with the determination to endure repression. It is from this community that the house churches sprang up. House church Christians vastly outnumber the adherents of the Three-Self Movement.

Communist repression blurred the denominational landscape in another way. Persecutions made denominational issues less important. Rather than maintaining one's denominational distinctiveness, maintaining one's faith as a Christian became the primary goal. Because Christian activities were greatly restricted, one was glad simply to be able to associate with two or three

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<sup>1</sup>For example, the True Jesus Church, the Assembly Hall Church, and independent churches such as the one pastored by Wang Mingdao.

fellow Christians in secret, regardless of minor differences in belief concerning Christian doctrine.

All these reasons have contributed to what religious observers now call China's "post-denominational" situation.<sup>1</sup> This post-denominationalism is well-suited to the fundamentalist house churches. House churches, like their "low" church predecessors, tend not to think of themselves as denominations, but simply as Christians. Such post-denominationalism is reinforced by the union nature of the Three-Self Movement. The Three-Self Movement was supposed to solve the denominational conflicts of pre-1949 Protestantism. Today, it represents one uniform Protestantism for all of China.

#### Reasons for Growth

Why are the Christian churches growing so rapidly in China?

Religious freedom in the People's Republic of China is now as great as it was in the early 1950s. The degree of religious freedom seems to be increasing. Religious freedom differs in degree according to geographic locale. Some local governments allow

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<sup>1</sup>Donald MacInnis, "The North American Churches," p. 64.

greater latitude of religious expression than do others. However, there is enough religious freedom throughout China that people everywhere are responding eagerly to the spiritual alternatives offered by Christianity.

There is a great spiritual void in China, especially among young people. Thomas B. Gold, in an article in the 18 May 1981 issue of the Asian Wall Street Journal Weekly, states:

Young people in China's cities tend to have several characteristics in common. They are alienated and cynical after two decades of national and local power struggles and the more recent public criticism of Mao Tse-tung himself. . . . Former Reg Guards are the same age as the republic. They spent their formative years during the period of greatest revolutionary optimism and elan. They have born the brunt of every policy twist and turn since. . . . Teenagers and those around 20 years old were born or were children at the height of the Cultural Revolution chaos, and so had little formal education or moral training. Many seem to lack a social conscience or sense of higher purpose. . . . With rare candor, the authorities have publicly acknowledged both the existence and scale of China's youth problem.<sup>1</sup>

More than thirty years of Communist rule have been punctuated by frequent and violent reversals in governmental policy. Purges, rehabilitations, factional disputes, doctrinaire fanaticism, and economic chaos have preated a yearning for a system of values that can

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<sup>1</sup>"Alienated Youth Cloud China's Future," p. 13.

provide a coherent and consistent meaning for one's life. Robert L. Niklaus provides further insights:

Pragmatism on the part of the authorities dovetails with growing interest in religion among the masses. Fox Butterfield in the New York Times lists some of the reasons for grass roots interest: 'Churchmen have privately pointed to China's new problems of unemployment, crime and housing shortages and disillusionment with the Communist Party after years of confusing political campaigns.'

Rev. Yin Jizeng, pastor of the Peking Christian Church, puts his finger on the primary cause for the renaissance of religion: 'During the time of the Gang of Four the people's hearts had no spiritual relief.'<sup>1</sup>

Donald MacInnis talks about Christianity's attraction for the younger generation of Chinese, those who were educated and nurtured in the turbulent context of Maoist values:

Where do these young people come from after their years of education in materialist values? Father Sheng Baodz of Shanghai, commenting about the first class to receive baptism since the re-opening of his church, said that some of the youth who attend are from devout Catholic homes. Yet many others--no one knows how many--are 'searchers' (mu dao you) from non-religious homes. They represent a crisis of faith among young people, dramatized by the outpouring of letters sent to the national magazine Chinese Youth last year in response to a letter by a 23 year-old woman worker who asked the question, 'What is the meaning of life, after all?'

In her letter Pan Xiao wrote: 'I am now 23 years old. It should be that I have begun to experience life. Instead, now all the profound mysteries and fascinations associated with life do not appeal to me. It seems that I am at the dead end of my life. . . . The path which I tread leads from bright crimson to pale white,

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<sup>1</sup>"China: What Future Religion?" pp. 238-39.



from hope to despair. . . .'

When younger, she had embraced high ideals: 'One should live for the betterment of other people. One should be noble-minded and ready to give up all for a worthy cause. I was intoxicated with passion for self-sacrificing for the party and the state.' But the bitter experiences of conflict within her family, betrayal by friends, and abandonment by her fiance left her embittered and asking: 'Life, is this the mystery you try to reveal? Is the ultimate end nothing more than a dead body?'

Pan Xiao's lament brought replies from young people in every province in China. Within three months Chinese Youth received more than 40,000 letters in response, most writers voicing their own inner pain. The editors were forced to publish extended editions of the magazine in subsequent weeks to accommodate the outpouring of letters. Finally, in a second letter, Pan Xiao wrote: 'I shall not be satisfied merely to be Pan Xiao. I have tasted the bitter chalice of the past, and I am listening to the call of the future. With wide-open eyes I will search for a new tomorrow. . . .'

Judging by this extraordinary correspondence, portions of a whole generation of young people, traumatized by Cultural Revolution experiences and the ideological reversal that followed, are searching for new directions and personal faith commitments.<sup>1</sup>

Wherever there is spiritual hunger, Christianity will gain converts. The recent revival of Christianity in the People's Republic of China has shown that Protestants, and to a lesser extent Catholics, have begun to satisfy the spiritual needs of a portion of China's population.

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<sup>1</sup>"Religious Revival in China," p. 348.

The Chinese Churches are also successful because they are purer. The rice Christians and lukewarm believers were alienated from Christianity by thirty years of repression. Strong believers remained who were willing to make genuine sacrifices to preserve their Christian identity. Even today, in China's relatively liberalized environment, the act of becoming a Christian is not a step lightly taken. Proletarian prejudice and Marxist dogma are still powerful enemies. Religious freedom has increased only because the Chinese government is finally carrying out its religious policy. Its attitude of opposition to religion has not changed. One becomes a Christian in China today because he believes in Christian teachings and because it is important for him to base his life on those teachings. Whatever the opposition, a group motivated by such commitment will attract many converts.

#### The Future of Chinese Christianity

What does the future hold for Chinese Christianity? Given the turbulence, sudden reversals, and factional struggles of Chinese politics, any predictions are hazardous. Christianity's recent renaissance is directly traceable to the pronounced de-radicalization of Chinese politics. One could surmise that if moderation continues, Christianity will continue to

to enjoy increasing freedom and growth. And if a period of reaction ensues, Christianity's sphere of activity will once again be tightened. A note of caution is in order: China's religious situation is still far from being free. But this author is confident that the Chinese churches will withstand any persecutions in the future. He also feels that they will capitalize on whatever freedoms they can enjoy. If Chinese Christianity can survive the Cultural Revolution, what can't it survive? When someone believes in something strongly enough, he will cling to it and give it to others, no matter what the price. Chinese Christians have done this. The title of Mary Wang's book sums it up aptly: The Chinese Church That Will Not Die. Written before liberalization, when people outside China heard only frightening reports of the fate of China's Christians, her book reflects the faith and commitment that have characterized Chinese Christianity. The author is confident that Chinese Christianity will continue to profit from such faith and commitment. Motivated groups of people flourish even in the most hostile environments.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS AND CHINA

#### Mormon Desires to Proselyte in China

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has recently renewed its interest in proselyting in China. On 29 September 1978, Spencer W. Kimball, President of the Mormon Church, urged Latter-day Saints to prepare themselves to preach the gospel to the Chinese people. He noted: "When we are ready, the Lord will use us for his purposes."<sup>1</sup> On 30 March 1979, President Kimball said: "Let us ask our Heavenly Father to grant our petition and permit this great neighbor, China, to join the great family of nations now bowing to the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> He encouraged Latter-day Saints to learn Mandarin. He further counseled Chinese church members to prepare themselves to serve missions in

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<sup>1</sup>Gardner, "Seminar for Regional Representatives," p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>Marvin K. Gardner, "President Kimball Shares Missionary Vision with Leaders," Ensign 9 (May 1979): 105.

China by saving money to finance their missions. Cantonese-speaking Mormons were urged to study Mandarin.<sup>1</sup>

Divine intercession on China's behalf was similarly sought sixty years ago. While dedicating China for the preaching of the gospel, Elder David O. McKay prayed that China would enjoy political stability. He also prayed that the influence of superstition would be lessened in China.<sup>2</sup>

Shared by Latter-day Saints and many other Christians, the prayers of President Kimball and Elder McKay are being answered. China now enjoys greater political stability. This makes preaching of the gospel more feasible. Communism has diligently tried to weaken the strength of superstition in China. While the success or failure of such efforts cannot yet be known, it is clear that people in China are now more open to accepting new directions. Politically and spiritually, the People's Republic of China is now much more favorably inclined to Christianity than it has been for a long time. Recent developments in China have shown that the Lord is doing his part. But what

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>William Heaton, "China and the Restored Church," Ensign 2 (August 1972):14.

must Latter-day Saints do before they are ready to proselyte in China? Only as this question is answered and only as answers are translated into action can Latter-day Saints expect divine help in preaching Mormonism in China.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints must diligently prepare itself to present its message to the Chinese people in a way suited to China's current Sino-Marxian environment. Further, it must utilize ways now available to it to preach the gospel in China. Divine help will not help Mormons achieve goals in the future if they fail to expend adequate efforts towards those goals now.

How Latter-day Saints Can Prepare Themselves  
to Evangelize China

Latter-day Saints must avoid the mistakes made by Catholic and Protestant missionaries that so offended the Communist regime. Before 1949, Chinese churches depended on foreign missionaries and foreign mission boards. The Communists accused them of being foreign institutions. This criticism was heightened by the cultural imperialism of missionaries. Chinese Communist sensibilities were so offended by the foreign image of the Chinese churches that Christian missionaries were expelled. The government-sponsored

Protestant and Catholic churches were in part set up to rid Chinese Christianity of its foreign influences.

Ominously, Chinese sensitivities towards foreign missionary efforts are once again being aroused. The government is still opposed to foreign missionary involvement with the Chinese churches. The Three-Self Movement and the National Catholic Patriotic Association are also opposed to such involvement. Having gone it alone during more than thirty years of repression, Christian churches have acquitted themselves admirably. They are proud of their achievements. Chinese expressions of Christianity have been fashioned in place of discarded Western expressions. Chinese Christians fear a return to the paternalism of pre-1949 missionary Christianity. Such fears are heightened by the eager efforts of fundamentalist organizations to hop on the Chinese bandwagon. Ding Kuangxun, leader of the Three-Self Movement, recently notified the China Program of the [American] National Council of Churches that the Three-Self Movement disapproves of "certain evangelistic organizations in the United States that print Bibles for mass distribution in the People's Republic of China."<sup>1</sup> Chinese Christians do need Bibles, he said,

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<sup>1</sup>"No Bible Smugglers Wanted," Christian Century 98 (1 April 1981):344.

but are wary of accepting Bibles from evangelical Bible distributors who imply that they have an official sanction from the Three-Self Movement for their activities. "The proselyting and money behind some Western Bible distribution campaigns raises the specter of the pervasive foreign influences that set Chinese culture in turmoil during the first half of the 20th century. . . . Some aspects of renewed evangelistic interest in China suggest a 'big-brother mentality.'"<sup>1</sup>

Foreign missionary involvement in Chinese Christianity is feared from another angle. Officially, one Protestant and one Catholic church now exist for all of China. They are union, non-denominational churches. On an unofficial level, house churches are also non-denominational in nature. Were foreign missionaries once again allowed in China, it is probable that denominational issues would once again surface in the People's Republic of China. Chinese Christians seem to be uninterested in denominational issues. "How to be at the same time truly Chinese and truly Christian is much more crucial to them now than are the denomination issues that still concern us in the West."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"Focus on China," International Bulletin of Missionary Research 5 (April 1981):49.



If Latter-day Saints are ever allowed to enter the People's Republic of China, they will probably not be able to operate in the traditional sense of Caucasian, white-shirted missionaries going door-to-door, who are supported by a mission organization answerable to Church headquarters in Salt Lake City. To the Chinese, such procedures would probably seem a return to pre-1949 missionary paternalism.

The question of denominationalism also raises potential problems for Mormon missionary work in China. Whatever the claims of Latter-day Saints that their church is the only true church of Christ, Mormons are not alone in claiming exclusive insights into the gospel. As such, they would probably be viewed as a typical denomination. Further, relations between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and other Christian churches are strained because of Mormonism's exclusivist claims. This probably would very likely be transferred to China. Such considerations will likely inhibit any permission granted to Latter-day Saints to proselyte in China.

While it is frustrating for Mormons not to be allowed to work in China, they need to be sensitive and understanding as to why missionary work is not allowed. It is not enough to say that missionary work is not allowed because religion is persecuted in China.

The Chinese have good reason to be leery of allowing foreign evangelical groups into their country. If the Chinese can be persuaded that allowing Mormons into China is to their advantage, they will do so. Hopefully, through patience and good works, Latter-day Saints can so persuade. Any future Mormon presence in China might not initially be concerned with direct proselyting. Educational and medical assistance are two areas where the Chinese government might be more amenable to Mormon missionaries than the area of direct evangelical work. Latter-day Saints possessing technical skills vital to China's modernization program might be able to offer their services. Perhaps the fruits of Mormonism, as expressed in such areas, will someday open the doors to missionary work of a more direct nature.

Whatever the feasibility of such openings for the Mormon Church in China, they will not take place until Latter-day Saints have tried as best they can to adapt themselves to the sensitivities and cultural peculiarities of China's present environment. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints needs to begin now to tone down its foreign image in areas where it can preach to the Chinese people.

Proselyting in Hong Kong and Taiwan is an overture to proselyting in the People's Republic of

China. It should therefore be improved in order to prepare for future missionary work in China. Problems involved in Chinese proselyting should be ironed out as much as possible in Hong Kong and Taiwan, so as to minimize future problems involved in proselyting in the People's Republic of China.

The vast majority of Mormon missionaries in Taiwan are American. The Mormon Church in Taiwan is therefore considered an American church. While a greater percentage of Mormon missionaries in Hong Kong are Chinese, Americans are still in the majority. On the stake level, even though all Church leaders in Hong Kong and Taiwan are Chinese, Latter-day Saint channels ultimately lead to Salt Lake City. The American image of the Church is thereby reinforced. As long as the Church is unavoidably tied to an American image in the areas of missionary nationality and church channels of authority, it must exercise special care to not thoughtlessly trample on Chinese sensibilities.

But Latter-day Saint mission organizations frequently emphasize this foreign image. For example, in 1977, the Taiwan Taipei Mission celebrated the Fourth of July, America's Independence Day. It did not recognize Double Ten Day (10 October), the anniversary of the founding of the Republic of China. Missionaries took time to celebrate Christmas, but they were urged to

proselyte during Chinese New Year, China's most important holiday.<sup>1</sup>

Taiwan is not nearly as sensitive about foreign involvement in church work and the foreign image of churches as is the People's Republic of China. However, the author, while serving as a missionary in Taiwan, still encountered significant resentment about the American image of the Mormon Church. During his missionary service, the author saw such resentment aggravated by the thoughtlessness of many Latter-day Saint missionaries. Unwilling to adjust to the Chinese culture, they did not appreciate its strong points. They offered many criticisms. They conducted themselves in American ways that are rude in a Chinese setting. Missionaries called to serve among the Chinese people, whether now in Hong Kong and Taiwan or later in the People's Republic of China, need to be more rigorously selected and more intensively trained. China is a special place with special conditions that requires special missionaries. Tares are much more easily sown in China, where ethnocentricity and feelings of cultural superiority are pronounced. In a culture where youth is denigrated and age is revered, it is recommended that the Mormon Church call older couples as missionaries.

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<sup>1</sup>These are personal experiences of the author.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also needs to begin to prepare for whatever missionary work can be done in the People's Republic of China in the future. Such missionary work should draw heavily on Chinese Latter-day Saints living in Hong Kong, the United States, and the Overseas Chinese communities of Southeast Asia. (Unfortunately, Taiwanese Latter-day Saints almost certainly would not be allowed by their government to engage in proselyting activities related to the People's Republic of China.) Chinese Church members from these areas should be called to serve as missionaries in Taiwan. This will provide them with the Mandarin background necessary for missionary work in China.

Preparation of Church Materials for Use in  
the People's Republic of China

Complex characters are officially used in Taiwan and are prevalent in Hong Kong. All Chinese language materials prepared by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are printed in complex characters. This is a major obstacle to the profitable distribution of printed Church materials in the People's Republic of China. The People's Republic of China uses simplified characters. In most instances, one can make the adjustment from complex characters to simplified characters with minimal effort and several

educated guesses. The reverse is not true. If one's background is in simplified characters, complex characters are very difficult to comprehend. This will become a real problem as investigators in the People's Republic of China read Latter-day Saint religious literature. The Mormon Church needs to print the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and major religious tracts in simplified characters. Not only is the issue of simplified characters versus complex characters one of linguistic convenience, it is also a political issue. Nationalists use complex characters, Communists use simplified characters. The People's Republic of China is proud of its reformation of written Chinese. Simplified characters are a symbol of progress. Complex characters are looked down upon as a symbol of China's backward past, when the cumbersome written language hindered progress.

The Communists have also reformed spoken Chinese. The spoken colloquial language of Beijing now serves as the standard for spoken Chinese throughout China. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has based its Chinese proselyting on the Cantonese spoken in Hong Kong and the Mandarin spoken in Taiwan. Cantonese and Beijing Mandarin are mutually unintelligible. While mutually intelligible,

the Mandarin spoken in Taiwan and the Mandarin spoken in the People's Republic of China have many serious points of divergence. For example, after more than thirty years of no communication between the two places, ai ren means "wife" in the People's Republic of China. In Taiwan it means "lover" or "mistress." Communism has markedly influenced terminology in Mainland Mandarin, while Taiwanese Mandarin is influenced by Nationalist rhetoric.

Spoken Beijing Mandarin has further been made the standard for written Chinese in the People's Republic of China. The written language in Taiwan and Hong Kong is much more traditional and formal. There is a much greater difference between spoken and written Mandarin in Taiwan than there is in the People's Republic of China. The more traditional and formal written language is used in the Chinese Standard Works and Chinese religious tracts. Such language would be difficult for investigators in the People's Republic of China.

Written materials and missionary discussions in Taiwan use formal language derived from the Chinese classics. Such language is steeped in traditional values. Its usage emphasizes how the restored gospel harmonizes with traditional Confucian values. The Mormon Church also strives in more explicit ways to

emphasize this harmony. For example, the Taiwan Taipei Mission and the Taipei Taiwan Stake hosted an open house in August 1978. The theme of the open house was the Confucian analect Shou Shen Qi Jia Zhi Guo Ping Tian Xia.<sup>1</sup> The open house showed how the restored gospel complemented China's traditional values.<sup>2</sup> Confucian teachings, however, are condemned in the People's Republic of China as feudalistic, and traditional values are often rejected in favor of progressive Marxist models.

In preparing religious materials for the People's Republic of China, new language and new examples are needed to show how the gospel harmonizes with the best that society and culture in the People's Republic of China have to offer. Latter-day Saints need to study and make themselves aware of the cultural and linguistic changes that have taken place in the People's Republic of China and accordingly alter their message. They should not present their message as it is currently given in Hong Kong and Taiwan. For any non-Chinese Latter-day Saints involved in missionary

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<sup>1</sup>By cultivating oneself, the family is united. Then the nation is regulated, thereby bringing peace to the world.

<sup>2</sup>The author was personally involved in this open house.



work relative to the People's Republic of China, the Mormon Church needs to prepare missionary materials in Pinyin, the romanization system used by the Communists.

Such concerns are raised because Latter-day Saints have only imperfectly translated their message into the cultural milieu of Hong Kong and Taiwan. For example, the grammar of the English Doctrine and Covenants extensively uses the passive case. This use of the passive case has been liberally carried over into the Chinese translation, even though Chinese grammar seldom uses the passive case, and then only to describe undesirable situations. The Chinese Doctrine and Covenants therefore has a foreign, awkward, and non-Chinese flavor.<sup>1</sup> This problem is repeated in the translation of the missionary discussions from English to Mandarin Chinese. The Book of Mormon is better translated. However, it is so literal in its translation that it still retains that awkward, non-Chinese flavor. The cultural integrity of a translation need not be at odds with the accuracy of that translation. The Chinese edition of the Bible used by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints blends both requirements admirably.

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, the Chinese translation of Doctrine and Covenants 1:26,30; 84:33; and 110:1,9.

The hymnbook used by Chinese Latter-day Saints is composed entirely of translations of Western hymns. It does not have a single indigenous hymn, although there are many indigenous Chinese hymns that could probably be used in Mormon services. Yet Latter-day Saints in Taiwan and Hong Kong still sing songs like "High on the Mountain Top," "Firm As the Mountains Around Us," "O Ye Mountains High," and "They the Builders of the Nation." Such songs emphasize the Utah and American nature of the Church. Chinese Latter-day Saints need to sing not only songs concerned with universal aspects of the gospel (such as "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet"), but they also deserve songs concerning the reality of Zion in its uniquely Chinese context.

Although many Church books and manuals are printed in Chinese, some, such as Gospel Essentials, are accompanied by photographs from an American/Wasatch Front setting. Such materials need to be culturalized. The Chinese Church also needs Chinese authors who can prepare original religious materials suited to the mindset of their Chinese brothers and sisters.

Chapel architecture is imported from America. Expensive and difficult for less affluent Chinese Latter-day Saints to maintain, it ignores the genius of Chinese architecture. Future Mormon chapels should be designed in a more Chinese way.

All this is not to say that Latter-day Saints have not made considerable progress in translating their message into Chinese terms. When missionary work first began in Taiwan and Hong Kong, there was no Chinese Book of Mormon. Only those investigators who could read English were able to enjoy the Book of Mormon. The author remembers his pleasure, while serving as a missionary in Taiwan, when Articles of Faith and Jesus the Christ were finally translated into Chinese, allowing Chinese Latter-day Saints to enjoy basic Church writings other than the Standard Works.

But more progress is needed. The Mormon Church in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China needs to become more than a translated version of the American Church. Culturalization is needed in church writings, scriptures, hymns, and architecture. Such elements of the church need to truly and thoroughly express the gospel in terms understandable and familiar to the Chinese.

The author recommends that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints set up a "China Section" in its missionary department. This section should supervise the preparation of culturalized church materials. It should also make itself aware of the existing cultural, political, and religious conditions in the People's Republic of China. Latter-day Saints

will not be able to prepare themselves to proselyte in China if they are unaware of current conditions and fail to adapt missionary work to those conditions. This section should also examine the efforts of other Christian groups that are attempting to evangelize China, as well as the activities of churches inside China. The successes of others should be adapted to the best advantage of Latter-day Saints. Based on the knowledge accumulated in these three areas, this section should formulate short-range and long-range goals and policies for Mormon proselyting in China.

If Latter-day Saints are serious about evangelizing China, they need to adapt themselves to the Chinese context far more than they already have in Hong Kong or Taiwan, or than they currently are doing. They need to adapt themselves to those aspects of Chinese culture in the People's Republic of China that are different from the Chinese culture in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

China is an old country whose culture has continued unbroken for four thousand years. It is an extremely ethnocentric, tradition-bound country whose people are convinced of their cultural superiority. Christian missionary efforts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries converted only 1 percent of China's population. The Chinese culture is not easily

penetrated. The presentation of Mormonism in a foreign way has hindered the greater success of the Mormon Church in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Greater difficulties await Latter-day Saints in the People's Republic of China. There there are far fewer Western influences that can bridge cultural barriers to the gospel, such as exist in Taiwan and Hong Kong. And there there is far less tolerance of Western cultural imperialism than in either Hong Kong or Taiwan. Mormon proselyting in China will be a long-range proposition. It requires far-sighted study and goals that are geared to establishing a thoroughly grounded basis for the Church. Christians in China have further had a history of persecution. To withstand future persecutions, Mormons in China must build their houses of brick, not of straw.

#### What Mormons Can Now Do in China

Formal missionary work is prohibited in the People's Republic of China. Future permission for such evangelization seems a remote possibility. However, observers are encouraged by the radical improvements in Chinese Christianity's fortunes within the last three years. In 1978, today's givens would have been dismissed as improbable hopes. Latter-day Saints should therefore hopefully and prayerfully prepare

themselves for the day when they will be allowed to openly proselyte in China.

But if Latter-day Saints sit around and wait for conditions to change to their liking, only then to begin missionary efforts, they will lose many valuable opportunities. There is much that can be done now to preach Mormonism to the Chinese people. And if Latter-day Saints begin now to spread the gospel in China, they can create a favorable opinion of the Church that will perhaps soften official opposition to missionary work. If the Chinese government sees that Latter-day Saints bring forth good works and make positive contributions to national welfare, then Mormon chances will be much better.

Here, it is instructive to examine the relative success of several Protestant missionary denominations in Taiwan. Between 1949 and 1951, Protestant missionaries were either expelled or withdrawn from the newly-created People's Republic of China. Taiwan's collapse was viewed as imminent. Missionary societies therefore rejected Taiwan as an alternative field of labor for the missionaries who had left China. But Taiwan was ripe for missionary work. The harsh economic plight caused by Taiwan's explosive population increase, the shock of the Nationalist defeat, and the mass migration of Mainlanders to Taiwan all produced a

great spiritual hunger in Taiwan. However, not until President Truman sent the American Seventh Fleet into the Straits of Taiwan to protect Taiwan did Protestant denominations begin to send missionaries to Taiwan.

The Baptists did not wait, though.<sup>1</sup> In 1948 and 1949, the Baptists established themselves in Taiwan directly from the Chinese mainland. They were not deterred by China's uncertain future. Capitalizing on troubled conditions in Taiwan, they had already established a strong church by the time other Protestant denominations first appeared. And by the time other Protestant denominations had prepared an adequate institutional and structural basis for church building, Taiwan's enthusiasm for Christianity had largely passed. These churches had set themselves up to serve the spiritual needs of Taiwan's population. When they were finally in a position to fulfill such needs, these needs were no longer felt. Taiwan had become prosperous. Life was more stable. Only the Baptists truly reaped the benefits of Taiwan's spiritual crisis.<sup>2</sup> Of all the post-1949 Taiwanese Protestant missionary denominations, the Baptists are by far the biggest and the strongest.<sup>3</sup> The indigenous, non-missionary

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<sup>1</sup>Neither did the Presbyterians, but they were already well established in Taiwan.

<sup>2</sup>Swanson, pp. 105-109, 118. <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

Assembly Hall Church also did not wait for favorable conditions. After the Nationalist collapse, it immediately began work among Mainland refugees in Taiwan. Its strength today is correspondingly great.<sup>1</sup>

The People's Republic of China is now in a spiritual quandary comparable to that confronted by Taiwan in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Economic chaos and political instability have created genuine spiritual needs among China's people. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should learn from the example of the Baptists in Taiwan. If Mormons spread their message among the Chinese people now, whatever the obstacles and unfavorable circumstances, they may win many converts. If they wait until political conditions are more favorable before they do anything, they may lose their opportunity. China's spiritual needs might be satisfied by political stability and economic prosperity. Latter-day Saint missionary work should adapt itself to the conditions within which it must operate. Fundamentalist Protestant organizations that are already aiming their activities at China should not be allowed to repeat what the Baptists did in Taiwan.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 190.



What, then, can Mormons do in China?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has already begun various contacts with the government of the People's Republic of China. For example, the ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the United States recently visited Utah as a guest of the First Presidency.<sup>1</sup> The 1980 tour of China by the Young Ambassadors of Brigham Young University was highly successful. It created a very favorable impression of Brigham Young University and its sponsor, the Mormon Church.<sup>2</sup> The Brigham Young University Folk Dancers have just returned (May 1981) from a successful and well-received tour of the People's Republic of China. "The Chinese have been very impressed with the attractiveness, clean-cut image as well as the high moral standards of BYU students, BYU President Holland said."<sup>3</sup> Robert Blair, an English professor at Brigham Young University, is now teaching English in Jinan.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"China Ambassador Visits Utah," Deseret News, 17 January 1981, LDS Church News, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Loralee Turner, "YA's China Tour Proves Successful," Brigham Young University Universe, 12 June 1980, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Susan Hall, "China Trip Beneficial," Brigham Young University Universe, 4 June 1981, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>As told to the author by Dr. Blair's daughter, Miss Lisa Blair.

Such examples of indirect missionary work can gradually build a reservoir of good will between the Church and China that will hopefully inch Latter-day Saints closer to their goal of proselyting in China.

There is also much that the Mormon Church can do unofficially.

In a December 1980 conversation with Sheldon Poon, former president of the Hong Kong Stake, the author learned that the Mormon Church had been sending Books of Mormon and religious tracts into the People's Republic of China since 1978. Latter-day Saints who lived in Hong Kong, and whose businesses took them into the People's Republic of China, took these materials through customs, evidently without difficulty. Hopefully soon to be culturalized and prepared in simplified characters, such materials can be of great help in interesting the Chinese people in the restored gospel.

Radio broadcasting is a good missionary tool. Long abused by fundamentalist evangelists, radio broadcasts could be used by Latter-day Saints to introduce the Chinese people to basic Mormon teachings. High-powered radio stations could be established in many places near the Chinese mainland, such as the Phillipine Islands, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, or Taiwan. The need for this kind of Christian ministry is shown

by the large volume of mail that comes, unhindered by postal censorship, from China in response to the Christian broadcasts of the Far Eastern Broadcasting Company. A Hong Kong address could be provided at the end of each broadcast to which interested persons could write for more information. Correspondence courses could be set up to help investigators study Mormon teachings.<sup>1</sup>

Even though formal, open proselyting is not allowed, holders of the Mormon priesthood could still enter the People's Republic of China and contact those interested in the Church. This could be done with tourist or business visas. These priesthood holders could further teach the investigators, baptize them, and ordain them to the priesthood. Latter-day Saint groups could be set up, similar to those found in isolated outposts of the American Armed Forces. Such groups keep formal church organization and structure to a minimum, an advantage in China's fluid and semi-clandestine religious situation.<sup>2</sup>

This would perhaps be difficult for tourists to accomplish. It is still difficult for tourists to enter the People's Republic of China except in a tour

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<sup>1</sup>These ideas were developed by Dr. R. Lanier Britsch of Brigham Young University.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Charles Holloman, "The LDS Church in Communist China: How and When?" Brigham Young University, 1979.

group. It would be hard for such Latter-day Saint missionaries to visit people far from the prescribed, beaten tourist path. Mormon businessmen would have greater freedom of movement.

Although Caucasian Latter-day Saints who speak Chinese can help in such work, the Church needs to use its Chinese members in such efforts. This helps avoid the bugaboo of foreign missionary involvement in China's religious affairs. It also keeps the publicity surrounding clandestine missionary work at a much smaller level. Caucasians still attract too much attention in China. Considered as Overseas Chinese by the Chinese government, Chinese Church members can enter China much more easily. They enjoy much greater freedom once in China. They can abandon their Western clothing, don proletarian clothing, and go native in a way that Caucasians cannot. Many of these Chinese Church members have immediate or extended family relatives living in the People's Republic of China to whom they could preach the gospel. Chinese Church members in Hong Kong, the United States, and throughout the world can be called as missionaries to make periodic proselyting trips into the People's Republic of China. A two month visit to relatives could be the basis for a brief proselyting campaign.

While Caucasian Latter-day Saints should be used as little as possible in direct missionary work, there are still ways in which they can more indirectly plant the seeds of Mormonism in China. The Church should encourage young Latter-day Saints to participate in student exchange programs with Chinese universities. Latter-day Saints employed by business firms that have dealings with China should be encouraged to represent their businesses in China. More Latter-day Saint university professors should be encouraged to follow the example of Robert Blair. Such people could be set apart by Church leaders as missionaries, with instructions to teach the gospel in China as opportunities arise. Although their missionary work might be limited to providing a good image for the Church, they can prepare a good foundation for the Church.

Conditions in the People's Republic of China inhibit establishing the Mormon Church in a fully organized way. But organization is only a means to an end. Evangelization of China is the goal. Latter-day Saints need to show themselves willing to use the limited opportunities already available before they can worthily claim freer opportunities in the future.

1 Cor. 9:19-22 says:

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

Paul's meaning is clear. It is imperative for the missionary to adapt himself as much as possible to the conditions in which he is attempting to preach. He cannot wait for those conditions to change to his liking. Political and religious restrictions must be adapted to. Mormons must also become as those whom they proselyte. In terms of language and message culturalization, there are many elements in China's Sino-Marxian environment to which we must also adapt. Latter-day Saints have made significant efforts to present their message to the Chinese people in Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, they have not truly begun to present their message in terms that the Chinese people of the People's Republic of China can understand. Much work remains to be done.

## CONCLUSION

Christianity has always faced great difficulty in establishing itself in China. Both Nestorians and Fransiscans failed to erect lasting churches. Although the Society of Jesus permanently planted Christianity in China, China's Christian community was barely rescued from extinction by nineteenth century missionary work. Although the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed intensive evangelical work in China, the vast majority of China's population either resisted the Christian message or was unreached by that message.

Despite all obstacles, Christianity did establish a vital presence in China. This was no mean feat in such an ethnocentric and xenophobic country. Although in 1949 Christians comprised slightly less than 1 percent of China's population, they were a strong and expanding community. Growth was rapid in the first three decades of this century. Indigenous forms of Christianity appeared. Chinese churches were becoming increasingly independent of missionaries and mission boards. Conditions after World War Two seemed ideal for further Christian expansion.

The triumph of Communism cast a serious cloud over Chinese Christianity's future. The Chinese churches suffered great persecution. The Communist government engineered the reduction of church organizations into puppet churches. Yet Chinese Christianity did not die. It simply went underground. Today, it is much more open, and it is vigorously growing. The Christian missionaries of past years, whatever their faults, did their work well.

Even with the decline in Catholic numbers, there are now more Christians in China than in 1949. Protestants particularly have increased in numbers. When it is realized that persecutions caused many Christians included in 1949 figures to apostatize, this fact is truly impressive. Although restrictions are greater than in 1949, the author feels that Chinese Christianity is stronger. It is enthusiastic and evangelical. Weaned from foreign missionaries and mission boards, it is now independent. It has adapted itself to a hostile Chinese environment and is thriving. Its growth of the last few years is impressive. China's present spiritual hunger augurs well for the future. Young people are accepting Christianity in large numbers.

For the religiously devout, it is hard not to see the hand of God in such events. After many attempts,



the seed of the gospel was firmly planted in Chinese soil. Since 1949, it has been severely buffeted. But in spite of everything, it has survived. The trials of the last thirty years have separated the wheat of strong Christians from the chaff of lukewarm believers. The remaining wheat is experiencing exciting growth.

For the believing Latter-day Saint, China presents many opportunities. It can be argued that, in the final dispensation of the gospel, the Lord is preparing China for conversion. He has planted a firm base of Christian belief in China. He did not allow this base to be uprooted. He has created spiritual hunger to cause this base to grow. Latter-day Saints can already proselyte China in several ways. Remarkable things have already happened. Latter-day Saints also have much to do to prepare. In 1977, no one would have dared predict the favorable conditions surrounding Chinese Christianity in 1981. What will be the case in 1985? The author believes that Latter-day Saints can cause even more remarkable things to happen in China if they properly prepare themselves.

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CHINESE CHRISTIANITY SINCE 1949: IMPLICATIONS

FOR THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF

LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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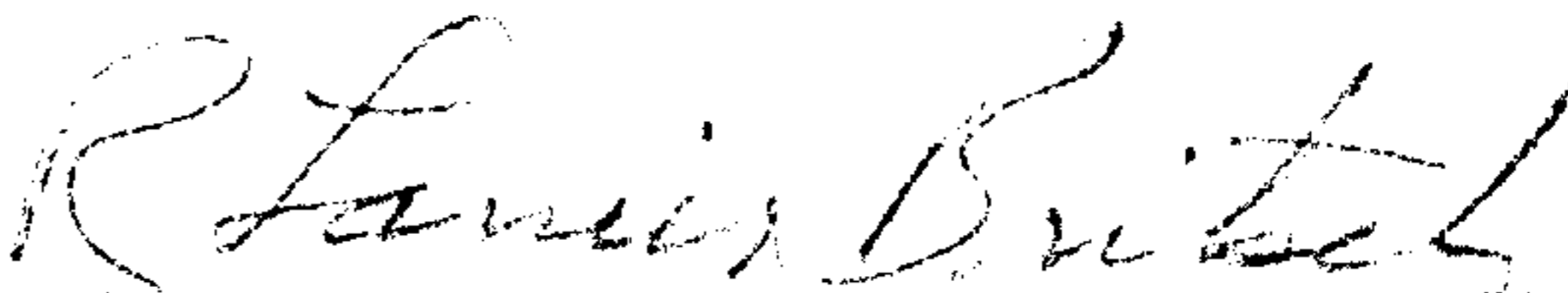
Department of Asian Studies

M.A. Degree, August 1981

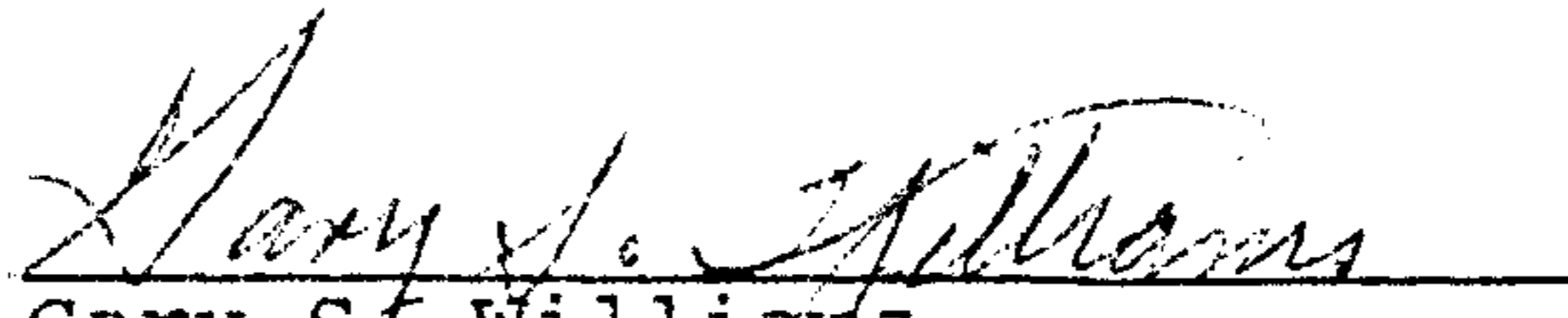
ABSTRACT


In the last thirty years, Chinese Christianity has experienced severe persecution. Communism actively sought its subjugation. Despite this, Chinese Christians maintained their faith. When their church organizations became puppets of the state, Christians went underground and continued to worship in house churches. The recently liberalized political climate in China has allowed Christians to more openly practice their faith. The official Protestant and Catholic churches have been rehabilitated. House churches have come out of the closet. Capitalizing on an acute spiritual malaise in China, Christians are experiencing a major and sustained revival. There are ample opportunities for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to benefit from China's Christian revival. However, any missionary work will require considerable preparation by Latter-day Saints.

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