

The China Inland Mission and the Indigenous Church Movement in China

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When D.E. Hoste succeeded Hudson Taylor as director of the CIM in 1902, the work of the Mission was in the midst of drastic change. It had never been Taylor's objective to build up a Chinese Church. Rather, he aimed only to evangelize the entire Middle Kingdom with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I call this the period of evangelization in the history of the CIM. After forty years of pioneering work, the political and ecclesiastical situation had become very different. Drastic changes were needed within the CIM in order to cope with the new paradigms in China.

By 1906, the foundation had been laid. There were 21,675 communicant members, 476 organized churches, 14 hospitals and 188 schools. It seemed the right time to start building upon this foundation. After the Boxer Uprising, the Chinese began to realize the superior power of the Western nations, and acknowledge that they had to be appeased through treaties and concessions. Foreign trade increased, railways were opened, newspapers and periodicals, previously practically unknown, were published and sold throughout the country. There appeared to be a new attitude of respect toward foreigners. Everywhere, preaching and teaching of the Christian faith abounded. D.E. Hoste was a wise man and a soldier by training. He foresaw the problems ahead of the Chinese Church. The deep bitterness and resentment against missionaries remained. To most of the Chinese, imperialism and missions were closely related. The Chinese felt that they had been forced to open up their country only because of the unequal treaties. Hoste strongly believed that the only way to circumvent this problem was to establish a strong indigenous church under Chinese leadership. He was determined to steer the CIM towards this goal. In his keynote address at the first Annual Meeting he attended in London, he said:

You are probably all aware that in earlier days the work of the Mission was almost entirely pioneering and itinerating in various regions in inland China... but that what we may call pastoral work in the nature of the case was not carried on, simply there was no church. Now, however, through God's blessings upon the labors of the missionaries, many districts, which years ago were the scenes of pioneering and itinerating work, have considerable numbers of Christians ... and we find ourselves compelled to give attention to the instruction and training of converts.¹

¹ Phyllis Thompson, *D.E. Hoste "A Prince with God"* (London, China Inland Mission 1947), p.106

Then he continued to remind his audience that the Chinese as a people had accomplished a feat in the domain of government which had been unequalled by any sector of the human race. The Chinese empire had held, as an organized corporate body, between two and three millions of people for many centuries. He said, “The point I want to make is this: that a people of this kind possess men capable of government on a large scale, and, therefore, we may expect to find as time goes on that the Spirit of the Lord will clothe Himself with men who will be organizers and leaders of organization of considerable magnitude.”²

Hoste foresaw that the Chinese church could only survive if two goals were achieved. First, Chinese believers needed to be nurtured and trained in the Word of God. He said that so much would depend, during the next twenty years, upon their being able to instruct in the Word of God, and to instil into the churches, correct standards of Christian life, doctrine and practice. China would be exposed to all the manifold influences of rationalism and secularism, and all the varieties of spurious and false doctrine which abounded in Western Christendom. These ideas would make their way into China, and unless they in the meantime had been able to raise up a generation of Christians grounded in the Word of God and established in sound doctrine, one would tremble for the future of the Church in China.³ Second, the establishment of an indigenous Chinese Church with Chinese leadership was a must for its survival. He reminded all the trustees and missionaries that the Chinese had historically proven themselves capable people, and thus training Chinese leaders to take up leadership roles in the church was a top priority on Hoste’s agenda. We see these two themes reiterated again and again in Hoste’s correspondence with fellow missionaries as well as Chinese colleagues.

However, no matter how noble this goal might have been, it was not easily implemented. The situation was much more complicated and difficult than could be imagined. In this chapter, we shall explore some of these problems and examine how the CIM handled them. In this case, Lyall’s reports provide much insight into the struggles encountered in the implementation process.

1. The Definition of “Indigenous Church”

The term “Chinese indigenous church” as used in this study is a translation of the Chinese phrase 中國本色教會 (Zhongguo bense jiaohui) which became popular in the 1920s. Basically this term expresses the idea that the church of China must be of the Chinese people, for the Chinese people and led by the

² Ibid. pp. 106-107

³ Ibid., p.106

Chinese people.⁴ However, we have to distinguish between the ecclesiastical and the theological definitions of this term “indigenous church.” In the ecclesiastical sense, the Chinese indigenous church refers to a church free from foreign control. This concept was first advocated by Rufus Anderson (1796-1880), Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and by Henry Venn (1796-1873), General Secretary of the Scottish Missionary Society. Anderson called for the establishment of “self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches” in the mission fields. Venn popularized this “three-self” principle and made it a standard by which to judge whether a mission church had become indigenous. According to Kenneth S. Lattourette, this “three-self” principle was the goal of almost all mission societies as early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He said that all over the world, missionaries were stressing the transfer of control to the “native” churches. The 1913 Conference, accordingly, not only included Chinese in its membership but had much more to say of the transfer of responsibility from mission to church than did that of 1907. A general statement of purpose was issued similar to that of the earlier gathering, but more detailed suggestions were adopted for the development of self-support, the sharing of responsibility with the Chinese, the propagation of the Chinese churches, and the discovery and training of Chinese leaders. The Conference favored Chinese churches independent of and separated from the missions.⁵

However, many scholars seriously doubted whether fulfillment of the “three-self” principle really made a church “indigenous.” Back in China, Jonathan Chao commented that the “three-self” church envisioned by missionaries was not really indigenous. Rather, it was essentially a transference of the Western model of the local church to the Chinese field, calling for Chinese financial support, Chinese administration, and Chinese pastoral leadership. The “three-self” model did not encourage the development of Chinese theological independence, liturgical renewal, or organizational reform, nor did it encourage the integration of Christian faith with Chinese culture.⁶ Chao pointed out that ecclesiastical indigenization without theological indigenization is not true indigenization at all.

What then, is “theological indigenization”? Is the Gospel of Jesus Christ trans-cultural, that is, universally applicable in all cultures? Or do we believe that there is no such thing as “the Christianity”, but only “Chinese Christianity”, “British Christianity” and “American Christianity”?

⁴ Jonathan Tien-en Chao, *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement, 1919-1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movements in Modern China*, a Ph.D dissertation in the University of Pennsylvania, 1986. p. 5.

⁵ Kenneth Scott Lattourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, p.674.

⁶ Jonathan Tien-en Chao, *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement, 1919-1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movements in Modern China*, a Ph.D dissertation in the University of Pennsylvania, 1986. p. 43.

Is there such a thing as “the Chinese culture”? Is the culture of the rural class the same as that of the intellectual class? When we speak of the integration of the Christian faith with Chinese culture, what kind of Chinese culture are we referring to, bearing in mind that China was undergoing tremendous change during this period of history? China became much more “modern” during the first half of the twentieth century. Was it possible for missionaries to integrate the Christian faith into such a fast-changing culture?

Is it fair to say that all foreign missionaries shared the same culture which they wanted to impose upon all Chinese churches? Obviously, they did not. Theologically and culturally they were very different. The fight between Western Christian liberals and conservatives was on-going even on Chinese soil.⁷ This kind of integration is an impossible task.⁸ It is no wonder that even today, there is still no universally accepted integrated Chinese indigenous theology. However, the CIM then, particularly her director D.E. Hoste, believed that the Word of God is the revelation of God to all men regardless of their culture and ethnicity. In other words, the Word of God is a universal truth that can be applied to all kinds of cultures. The main goal of missionaries is to instruct, teach and expound faithfully the Word of God. Yet, in terms of the development of the Chinese Church, it was absolutely necessary for the Mission to pass the baton to local leaders at some point. Thus, when the CIM spoke of establishing the indigenous Chinese church, it basically referred to the ecclesiastical sense of the term.

Is it true that the Christian faith is a universal truth that can be applied across cultures? The theologian Karl Barth provided an insightful answer to this question. He used three concentric circles to represent three different kinds of Words. First, Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word or better known as *the logos*. This Word is supra-cultural, that is, it is applicable across all cultures. Second, is the written Word or *the graphai*. This Word is God’s revelation in Jewish history, explaining to us the salvation plan of God through Jesus Christ. Obviously, this Word is closely related to Jewish culture. The third is the preaching Word or *the kerygma*. *Kerygma* refers to the proclamation of the written word relevant to the needs and the culture of the community.⁹ The following example illustrates to us the relationship between these three kinds of Words. Jesus is described as the Lamb of God who was sacrificed on our behalf. This is the essence of the Gospel,

⁷ Peter Tze Ming Ng (吳梓明), “The Necessity of the Particular in the Globalization of Christianity , the Case of China”, in *Studies in World Christianity* ,vol. 12 (Summer 2006). pp.164-182.

⁸ Lai Bun-Chiu, So Yuen-Tai (賴品超, 蘇遠泰), *Zi Bei Cu Nan: You Da Lu Zhi Bian Yuen – Xu Songshi de Ben Se Hua Li Lun de Zhuan Bian* (自北徂南: 由大陸至邊緣–徐松石的本色化理論的轉變.) in Li Kan-Keung, Ng Tze-Ming, Ying Fuk-Tsang ed.(李金強, 吳梓明, 邢福增主編): *Zi Bei Cu Nan – Jidu Jiao Lai Hua Er Bai Nian Lun Ji 自北徂南-基督教來華二百年論集*. (Jidu Jiao Wen Yi Chu Ban She 2009). pp.507-524

⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969) Vo.1 Part 1. p.xv-xvi.

which is a universal truth. However, the use of the imagery “the Lamb of God” in the Bible is deeply embedded in Jewish culture. Without an understanding of the sacrificial system of the Jewish culture, it is very difficult to understand the concept of substitution atonement behind this term. Now when a missionary is preaching the Gospel to a community whose culture is very different from the Jews, say, one that believes that the lamb is a symbol of evil, it would be a disaster if the missionary went ahead and preached that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Thus, it is necessary for the preacher to be sensitive to the culture of his audience, and proclaim the Gospel in such a way that is relevant to them. Thus, while *the logos* remains unchanged, *the graphai* is deeply embedded in Jewish culture, and it is necessary for the missionary to proclaim the Gospel within the cultural context of the audience. This is what Barth called *kerygma*.

The German theologian Jurgen Moltmann expressed it another way. To him, the Christian faith is a paradox. He termed it an “identity and relevance dilemma.”¹⁰ In the proclamation of the Gospel, if one sticks too closely with the “identity” of the Christian faith, one may preach a cross-culturally irrelevant message. On the other hand, if one works too hard at “relevance”, one may lose the Christian identity. This is the dilemma missionaries have to face. Missionaries need to accept that they will always live with the tension of trying to strike a balance between identity and relevance. Karl Gutzlaff, the German missionary and the founder of the Chinese Union in the middle of the 19th century, believed that China’s millions could never be converted by foreign missionaries, and Chinese Christians themselves must carry out the evangelization of the empire while Western missionaries served as instructors and supervisors. He believed that the cultural gap between Westerner and Chinese, and the difficulties of attaining true language facility were so great that few missionaries could ever communicate effectively with the masses. A Chinese Christian, even without great depth of theological knowledge, could always interact with the populace more effectively than a foreign missionary. As evidence, Gutzlaff pointed to the fact that the majority of Christian converts up to that point had been made by Chinese workers rather than by missionaries.¹¹

The Chinese historian Wang Zhixin (王治心 1881-1968) used an interesting analogy to describe the process of the indigenization of the Chinese church. When the Westerners came to China, they brought with them seeds of peanuts and planted them in Chinese soil. At that time, the Chinese called peanuts “foreign peanuts.” After a while, when Chinese grown peanuts became popular, the Chinese dropped the word “foreign” and simply called them peanuts implying that they were local produce without foreign elements.

¹⁰ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God, the Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of the Christian Theology* (Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 7-18.

¹¹ Jessie G. Lutz and R. Ray Lutz, *Karl Gutzlaff’s Approach to Indigenization: The Chinese Union in Christianity in China, From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* ed. By Bays, Daniel H. (Stanford University Press. 1996), pp.269-270.

In the same way, it took time and effort for Chinese church leaders to grow the Chinese church and make it truly Chinese without “foreign” elements in it.¹²

Thus, Hoste wisely chose to focus on the following two goals. First, instead of using Taylor’s wordless book, he emphasized the teaching of the Word of God to Chinese believers so that the identity of the Christian faith would not be diluted over time. Secondly, understanding the limitations of Western missionaries as pointed out by Gutzlaff, he made implementation of the three-self principle in the Chinese church a top priority, focusing especially on the training of local leaders who would be more capable of effectively preaching a Gospel relevant to fellow-Chinese.

2. The Anti-Christian Movement, and the Great Evacuation in the 1920s

“Few scholars would deny the crucial importance of the 1917-1927 decade for the course of modern Chinese history. Nor would they deny the rapidity and complexity of change in its interplay with the residual dynamic of China’s cultural heritage.” This is how Jessie Gregory Lutz introduces her book *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions, the Anti-Christian Movement 1920-28*.¹³ Indeed, the Anti-Christian Movement in this decade had tremendous impact not only on missionary activities in China, but also on the development of the entire history of China, both politically and culturally. However, in this present study, we confine ourselves to its impact on missionary activities, particularly on the development of the CIM.

The Revolution of 1911 marked the final collapse of the old Confucian socio-ethical order and made possible radical changes in both political ideology and social institutions. This prepared the way for the New Culture Movement known as the May Fourth Movement, followed by the Anti-Christian Movement in the early 1920s. On the one hand, the establishment of a republican form of government brought an end to state control over religion and thereby gave Chinese Christians legal status. Before 1912, Chinese Christians were called *jiao min* (教民) “people of religion” and not *pin min* (平民) “citizens”, but after 1912, the Constitution gave them legal status as *guo min* (國民) “national citizens” just like any other citizen in China. This meant that they had the right to build their own churches, register their churches with the Government and enjoy the guarantee of religious freedom.¹⁴ In addition, the rejection of the old Confucian

¹² Wang Zhixin (王治心), *Bense Jiaohui yu Bense Zhuzuo* (本色教會與本色著作): (Wen She Yuekan Vol. 6, May 1926, p.1-17) (文社月刊, 一卷 6 冊 (1926 年 5 月) 1-17 頁。

¹³ Jessie G. Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions, the Anti-Christian Movement 1920-28* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1988) p.1.

¹⁴ Jonathan Tien-en Chao, *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement, 1919-1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movements in Modern China*, a Ph.D dissertation in the University of Pennsylvania, 1986. P. 64.

ethic left a vacuum especially among the intellectuals. The Christian church had a great opportunity to fill the gap, but it failed to seize the day. Professor Lutz cited an interesting example. In 1919-1920, one of the future founders of the Chinese Communist Party, Ch'en Tu-hsiu (陳獨秀 1879-1942), briefly examined Christianity and concluded that Christ's teachings was the source of Western dynamism. He thought that Christian precepts deserved serious study. But this favorable evaluation did not extend to the Christian church or to Christian missions, and Ch'en soon deserted Jesus' teachings for those of Marx, opting for the latter as having greater national relevance.¹⁵

The political tumult after the Revolution proved to be an obstacle to the growth of the Chinese Church. Sun Yat-Sen (孫逸仙 1866-1925) was sworn in in January 1912 as the first provisional President, but six weeks later gave way to Yuan Shih-kai (袁世凱 1859-1916), a well-known general. A fearful reign of terror ensued. Settled government was virtually suspended and the period of the warlords began. Many ancient cities in China were ravaged by criminals and other lawless elements during this period. Two missionaries and six children of the CIM were murdered in Sian. Several stations were looted and many missionaries narrowly escaped death.¹⁶

However, the most devastating event was the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The Chinese were confused to see the so-called Christian nations fighting one another to the death. Furthermore, China found herself betrayed by her Western allies at the Paris Peace Conference. In 1917, China entered the war on the side of the Allied Triple Entente on the condition that all German spheres of influence, including Shandong, would be returned to China after the war. When the war ended, however, Western Allies turned a deaf ear on Chinese demands and gave all the German rights to Japan despite China's angry protest. The Chinese public was furious. They viewed this as a betrayal by the West, and also as a sign of Japanese aggression in the face of the weak and corrupt warlord government of Yuan Shi-kai. On May 4th, 1919, college students in Beijing demonstrated to protest against this unjust transfer. About 3,000 students from 13 Beijing universities assembled at the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Tiananmen Square. They distributed fliers declaring that the Chinese would not accept the concession of Chinese territories to Japan. The police attacked the protestors and arrested 32 students. News of the students' demonstration and arrest spread throughout China. Similar demonstrations sprung up in many other major cities including Guangzhou, Nanjing, Shanghai, Wuhan and the like. Shop closings in June 1919 exacerbated the situation and led to the boycott of Japanese goods. Labor unions also staged strikes. They demanded the release of the students and

¹⁵ Jessie G. Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions, the Anti-Christian Movement 1920-28*, p.11.

¹⁶ Leslie Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible, The Continuing Story of the Mission Hudson Taylor Began*, p.79.

the firing of the cabinet officials. This demonstration led to a full resignation of the cabinet. This event was significant because it marked a great upsurge in modern Chinese nationalism. The desire to be free from the control of Western powers spread all over China particularly among the intellectuals.

The May Fourth Movement was followed by the Anti-Christian Movement in the 1920s. Initially, the intense nationalism generated by the May Fourth Movement was directed at the foreign governments who had wronged China at Versailles, and then at the Chinese Government for failing to protect their citizens and the nation's sovereignty. By the 1920s, the main target was Christianity—its institutions, its believers and especially its missionaries. While the Boxer Uprising had affected mainly North China, this Anti-Christian movement affected the entire nation. Moreover, the Anti-Christian Movement was initiated and led by intellectuals and university students instead of the uneducated peasants as in the case of the Boxer Uprising. The intellectuals were extremely concerned about the missionaries' control of the education system of modern China. They accused Christians of beliefs which were superstitious, unscientific and no longer respected in the West. They also asserted that Christian schools did not pay enough attention and respect to traditional Chinese culture, and were more interested in importing and imposing Western culture on the students. This protest posed a great threat and challenge to the missionaries who had invested a lot of resources building up modern educational institutions in China.

As far as the CIM was concerned, the initial impact of the Anti-Christian Movement was comparatively less significant relative to other mission agencies because education was not her major focus. Besides, the early phase of the Anti-Christian Movement was basically an urban phenomenon and those who worked in the interior were not directly affected.

The second phase of the Anti-Christian Movement proved to be much more widespread and severe. The British police who fired on demonstrators in Shanghai's International Settlement on May 30th, 1925, could hardly have foreseen that their action would generate such an impact on both the Chinese church as well as China's power structure. The killing of twelve students sent shock waves throughout the entire country escalating the Anti-Christian Movement into its second phase. Unlike the May Fourth demonstrations, this episode was much more organized and violent. Historians believe that it was funded and organized by the Soviet Union.¹⁷ The May 30th shooting was followed by the largest anti-foreign demonstration China had yet experienced. It encompassed people of all classes from all parts of the country. Both the Guomindang and the Communists tried to use this movement to enlist new supporters, especially

¹⁷ Jon Jacobson, *When did the Soviet Union Enter the World Politics?* (University of California Press, 1994), p. 188-190

among urban workers and students. According to Lutz, the Guomindang's decision to launch the Northern Expedition in mid-1926 grew out of the evidence of the power and appeal of Chinese nationalism and the dramatic expansion in party membership that followed the events of May 30th 1925.¹⁸

The Anti-Christian Movement impacted the development of the Chinese church even more seriously than either the Boxer Uprising or the May 30th event. Many Chinese Christians found it difficult to reconcile their church allegiance with patriotism and decided in favor of their country. Others, while continuing to call themselves Christians, either broke with the church or found fault with it. Still others, though silent, became uncertain and lukewarm.¹⁹ Lyall described the situation in this way, "It was clear that the main force of the second revolution [the second phase of this Anti-Christian Movement] was being directed at the foreigners and not at the social conditions: kidnapping and killing were the order of the day. Six more missionaries were murdered during the year. Missionaries became the object of vilification from every quarter, most of it Communist-inspired"²⁰ In 1926, passions were further inflamed when the British Navy sailed up the Yangtze Gorges and bombarded the populous city of Wanh sien, killing many and doing great damage. Foreigners were ordered out of the city, including the CIM missionaries. Many churches all over China decided to sever their relations with all foreigners.

The political instability and fierce anti-foreign sentiment caused the CIM to suffer severe losses in 1927. Morris Slicher and his three year-old daughter were shot dead in Kweichow (Guizhou); George King was drowned while escorting a party of missionaries down the Yellow River on a pigskin raft; he was attempting to refloat one of the rafts when the tragedy occurred. Whitfield Guinness of Kaifeng, contracted typhus after treating Chinese soldiers and died in Beijing after being forced to undertake the journey there at the height of his illness. Apart from loss of life, Mission premises were occupied, looted and often destroyed. The Hudson Taylor School in Szechwan was completely destroyed and was only replaced at great cost. The Language School in Yangchow was wrecked. The hospital in Kaifeng was a total loss. As Lyall put it, the battle was fierce indeed.²¹ The anti-foreign and anti-Christian feelings were so strong throughout China that under urgent consular instructions, the majority of all missionaries, including CIM missionaries, reluctantly left their stations in the interior and headed for the coast. This exodus is known as the Great Evacuation.

¹⁸ Jessie G. Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions, the Anti-Christian Movement 1920-1928*, p.161.

¹⁹ Kenneth Scott Lattourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, p.812.

²⁰ Leslie Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible, The Continuing Story of the Mission Hudson Taylor Began*, pp.92-93.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96

3. Toward a Greater Vision--The Forward Movement of the CIM

According to Lyall's report, about 800 CIM missionaries were forced to leave the interior and withdraw to the coast, but 213 CIM missionaries risked their lives and remained in seventy inland stations. ²²How did the missionaries react to this crisis? Many were puzzled. They had sacrificed so much for the people of China only to be treated with hatred and hostility. These experiences so disappointed and dismayed many of the missionaries, that even their faith in the power and efficacy of the Gospel was shaken. Many lost hope and returned home, while feeling guilty for abandoning the Chinese brothers and sisters at such a critical moment. The leaders of the CIM faced an even greater challenge. How was their withdrawal possible? Where would the funding come from? How could they persuade isolated missionaries of the necessity of evacuation? How could they encourage those dispirited missionaries who had been idling on the coast for an indefinite period of time?

Yet the most serious problem concerned the abandoned Chinese churches, which were now leaderless and penniless. A. Lutley shared this concern in his report in the 1931 issue of *China's Millions*. The sudden calling away of so many missionaries from their work, and the uncertainty of the future, brought into prominence the fact that in many districts the Chinese church was ill prepared to meet such an emergency, partly due to the missionaries having been so largely responsible for the oversight of the church and the direction of the work. The Chinese church therefore had little experience in self-government, and had assumed little or no responsibility for the support of their own churches. ²³

Hoste, the director of the CIM and a talented strategist, had a different plan. Instead of retreating, he believed that this was an opportunity given by God to take the offensive. This response came to be known as the Forward Movement. It is interesting to note that the CIM intentionally termed this the Forward Movement when they were actually in retreat. Perhaps the French proverb "In order to jump farther forward, you need to retreat a few steps backward" was in the minds of Hoste and the leaders. Lutley wrote:

While the members of the CIM, faced with this crisis, were met together seeking afresh to know God's will, and to learn the lesson He would teach them through these experiences, they gradually realized that they had been called away from the stations and immediate surroundings in order that they might be able to see the work in truer perspective, and understand more clearly God's purpose concerning the evangelization of the great land. They also became conscious that God was calling them to a new venture

²² Ibid., 98

²³ A. Lutley, The Forward Movement—Retrospect and Prospect in "*China's Millions*", July 1931, p. 119.

of faith through the adoption of a definite forward policy throughout the whole mission.²⁴

There were four objectives in the Forward Movement. Lutley summarized these as follows:

More rapid transfer to Chinese leadership of the pastoral care and oversight of the Chinese churches connected with the Mission.

More thorough instruction of Chinese Christians for life and witness, and the training of larger numbers of Chinese evangelists, to co-operate in the evangelization of their own people by means of station, district, and provincial Bible schools.

Speedier evangelization of the thousands of villages and towns surrounding existing Mission stations, by setting missionaries free from church work to co-operate with Chinese Christians in the systematic evangelization of these districts.

Freeing up men and women with the necessary physical and spiritual qualifications, to undertake pioneering work in the large outlying districts still unreached by the Gospel, within the fields for which the CIM was responsible.²⁵

To many, this plan might have sounded like sheer madness. Even some of the CIM missionaries themselves might have wondered about the usefulness of the Forward Movement. Was not the land overrun by bandits? Was not Russia propagating Communism and succeeding to a large extent? Had not the civil war devastated whole provinces, leaving the whole country poorer? Was it not true that missionaries were being withdrawn from many inland stations? What folly then the Forward Movement appeared to be! Miller Morris, one of the leaders of the CIM in that period, summarized this as follows, "To those without spiritual perception it is nothing short of madness."²⁶

Hoste needed to accomplish three important things if he wanted the entire CIM force to join him in this movement. First, he needed to raise the morale of the missionaries who were confused and dispirited. Second, he needed to convince the Chinese church that this was the only way for her survival despite all the difficulties ahead of them. Third, he needed to have reinforcements.

²⁴ Ibid., p.120

²⁵ Ibid., pp.120-121

²⁶ H. Millner Morris, *The Forward Movement in the CIM in "China's Millions"* January, 1931. p.4

He reminded his colleagues of the CIM's core values which had been part of its culture since the days of Hudson Taylor: faith in God alone, passion for the evangelization of all China, and recognition of the ability of the Chinese brothers and sisters. Bishop Cassels, one of the Cambridge Seven and a good friend of Hoste's, wrote just before his death, "We came in the steps of Him who was despised and rejected of men. Perhaps this is one of the lessons we have to learn at a time when extraordinary and bitter hatred is being stirred against us."²⁷ Echoing the tone, Lyall wrote on behalf of the CIM leaders:

It can scarcely be said that the Church was really "anti-foreign". Rather was it "pro-Chinese" for it was natural for Chinese Christians to see events from a Chinese point of view. The history of relations between China and the West was open to the worst possible interpretation. It could not be denied that Christian missions had been the first to take advantage of the permission to travel and to reside in the interior, a concession China had been forced to make as the result of defeat in war. It was easy to believe that missionaries were agents in the pay of foreign Governments and a kind of "spear-head of cultural aggression." Chinese Christians could scarcely be expected to appreciate the sacrifices which missionaries made when even the humblest mission station was to them an evidence of wealth and power." Another missionary wrote, "Imagine us not exposed to danger, but misunderstood by those we seek to serve, drinking the cup of ingratitude, shame, humiliation and reproach, despised by the many and hated by some. We are partakers of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and learning when reviled not to revile again."²⁸

This is what we call "the daring spirit of Hudson Taylor" or "the passion for the impossible." Hoste himself reminded all CIM missionaries in the policy statement of the Forward Movement thus, "In view of the many cities and great tracts of country still unevangelized in the spheres for which the CIM is considered responsible, we believe that the time has come for more definite effort to secure the evangelization of our whole world."²⁹ When Hoste mentioned the unevangelized areas, he had the strongholds of Islam, particularly in Kansu and Sinkiang, the tribes in the West of China, the Tibetans, the Mongolians as well as many of the walled cities in China in mind.

Second, he emphasized that this Forward Movement was a joint project between the CIM and the Chinese church. The last clause of the policy read this way, "... that we seek prayerful fellowship, counsel, judgment and co-operation of the Chinese church with us in carrying out this Forward Movement."³⁰ In

²⁷ Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible, The Continuing Story of the Mission Hudson Taylor Began*, p.92-93.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.93

²⁹ Phyllis Thompson, *D.E.Hoste "A Prince with God"* (London, China Inland Mission 1947), p.135.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.134

other words, it was a joint project between the CIM and the Chinese church. The church established by the CIM in the last fifty years had now become independent and autonomous. He reiterated that without the active involvement of the Chinese church, this movement would be fruitless. Thus, the indigenization of the Chinese church was of top priority. In order to accomplish this goal, the training of capable Chinese leaders was most important as spelt out in the first two points of this four-point Forward Policy.

Third, Hoste appointed a sub-committee to make estimates of the number of new workers that would be required to support this Forward Movement; they estimated that 199 were needed. They were concerned not only with numbers, but also with the quality of these new workers. They needed passionate, and more qualified workers to train local believers. The two hundred new missionaries recruited by Hoste during this exercise were very different from the missionaries recruited by Taylor previously. These were more qualified in terms of academic and theological training; many were either university graduates or Bible College graduates. Lyall, a Cambridge graduate, was the kind of missionary Hoste was looking for.³¹

4. Difficulties Implementing the Indigenization Principle in the Chinese Church

It was easy to outline a program for the formation of a Chinese church independent of foreigners, but it was quite another matter to put it into effect. A number of problems hindered the process of indigenization.

As Kenneth S. Latourette pointed out, there was always a problem recruiting and educating enough numbers of Chinese of ability to lead the church successfully. In Chinese culture, religious professionals, like Buddhist or Taoist monks, were usually regarded with contempt. Many educated Chinese were reluctant to enter into the ministry, and as a result most of the Chinese workers, while often earnest and devout, were relatively uneducated. They had been looked upon as “helpers” of the missionaries, and had been paid low salaries. Even if highly educated Chinese had been willing to enter the ministry, the indigenous churches would not have been able to pay them without subsidies from the Mission agencies.³²

In the previous fifty years, the missionaries had built up medical, educational and other institutions. It was highly dubious whether the Chinese church had enough human and financial resources to take up the responsibility of managing these expensive institutions by themselves.

³¹ *China's Millions*, Oct. 1931. P.183-227.

³² Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, pp.674-675.

Jonathan Chao pointed out that the alienation of Chinese Christians from their neighbors and families was another obstacle to this indigenization process. This was especially so in the countryside. These Christians refused to participate in community religious festivals, stopped worshiping folk deities, did not contribute to the support of local temples, and thereby set themselves apart from their communities. Being socially and culturally alienated, they had to depend on the foreign missionaries for a new world view, value system and even lifestyle. Because Christianity was rejected by the intellectuals, the young Chinese church lacked educated leaders and was forced to depend on the missionaries for leadership.³³

The strategy used by the missionaries also contributed to these difficulties. Typically, when a young missionary came to China, he needed a Chinese language teacher, later an escort to accompany him during his evangelistic tours, and a servant to do the household chores. As he usually found his language skills insufficient, he would hire an assistant to help with his evangelistic work. Missionaries regarded all their assistants not as independent persons, but as extensions of themselves who enabled them to relate to the local people. Henry Blodget put it this way, “Our native agents are our eyes, our tongues, our hands, our feet. They help to bridge the chasm between a Christian of the Far West in his Western dress and with his Western civilization, and our Chinese friends in their own dress and with their own civilization.”³⁴ All these assistants were paid employees of the mission. The relationship between the missionary and his Chinese assistants gradually came to be known as “the employment system.” Though many of the missionaries tried to train and disciple these assistants to be independent evangelists or even pastors, yet this employer/employee relationship was very different from a mentor/disciple relationship. Jonathan Chao observed, “The employment system, marked by the missionaries’ selection, control, and payment of Chinese evangelists, institutionalized Chinese dependence upon foreign missions.”³⁵ Under such a system, it was difficult for the Chinese church to develop independence.

It is interesting to compare the strategy used by the Communists with the Missionary strategy in the 1920s and 1930s. Both Communism and Christianity were Western imports. However, Communism as interpreted by Mao Zedong, was much more appealing to the Chinese. According to Professor Charles P. Fitzgerald (1902-1992), this had something to do with their strategies. Instead of adopting this “employment system,” high-ranking Communist officers would come to a village and if they saw a peasant whose cart

³³ Jonathan Tien-en Chao, *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement, 1919-1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movements in Modern China*, a Ph.D dissertation in the University of Pennsylvania, 1986, p. 40.

³⁴ Henry Blodget, “May Native Agents be Supported by Foreign Funds?” in *Chinese Recorder*, XVII, 12 (1886), p.447.

³⁵ Jonathan Tien-en Chao, *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement, 1919-1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movements in Modern China*, a Ph.D dissertation in the University of Pennsylvania, 1986, p. 54.

had slipped off the road into a ditch, they stopped, took off their coats, and pushed in the mud till they got the cart back onto the road. They would stay in the village, helping the villagers in whatever way they could. While the male comrades helped out in the paddy fields, the female comrades took care of the children and the seniors. In the evening, they would gather all the villagers and tell them stories. After winning their trust, they would share their stories about how they defeated the imperialists and landlords. Within a short period of time, whole villages adopted communist beliefs, and their young men were recruited into the Red Army. They won the hearts of the people. Fitzgerald commented that this incarnation model in fact originated from Christianity. It was abandoned by the missionaries, but adopted by the Communists.³⁶

The political situation was another factor affecting the indigenization process. The Anti-Christian movement led to many church and mission properties being occupied by military or brigand bands. In some cases, churches leaders were murdered, while others were robbed. Many missionaries were compelled to flee and remained in hiding for long periods. In other cases, Christians lost their crops and possessions through brigandage and civil strife. They found it very difficult even to support their own families, much less the church. Lutley wrote:

The evangelization of the towns and villages around the Mission stations has also been much hindered by the continued lawless conditions of the country which have often made it difficult, if not impossible, for the Chinese evangelists to visit the districts. The constant civil strife and frequent fighting over wide areas, together with the fact that the outlying districts have been overrun with brigand bands, has also greatly interfered with the opening up of new districts. Typhus and other fever which have followed in the wake of famine, have also struck down a number of valued workers.³⁷

Under such harsh conditions, it was difficult for the young Chinese church to survive and flourish.

5. The Implementation of the Indigenization Principle in the CIM Churches

In order to achieve the goal set forth by the Forward Movement, the CIM needed to solve three major problems. First was the issue of funding. This was closely related to the implementation of self-support. Second was the issue of local leadership particularly in the pastoral field. This related to the principle of self-government. Third was the issue of establishing believers both in their spiritual maturity as well as their ability to evangelize. This related to self-propagation.

³⁶ C.P. Fitzgerald, *The Birth of Communist China*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967), p.149.

³⁷ A. Lutley, "The Forward Movement—Retrospect and Prospect" in *China's Millions*, July 1931, pp. 120-121

In general, the majority of Chinese Christians in the CIM churches were poor even by Chinese standards. Frank Houghton, Director of the CIM, wrote in 1936, “It has to be remembered that even according to Chinese standards, which are considerably lower than our own, the majority of Chinese Christians are living in poverty.”³⁸ Lyall also wrote:

This policy [indigenization of the Chinese church policy] was not easily accepted by many simple Christians who had been contented with the old paternalistic situation. Most of them were poor; how could they then be expected to assume financial responsibility for pastors, evangelists, teachers and Biblewomen? Lacking support, not a few Chinese evangelists decided to leave Shansi (Shanxi) for church areas where such hard conditions were unknown and where foreign missions still paid handsome salaries to their young workers.³⁹

Such views were not only expressed by foreign missionaries, but by local Christian leaders as well. The following is a quote from an address delivered in 1931 by Chang Tzu-chiang (張之江 1882-1966), Chairman of the National Opium Prohibition Bureau, and the Board of Art, Pacification Governor of Kiangsu, and an earnest Christian leader:

Up till now the Christian Church in China has been largely financed by the churches of Western pioneers. In regard to their inner working, some Churches have made a good beginning, some have made great advances, but they have been inevitably hampered in developing a Church which really suits the Chinese genius. For some years there has been much talk of self-government and self-propagation, and it sounds as if we were going forward by leaps and bounds. But the facts are far otherwise, and the reason is that there have been many who echoed the slogan, but few who carried it out to the point of bearing financial responsibility, so that the church might indeed be self-governing and self-propagating. In fact, such churches are as rare as phoenix feathers or unicorn’s horns! Of course, if we do not want the Chinese Church to advance, there the matter ends. But if we do want it to advance to the point of independence and self-propagation, then every individual Christian in the Church must have a sense of responsibility in regard to financial burdens. Only if we have the spirit of the Christian at Philippi long ago can this be.⁴⁰

³⁸ Frank Houghton, *China Calling*, (London, IVF of Evangelical Unions, 1936), p.128.

³⁹ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China’s Mighty Men*, (OMF, 2000). Page 22.

⁴⁰ Chang Tzu-chiang, Two Urgent Needs of the Chinese Church Today (translated from the *Chinese Christian Intelligencer*, *Tong wen bao: Yesu jiaoting xinwen 通問報: 耶穌家庭新聞*) in *China’s Millions*, May 1931, p.81.

How did the CIM cope with such a difficult situation? From all the information gathered, we can summarize the steps taken by the CIM towards realizing the self-support principle.

First, the CIM acknowledged mistakes made right at the beginning of their mission. Houghton wrote, “But Western missionaries have made the mistake of assuming financial responsibility for the building of churches, and the payment of Chinese helpers [pastors, catechists, Biblewomen, etc.] thus fostering a spirit of dependence.” Then he continued, “We have constructed solid, if not elaborate, buildings, whose upkeep is a heavy drain on church finances ... Now we see our mistake, is it any wonder that they hesitate to maintain a building for which we, and not they, were responsible?”⁴¹ We previously saw that Hudson Taylor had followed in the footsteps of the apostle Paul in formulating his missionary strategy. However, in the financing of local staff and church buildings, he abandoned Paul’s strategy and his faith mission practice. According to Roland Allen, Paul never provided any financial aid to the churches he established. He said, “Every province, every church, was financially independent. The Galatians are exhorted to support their teachers. Every church is instructed to maintain its poor. There is not a hint from beginning to end of the Acts and Epistles of any church depending upon another.”⁴² It was likely Taylor’s passion for evangelism and his desire to see fruit that caused him to assume financial responsibility for all the local workers, inadvertently creating this difficulty of handing over financial responsibility to the Chinese church.

When the CIM implemented the principle of self-support in the Chinese churches, it did not mean that they withdrew all financial support. Their goal was to partner with the Chinese church in the evangelization of the entire country. Local believers took up financial responsibility for the organized churches, such as the salaries of their pastors, the maintenance of their church facilities, and all other administrative expenses. The Mission remained financially responsible for all the expenses of those stations which had not yet developed into organized churches, including expenses of all the hospitals, clinics, schools, and expenses of all the missionaries. In some cases, the Mission also remained responsible for the salaries of the local evangelists, Bible-women and teachers. The Rev. C.H. Stevens described the situation of the Fengsiang and Meih sien districts of Shensi (Shenxi) in 1931, “In keeping with the Mission Policy all our Bible-women and Evangelists receiving foreign funds are to share in the work of evangelism.”⁴³ This report clearly shows that there were cases where the Mission was still supporting the salaries of Biblewomen and evangelists in 1931. By this time, however, many local Chinese churches had already taken up these financial responsibilities themselves. Lyall also confirmed that missionaries had hitherto, in many cases,

⁴¹ Frank Houghton, *China Calling*, (London, IVF of Evangelical Unions, 1936), pp.128-129.

⁴² Roland Allen, *Missionary Method: St. Paul’s or Ours?* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1962), p.51

⁴³ C.H. Stevens, The Forward Movement in Shansi in *China’s Millions, May 1931*, p. 82

virtually assumed the roles of pastors, while national evangelists, Biblewomen, pastors and school teachers were subsidized by Mission funds. For these reasons, the Communists called Chinese Christians ‘running dogs of the imperialists.’ Now all was to be different and the churches were expected to stand on their own feet administratively and economically, while the missionaries took a back seat.⁴⁴ Houghton reported that the CIM also had the policy of transferring ownership of church buildings to local Chinese churches free of remuneration, with the maintenance of these facilities then becoming the responsibility of local churches.⁴⁵

Another effective solution to the “money issue” was the training of large numbers of lay workers to build up the indigenous church. Houghton wrote:

We thank God for a very large number of voluntary workers, men and women whom He has given with powers of leadership. More often than not they are engaged for part of their time in other callings, but especially in country churches, they lead Sunday services, are responsible for church funds, care for the spiritual life of the church members, and do much to maintain a Christian witness. On the other hand, it is generally felt that larger churches, or groups of churches, need the oversight and supervision of men whose gifts have been developed by training, and who should give their whole time to the work and thus it is not always a sign of grace when a church, faced with a diminishing Mission Grant, dismiss some or all of its paid workers, and decides to depend on voluntary part-time service.⁴⁶

In other words, while the CIM realized that voluntary workers played a significant role in building up the Chinese church, they nevertheless also realized that the church simply could not dismiss wholesale the role played by paid pastors, evangelists and Biblewomen.

By the CIM’s careful calculation, it appeared that no matter how poor the Chinese churches might appear to be, they nevertheless had enough financial resources to support themselves. Houghton wrote, “It is often pointed out that the average Chinese convert contributes far less to the church than he was wont to spend for idolatrous purposes.”⁴⁷ According to Houghton, the reason why Chinese believers were reluctant to give is not because of a lack of funds, but because of a lack of trust in their pastors. Houghton quoted an interesting case. He came across a well-known Chinese dignitary who told him of the difficulty a certain

⁴⁴ Leslie Lyall, *Three of China’s Mighty Men* (OMF 2000) p.22.

⁴⁵ Frank Houghton, *China Calling*, (London, IVF of Evangelical Unions, 1936), p.130.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.130-131

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.131

church was finding to support its pastor. The church members had suffered much from Communist invasion, and nearly all the wealthy amongst them had moved to other cities. Five minutes later, he surprised Houghton with the remark, “Of course, if Mr. X [naming a splendid Chinese worker] were their pastor, there would be no difficulty in raising the money!” In fact, oftentimes, large contributions by members of the church were voluntarily made to members of evangelistic bands, or speakers at special conferences. There seems to be clear evidence that Chinese Christians, however poor, would give, and gave liberally, where they had obtained real benefits.⁴⁸ Thus, we see that the real issue was not about money, but about a lack of confidence in pastoral leadership.

The issue of local Chinese leadership more properly concerned Church government and organization. It was the goal of the CIM to pass the baton to local Chinese leaders. Their objective was that missionaries might be members of these church bodies, but that the Chinese should always be the majority. The position of pastor of a church should not be held by any other than a Chinese. The Great Evacuation of the missionaries in 1927 forced the CIM to hasten the process of handing over church government to Chinese leaders. Were the Chinese ready for this? We find conflicting conclusions from available reports. The CIM did face much opposition and struggle in the implementation of this policy. However, there were also some encouraging reports of local Chinese churches rising to the challenge. How do we account for such conflicting reports? A closer examination of the field reports of the missionaries, as well as reports filed by Chinese workers shows us that despite initial challenges, the CIM did finally overcome the problems encountered.

Before 1927, most Chinese workers were trained in Church schools or theological colleges operated by missionaries. However, during the anti-Christian Movement, most of these schools were closed due to the Great Evacuation. Chang Tze-Chiang pointed out that previously their leaders were trained only in Church schools or theological colleges. But with the Great Evacuation, the majority of church schools had closed, while those which remained had made religion a voluntary subject, which very few students elected to take. Theological colleges were also a far cry from what they had been before. Thus it was unrealistic to expect the same contribution of Christian leadership from these schools and colleges.⁴⁹ At this critical time, the burden of training local leaders fell on the shoulders of the local churches. It had been part of CIM strategy to start short-term Bible schools led by missionaries. This was the most effective way of training both paid workers as well as lay leaders. But, the political situation in the late 1920s prevented the

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.132.

⁴⁹ Chang Tzu-chiang, Two Urgent Needs of the Chinese Church Today (translated from the *Chinese Christian Intelligencer*) in *China's Millions*, May 1931, p.81.

missionaries from taking up such responsibilities. F. Worley reported from Wenchow (Wenzhou) in 1931:

Though the city of Wenchow (Wenzhou), in which we dwell, has been kept in safety, yet the country around has been much overrun during the past few months, making it unsafe to travel, so that since May we have not been able to carry on that part of our work. The churches, however, throughout the country districts, have been able to carry forward their work as usual, although hampered temporarily in some places. The churches being self-governing, are in no wise dependent on visits from the missionaries for the carrying on of their work, but we regret that it means the giving up of a number of the ten-day Bible Schools, which have proved such a help to them, until conditions improved. The church leaders strongly advise us not to go into the country, for we should attract the attention of the bandits, while the Chinese workers could go on their work unmolested.⁵⁰

If even Wenchow (Wenzhou), with an old established church, was impacted by the closing of these short-term Bible Schools, we can imagine the impact on other less established churches in the interior part of China. D. Beugler wrote in her letter from Sinchang, “There has been a good deal of disappointment at this station with regard to the effect of ‘independence’ in relation to the spiritual work of the church and apprehension as to the possibility of cordial co-operation with missionaries under the present methods of procedure in connection with established churches.”⁵¹ It seemed quite obvious that at this critical time, the most effective way of achieving the goal of indigenization of the Chinese church was to have some charismatic Chinese leaders take up this training responsibility. David Yang was one such person. Lyall called this humble man one of the three mighty men in the Chinese church.

David Yang was chairman of the CIM Church Council for the province of Shansi (Shanxi). When the CIM decided to more stringently put into practice its policy to help its churches towards independence, salaries for many workers were no longer granted by the Mission. Meanwhile, local churches, for different reasons, found themselves unable to undertake the support of these workers. It was no little burden to Yang of Kuwo (曲沃), that thirteen counties were left with no more than five or six full-time Chinese workers, while voluntary workers were few and far between. The spiritual state of the churches constituted a direct challenge to Yang.⁵² According to Lyall,⁵³ on one of Yang’s journeys, rain turned the motor road into an impassable quagmire and he spent several days at an inn waiting for the weather to clear and the road to

⁵⁰ F. Worley, Advance Amid Alarms in *China’s Millions*, Jan. 1931, p. 12.

⁵¹ *China’s Millions* March, 1931, p. 50

⁵² See Arthur Reynolds, Workers Together with God in *China’s Millions*, July 1937, p. 132

⁵³ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China’s Mighty Men*, (OMF, 2000), p. 25.

dry. It was at that crude hostelry that a clear vision of something quite new came to him - that of a team of fellow workers living a communal life of faith. Half of the year they would devote to the study of the Bible and the nature of the Christian ministry, and in the other half, they would go out in small teams to minister to the churches and to evangelize, putting to use the truths learned while studying together. They came to be known as the Ling Gong Tuan (Team of Christian Workers) which would have a very lasting impact on the development of the Chinese Church in the future.

It may be said, broadly, that the aim of the Team, in serving the Chinese church, was to promote its independence by producing quality Chinese workers to lead the church. There were a number of unique characteristics in this training method. Though not exactly a Bible School in the traditional sense, it nevertheless emphasized instruction in Biblical knowledge and doctrine. Arthur Reynolds, a CIM missionary described the Team in this way:

A growing danger, in some parts of China, is that of zeal without knowledge. This is not to say that the churches are on fire, any more than this could be said of churches at home, for it may be that a perfectly healthy fear of excess has been allowed to overshadow any fear of deficiency; and who can say that the extent of our coming short does not represent a much more serious error than does that of our excess? Both are wrong, of course, and in view of this, the Team seeks to uplift, and uncover, that which is a Lamp unto our feet and a Light unto our path. Thus guided, the enthusiasts may press on fearlessly. It may be added that the implied two-folded need, which the Team endeavors to meet, has been aptly illustrated, in the reminder that the utility of a locomotive depends equally, on the possession of fire, and a trustworthy track.⁵⁴

Though not a monastery, the Team nevertheless emphasized spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation and repentance. Many believers, according to Reynolds, were at times, stirred from their lethargy and manifested unbounded enthusiasm. Amongst these were some with a steadfast desire to serve the Lord Jesus, but who did not know how to begin. Or, it might have been that some mistake was followed by discouragement, and eventually, retirement from the field. The Team sought to help such men and women in their service for God.⁵⁵ The Team sought to keep the fire going by living a Spirit-filled life through practicing these spiritual disciplines. Yang himself gave this testimony. "I can think of a large number of brothers and sisters [in the Team) who three or four months ago were weak and powerless, yet today have become strong leaders in the firing line, to whom the Lord is entrusting the care of saved men and women ... The living water still flows and I believe that the Lord will give yet greater grace that His name might be

⁵⁴ Arthur Reynolds, *Workers Together with God in China's Millions, July 1937*, p. 133

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 132

glorified.”⁵⁶

Though not a seminary, it was a training center for Christian workers under the close supervision of Yang himself. Again, Lyall wrote, “In Shansi (Shanxi), David Yang pioneered a unique experiment in evangelism: select men and women studied together for six months of the year and then engaged in Christian service for six months. Young missionaries joined the team as learners. Many of the members of the “Spiritual Work Team” later became outstanding workers in different parts of China.”⁵⁷ Therefore, they did not call members of the Team students, but workers. They learned by serving together as a team rather than in a classroom setting.

They depended totally on the Lord for funding. The faith mission principle was applied here. Reynolds shared the following testimony. A young Chinese woman was praying. Spread before her as she waited on God for guidance were three leaflets. Two of these concerned University and Theological Seminary, for either of which support had been promised should she choose to enter. The third leaflet, given to her by a friend, was an introduction to a certain “Team of Christian Workers” composed of men and women, called of God and prepared to step out in simple dependence on Him. Which should she choose? God had already been speaking to her, and she was conscious of being led to a wider ministry, trusting Him to supply her needs. She resigned from her position on the staff of a Girl’s Middle School, and joined the Team.⁵⁸ Reynolds cited yet another interesting example. On one occasion, the cook (for the Team) asked if flour could be purchased on credit since their supplies would be exhausted after the morning meal. “No” was the reply, “we will tell the Lord”. The morning was well advanced when a visitor who passed through was constrained to make a donation. The dinner bell rang as usual.⁵⁹

Prospective Team members needed to have a definite experience of conversion, to be sure of God’s call and of His leading for them to have fellowship in the work of the group. The willingness to follow such leading implied a recognition of the faith mission principle. All members were expected to live on equal terms with, and to be admonished by fellow-members, and it was desired that all would be enthusiastic and bold in their given ministry. ⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Leslie t. Lyall, *Three of China’s Mighty Men*, (OMF, 2000), p. 29.

⁵⁷ Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible, The Continuing Story of the Mission Hudson Taylor Began* (London, OMF, 1976) , p.106.

⁵⁸ Arthur Reynolds, *Workers Together with God in China’s Millions, July 1937*, p. 132

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 133

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 133

Yang was not only an instructor, but also a Team member. He taught by example. He used the principle of “life influencing life” to mentor his younger workers. Adeney, a young missionary in the Team, recalled:

Hearing about the ‘Ling Gong Tuan’ in Shansi, I asked permission to visit this Spiritual Action Team where both men and women joined together in study and evangelism, living as one family. Right at the center of this fellowship was David Yang, the man who led us in the study of the Scriptures and in deep fellowship with the Lord and with one another. He encouraged us to seek for a keener understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and of the gifts He has given to His Church. I can never forget a half-day spent in prayer when the truth of Ephesians 1:18-23 became clearer to me personally. David Yang himself was always trying to attain to a deeper fellowship with the Son of God. He had asked me to go and spend some time with him in prayer. I found him stretched out upon the mud floor of his simple room crying to God, confessing his own weakness and sinfulness and asking for cleansing and the filling of the Holy Spirit. He was already a man whose life was characterized by humility and Christlikeness and yet that day I saw him humbling himself before the Lord. It made an undeniable impression upon me. I realized that however greatly a man might be used in the service of the Lord Jesus he is nevertheless constantly in need of repentance and of waiting upon the Lord.⁶¹

In the early summer of 1934, on land donated for the purpose, a cluster of simple adobe buildings went up, surrounding a central building to be used both for lectures and as a refectory. There were thirty-four rooms in all and everything was completed in just three months. In September of that year, twenty men and women who formed the Spiritual Action Team commenced their studies and service. The results were amazing. Lyall reported that the thirty-eight counties of Shanxi for which the CIM was responsible made more progress towards the goal of healthy autonomy than churches anywhere else in China.⁶² This model of training also spread to other provinces such as Henan and Shandong. Many missionaries, including Adeney and Lyall were involved with this Team. Lyall put it this way, “It is the beginning of a dream’s fulfillment when we can work with Chinese men and women, no longer on the basis of employer and employed, but on the bonds of a free service, one and all in dependence on God alone. It has initiated a new era in spiritual fellowship and on the only satisfactory basis for such fellowship.”⁶³

The third issue was the establishment of believers into spiritually mature disciples able to bring others

⁶¹ Carolyn Armitage, *Reaching for the Goal, the Life Story of David Adeney* (OMF, 1993) p. 59.

⁶² Leslie Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), pp.28-29.

⁶³ Arthur Reynolds, *Workers Together with God in China’s Millions, July 1937*, p. 132

to the Christian faith, that is, the issue of self-propagation. The growth of the church could not depend only on a few capable leaders, but on the motivation and equipment of the entire congregation to be involved in evangelism. To illustrate, a skilled fisherman, who can catch 100 fish each day, coaches instead, 100 students to catch fish instead of catching fish all by himself. Though each of his students may only catch 10 fish a day, the total catch would still be 1000 instead of 100. It was obvious that the growth of the church depended on the involvement of all believers in evangelism.

In 1926, while anti-Christian propaganda was at its peak, a great revival took place in China concurrently. A number of young Christians connected with the Bethel Mission sprang up in Shanghai. Prominent among them were Andrew Gih, Leyland Wang (Wang Zai 王載 1898-1975), and John Sung (Song Shangjie 宋尚節 1901-1944). This Bethel Band travelled through many provinces in China preaching the Gospel and challenging people to repent. Thousands repented and accepted Jesus as Lord; many lives were changed; new members flooded into the church; Christians began to witness spontaneously to others while joy and love overflowed in Christian fellowship.

Historically speaking, revivals always resulted in an increase in evangelism. The Bethel Band, in particular, encouraged every church they visited to form small voluntary preaching bands, each with its own flag and leader. Hundreds of such bands of lay witnesses became active in the wake of visits from the Bethel Band. Since many CIM churches were actively involved in these revival meetings, they experienced tremendous growth during this period. Houghton witnessed thousands of church members taking part in special evangelistic efforts at the New Year. Many churches supported evangelistic bands operating in neighbouring villages and towns. One result of the revival movement was the formation of hundreds of voluntary preaching bands, in connection with churches and Christian schools. Houghton travelled long distances on boats in the company of Chinese Christians, and he marveled at their faithfulness in making Christ known to their fellow-passengers.⁶⁴ Lyall reported that by 1933, the Chinese church was growing more through self-propagation than through the work of foreign missionaries. In 1936 a record total of 8,841 baptisms took place, double that of 1926. This stormy decade produced over 60,000 baptisms altogether, bringing the membership of the CIM churches up to 95,000 (about 20% of the total Christian population in 1936).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Frank Houghton, *China Calling*, (London, IVF of Evangelical Unions, 1936), p.134.

⁶⁵ A.K. Macpherson, *Indigenous or Apostolic?* in *China's Millions* July, 1931, p.128

6. A Case Study—Wenling: a Typical CIM Indigenous Chinese Church

Wenling (溫嶺) is a county in Chekiang (Zhejiang) Province in the south-east corner of what used to be known as the Taichow (Taizhou 泰州) prefecture. It lies south of that branch of Tayu Ling (Great Stack Mountain) which crosses Chekiang (Zhejiang) from south-west to north-east, dividing the province into two very different regions. North of the range everything, including the soil, climate, people, their dress and language, resembles that of southern Kiangsu (Jiangsu) and Anhwei (Anhui). South of the range, everything resembles Fukien (Fujian). The eastern part of Wenling is fertile, rice-growing land, patiently reclaimed from the sea as it gradually silted up. Some of the place names reveal the fact that the hills above this alluvial plain were islands at one time. In the 1930s, there was already a highly developed network of waterways. The population was probably as dense as in any other part of China. This was also a place with many pirates and bandits.

The first Christian missionary came here in 1870. In 1874, an outstation was established in the city, which in 1898 became a station with resident missionaries from the CIM. Difficulties with the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Seventh Day Adventists, and opposition from the local Chinese, made progress very slow. Since 1915, no missionary had resided in Wenling, though regular visits were paid by those located in the neighboring county of Hwangyen (黄岩区). However, in the early 1930s, much progress was made, not only in church growth, but also in self-government, self-support and self-propagation.

There was a District Church Council composed of delegates appointed by different congregations, including both paid and voluntary workers. This Council met quarterly and the CIM missionary had a seat on the Council. The administration of all church matters was in the Council's hands. It appointed the workers who performed the pastoral duties of the district, administered the sacraments, and conducted marriage and funeral services. The Council served as a coordinator for all the congregations within the district. Some congregations might appeal for help with man-power for their outreach programs during the summer. Other congregations might ask permission to enlarge their chapel and appeal for financial assistance. Yet others might ask the Council for help to arrange for a week's Bible School. Each congregation was autonomous in most of its routine affairs, but this Council served as the coordinating body for mutual help.

On the issue of self-support, the Wenling Church had been carrying out her work without financial help from the Mission. However, on a few occasions, grants from the Mission were given towards

extraordinary expenditure, such as building projects or Special Bible School expenses. According to the report from the Wenling Church recorded in *China's Millions*, contributions in 1930 amounted to \$3,360.⁶⁶ This sum was expended as follows:

Salaries of four workers	\$516
Expenses of evangelistic campaigns	\$100
Building two chapels	\$2,000
Purchase of house for chapel	\$250
Rent of four chapels	\$100
Repairs to buildings	\$84
Bible School expenses	\$60
Poor relief	\$100
Expenses of Christmas celebrations	<u>\$150</u>
Total:	<u>\$3,360</u>

From the above report, we see that in 1930, 72% of the Wenling church's budget was spent on buildings, 15% on the salaries of workers and 13% on ministry. It is obvious that facilities constituted the major concern in the Wenling Church. On the issue of self-propagation, the Wenling church did well. One hundred and twenty persons were baptized in the year 1930, making a total of 857 in church membership. About 2,500 seekers came to the church in that year. One interesting feature about the Wenling church was that when the head of a household became a Christian, he usually brought along his whole family with him to the church. In fact, this feature was not only true in Wenling, but also in many other parts of China.⁶⁷

One of the most effective ways to train up leaders was through the short-term Bible schools held every year. In Wenling, the Bible School was held from February to March. In 1930, about 300 attended. They met from 6:30 am to 9:30 pm every day, with lodging and food provided for all attendees. Missionaries and local pastors were invited to be instructors. On the final day, attendees gave testimonies on what they had learned. The Rev. A.K. Macpherson, a CIM missionary who had helped the Bible School in Wenling wrote:

In reviewing the visits I have paid to Wenling during the past three years, I have come to believe that the church there follows primitive apostolic methods more than we, who have been brought up to value

⁶⁶ A.K. Macpherson, *Indigenous or Apostolic?* in *China's Millions* July, 1931, pp.127-128

⁶⁷ A.B. Lewis, *How the Chinese Church Grows* in *China's Millions*, Jan. 1930, p.9

order and organization, are naturally inclined to appreciate. Many things are far from ideal. The church has its difficulties and failures just as the early church had. But there is *life* and that is the main thing. God does not necessarily work along what we consider orthodox lines. Some of the Wenling workers are real free lancers, refusing to be hampered by any rules and regulations whatsoever. Yet the Lord is using them to make His name known in that region.⁶⁸

This is a fair assessment not only of the Wenling church, but many other CIM churches as well.

7. Did the CIM Really Do a Credible Job in the Indigenization of the Chinese Church?

How successful was the CIM in its implementation of the three-self principle in China? According to the above reports, we can say that no matter how difficult the situation might have been, the CIM did do a credible job in the indigenization of the Chinese church. Houghton reported in 1936 that except in places where the work had been almost fruitless or where it was so new that the Church existed in embryo, the affairs of the local churches were by then almost entirely in Chinese hands, or in the hands of synods, presbyteries, or committees, on which they were represented. Missionaries might be members of these bodies, but the Chinese were always the majority.⁶⁹

However, reports by other historians seem to reflect a different picture. When historians wrote about the indigenization movement in China, the work of the CIM was never mentioned as if it had done nothing to contribute to this movement. Secondly, some historians, citing a few isolated cases concluded that the CIM had actually been an obstacle to this movement. How do we account for such a great discrepancy?

Daniel Bays, for instance, mentioned the formation of the Church of Christ in China and/or the National Christian Conference in 1922 as one of the major contributors to the indigenization of the Chinese church. He was very cautious about the use of the term “indigenous.” To him, the churches were not actually “indigenous.” He preferred the term “Sino-foreign Protestant establishment.” From the formation of the China Continuation Committee after the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, the goal of indigenization was pursued more systematically, reaching a watershed at the National Christian Conference of 1922. Out of this conference came the ecumenical Church of Christ of China, a Sino-foreign body with a significant degree of Chinese leadership and responsibility, which eventually claimed membership of

⁶⁸ A.K. Macpherson, *Indigenous or Apostolic?* in *China's Millions* July, 1931, p.128

⁶⁹ Frank Houghton, *China Calling*, (London, IVF of Evangelical Unions, 1936), p.124.

about a quarter of the Protestant Christian community. The National Christian Council (NCC), a national Protestant coordinating and liaison body, was also a product of the conference and was in operation by the mid-1920s.⁷⁰ Bays mentioned that not all denominations or mission groups joined the Church of Christ in China and/or the NCC. Some, like the Anglicans or Lutherans, pursued their own forms of Sino-foreign unity in nurturing Chinese leadership. Regarding the CIM's efforts in this indigenization movement, Bays seemed quite negative. He said, "The CIM continued in what was basically a foreign-dominated structure at the top levels, but tried to promote sensitivity to and encouragement of Chinese Christians' aspirations to responsibility and autonomy at the local level."⁷¹

Gloria S. Tseng is another historian who was totally silent about the CIM's efforts in this indigenization movement. She wrote that the history of the indigenization of Christianity in China in the twentieth century had three currents: (1) the ecclesiastical development of the Church of Christ in China, which was the culmination of the church-union movement in China in the first decades of the twentieth century; (2) the emergence of Chinese Christian intellectuals associated with missionary colleges and universities, the best known of which was Yenching University; and (3) the emergence of independent preachers and their mass followings outside denominational missions. The first and the second developments shared a similar set of participants: representative figures such as Cheng Jingyi (誠靜怡 1881-1939), T.C.Chao (Zhao Zichen 趙紫宸 1888-1979), Liu Tingfang (劉廷芳 1891-1947), Wu Leichuan (吳雷川 1870-1944) and Y.T. Wu (Wu Yaozong 吳耀宗 1893-1979). The third development involved participants such as John Sung, Wang Mingdao, and Watchman Nee.⁷² The lack of mention of CIM contributions to this indigenization movement seems to imply that its contribution was not significant.

Jonathan Chao also omitted the CIM's efforts in the indigenization movement in his PhD dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania, 1986, titled *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement, 1919-1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movements in Modern China*. Instead, he cited two cases showing that the CIM was an obstacle to this movement. The first was the case of the church in Kaifeng (開封), Henan. He quoted a declaration by a group of Christians in Kaifeng published in *Sheng-ming Yueh-k'an* (生命月刊) V.9 July, 1925 that some Christians from the CIM hospital left to organize an independent self-governing, self-supporting Chinese Christian church. They declared their complete severance of relations

⁷⁰ Daniel H. Bays, *Christianity in China* (Stanford, CA. 1996), p.308.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.309

⁷² Gloria S. Tseng, Botany or Flowers? The Challenge of Writing the History of the Indigenization of Christianity in China in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol. 36 No.1, Jan 2012, pp.10-13.

with the CIM and even called on other Christians in Kaifeng to leave these “British-flagged churches” and join their independent church. The second case was that of the church in Wenzhou. Citing the same source, he quoted, “Now that non-Christians are accusing us Christians of being the running dogs of foreigners, the good name of our faith is being maligned. So let us separate ourselves from foreigners and flee from the power of the imperialists. We have been talking about independence for so long, now is the time to rise up for independence.” Chao claimed that in both cases, the CIM missionaries were not happy with their separation.⁷³

In order to understand this apparent discrepancy, we need to understand the background of the indigenization movement in the first half of the 20th century. There were four main issues: denominationalism, nationalism, theological differences, or more precisely, the fight between the modernists and the evangelicals in China, and finally, the issue of mission strategy. Without a clear understanding of these four issues, one may arrive at a distorted view of the indigenization movement in China at the time.

There is a general consensus among historians that Cheng Jingyi played a vital role in this indigenization movement in Chinese church history. He was one of only three Chinese delegates out of 1,215 official delegates to the 1910 World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland. At the time of the Conference, Cheng was only twenty-eight years old, serving as an assistant pastor of a newly established church of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Beijing. He was a fairly new Christian, having been converted at the age of seventeen at a revival meeting at Tienjin. At the Conference, he gave a speech which proved significant to the development of the Chinese Church. He said, “As a representative of the Chinese Church, I speak entirely from the Chinese standpoint ... Speaking plainly we hope to see, in the near future, a united Christian Church without any denominational distinctions. This may seem somewhat peculiar to you, but, friends, do not forget to view us from our standpoint, and if you fail to do that, the Chinese will remain always as a mysterious people to you.”⁷⁴ Obviously, his major concern was the denominationalism imported from the West. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Protestant missionary movement was dominated by organized missionary societies, most of them (with the exception of the CIM) agencies of large denominational churches in North America and Europe. Each denomination had its own historical heritage, culture, rituals and church polity. Their goal was to plant

⁷³ Jonathan Tien-en Chao, *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement, 1919-1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movements in Modern China*, a Ph.D dissertation in the University of Pennsylvania, 1986, pp. 204-206

⁷⁴ Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 108.

churches of their own kind with the same distinctiveness. To Cheng Jingyi this was not acceptable, for such distinctiveness was characteristically foreign to the Chinese. That is why he said that if this aspect of missions remained unchanged, the Chinese would always remain a mystery to Westerners. He suggested instead, the formation of a united Protestant church free from all denominational baggage, a union of churches allowed to support itself and direct its own ministry. I would like to emphasize that his ideal was not so much to establish local, indigenous, self-governing and self-funded congregations, but a union of churches free from Western denominationalism.

Cheng was well received and respected at the Conference. He was invited to be a member of the Continuation Committee to carry on the spirit of cooperation in missions. Subsequently, this Continuation Committee established the China Continuation Committee (CCC) which was an official branch of the Continuation Committee from 1912. Cheng was appointed the first joint secretary of the CCC, which in 1922, evolved into the National Christian Council (NCC) in China. From 1924 to 1933, he served as the general secretary of the NCC, a national Protestant coordinating and liaison body. Under his influence, the Church of Christ in China (中華基督教會) was formed in 1927. This Chinese Church Union consisted of sixteen Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist church bodies. Cheng was appointed its first moderator (later general secretary), serving till his death in 1939.⁷⁵

Cheng was indispensable to the Chinese indigenization movement for he set the tone for the future of the whole movement. When he spoke of the Chinese indigenous church, it was always with reference to a Chinese Church Union against the background of Western denominationalism in China. Judging from the later development of the Church of Christ in China, we can say that he was actually trying to create a denomination with distinct Chinese characteristics.

Conversely, it had never been the agenda of the CIM to form a denomination in China. In fact, the CIM was a trans-denominational mission. Lyall, in his debate with Bishop Leslie Newbingin spelt out the position of the CIM very clearly. Like Cheng, the CIM also realized that the mission of the Western Church should not be to duplicate its own form and tradition in other countries, no matter how ingrained these forms and ceremonies might be. Such paternalism only hindered the normal healthy growth of the churches in the mission field. The missionaries of the CIM, coming from many different denominations in their homelands, were completely uninterested in reproducing Western denominationalism in China. Unlike

⁷⁵ ZJN, (中華基督教會年鑑 *Zhonghua Jidu jiaohui nianjian* China Church Year Book), Published by The China Continuation Committee and the National Council of China, from 1914 to 1936.

Cheng who advocated a Christian union with Chinese distinctiveness, the CIM aimed to plant local autonomous churches without a super hierarchy over them. Each local congregation might have its own distinctive style of worship, liturgy and form of government, but the essentials of their faith was the same everywhere. Each church was self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating, though mutual help was not uncommon among these churches. To the CIM, the church was not an organization, but an organism, the living body of Christ. Unity among these churches was important and necessary, but uniformity was not necessary.⁷⁶ It would be correct to say that the CIM did not contribute to the formation of a distinctly Chinese church union, which was Cheng's idea of an indigenous church. The CIM's definition of an indigenous church was so entirely different.

The second issue relates to nationalism. "The British police who fired on demonstrators in Shanghai's International Settlement on May 30th, 1925, could hardly have foreseen that their action would generate significant changes in China's power structure." These are the words of Professor Jessie Gregory Lutz in her book *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions, the Anti-Christian Movement of 1920-1928*.⁷⁷ The killing of a dozen Chinese and the wounding of twice that number in this incident sent shockwaves reverberating through China's cities. As a result, there was an anti-imperialist movement throughout the entire country. The Educational Rights Association which aimed to attack mission schools, and the Anti-Christian Federation were established. These groups, like the Student Union, the Communist Youth Corp, and numerous mass associations, were able to develop effective organizations and increasingly gained in vitality and militancy. In the rapidly changing scene, an accusatory finger was soon pointed specifically at Christians and Christian schools. Quite a number of missionaries were murdered, and churches were looted and demolished. The anti-foreign and anti-Christian feelings were so strong throughout China that under urgent consular instructions, the majority of all missionaries, including CIM missionaries, reluctantly left their stations in the interior and headed for the coast, in what is known in history as the Great Evacuation.

How did Chinese Christians respond to such a challenge? Understandably, many Chinese Christian leaders responded to charges of being "running dogs" of the imperialists by severing their relationships with foreign missionaries. They believed that this was the only way to exonerate themselves. While some wanted a gradual transference of authority from the missions to Chinese leaders, others wanted a more radical separation from foreign missions and sought to organize independent indigenous churches, like

⁷⁶ Leslie T. Lyall, and Leslie Newbingin. *The Church--Local and Universal* (London: World Dominion Press, 1962), pp.1-10

⁷⁷ Jessie G Lutz. *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions, the Anti-Christian Movement 1920-28* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1988), p.160.

those of Kaifeng and Wenzhou as cited by Jonathan Chao. The re-organization of the churches at Kaifeng and Wenzhou occurred in July 1925, right after the May 30th incident when nationalism and anti-Christian feelings were at their height. If an “indigenous church” is defined as a Chinese church completely separated from foreign missions, then we have to say that the CIM made no contribution whatsoever.

The third issue is the difference in theology. As mentioned previously, Gloria Tseng highlighted three currents in the indigenization movement in the first half of the twentieth century: (1) the ecclesiastical development of the Church of Christ in China, which was the culmination of the church union movement in the first decades of the twentieth century; (2) the emergence of Chinese Christian intellectuals associated with missionary colleges and universities; (3) the emergence of independent preachers with their mass followings outside denominational missions such as Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee. Tseng did note that these first two developments shared a similar set of key players such as Cheng Jingyi and Zhao Zichen. The main difference between these leaders and the independent preachers was in their theological viewpoints. These were intellectuals who converted to Christianity as a result of their exposure to the liberal wing of the Protestant missionary enterprise in China, and who went on to take their places as leaders of the liberal wing of the Chinese Protestant church, and as leaders in the movement leading to the formation of the Church of Christ in China. Samuel Ling in his Ph.D dissertation titled *The Other May Fourth Movement: The Chinese Christian Renaissance, 1919-1937* pointed out that these leaders had certain distinctive theological presuppositions: the educability of man, the immanence of God, emphasis on the humanity of Christ, and the hope of the coming of the Kingdom through social reform. Ling also named two major concerns of these Christian leaders, namely indigenization and social reconstruction. While “indigenization” was understood as the sinicization of both the organization and theology of the church, “social reconstruction,” seen as the solution to China’s problems, was its mission. Their conviction was that the churches should share the fate of their national contemporaries. They identified first with the Chinese people, and only second with their religion. In other words, their engagement with the political concerns of their age significantly shaped the form of indigenization they represented.⁷⁸ The independent preachers, represented by Wang Mingdao, did not share the liberal view of these intellectuals. While most independent preachers were similarly motivated by nationalism, they also believed in the separation between church and state. In a reversal of priorities, they identified first with their religion, and second with the Chinese people.⁷⁹ Theologically speaking, the CIM shared the view of the independent preachers more than that of the intellectuals for they strongly believed in the separation between church and state. Therefore, we see that

⁷⁸ Samuel D. Ling, “The Other May Fourth Movement: the Chinese ‘Christian Renaissance,’ 1919-1937” (Ph.D. dissertation., Temple University., 1980), pp.5-6, 10, and 81.

⁷⁹ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp.2.3.12.

Lyall, Adeney and many other missionaries of the CIM worked closely with these independent preachers. In short, if we define “indigenous church” in accordance with the understanding of the Chinese intellectuals, we would also have to conclude that the CIM made very little contribution to indigenization.

The fourth issue is that of mission strategy. In the early phase of missionary activities in China, Karl Gutzlaff, the pioneer as well as the founder of The Chinese Union already pointed out that China’s million could not be converted to Christianity by foreign missionaries. Chinese Christians themselves must carry out the evangelization of the empire while Western missionaries served as instructors and supervisors. He believed that the cultural gap between Westerner and Chinese, and the difficulties of attaining true language facility were so great that few missionaries could ever communicate effectively with the masses. A Chinese Christian, even without great depth of theological knowledge, could always interact with the populace more effectively than a foreign missionary.⁸⁰ The CIM also adopted this strategy. Their goal was not to dominate the Chinese churches, but to partner with them in the expansion of the Kingdom of God. While the CIM remained in the hands of Westerners, the Chinese churches established by the CIM missionaries were autonomous, self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. The Mission had no authority over the churches. They believed that this was the best mission strategy. Perhaps, the term “Sino-foreign Protestant establishment” coined by Daniel Bays was a more accurate descriptor than the word ‘indigenous’ in this case. The CIM, on the whole, was highly sensitive towards the Chinese Christians’ aspiration to responsibility and autonomy at the local level though it cannot be denied that paternalism still persisted among some individual CIM missionaries.

In conclusion, we can say that the CIM was on the right track in its implementation of the three-self principles at this critical time. However, the success of indigenization depended very much on the availability of capable local leaders. In short, we can say that the Forward Movement initiated by D.E. Hoste was successful in promoting the growth of the church in China. The number of centers from which CIM missionaries operated increased by 104 between 1927 and 1936. There were 8,814 baptisms recorded in 1936, double the number from 1926. Within the decade (1927-1936), there were cumulatively, over 60,000 baptisms, bringing the membership of the CIM churches up to approximately 95,000 or about 20% of the total Chinese Christian population at that time. Strategically, The Forward Movement also prepared the church for the coming of greater storms, first the invasion by Japan in 1937, and then the persecution of Christians by the new regime in the 1950s.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Jessie G. Lutz and R.Ray Lutz, Karl Gutzlaff’s Approach to Indigenization: The Chinese Union in *Christianity in China, From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* ed. By Daniel H. Bays (Stanford University Press. 1996), pp.269-271

⁸¹ Leslie t. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible, The Continuing Story of the Mission Hudson Taylor Began*, , p.107.