

# **The Chinese Church behind the Bamboo Curtain**

## **By Wing Yui So (Ph.D)**

### **1. The Situation in Post-War China**

After VJ Day on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1945, missionaries trickled back to what had been occupied China in a mood of excited anticipation. Many believed that a new era had dawned and were optimistic about their future ministry. The CIM immediately sent a team of twenty to visit the churches which had been under Japanese occupation, with letters dispatched ahead to convey the Mission's warmest greetings. The team was not only sent to bring reassurance to the churches, but also to assess the role of the Mission in the post-war era. They visited churches in Zhejiang, Henan, Jiangsu, Anhui, Hebei and Shanxi, part of which had already come under Communist control. According to Lyall's report, the missionaries were warmly received. Even non-Christians were enthusiastic and many of the team members were invited to speak at schools and in prisons. On the whole, the team was encouraged by what they encountered. Despite losses, the churches had largely held their ground. A few had closed down, but many remained strong and steadfast, while in some areas, contrary to expectations, remarkable progress had been made.

In Henan, 1800 baptisms had taken place during the missionaries' two-year absence. In the Swedish Mission field along the Yellow River Valley, a revived church had attracted 2000 new members, while the membership of another church had increased from 300 to 1000 in 1946 alone. In Shanxi, 1000 people were baptized during the war. The local churches also made it clear to the Mission that they still needed the help of the missionaries especially in the areas of Bible teaching, Sunday School activities, leadership training and in other specialized ministries. In view of the need, the Directors' Conference in Shanghai in 1947 decided to double the number of missionaries in the field. The Directors issued an appeal for recruits of the highest caliber, spiritually mature men and women, ready to respond immediately in any circumstance.<sup>1</sup>

The CIM was not the only mission to hold such an optimistic view. Many other missionary organizations were similarly hopeful and confident of the future. They assumed that the relationship between China and the West would improve as they had been allies during the War. The West would therefore no longer be viewed as imperialists, but as contributors to the building of a new China. Missionaries would not only be wanted, but needed.<sup>2</sup> They also believed that the Chinese Church was not likely to be in a position to dispense with their assistance for the foreseeable future. At the time, the number of Christians in the general population was one in six hundred at best. Missionaries did not think that the

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; the China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>2</sup> Oi Ki Ling, *The Changing Role of the British Protestant Missionaries in China, 1945-1952*, pp.53-55.

Chinese Church had yet reached the stage of being able to evangelize on its own because there was still a large portion of China without any Christian witness. In the medical and educational fields, the missionaries were convinced that they were needed for their expertise and financial support. Chiang Kai-shek's favorable attitude toward missionary work in the country also bolstered the missionaries' confidence about their prospects in China. In an address to the National Christian Council in May 1943 Chiang had declared that missionaries were welcome in China.<sup>3</sup> Missionaries took this statement as a friendly signal from a government that was seeking to enlist missionary help for post-war reconstruction. Their optimism was based upon the assumption that the Guomindang government would be able to sort out its problems and that things would improve politically and economically.

Lyall was among the very few who had serious doubts about the ability of the Guomindang to re-establish political order and stabilize the economy. He also had reservations about whether missionaries would be welcomed back on previous terms if the Communists were to take control. In September 1945, in an insightful and thought-provoking article entitled *New Era in China for China's Millions*, Lyall wrote:

Is the Chinese Government capable of restoring order within a reasonable time? Are there enough officials of comparative integrity and public spirit to govern the liberated territories as well as Manchuria and Korea as efficiently as the Japanese undoubtedly had done? How will the Government deal with the tens of thousands of traitors who have unashamedly worked for the enemy? And how to deal with the terrible and deliberate demoralization of the occupied areas? Uppermost in every mind is the civil war - to be or not to be? With the end of the war the simmering cauldron of an uneasy truce between the Nationalists and the Communists may well boil over. Outside influences apart, only superb statesmanship can prevent war which would retard resettlement, reconstruction and progress for years ... What of missions and missionaries? They are not going to be welcomed back on the old terms.<sup>4</sup>

To Lyall, such analysis was not simply an academic exercise, but motivation for active preparation to weather the imminent storm in the years ahead. He realized that the Mission needed to learn to play second fiddle in the building up of the Chinese church. During the CIM's post-war fact-finding missions, they were told by Chinese church leaders that if they wanted to return to serve in fellowship with the Chinese under Chinese authority, they would be more than welcome. The paradigm for Missions, as they faced an uncertain future in 1946, became plain. The task of evangelism and church building was no longer one that solely concerned the missionary, but one in which missionaries needed to share with the local

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

<sup>4</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, "New Era in China" *China's Millions* (September-October, 1946): pp. 33-34.

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He also recognized that the most strategic preparation for that uncertain future involved investing his time and energy in the student ministry, particularly among the elite students at the prestigious universities in Beijing. Lyall was aware that Chinese Christians would likely suffer a great deal in the future. Therefore, he armed the students with the message from 1 Peter, a message written for first century Christians facing imminent persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. Its reminder of Christian theological foundations, the meaning of suffering, and hope in Christ were extremely relevant to the situation at the time. This preparation enabled many to survive and keep their faith despite prolonged suffering.

Lyall and the students realized that the best way to cope with future persecution was “by scattering.” Instead of large Christian groups confined to a few big cities, it was more strategic for Christians to be “scattered” all over China. In so doing, they penetrated into unchurched areas, and were less obvious as targets of persecution, particularly after 1956.

## **2. The Manifesto and the CIM Response**

By 1948, the situation had deteriorated. Financial chaos and social insecurity caused widespread student unrest, and starvation was rampant among the very poor. The nation completely lost confidence in the Central Government. The army was demoralized. Beijing fell to the Communists in November 1948, followed by Nanjing in April 1949, and Shanghai in May that year. At this critical time, the burning question in the minds of the CIM directors was whether the CIM should plan for a complete withdrawal, or bring in more recruits to continue its ministry in China. Meanwhile, shocking news reached the missionary community that Miss Lensell of the Swedish Mission was suddenly arrested, tried by a Peoples’ Tribunal, and executed. Miss Lensell had lived in a region under Communist domination for some time. Such a thing had never happened before. Missionaries had been killed in riots, murdered by bandits, and died as prisoners of war, but execution “by the will of the people” was totally new and very ominous! In rapid succession, four other missionaries of other missions were killed in various parts of the country, leading to further alarm. The leadership of the CIM realized that it was as vulnerable as any other mission organization, but it was determined to continue its ministry in China despite these warning signs. To cope with this difficult situation, they set up a skeletal headquarters in Chongqing which was still under Nationalist control, and a financial center in Hong Kong in 1948. Since Hong Kong was a British crown colony, it was outside the jurisdiction of any Chinese government, Nationalist or Communist. In an emergency, funds could be sent there from

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<sup>5</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; the China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, p. 147.

the homelands and forwarded to other parts of China via Shanghai or Chongqing.

In November 1949, Chongqing also fell to the Communists. The Nationalist Government took refuge in Taiwan, the island province recovered from the Japanese in 1945. On the mainland, the People's Government became firmly established. Meanwhile, CIM missionary work continued. At the end of 1949, there were still 737 members of the CIM in China. Though many churches were closing and lesser Communist officials sometimes confiscated Bibles and imprisoned pastors, yet large numbers, especially students, were being baptized all over China. The CIM leadership held a crucial meeting in mid-December 1949. Houghton believed that the Communist government would wish to maintain international contacts, and for that reason would have some respect for foreign opinion. He said, "We have yet to prove that Christian witness will be impossible under a Communist government in China. The gospel is intended for the whole world, including those who have come under the sway of communism. God called us to serve Him in China. Has he withdrawn that call?"<sup>6</sup> Thus the CIM determined to remain in China, even under a Communist government. All members were informed of the new policy. If any missionary wished to withdraw, he/she could do so, but it meant resigning from the mission. This policy was upheld until early 1951 despite obvious signs of a negative impact on both local Chinese churches as well as the missionaries themselves.

The CIM was one of the last Missions to withdraw from China. Han Su-yin, the Chinese novelist, had an ex-missionary character in one of her books speak thus, "Missionaries will never go back to China ... it is no use deluding ourselves. We have done our work and now we must go. Some will be clinging on until one by one they too will drop off. The China Inland Mission will probably stay on a little longer. And the Catholic Church will hang on to the end." Han's words were prophetic.<sup>7</sup>

1950 was a year of increasing pressure on foreign missionaries. The new government began to take over control of their hospitals, schools and orphanages, and Christian broadcasting stations were forced to close. Missionaries suddenly found themselves in very difficult positions. The experience of W.A. Saunders, a CIM missionary in south Kansu, was typical. When the Communists first arrived, they more or less ignored the missionaries. They had other matters to attend to, and other people to deal with. Apart from being told that they had to register, and get a permit if they wanted to travel outside their districts, missionaries were left to carry on as before. No other restrictions were placed on them. Saunders continued

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<sup>6</sup> Phyllis Thompson, *China: the Reluctant Exodus: the Story of the China Inland Mission's Withdrawal from communist China*, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; the China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, p. 165.

to visit the various groups of Christians scattered about the area. He encountered no opposition. However, two months after the peaceful occupation of the city, a leading church elder came to visit him and warned him to go. The elder said, “If you don’t go soon, you’ll be in trouble. We’ll also be in trouble.” A few weeks later, he received a similar warning from a young pastor. Saunders wrote to Shanghai, reporting what had been said. But the advice from the CIM headquarters was: “Settle down, continue work and evangelism. Obey all regulations that do not go against the conscience. There will be difficulties at first, but we believe that if we can stick it out, there will be a place for us missionaries in the new China.” Saunders was torn between the reality he faced and his loyalty to the Mission. He continued his ministry there until he was arrested and taken back to his home under police escort. What worried him most was that the old Chinese Christian who had accompanied him also had a bad time of it.<sup>8</sup>

The outbreak of the Korean War at the end of 1950 accelerated the Communists’ timetable for the expulsion of the missionaries. It provided a golden opportunity for the new government to inflame the whole nation in its fight against the West, and to clear the imperialist elements within the church. The new regime started to take more aggressive steps against the Christian church especially those associated with foreign missions. The publication of the Christian Manifesto at the end of July 1950 sent a clear message that all foreign missionaries would no longer be welcome in China. In May that year, Mr. Chou Enlai invited a group of self-appointed Chinese Christian leaders to meet him in Beijing. The Christian Manifesto, drafted by a progressive Christian Wu Yaozong (吳耀宗), was entitled ‘The Direction of Endeavor for Chinese Christianity in the Construction of New China.’ This manifesto consisted of four main sections:

The missionary endeavors of the previous 140 years were condemned for having supported Western imperialism. It urged Chinese Christians to be vigilant, warning them that the imperialist powers would seek to use Christianity to forward their plots to stir up internal dissent, and create reactionary forces in the country.

The task of the Chinese church was to declare its support for the state and the general policies of the government.

The fundamental aim of the Christian church was to make Christians aware of the imperialistic influences within Christianity, with the ultimate intent of purging the church of such influences, cultivating instead, a “patriotic and democratic spirit among the adherent” in order to speed up the reform of the church.

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<sup>8</sup> Phyllis Thompson, China: *The Reluctant Exodus: the Story of the China Inland Mission's Withdrawal from Communist China*, pp. 37-38.

In the final section, concrete steps to achieve these aims were laid down. This included plans to terminate all foreign financial assistance, and achieve complete independence from all foreign support within the shortest possible time.

The message was clear. When Lyall brought this news to John Robertson Sinton, China director of the CIM, at the Shanghai headquarters, Lyall said:

They want us out - the government does, I mean. The men were told that any troubles the Christians might now experience were due to their association with missionaries from the West. It was up to the church to see that they got out of China. They were told Christians ought to be aware they were being used as a tool by the missionaries, who were agents of their government. So they are going to produce what they call a Church Manifesto. They are going to get every churchgoer to sign it. They have got what they called a Three-Self policy, too! They appointed a committee to see to the wording of it, but in effect, what it will say is that the church promises to make the People's Government its first loyalty. It is to give unquestioning obedience to the Communist Party, and to purge itself of all traces of imperialism ... The government isn't going to do it. The church has got to do it. They have got to get rid of us.<sup>9</sup>

Oddly enough, even in the face of the Christian Manifesto and Lyall's clear warning, CIM leaders still insisted on remaining in China. They felt that the clause relating to "imperialistic influences" did not apply to the CIM. The private periodical sent out to all CIM missionaries carried the following explanation:

It [the Manifesto] stated that those churches that were depending on foreign personnel or foreign money should make concrete plans for the complete elimination of all such at an early date. Since the churches associated with CIM were already to all intents and purposes independent on both counts, we did not feel the new orders affected us intimately. We would stay on as a mission as long as God permitted. It was agreed at the same time that there might be those of our number who had a personal conviction that the Lord would have them retire from the field.<sup>10</sup>

Why did the CIM leaders fail to see reality as it was? In actual fact, many CIM missionaries disagreed with this policy. Leonard Street, superintendent of the Mission in the northwest, was one among many. He became increasingly uneasy about his situation and did not hesitate to say so in his letters to headquarters. He had personally observed the arrests, interrogations, accusation meetings, confiscation of property, and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-42.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

truckloads of political prisoners passing through. An atmosphere of fear permeated every community. The missionaries' presence created not only danger for themselves, but also for their Chinese Christian friends. Many missionaries were additionally concerned about their children in Kuling. It was obvious to many that the children should not remain in Kuling in view of the uncertain political situation. Many parents applied for permits to visit their children, but were denied permission by the government. This situation made them anxious and angry with the Mission's policy.

There were a number of reasons why the leaders of the CIM, particularly General Director Houghton, refused to withdraw its missionaries even under such dire circumstances. The situation in Shanghai was still relatively at ease. The alarming reports about what was happening in other parts of China brought a sense of apprehension to the leaders, but they did not have the same sense of urgency or anxiety as their colleagues out in the field. The general tenor of life in Shanghai continued as before. No one had been taken away for the dreaded interrogations. All were free to attend their churches. There was no change in the usual comings and goings, the animated chatter at the dinner table, or the regular meetings for prayer and worship. Private personal celebrations, like birthdays, still provided a reason for visiting the Willow Tree Restaurant or the Chocolate Box Tearoom in the central shopping area, all as described by Phyllis Thompson.<sup>11</sup>

During the War against Japan, the relationship between the CIM missionaries and the Communists seemed to improve significantly. Between 1937 and 1939, Lyall served in Shanxi where the Communist soldiers, under the command of the legendary Marshal Zhu De, were actively fighting the Japanese. Marshal Zhu's wife was once treated at the hospital run by CIM missionary doctors. The marshal trusted the missionaries and sought advice from them about the problems of homosexuality among his soldiers. As an expression of gratitude for the services of the hospital, he presented the doctors with an antique vase. Such stories gave CIM leaders the wrong impression that the Communists would treat CIM missionaries with special favor.<sup>12</sup>

The CIM leadership were also misguided in thinking that they had a moral obligation to stand alongside their Chinese Christian brothers and sisters. When the Christian Manifesto was issued, they still regarded it simply as the work of liberal Christians in cooperation with the Communist government, and assumed that CIM associates and local leaders would never sign it. When Lyall reported on the issue of the Manifesto to headquarters, he said, "Many of the Christians I know won't sign it. The Inter-Varsity leaders won't sign it. I am sure. And I can't see men like Wang Mingdao and David Yang pledging their first loyalty

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, p. 52.

to the People's Government, or any government.”<sup>13</sup> The CIM failed to realize that their presence actually endangered the local Christians, and while it was true that most of the leaders who signed the Christian Manifesto were liberals, yet quite a few leaders of the evangelical faith and close associates of the CIM also signed eventually, including David Yang, Marcus Cheng and Watchman Nee.

Unlike most other missions, the CIM had no other fields to which its members could be deployed. The withdrawal of its missionaries from China would have meant the “sudden death” of the CIM. It would have been devastating for CIM leaders to leave a country they loved, and a mission to which they had devoted so much time and effort. For General Director Houghton, such a decision was even harder; no one wanted to see the mission end that way.

About the time that Saunders' letter reached the headquarters of the CIM, a turn of events on the international scene seemed to bode well for the future of the CIM in China. Great Britain recognized Communist China. The news gave the leaders of the CIM the false hope that they would be allowed to remain in the country. They felt that the new government of China would likely not antagonize a country that had shown itself friendly.

The CIM failed to understand both China and Chinese Communist ideology. They believed that China would not change. The men at headquarters constantly expressed this argument:

Down through the millennia the country had survived invasions and political upheaval. In all of it, China had remained basically the same. She did not resist her conquerors, she absorbed them! Just wait long enough and the same thing will happen again. The patience, wisdom and power or long endurance that has always characterized the Chinese will outlive Communism and any other ism! They appear to yield, but they always end up doing things their own way!<sup>14</sup>

They failed to understand Communist ideology. To the Communists, religion is merely the opiate of the people. When a country is sick, religion may be helpful, but once the country is restored to health, religion would be detrimental. When China was chaotic and unstable, the government pragmatically tolerated the existence of religion. Once the country was entirely under the control of the communist government, religion became taboo. The first step towards eliminating religion was to clean up the church

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<sup>13</sup> Phyllis Thompson, *China: the Reluctant Exodus: the Story of the China Inland Mission's Withdrawal from Communist China*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-39.



by expelling all foreign missionaries who were agents of the imperialists.

Finally, in my opinion, Houghton's mental state might have played a role in this 'misjudgment'. After he took up the Directorship of the CIM in 1940, the subsequent years were very difficult. Funds were low; China was chaotic; the relationship between the German and the Scandinavian Associate Missions and the CIM was tense; the future of the CIM on the eve of the total collapse of the Nationalist government was uncertain. Under these pressures, Houghton suffered from insomnia and at this critical time, left for Australia to recuperate. He was absent while the rapid changes were happening throughout 1949, but was immediately called upon to make a decision about the future of the CIM upon his return in December that year. It would have been extremely difficult for him to judge wisely under those circumstances. Nonetheless, in the tradition of the CIM, it was still the General Director who had to make the final decision.

### **3. The Reluctant Exodus**

A drastic purge of the church immediately followed the publication of the Manifesto in July 1950. With the outbreak of the Korean War, the situation worsened. Waves of arrests and trials left the whole country in the grip of fear. An 'accusation' campaign singled out all pastors and leaders who had enjoyed special relations with the missionaries. They were pilloried by government cadres, and even by their closest colleagues, accused of being 'pro-imperialists' and 'pro-American reactionaries' or 'corrupt elements.' It was impossible for the missionaries to stay under such conditions. Their continued presence endangered the Chinese believers, the missionaries themselves, and even their children. At this critical time, General Director Houghton was again out of the country on doctors' orders. The burden to make a decision fell upon the shoulders of John Sinton, China Director of the CIM, second in command. Unlike Houghton, Sinton was more sympathetic toward the missionaries, especially those who were isolated in the remote parts of China. Phyllis Thompson wrote, "He (John Sinton) felt deeply for those living in isolation in far-away places, cut off from all this fellowship. If any felt they should leave and go home, he told them, they must be free to do so and still remain members of the mission."<sup>15</sup> In fact, in the year 1950, permission was granted by John Sinton to eighty-two missionaries to leave China without resigning from the mission, in violation of the policy of the CIM drafted at the end of 1949.

At the end of 1950, two events prompted the leaders of the CIM to change their minds. One was the arrival in Shanghai of a church leader from a neighboring province. He went to see the CIM China Director with a single, specific request, "Please go." He expressed to them that the church was under great pressure

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

when confronted with accusations like “Why have you not purged your churches of imperialists? Why are these missionaries still with you? Why have you not got rid of them?”

A similar request was made by Marcus Cheng (Chen Chonggui 陳崇桂), principal of Chungking Theological Seminary, a close associate of the CIM and a good friend of Houghton's. In his letter addressed to CIM headquarters, he requested that all missionaries be withdrawn immediately from his staff despite the fact that almost his entire faculty was made up of CIM missionaries. With these two requests coming so close together from such persons, it was clear the CIM could no longer remain in China. Sinton sent a telegram to Houghton, “Our presence is making things worse for the very people we most want to help. This is the view of all staff in the headquarters. The sooner we get out, the better.”<sup>16</sup> With Houghton's approval, Sinton wrote to all the missionaries, “It is with sorrow of heart that we have reached the conclusion that we must proceed with a well-planned withdrawal of our missionaries. It will seem to many that this is the beginning of the end.”<sup>17</sup>

Without a detailed exit plan, it was indeed a great challenge to withdraw the entire team from China. When the CIM decided to evacuate all missionaries at the beginning of 1951, there were 518 full members, 119 associate members and a large number of children in the Chefoo School in Kuling. The problem was that the missionaries were dispersed throughout the country, some in the remote North West or South West. There were a number of questions facing the Director. How would they fare as they requested permission to leave? How would the immense cost of the evacuation be met? What did the future hold for them all?

1951 became the story of retreat. Phyllis Thompson called it the “reluctant exodus.” The heavy cost of the withdrawal was a great challenge to the CIM. At the time, there was approximately ten thousand dollars in the furlough account, and that sum was just enough to cover the travelling expenses of twenty people. Apart from the travelling expenses, there was the issue of severance pay. Servants had to be dismissed when the missionaries prepared to depart. Compensation for loss of employment was demanded by the government. Servants were incited by local cadres to demand great sums of money as compensation. Letters from bewildered missionaries asking what to do arrived at headquarters in increasing numbers. In most cases, nothing could be done but to pay. It became evident that the cost of withdrawal would be much higher than anticipated. Where would the money come from? Under normal circumstances, it would have been reasonable to sell the mission's many properties and assets for cash. However, most of the CIM properties had been confiscated by the Communists.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

According to Lyall's report, the financial problem was eventually solved by renting out the headquarters premises in Shanghai to a Communist Government hospital, together with the outright sale of the furniture. Humanly speaking, this transaction was highly improbable, if not impossible. The Government had demanded the deeds of every foreign property throughout China. It could easily have expropriated these premises in the same way, without compensation. The missionaries were on the way out and it was only a matter of time before the premises would fall naturally into Government hands. But the God of the impossible inclined the People's Government of China to sign a rental agreement with the CIM and pay out a huge sum which was enough to cover the entire cost of the withdrawal to the coast of every missionary, the severance pay demanded by hundreds of Chinese employees, and the support of those missionaries who were detained after the main body had left. The deal was made against the wishes of powerful men who were, however, helpless to stop it.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, their accommodation in Hong Kong was wonderfully prepared in an unusual way. A semi-dismantled camp of eleven Nissen huts near the CIM temporary headquarters on Chatham Road were given to the CIM as temporary accommodation for all the missionaries and their children. The Camp was christened "Freehaven" and the Chefoo School children were among the first to take up residence. Hong Kong became a haven of relief and rest where 600 missionaries relaxed and waited, utterly weary after hair-raising journeys and harrowing experiences at the hands of the new Government.

By April 1951, the number of missionaries in China was reduced to 371. At the end of June, there were 203. By September, only 90 remained, and by the end of that year, 33. Those who were left behind were haunted by loneliness and foreboding. They were cut off, harassed, maltreated, humiliated, and some even imprisoned for a time. David Day was confined with twenty-one other men in a cell measuring twelve feet square. No talking was allowed. Don Cunningham was imprisoned for nine months. However, they were all eventually evacuated without any loss of life. The last members of the CIM, and almost the last Protestant missionaries to leave were Arthur Mathews and Rupert Clarke in 1953. They endured two whole years of trials and challenges after the first order to withdraw was given. My question is: was such ordeal necessary? Could a better exit strategy have avoided unnecessary suffering? The concept of faith missions does not mean the absence of planning and preparation. The 'misjudgment' by General Director Houghton of the political situation in China at the time, was certainly one main cause for these unnecessary ordeals.

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<sup>18</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; the China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, p. 165.

## 4. From the CIM of Old China to the OMF of Asia/New China

As the missionaries of the CIM retreated to Hong Kong, CIM directors from all over the world converged on the small town of Kalorama on the slopes of Mount Dandenong in Australia from April 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>, 1951. In addition to Houghton, there were present, John Sinton (China), Fred Mitchell (England), H.M. Griffin (North America), J.O. Sanders (Australia), J.H. Robinson (South Africa) and H.W. Funnell (New Zealand). These seven men needed to decide whether or not the CIM would continue. The problems were altogether vast. The CIM leadership had likely never encountered a greater challenge. About half the team were dubious about attempting to perpetuate the Mission's work, but as the men met, they began to realize that this might in fact be an opportunity, and that the Lord was calling them to a new and formidable venture in faith. Thus was born the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) of Asia/New China. In his report, Houghton wrote:

We were encouraged as the Conference opened by receiving letters and cables from all over the world promising prayer support and quoting passages from God's Word, which always provides us so much more solid assurance than the words of men. Thus in touch with the reality which men tend to ignore we were sobered but not daunted by a cable from our friends in Shanghai reporting on the realities of the situation - realities which they and we must face in the light of the greatest Reality of all. This cable showed that, with regard to some hundreds of missionaries and their children still in China, we must be ready to consider complete evacuation instead of large-scale withdrawals. Perhaps the biggest question before us was whether this force of God's soldiers is now to be demobilized, scattered throughout our home countries, while the Mission as such ceases to exist, disintegrating because in the purpose of God it has no further task to accomplish. We faced this possibility that this might bring blessing to the churches at home. We recognized the danger of perpetuating the existence of an organization for its own sake. But I believe that it was the Lord who made us of one mind more rapidly and more completely than any one of us anticipated - the living God who called this Mission into existence in 1865 remains among us and is calling us to a new and formidable venture of faith.<sup>19</sup>

In the same report, Houghton emphasized that though the CIM was not likely to return to China for the foreseeable future, they steadfastly refused to relinquish the hope of returning at some later time. If they ever returned, it would have to be at the clear invitation of the Chinese churches, and under their direction. Houghton reiterated that the task was not yet finished. Meanwhile, he asked all the supporters of the CIM

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<sup>19</sup> Bishop Frank Houghton, "If It Be Thou ... A Report of the Conference of Directors of the China Inland Mission" *China's Millions* (April, 1951): pp. 38-39.

to pray for the Chinese believers, the re-opening of China and the missionaries who still remained in China.

The Mission would not only continue. It would expand geographically into Asia, particularly Southeast Asia. Houghton wrote:

What is this new plan? Where are these new fields? During the last year there were many in the home countries and in China who began to wonder whether the Lord might call us as a Mission to take up work amongst the millions of overseas Chinese in such lands as Thailand, Malaya, Indonesia, the Philippines ... We felt that, if a need existed which is not being met by other agencies, it would be a serious responsibility for us to acquiesce in the demobilization of forces which might be deployed from Hong Kong to other parts of South-east Asia. If there are Chinese whom no one is reaching with the gospel, and the CIM cannot at present function in China itself, must we not at least consider whether we are called to cross over to this new Macedonia and help them?

While giving priority to the Chinese, they recognized also the possibility of sending linguistically trained tribal workers to the Bible-less tribes in Thailand and the Philippines. Japan was also under consideration, despite reservations because there were few Chinese and no tribes. Japan was eventually included because of two letters they received in the midst of their discussion. The first was sent by the General Director of Sudan Interior Mission asking the CIM to take up Japan as their mission field. Along with this letter, there was a check of \$1000 donated by a Christian to start the project. The second letter was sent by a Christian friend of the CIM's requesting that they send a team to survey the needs of the Japanese people, enclosed with a donation of \$500 for the purpose. The Directors reached the unanimous conclusion that survey teams should be sent as expeditiously as possible to these countries in order to discover the unmet needs.<sup>20</sup>

Sinton, the deputy China director, returned to Hong Kong, which had become the temporary headquarters of the Mission. He immediately formed the survey teams. The surveys revealed the presence of 10 million Chinese in South-east Asia. Many invitations were extended to the CIM to commence work amongst them in Singapore, Malaya, Borneo, Manila, Tokyo and Bangkok. Moreover, as the survey teams consulted with the mission leaders in the countries concerned, a new pattern of need among non-Chinese nationals of these countries appeared, one not yet met by existing mission agencies. The CIM began to regard the following fields as their own: the tribal area of north Thailand, the thirteen totally unevangelized

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-41.

provinces in the Chao Phraya basin of central Thailand, the Muslim south Thailand, the north island of Hokkaido in Japan and the tribes of the island of Mindoro in the Philippines.<sup>21</sup>

November 1952 saw a landmark meeting in the history of the CIM in Bournemouth, England. Originally, this meeting was to discuss projects proposed by the survey teams. Houghton had invited twenty-four Mission leaders to this conference for this purpose. However, in a deviation from the original goals, the topic of discussion focused on the core problems of the Mission, including the leadership issues. They re-examined the Mission's policies and pondered honestly its past failures. According to Dr. Arthur Glasser, a former CIM missionary and a participant at this conference, many members of the administration expressed dissatisfaction with Houghton's leadership at the meeting. In the course of discussions, it became apparent that the whole company, except Houghton himself, did not want to go forward under Houghton's leadership. The team appointed J. Oswald Sanders, an Australian solicitor, with many years of experience in Christian administration and an Australasian Home Director of the CIM, as the new General Director.<sup>22</sup> This was the first time that the CIM was led by a non-British director, beginning a new era in the Mission's history. Since then the CIM (then renamed OMF) became increasingly international. Many of the then directors retired after this conference and were replaced by younger blood. Glasser commented, "Well, they were young fellows. They were thinking differently. There was a lot of fresh air. There wasn't all this baggage of tradition and this and that ... There was much more venturesomeness."<sup>23</sup> Lyall commented, "It was as though God had brought the Mission very low, even down to death, in order to renew its life by resurrection, and multiply its fruitfulness after fresh blossoming of the old tree. Even the name was new, for "Overseas Missionary Fellowship" was the chosen name by which the CIM became known throughout East Asia."<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the change of directorship and the name of the Mission, the following decisions were made at this conference. The headquarters of the Mission was moved from Hong Kong to Singapore. Literature work was given high priority as suggested by Watchman Nee before the departure of the CIM from Shanghai. Witness to the 10 million overseas Chinese in South-east Asia was the Mission's target and the Bournemouth Conference confirmed this vision. They extended their ministry to the densely populated central provinces of Thailand to evangelize the Buddhists there, the Muslims in South Thailand, the Muslims of east and central Java in Indonesia, the people of the Philippines particularly in Batangas and

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<sup>21</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; the China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, p. 171.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur F. Glasser, Interview by Bob Shuster, April 17, 1995, Collection 421, T4 Transcript. Billy Graham Evangelical Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; the China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, p. 173.

Mindoro, the northern island of Hokkaido in Japan, the tribal peoples in Thailand, Laos, the Philippines and Taiwan. Though the Mission had no desire to re-establish itself in China in its original form, the OMF was still deeply committed to the Chinese people. They would never forget that they had come into existence as the China Inland Mission. Ever since the “reluctant exodus” they began to call upon the worldwide church to pray for their brothers and sisters in China.

Though the vision was clear, the way ahead was difficult. Psychologically, many missionaries felt guilty showing enthusiasm for another mission field. They felt, on some level, that they had abandoned the Chinese believers. Meanwhile, suspicion and hostility often greeted them in these new fields. They had to adapt to new languages and cultures. Many places were politically unstable; physical danger was never far. The lukewarm churches in these new mission fields contrasted sharply with the zeal of those in China. Refugee needs in places like Hong Kong or Taiwan were overwhelming. Despite these challenges, the OMF moved forward. By the 1960s, over 500 more men and women had joined since its inception in 1951. Fifty-eight percent of the total membership of about 850 were under the age of forty, with fewer than ten years’ service. There was youth, vigor and vision. The spirit and passion inherited from Hudson Taylor was still much evident, except that the vision had taken on greater breadth and depth.<sup>25</sup>

## **5. Lyall’s Reports on the Chinese Church behind the Bamboo Curtain**

The OMF had no desire to re-establish itself in China in its original form, but it remained deeply committed to the church in China. The leaders of the OMF would never forget its original existence as the CIM. From the time of the “reluctant exodus” they had called upon the worldwide church to pray for their brothers and sisters in China, and to share in proclaiming the gospel and nurturing the millions of new believers through radio broadcasts and the provision of Bibles and Christian literature. One of the most important ministries of the OMF was to keep up with the status of the Church in China post-1949. Lyall took up this challenge and wrote several very informative books including *New Spring in China*, *Come Wind, Come Weather*, *The Church in Mao’s China* and *The Phoenix Rises - the Phenomenal Growth of Eight Chinese Churches*.

In the winter of 1967-8, at the height of the Cultural Revolution, a party of about fifty students from Australia visited the People’s Republic of China under the leadership of Baden Teague, a committed Christian. Teague was enthusiastic about what he saw and experienced at conferences with Chinese student contemporaries. In 1967, he went to England for his PhD at Cambridge University. Lyall and Teague agreed

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.184.

to form a Christian China Study Group in order to keep abreast of developments there, particularly with regard to the Christian Church. Books on China were regularly under review and experts were often invited to lecture on contemporary China particularly in the educational and medical fields. In June 1971, the Christian China Study Group sent letters to both the British Council of Churches (BCC) and the Evangelical Alliance (EA) urging them to call a meeting of all societies with an interest in China to consider what action might be possible should communication with the Chinese Church be restored. In 1972, the BCC launched its own China project and Lyall was invited to be a member of the committee. He was often invited to speak at different conferences about China. In those days, many of the so-called China experts were sympathetic to the Cultural Revolution. In 1974, an international gathering of some seventy theologians met in Louvain, Belgium, to share their views on the Church in China. Almost unanimously the colloquium praised the achievements of Mao Zedong's regime in China as 'part of God's saving work in history,' and even questioned whether Christianity was any longer essential to China! Dr. Joseph Needham, a professor at Cambridge University, was quoted as equating Chinese society with the Kingdom of God and describing China as 'the only truly Christian country in the world!'<sup>26</sup> Lyall's view differed sharply, but he seemed to be the lone voice of dissent at these conferences. The difference lay in the fact that these so-called China experts drew their conclusions from the propaganda coming out of China, while Lyall drew his from the actual reports of people who were coming out of China. After the Cultural Revolution, many of these scholars began to realize that they had been naïve in accepting reports from China at face value and modified their positions considerably. In the following section, we shall examine the picture of the Chinese Church painted by Lyall in light of additional information now available.

### **5.1 Being "Shackled" (1949-1958)**

In 1950, there was an unprecedented meeting in Beijing between Premier Zhou Enlai and selected members of the National Christian Council. At that meeting, the terms of the Christian Manifesto were agreed upon. They plainly committed the Church to dissociate itself from all "imperialist" affiliations and to submit itself to the direction of the Communist Party. This signaled the end of an era. The Christian Manifesto left no doubt that all missionaries must withdraw from China. These Christian leaders had in effect signed the death warrant of the foreign missionary movement in China. The government department that was set up to deal with religion was the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB). This organization in turn created separate bodies to administer each religion: for Roman Catholics the Catholic Patriotic Association, which required Chinese Catholics to reject Vatican control over internal affairs;

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<sup>26</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, pp. 144-145.



for Protestants, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) was set up to direct the affairs of the Protestant Church, which also required complete severance from all “imperialist” support and control. The first chairman of the TSPM was Wu Yaozong, a YMCA secretary.

To Lyall, the TSPM was a political tool of the government, and Wu Yaozong a puppet. According to Lyall, the Christian Manifesto had been drawn up by Premier Zhou Enlai, not by the Church leaders themselves. In April 1951, 158 selected church leaders were called to Peking (Beijing) for an inaugural conference whose purpose was to launch the TSPM, originally called the Three-Self Reform Church. Only those leaders with “political awareness” had been invited to serve on the preparatory committees set up in 1950. The “three-self” slogan adopted in the 1920s by missionaries and the national church as a guide to the indigenization of the Church was now given an entirely new twist by making it mean the total severance of the relationship between the Church in China and the Church universal. The slogan was given a political connotation totally absent from the original concept. C.M. Chen, a defector to the West who was for ten years an official of the RAB once said that the dispute between the Christians and the Communists was not political but philosophical, and that therefore the struggle against Christianity took on the character of “an invisible battle.” The purpose of the government was not outright extermination but restriction, reformation and control. The TSPM, Chen said, had been created with this end in view, and the government went to great lengths and expense in the early years of its rule to indoctrinate church leaders so as to make religion serve politics and render the Church politically harmless. Nothing secret could be allowed, and detailed files were kept on all church leaders and their activities.<sup>27</sup>

Though Lyall’s views were shared by many evangelicals, not all historians agreed with him. Daniel Bays and Philip Wickeri, for instance, were of the opinion that the TSPM was a spontaneous, free, independent body of the Chinese church led by Wu Yaozong rather than one created by the Communist Party. They understood that the Christian Manifesto was not dictated by Zhou Enlai, but was basically the work of Wu Yaozong sanctioned by Zhou Enlai.<sup>28</sup> Their argument was that Wu had been a well-known ardent follower of Marxism and a pro-communist long before 1950. Wu truly believed that there was no conflict between Marxism and Christianity, and that Christianity should be reformed to keep abreast with the development

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, p. 161; Philip L. Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China’s United Front* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p.139.

of the New China. Bays and Wickeri believed that Wu was not a puppet, but someone who was able to influence the Communist Party in the formulation of its religious policy. It may be true that Wu genuinely believed that Communism was the only means to save China and that Christianity had no significant conflicts with Marxism. He might have also believed that the Christian Church needed to be reformed in order to survive and flourish, but it is definitely naïve to say that the Communist government had no agenda on religion and that the TSPM was entirely the initiative of some progressive Christian leaders. As pointed out by Ying Fuk-Tsang and Leung Ka-Lun, Wu was not at all a recognized church leader at the time. There was no way for him to be able to lead the entire church without the help of the government. According to Ying and Leung, in the beginning, many of the church leaders in the NCC were not supportive of Wu. In October 1950, the NCC had its first national meeting since 1946 and the TSPM was not even on the agenda. Yet, by the end of the meeting, up to 149 delegates voted to sign the Christian manifesto and embrace the TSPM. The reason was obvious. It had become clear to them that the so-called TSPM was the new structure created by the government to manage Christian affairs under communism and Wu was the appointed leader. After this conference, the NCC in effect ceased to exist. Ying and Leung concluded that the Government had hand-picked Wu, who it trusted, to wipe out the power of the old structure (NCC) and replace it with the new structure (TSPM) which would be totally under the control of the government.<sup>29</sup>

In 2014, Wu's son, Wu Zongsu gave a lecture in San Francisco in which he described his father as a tragic figure. His speech confirmed Ying and Leung's conclusion. He said:

My father thought that Christianity on the one hand and Marxism on the other hand could supplement each other, and the purpose of this is to build a just society where there is no exploitation. Christianity tried to achieve this purpose through love, and the Communists tried to achieve this through class struggle. However, the two have many things in common. In 1949, my father was appointed as the chief representative from the religious circle in the First Political Consultative Conference. After that, he was a member of the Standing Committee of the First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth National People's Congress and the founder of the

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<sup>29</sup> Ying Fuk-Tsang (邢福增), Leung Ka-lun (梁家麟), *Wu Shi Nian Dai San Zi Yun Dong De Yan Jiu* (五十年代三自運動的研究 *The Three-self Patriotic Movement in 1950s*) (Xianggang: Jian Dao Shen Xue Yuan Jidu Jiao Yu Zhongguo Wen Hua Yan Jiu Zhong Xin, 1996), p. 224.

Three- Self Movement ... [But] there was an evil backstage manipulator behind everything my father did, and this manipulator was the Chinese Communist Party. The publication of the 'Declaration of Renewal' was originally for the purpose of correcting the erroneous religious policies of the Chinese Communist Party implemented after 1949. He wanted Zhou Enlai to issue an order to protect religious freedom. However, after he met with Zhou Enlai, he made a turn of 180 degrees and never mentioned those errors. He told his congregations that they must break with the imperialists.<sup>30</sup>

Religion, according to Karl Marx, is unscientific and a harmful superstition, an opiate to lull the poor into indifference to their lot and so prevent social change. It should be no surprise that the new government would want tight control of religion. Initially, when the rule of the new government was not yet fully established, it adopted a more tolerant policy allowing the church to enjoy some freedom. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1951 gave the government opportunity to rally the support of the entire country to fight against "imperialists." The war produced a flush of zealous patriotism which occasioned the final and rapid takeover by the government of the Church. This why Lyall described the Church as having been "shackled" by the government.

A drastic purge of the Church immediately followed the publication of the Christian Manifesto, coinciding with the wave of arrests and trials which held the whole country in the grip of fear. An "accusation" campaign under the supervision of government officials singled out all the pastors and church leaders who had enjoyed special relations with missionaries. The prototype "accusation meeting" was held in Beijing in April 1951. Wu Yaozong compared it to the cleansing of the Temple by Jesus. Some missionaries and Church leaders were accused of being "pro-imperialist and pro-American reactionaries" or "corrupt elements." On June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1951, the TSPM staged another huge, carefully rehearsed accusation meeting in the Shanghai Canidrome stadium where prominent local Christian leaders were required to make public confessions. A number of Church leaders including Chen Wenyuan (陳文淵), Liang Xiaochu (梁小初), Andrew Tsu Yuyue (朱友漁), Calvin Chao and Zhao Shiguang (趙世光) were targets of attack. Many such accusation meetings were held throughout the whole country. Though these accusation meetings resulted in only a few imprisonments and a handful of executions,

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<sup>30</sup> "Wu Zongsu: Wu Yaozong, the founder of China's Three-Self Patriotic Church, is a 'tragic figure'," China Aid, last modified Feb. 17, 2014, accessed July 25, 2015, <http://www.chinaaid.org/2014/02/wu-yaozongs-son-wu-yaozong-founder-of.html>.

those targeted suffered intense humiliation and trauma, as their co-workers and even family members were pressured to denounce them. Some were even driven to suicide.

Apart from these accusation meetings, the TSPM also forbade anyone from “parasitically” accepting a salary from his congregation. Ministers were compelled to engage in productive labor on farms or in factories. Indoctrination in Marxism, Leninism and Mao thought had already become a part of everyday life for the masses, but pastors and church workers were required to attend special extended courses for intensive indoctrination. Churches had to obey Party direction, and loyalty to the State had to come before that to the Church.

How did the partners of the CIM react to this drastic change? While many leaders like Wang Mingdao and the Inter-Varsity leaders refused to sign the Christian Manifesto or join the TSPM even at the cost of their lives, many others like David Yang and Marcus Cheng did sign and joined the TSPM. Lyall was in close contact with Yang for about fifteen months in Shanghai under the communist regime. Lyall well understood his struggles and pain working with the TSPM. As his missionary friends bade farewell one by one, Yang felt a sense of foreboding about the future, in spite of the fact that the new National Constitution drawn up by the People’s Government promised freedom of belief. According to his son Dr. Yang Anxi, there were a number of reasons why David Yang joined the TSPM. First, he was convicted that God had called him to serve in China. Though several overseas churches urged him to leave China and serve overseas in 1947 and 1948, he refused because he did not think it was God’s will for him to leave his sheep behind. Second, he was impressed by the Red Army which was much more disciplined than the Nationalist army, and by the efficiency and moral standards of the new government. The Communist government quickly solved the prostitution problem in Beijing; all brothels disappeared overnight, and prostitutes were reformed. Third, he was very patriotic and whole-heartedly believed that it was his civic responsibility to support the new government especially when China was involved in the Korean War. Finally, he believed that it was only by joining the TSPM that he would be able to serve the Church. It seemed this was the reality he and all Christians had to accept.<sup>31</sup> He realized that the situation was not as simple as he had anticipated when he faced public trial in his old church in Nanjing. In the accusation meeting,

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<sup>31</sup> Yang Anxi (楊安溪): *Si Zai Yesu Qian, Huo Zai Yesu Qian, Huiyi Wo de Fiqin Yang Shaotang wei Mushi* (Fuyin Jiansheng Ji) (死在耶穌前, 活在耶穌前-----回憶我的父親楊紹唐為牧師,” 福音見證集,) accessed July 25, 2015, <http://www.ctestimony.org/2004/20041106.htm>.

he was attacked by his members, colleagues and students. It was a harrowing and utterly humiliating experience. The result of Yang's trial was his removal from the pastorate of the Nanjing Church on the grounds of being reactionary in thought, of having been under the influence of imperialism and of being anti-government. He left Nanjing for Shanghai and served the church there. Since Yang was a recognized evangelical leader, the authorities wanted to draw other evangelicals into the TSPM by making him a leader in the movement. Therefore, he was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Shanghai Three-Self Committee, but that did not last long. After 1956, most of the evangelical leaders, including Wang Mingdao, had either been imprisoned or arrested. Yang was no longer a valuable "tool" in the eyes of the government. His close association with Wang Mingdao, Watchman Nee and Chia Yuming, caused him to be criticized by Bishop K. H. Ting (丁光訓) for being "a two-faced progressive." He was even accused of attempting to revive the infamous CIM. From then on, Yang remained under close scrutiny by the government. According to his son, Yang Anxi, he was once invited to preach in Wenzhou for a week, but was abruptly stopped and forced to return to Shanghai after three days when the TSPM saw that many went to listen to him. In 1964, he returned to Shanxi to visit his church at Quwo. He was ordered back to Shanghai, and by way of punishment, spent time being reformed by hard labor. From then on, he was not allowed to preach in public.

Yang was most pained by the rejection and criticism from his good friends and colleagues who refused to join the TSPM. Zheng Huiduan, Yang's student and a worker at the China Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, confronted him with failing to practice what he preached by joining the TSPM. Wang Mingdao, a close friend, was similarly upset when he learned that Yang had joined the TSPM. In his diary, Wang wrote of a conversation he had with Yang Anxi, in which he totally disagreed with David Yang's position and was particularly upset by the accusations made against the CIM. Wang Mingdao commented that Yang's criticism of the CIM was an insult to God and to His son.<sup>32</sup> Wang was referring to an incident in which the TSPM required Yang to broadcast a criticism of missionaries on radio in Shanghai in 1951. Prior to the broadcast, Yang had shared his struggle with Adeney. Adeney said, "I saw the agony he went through while writing and re-writing his script. He well knew that if he refused to co-

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<sup>32</sup> Liang, Jialin (梁家麟), *Ta Men Shi Wei Le Xin Yang: Beijing Jidu Tu Xue Sheng Hui yu Zonghua Jidu Tu Bu Dao Hui* (他們是為了信仰: 北京基督徒學生會與中華基督徒佈道會) (Xianggang: Jian Dao Shen Xue Yuan, 2001), p. 89.

operate he would be arrested and imprisoned, not on account of his faith but on a political charge of collaborating with the imperialists.”<sup>33</sup> Yang became increasingly isolated, and lost his faith in people though never in God. Yang Anxi shared about the last conversation he had with his father in which they spoke of the future of the Chinese church. David Yang told his son that he did not share this information with others because he feared their betrayal. He had seen other pastors betrayed for sharing their views on the future of the Chinese Church, and suffer greatly as a result. David Yang truly believed that the Chinese church had a bright future, that she would prevail if believers everywhere prayed consistently for her, and that God was using the Communists to purify and strengthen her.<sup>34</sup>

In 1966, during the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards closed all churches throughout China and ministers were humiliated. These youthful revolutionaries had been charged with the task of eliminating the old and irrelevant aspects of culture, especially religion. The operation of the TSPM was suspended and many of its leaders were imprisoned or sent to labor camps. David Yang was one of those sentenced to productive labor. In 1969, while Shanghai was extremely cold, he was ordered to clean up the snow on the street. He had a heart attack while working on the street and died instantly. According to his daughter, in the months before his death, he often sang an old song popular in Shanxi during the Boxer Uprising, which translates as:

*Die in the presence of Jesus,  
Live in the presence of Jesus,  
Far better a day in the presence of Jesus,  
Than many years without Him,  
Fear not the cross before,  
An early death is an early homecoming,  
Know if you love the Lord?  
Know if you will suffer for Him.*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> Yang Anxi (楊安溪): *Si Zai Yesu Qian, Huo Zai Yesu Qian, Huiyi Wo de Fiqin Yang Shaotang wei Mushi* (Fuyin Jiansheng Ji) (死在耶穌前, 活在耶穌前 - 回憶我的父親楊紹唐為牧師,” 福音見證集,) accessed July 25, 2015, <http://www.ctestimony.org/2004/20041106.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Though many evangelicals and house church leaders criticized Yang's decision to join the TSPM, it cannot be denied that the growth of the TSPM churches in the last few decades was largely due to the foundation laid down in the early years by evangelical leaders like David Yang. Theologically speaking, over 90% of the TSPM churches in China today are evangelicals. The most unexpected event by far to the CIM missionaries was the action taken by Marcus Cheng, a close associate and good friend of Houghton's. It was Cheng's letter to CIM leaders requesting that all CIM missionaries be immediately withdrawn from his staff at the Chongqing Theological Seminary that caused Houghton to evacuate all CIM missionaries from China. Unlike David Yang, Cheng did not simply sign the Manifesto and join the TSPM. He publicly threw in his lot with the new Communist government, and the progressive Christian leaders like Wu Yaozong. In his articles written for *Tienfeng*, he was highly critical of the missionary record in China, and fulsomely praised the new regime and its policies.<sup>36</sup> He attended the crucial April meeting in Beijing which created the TSPM, and became one of the four vice-chairpersons of the preparatory council of the TSPM. He was the only evangelical Christian on the council; all others were theologically very liberal.<sup>37</sup> He continued to write for *Tienfeng* magazine, maintaining the same tenor as in the past. Cheng retired as president of Chongqing Theological Seminary in 1953 and moved to Dalian in the Northeast (Manchuria). Not long after, this seminary which had been established by the CIM was merged with others to form a unified seminary. Cheng, however, remained visible in national-level events, and remained a vice-chairman of the TSPM preparatory council. In March 1957, he attended a meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Beijing as a delegate. This meeting was held at the height of the "100 Flowers Movement" (*Baihua yundong*) which was a period in 1956-1957 during which the government encouraged its citizens to openly express their opinions of the communist regime. Cheng made a startling speech. Unexpectedly, this highly critical speech was reported in full in the March 25<sup>th</sup> 1957 issue of the *People's Daily*, and the May 13<sup>th</sup> 1957 issue of *Tienfeng*. The following extract indicates the nature of the speech:

Some churches have not been allowed to resume services. In some villages and small cities church buildings and furniture have been appropriated by various government organs and the religious life of Christians interfered with. The policy [of the government] has not been uniform and some cadres have taken a hostile attitude throughout, forbidding subscribing money to the

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, p. 167.

<sup>37</sup> Dr. Jia Yuming (賈玉銘) was another evangelical involved in the TSPM. But he was not a member of the council in the beginning. He became a vice-chairperson only at a later stage.

church, repairing church buildings, or taking in new members. Some cadres have not only not respected religious faith, but have even adopted an abusive attitude ... The contradiction between belief and unbelief, between atheism and theism, is a contradiction among the people and not against an external element. We are all citizens of China and this is not a contradiction between friends and enemies of the people ... It is a contradiction of the “hundred schools” ... You speak out your atheism and I will preach my theism, and in this controversy you must not take to abusing my mother, defiling my ancestral graves, or reviling my ancestors. In the eyes of us Christians, God is the Supreme Being and the churches are his temples, the place where Christians worship Him. In the argument over theism and atheism, you must not revile God or blaspheme His name; you must not take churches by force ... This is not criticism, but abuse of religion.<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately for Cheng, the 100 Flowers Movement was followed within a few weeks by the “Anti-Rightist Campaign” of mid-1957 and 1958, an extended campaign in which most of those who had criticized the Government or the Communist Party now became targets of vigorous denunciation. Cheng was one of the most prominent targets of denunciation among Protestant leaders during these months. His fate was sealed when Mao Zedong himself labelled Cheng as an obvious rightist. The attack was led by Wu Yaozong, Cheng’s close colleague in the TSPM. According to Daniel Bays, Wu himself had indirectly and unmistakably criticized implementation of the government’s religious policy at the same 1957 meeting at which Cheng had spoken. In fact, it was Wu’s speech that had emboldened Cheng to speak out his grievances. Quite obviously, Wu scapegoated Cheng to draw attention away from himself.<sup>39</sup> As a result of this purge, Cheng lost his position in the TSPM and became persona non grata. He spent the next few years in obscurity, and died in 1963. Almost thirty years after his death his reputation was officially rehabilitated.

Why did Cheng commit himself to the Communist Government and TSPM despite unequivocally understanding that the communists were atheists and that the leaders of the TSPM were liberals? Ying Fuk-Tsang analyzed the gradual changes in Cheng’s views towards the Communist government. His evangelical background made Cheng relatively negative

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<sup>38</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *Come Wind, Come Weather: The Present Experience of the Church in China* (Chicago: Moody, 1960), p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 181.



towards communism in the 1930s. Like most Chinese in those early days, he did not expect that the Communists would one day rule China. He also thought that the Christian faith and Communist atheistic ideology were not compatible. However, in the 1940s, he began to lose faith in the Nationalists because of the corruption and social injustice he observed under their rule. At the same time, he began to be impressed by the discipline and civilized behavior of the Red Army. To use Ying's words, Cheng was actually driven to the Communist camp by his disappointment and disillusionment with the corrupt and incompetent Nationalist Government.<sup>40</sup> Cheng's sister-in-law Lee Wenyi (李文宜) and her husband Zhou Xinmin (周新民) were underground workers for the Communists and exerted great influence on Cheng and his family, especially on his son Chen Renbing (陳仁炳). Daniel Bays was likely correct when he said, "There must have been many reasons for this change: patriotism, idealism, a desire to protect the Chongqing Theological Seminary, perhaps naivety."<sup>41</sup>

No matter the depth of Cheng's involvement with the TSPM, he continued to hold a certain respect for the CIM and its missionaries. In the accusation meetings, he did not denounce any CIM missionaries and he also advised all his students not to do so. He continued to submit his reports to *China's Millions*, even as late as 1950. When he decided to ask all CIM missionaries to leave the faculty of the Chongqing Theological Seminary in December 1950, he sent a courteous letter to each of them thanking them for their contributions to the school, and expressed regret that he had to make such a decision. Most of the missionaries understood that he was pressured into this decision. He also asked all the students to sign a letter addressed to Houghton telling him that they were determined to serve the Lord.<sup>42</sup> These actions indicate that he did value the partnership with the CIM despite the course of action forced upon him by the political situation at the time.

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<sup>40</sup> Ying Fuk-Tsang (邢福增), *Zhongguo Ji Yao Zhu Yi Zhe De Shi Jian Yu Kun Jing: Chen Chonggui De Shen Xue Si Xiang Yu Xhi Dai* (中國基要主義者的實踐與困境: 陳崇桂的神學思想與時代 The Praxis and Predicament of a Chinese Fundamentalist: Chen Chonggui (Marcus Cheng)'s Theological Thought and His Time (Xianggang: Jian Dao Shen Xue Yuan, 2001), p.245.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 167.

<sup>42</sup> Fuzeng Xing (邢福增), *Zhongguo Ji Yao Zhu Yi Zhe De Shi Jian Yu Kun Jing: Chen Chonggui De Shen Xue Si Xiang Yu Xhi Dai* (中國基要主義者的實踐與困境: 陳崇桂的神學思想與時代 The Praxis and Predicament of a Chinese Fundamentalist: Chen Chonggui (Marcus Cheng)'s Theological Thought and His Time (Xianggang: Jian Dao Shen Xue Yuan, 2001), p.245.

Among all the partners of the CIM, Watchman Nee was perhaps the most tragic. Like David Yang and Marcus Cheng he refused to leave China. In 1950, he stayed in Hong Kong for a month to lead a revival meeting. His colleague Witness Lee (李常受) and many other elders of the Little Flock in Hong Kong urged him not to return to China. He answered, “If a mother discovered that her house was on fire while she was doing laundry outside the house, without any hesitation she would risk her life and rush inside the house to save her children. In the same way, though I fully understand the danger of going back to China, yet how can I leave my brothers and sisters behind without a shepherd?”<sup>43</sup> It was clear that Nee went back to China with a mission. He believed that there was an opportunity for him and the Little Flock to expand its ministry despite the apparent danger.

According to Dr. Ying Fuk-Tsang, Nee understood that the TSPM was the only church recognized by the communist government. In other words, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for any church to survive outside the TSPM. Nee recognized that the leaders of the TSPM were mostly YMCA staff whose theology was too liberal for the evangelicals, and that Wu Yaozong was himself not very popular among the evangelicals. Nee believed that he could lead the entire Little Flock to join the TSPM, eventually taking over the leadership position from Wu. Since the Little Flock had no connection with any foreign missions and was truly self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating, they seemed to be in a better position to win favor from the new government.<sup>44</sup> When Nee returned to China, he did two things. First, he aggressively recruited other evangelicals to join him in his plan. He contacted David Yang of the CIM and Jiang Mengguang of the Christian Alliance Church and urged them to join the Little Flock. He contacted the CIM leaders and convinced them to entrust the CIM churches to him. He convinced the CIM to donate its library and entrust some of their churches in Zhijiang to the Little Flock.<sup>45</sup> Second, he enthusiastically courted the favor of the communist government by fully supporting the TSPM. Between the end of 1950 and January of 1951, he was able to collect 30,000 signatures from the Little Flock to support the Christian Manifesto. This represented about 17 % of the total number of signatures collected by the TSPM at that time. He even requested that Wu Yaozong publish these names in *Tienfeng* as a show of both their patriotism and people power. He invited Wu to the Shanghai Church to deliver a talk on “Patriotism” and more than a 1000 members attended. Workshops on the same subject were

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 28

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

sponsored by the Shanghai church and many “progressive” church leaders were invited as speakers. He mobilized hundreds of believers to join in the street protests against America, Japan and other so-called imperialistic countries. He was able to raise more than 66,159,000 renminbi from his followers to support China’s efforts in the Korean War, about 20% of the total donation from all Chinese churches. Such high-profile patriotic gestures were part of Nee’s strategy to win the favor of the communist government in the hope of obtaining their trust and recognition so that he might be able to wrest the leadership position of the TSPM away from Wu.<sup>46</sup>

Nee completely misinterpreted the situation and miscalculated the manner in which his followers would react. It was naïve of him to think that the government’s role was passive, and that Wu was the main architect of all these changes. He thought that the government was only concerned with those churches which were associated with foreign missions. Since the Little Flock was truly self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating, Nee had thought that as long as the church showed herself to be anti-imperialist, and supportive of the government, it would win the favor of the government. He was wrong.

The government had in fact orchestrated the entire TSPM movement. Wu, who had been sympathetic to the Communists since the 1930s, was hand-picked by the government to front the movement. It was only during the accusation meetings that Nee became aware of his error. Nee was surprised to be accused of unchristian behavior by his own followers. The government, on the other hand, suspected Nee of being the force behind the anti-accusation activities. Thus, Nee was attacked by his own church as well as by the government. In January 1951, Wu Yaozong explained the meaning of “self-propagating” in *Tienfeng*. He wrote that the issue was not limited to “who” propagated, but “what” was being propagated. Wu was unhappy with the leaders among the evangelicals who claimed to be three-self, but Wu regarded as psuedo-three-self for preaching an imperialistic message, not a genuine Chinese gospel.<sup>47</sup> Nee saw then, that there was no way for evangelicals to survive under the TSPM. He had no option but to turn against the TSPM, charging the leaders with using “accusation meetings” to attack evangelicals on religious grounds. He was ready to be a martyr for the sake of the gospel. However, the government was sufficiently astute not to charge him on religious or political grounds, but on

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-46.

<sup>47</sup> Wu Yaozong (吳耀宗), Judujiao Gexin Yundong de Xin Jieduan (基督教革新運動的新階段), *Tienfeng* (天風) 246 (1951): p.2.

the grounds of tax evasion and theft of state property by his pharmaceutical company. He was arrested in 1952 in the heat of the “five-anti” campaign launched in January that year against economic crimes (bribery, tax evasion, fraud, the stealing of state property and the theft of economic secrets) of the still active industrialists and business leaders from the Republican period. The charge was totally unrelated to his leadership of the Little Flock. The court sentenced him to twenty years’ imprisonment. Three years later, on January 21st 1956, the four elders of the Little Flock who had taken over Nee’s pastoral responsibilities after his imprisonment, and 28 other Christian leaders in the Shanghai area, were also arrested. Officially, the Little Flock had finally pledged its full support to the TSPM, but in fact, many Little Flock churches went underground at that point, eventually re-emerging as one of the pillars of the house church movement in the 1980s. Nee suffered much during his imprisonment. He died on June 1st 1972. Shortly before his death, he wrote to his sister-in-law reporting his poor health, but declaring that “the inward joy surpasses everything.” As Lyall said, “Despite pressures of every kind he never denied his Lord or renounced his faith. To the end he was true to his God.”<sup>48</sup>

Among all the partners of the CIM who refused to sign the Manifesto and/or join the TSPM, Wang Mingdao was perhaps the best known. By the mid-1950s, he was likely the last remaining obstacle to TSPM Protestant hegemony. From the outset, he daringly opposed the TSPM. Lyall wrote that Wang Mingdao, from his Biblical standpoint, saw clearly the true nature of Communism. He was convinced that compromise was not the way to glorify God nor save the Church. Between 1951 and 1954 he published a number of books on various aspects surrounding this theme. Increasingly, Wang became an embarrassment to the leaders of the TSPM and a major hindrance to progress in the task assigned to them by the government.<sup>49</sup>

In the spring of 1954, the TSPM sent out a circular to all churches and Christian organizations in Beijing requiring them to appoint delegates to attend an accusation meeting in which Wang Mingdao was to be publicly ‘accused.’ Following the accusations, the chairman asked the delegates whether they recommended death or imprisonment, but only a quarter of those present assented to either. The rest sat silent, some weeping, and no punishment was decreed. Several days later, the Beijing Christian Student Group started an ‘Oppose the Prosecution of Wang Mingdao’ campaign, which immediately received wide support from churches and

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<sup>48</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 97.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

Christian organizations. The protest spread to Tientsin and Shanghai and was reported all over China by the daily press. In May, the TSPM held its fourth annual conference in Beijing, attended by six hundred delegates from all branches of the Christian church. The leaders made a last effort to win over Wang Mingdao. Six prominent leaders of the TSPM called at his home, but he refused to meet them. Angered, the TSPM ordered ‘accusation meetings’ to be held against Wang all over China. *Tienfeng* became an official channel for launching a series of attacks on him and listed all his ‘crimes.’ In June 1955, Wang wrote a long article entitled “We, Because of Faith.” In it, he contended that the TSPM headed by Wu Yaozong was made up of modernist “unbelievers” with which an evangelical like him had nothing to do. At this point, the TSPM and the authorities apparently lost patience and had Wang arrested along with many students from the Beijing Christian Student Group.

The drama of Wang’s case continued after his arrest. After about a year in jail, constantly under intense psychological pressure, Wang relented and signed a confession in 1956 in exchange for release. The deal struck was that Wang would make a public confession and would affiliate with the TSPM. He did the former, then was so chagrined by what he had done that he retracted his confession and refused to join the TSPM. He was sent back to prison where he languished for more than twenty years. He was finally released in early 1980 after a total of twenty-three years in prison, and lived in Shanghai. Lyall said:

Later in life he was to face sterner tests at the hands of hostile governments. On two occasions, once under the Japanese occupying forces and once under the Communist government, it was demanded that his congregation join a federation of local churches, some of which were liberal in their stance. His refusal to do this led to his prolonged imprisonment. In the will-power he showed, we see the characteristics of a leader. He was indeed an outstanding leader, and a truly humble man. He once said, “For more than twenty years, as I have carried on my work, I have never ceased to learn and I am still learning.”<sup>50</sup>

In fact, Wang inspired many of the current house church leaders. He died on July 28th 1991, at the age of 90.

In the first decade after the Revolution, we observe an interesting picture of the church in China.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 146-147.

On the one hand, the TSPM was tightening its grip on many evangelical Christians. Many leaders fell out of favor and were either imprisoned or denounced. Freedom was limited. Lyall called this a period of being “shackled”.<sup>51</sup> He reported in 1957, “It is important for Christians, as for anyone else, to say the right thing, echo the current catch phrases and voice enthusiastic support for the Government. A labor camp or prison is waiting for anyone unwise enough to show themselves out of step with official thought and policy.”<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, the church was growing rapidly. The Bible Society in Shanghai continued to print Bibles and, from June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1949, to the end of 1955, sold a total of 171,278 bibles, 170,493 New Testaments and over three million Scripture portions. In Wenzhou, the CIM churches reported 300 baptisms in 1955 and about the same number in 1956. In Hwochiu of Anhui, there were 2000 members when the CIM missionaries left in 1951; by 1955 the number had increased to almost 4000. In Henan, one CIM church witnessed a threefold increase in membership over the course of only three or four years, even though their leaders were jailed soon after the departure of the CIM missionaries. In 1957, Christian students continued to meet for prayer and Bible study in nine of China’s universities, and that same year they held yet another delegate conference in Swatow. Events like these were surprising in view of the fact that the young were everywhere subjected to intensive Marxist re-education. While it is true to say that during this period, the Church was “shackled”, it is also true to say that paradoxically it was also a period of tremendous growth.

## **5.2 The “Furnace of Affliction” (1958-1979)**

1958 was an important year in the history of China. Following the Hundred Flowers campaign, Chairman Mao himself became very impatient with the slow speed of economic progress in the country. In the hope of achieving a “great leap forward” in production, the country was hastily reorganized into 26,578 communes, with 123 million families suddenly finding themselves part of the vast military-style system of communes, brigades and production teams. Mao wanted to replace individualism with total collectivism, and so all private farm plots and free village markets were abolished as vestiges of capitalism. Tragically for China, this stupendous, badly planned and thoroughly mismanaged adventure coincided with three years of drought and other calamities, which produced a famine so disastrous that about forty million people died of starvation.

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<sup>51</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, p. 125.

<sup>52</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, “God in China” *China’s Millions* (December, 1957): p. 126.

Mao was forced to step down from the office of state chairman. He was succeeded by Liu Shaoqi in 1959. In 1961, the character of the commune was greatly modified; both private plots and free markets were restored. In 1966, Mao executed a final gamble - the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. It was a socio-political movement that took place from 1966-1976. Set into motion by Mao, its stated goal was to preserve 'true' Communist ideology in China by purging society of the remnants of capitalist and traditional elements of Chinese culture, and to re-impose Maoist thought as the dominant ideology within the Party. The Cultural Revolution marked the return of Mao to a position of power after the Great Leap Forward. The youth responded to Mao's appeal by forming Red Guard units throughout the entire country. Mao's personality cult grew to immense proportions. As universities and schools were closed, students were recruited into the Red Guards and provided with armbands, Mao badges, and the Little Red Book of Mao's sayings, free travel passes, free food and accommodation. They were ordered to fan out over the whole country "making revolution" and destroying the "four olds" (old ideas, customs, culture and habits). Millions across the country were persecuted in the violent struggles that ensued, suffering a wide range of abuses including public humiliation, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, sustained harassment, and seizure of property. A large segment of the population was forcibly displaced, most notably in the transfer of urban youth to rural regions during the so-called 'Down to the Countryside Movement.' Historic relics and artifacts were destroyed. Cultural and religious sites were ransacked. The movement significantly paralyzed the entire country economically and politically. Many senior officials, including Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were purged. Liu died in solitary confinement in 1969. Mao was alarmed at the social rifts his revolution caused. He officially declared the Cultural Revolution ended in 1969, but its active phase lasted until the death of the military leader Lin Biao in 1971. After Mao's death and the arrest of the Gang of Four (the ultra-leftists in Shanghai led by Mao's wife Jiang Qing) in 1976, reformers led by Deng Xiaoping gradually began to dismantle the Maoist policies associated with the Cultural Revolution.<sup>53</sup>

As the Cultural Revolution exploded in 1966, Christians immediately began to fear the implications of the elimination of the "four olds." Religious believers were labeled "demons and monsters." The Red Guards seized and closed churches throughout China, removing or defacing religious symbols, and putting the buildings to alternative use as factories or warehouses. Bibles, hymnals and other Christian literature were confiscated and largely

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<sup>53</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, pp. 142-143.

destroyed. Lyall cited an eye-witness account from Amoy:

All church windows were smashed, the pews burned and the cross taken down. Every pastor was made to “walk the street” with a dunce’s hat on his head and a placard around his neck announcing his crimes [a common practice in humiliating intellectuals]. One woman was beaten to death. Communist cadres and Red Guards searched every Christian home for Bibles, hymnals and other literature. They then gathered over twenty YMCA and YWCA secretaries and forced them to kneel in front of the pile of burning books while a large crowd stood around observing the great spectacle. As the flames intensified and radiated their heat towards them, the victims cried out in excruciating pain. It was a pitiful sight. Tormented by their excessive burns, most of them, including the general secretary of the YMCA, committed suicide by jumping from high buildings. Yet these men were the “progressive” secretaries and pastors who had supported government policies in the 1950s and who had praised the Party for having attained what Christianity had failed to do in a hundred years! After this terrible ordeal, all church meetings in Amoy ceased.<sup>54</sup>

These experiences were repeated throughout China. The Church in China became one without Bibles, buildings and pastors, most of whom had been sent to labor camps or prison. 1968 was a most difficult year, with intense persecution and torture perpetrated upon churches. Lyall called this period the “furnace of affliction.” Paradoxically, this was also the period in which the house church movement flourished. As early as 1951, small groups of Christians, defying government restrictions, began to meet in secret and at irregular times for worship. These house churches existed in a simple non-institutional fashion. The Great Leap Forward gave these informal house churches greater impetus, but it was during the Cultural Revolution that the movement truly blossomed. At great risk to themselves and in the midst of one of the most terrible persecutions in history, Christians persisted in meeting in their own homes to worship God and strengthen one another. Stripped of all the foreign trappings of the past, these house churches, rooted in the home and protected by family loyalties, were clearly dissociated from western imperialists. With no bibles to read, members would share Scripture passages previously committed to memory, and pray together whenever they met at home. A key feature of these house churches was their loving care for all those in need or trouble. During the Cultural Revolution, many lost everything they possessed, and it was the Christians who shared

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-149.



their own food and clothing with the needy and the poor, especially with those families whose breadwinners had been killed or thrown into prison. They visited the bereaved and the suffering and brought them comfort. These hidden churches continued to grow in spite of the many difficulties and problems they faced.<sup>55</sup>

Two factors were indispensable to the survival of the house churches - total commitment to the faith and the presence of capable leaders. The Christian student movement came to play a significant role in the development of the house church movement. Many among the intellectuals and university students converted during the war and the subsequent student revival were among the tens of thousands consigned to the political scrap-heap. Most were not rehabilitated until about 1979. During their exile, they had tremendous impact on their fellow-workers and local communities. Their influence was no longer confined to the big cities, but had extended to the rural areas, fueling the growth of the house church movement in the countryside.

The Little Flock was another pillar of the house church movement. Many of its leaders were jailed and on April 15<sup>th</sup> 1956. The movement came under the control of the TSPM, and was in effect, dissolved. Yet, many pockets of the Little Flock survived both the persecutions of the 1950s, and the Cultural Revolution. Their tradition of focusing on the scriptures, on close fellowship in small group meetings, and their freedom from foreign control stood them in good stead. By the late 1970s, many house churches in the Little Flock tradition were once again flourishing in many cities, and in rural areas as well. It was reported, for example, that there were 70,000 Christians in Fuqing County in Fuzhou in 1981. Of these, 30,000 adhered to the Little Flock. By 1987, a local pastor reported growth to 100,000 Christians with corresponding growth among the Little Flock.<sup>56</sup> Another example is that of Xiaoshan County in northern Zhejiang. Here a large number of Little Flock Christians remained adamantly opposed to the TSPM. Of the 63,000 Christians in Xiaohshan in 1984, 95% belonged to the Little Flock. The staggering growth of the Little Flock in Xiaoshan can be traced back to a small group of Christian families “migrating” from Shandong to the area in 1949-1950. After the Cultural Revolution, house churches sprang up everywhere in this area. By 1998, they had grown to 100,000 members, most of whom were Little Flock Christians.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>56</sup> Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Oxford: Monarch, 2006) p. 64.

According to Lambert, since the 1970s, several large house-church groups developed in Henan, Anhui and Wenzhou. These churches were started by charismatic figures engaged in vigorous evangelism, and who were usually intermittently in and out of prison or labor camp. The vast majority of believers were rural folk and many were semi-literate. These groups sent out teams to many parts of China and they developed a national network.<sup>57</sup>

### **5.3 Blossoming (1980 - Present)**

In the three decades after 1980, China totally transformed itself. The economic reforms begun by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 have made China an economic superpower, with growth rates at 9 percent or more annually. China became “the workshop of world,” manufacturing toys, shoes, household goods, mobile phones, motor-cycles, textiles, electronics and computers. The old China was replaced by the New China. Private sector growth roared ahead while old State-controlled firms fell into obsolescence. A new urban middle class fueled a growing consumerism. In the old China, owning a bicycle was everyone’s dream. Now, foreign cars and expensive clothes are the new status symbols. Over 100 million Chinese are linked to the Internet and almost everyone has a mobile phone. However, economic transformation has its downside. Some twenty million peasants are in the process of leaving permanent poverty in the countryside for a better life in the cities. The greatest mass migration in history is under way, creating many social problems. The gap between the rich and poor is increasing. There is also a growing moral and spiritual confusion. It is under such conditions that we see the spectacular growth of the Chinese church. In 1967, there were no churches, apart from two for foreign diplomats and visitors. In 2006, there were over 50,000 registered Protestant churches and “meeting points” as well as a large number of unregistered house churches.<sup>58</sup> Lyall called this the period of “a hundredfold.” He wrote, “Who could have believed when the missionaries sorrowfully left China in 1951 that a Protestant Church then numbering fewer than one million in the space of thirty years would have multiplied many times over? This extraordinary phenomenon, other than being the sovereign grace of God, needs explanation.”<sup>59</sup>

Some attribute this revival to the political change in China. After the traumatic events of 1966-1976 the atmosphere all over China underwent a marked change. Deng constantly emphasized the importance of the United Front within which all sections of national life must work together

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>59</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, p. 162.

towards a common goal known as the “four modernizations” (agriculture, industry, science and defense). The authorities became more tolerant towards religion. Christians began to enjoy greater liberty than in the preceding twenty years, and became increasingly bold in their witness. Others offer a plausible sociological explanation for the revival. The Cultural Revolution marked the failure of Marxism to raise China out of her backwardness and poverty. This failure left a spiritual vacuum in the hearts of the people, especially the young intellectuals. The nation underwent a crisis of faith, and the Christian message became very attractive. In addition, the flexibility of Protestantism, especially in house church form, was a major factor in the Church’s survival and growth.<sup>60</sup> While these explanations may all be valid, they do not adequately explain the phenomenon. It has been pointed out that all these conditions are likewise present in Taiwan, which also offers much greater freedom to evangelize. Yet, the stunning growth present in China is not seen in Taiwan.<sup>61</sup>

A careful analysis of the pattern of growth of the church in China shows that the Church is strongest in those provinces where missionary efforts (particularly those of the CIM) were most successful before 1949. The following table shows that the geographic areas with the largest Christian populations in 1949, remain the areas with the most significant Christian populations at the end of the 20th century.

	<b>Number of Christians in 1949</b>	<b>Number of Christians in 1995 (Registered church only)</b>
Zhejiang	200,000	1,834,000
Henan	120,000	5,000,000
Fujian	100,000	1,179,000
Shandong	80,000	1,179,000
Jiangsu	50,000	1,572,000
Anhui	42,000	2,500,000

The majority of the new converts in this generation have no knowledge of the CIM or any other mission organizations before 1949. Therefore, it is difficult to prove that the present growth of the Chinese church is the direct result of the missionary efforts of the CIM. However, circumstantial evidence does point to such a link. The following three examples may generate

<sup>60</sup> Summarized from Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1993), p. 129.

<sup>61</sup> Tony Lambert, *China’s Christian Millions* (Oxford: Monarch, 2006), p.208.

some insight.

## 5.4 The Church in Wenzhou

Wenzhou is located in a small corner of Zhejiang Province. The church in Wenzhou traces its origin to the 1870s. George Stott was among the very first group of missionaries to sail for China with Hudson Taylor under the banner of the CIM. Stott had only one leg, but it was he who began proclaiming the gospel in Wenzhou. Hudson Taylor himself baptized the first converts. Early missionary activities included the setting up of schools and a hospital. In the 1930s, all the schools were closed as a result of the anti-Christian movement. At that time, many CIM churches began to seek independence, while remaining in partnership with the CIM. As the church grew, local bible schools ensured that the churches would have strong roots, grounded in the word of God. Evangelism was always a priority. By 1949, the CIM had four or five large and flourishing churches in Wenzhou, and hundreds of country congregations with a total of over 20,000 believers.<sup>62</sup> It was one of the largest Christian groups in Wenzhou.<sup>63</sup>

In the 1930s, Watchman Nee in Shanghai began training leaders for the expansion of the assemblies. A major expansion took place in the coastal provinces of Fujian and Zhejiang. Wenzhou also became a target for development. Many of the CIM churches joined the Little Flock movement and they experienced tremendous growth in numbers. By 1949, the Little Flock had 111 congregations and 19,750 members in Wenzhou and the surrounding areas.<sup>64</sup> By 1951, when the missionaries withdrew from China, the CIM churches together with those of its partner, the Little Flock, were undoubtedly the largest and healthiest in Wenzhou and the surrounding areas.

In 2004, there were more than 750,000 Christians in Greater Wenzhou. In 2014, there were more than a million Christians, comprising about 10-15 % of the total population of the Greater Wenzhou area. In 2014, I had the opportunity to do some field study in Wenzhou and interviewed some church leaders, both from the TSPM as well as the house churches. I found that while there was still a distinction between the TSPM and house churches, there did not

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<sup>62</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *The Phoenix Rises: the Phenomenal Growth of Eight Chinese Churches* (Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1992), pp. 126-127.

<sup>63</sup> The Methodist Church was in fact a larger Christian group according to a report in 1951. They had 24,200 believers, while the CIM had 21665 believers. These two groups made up of half of the total Christians in Wenzhou. But if we add the Little Flock as a partner of the CIM, then they would be the largest Christian group in Wenzhou.

<sup>64</sup> Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Oxford: Monarch, 2006), p.277.

exist the animosity toward each other that is often encountered in other cities. Officialdom here is relatively benign. In the past ten years, there has been a so-called “third force” emerging onto the scene. They do not identify with the traditional house churches, nor with the TSPM. Many among the “third force” are intellectuals who graduated from universities and colleges. Wenzhou has a fairly large Christian Inter-varsity group. Many of these students and graduates did not feel comfortable attending either house churches or TSPM churches. They had no option but to start their own.

In Wenzhou, the TSPM churches are also relatively strong. According to Lambert, in 2006, there were about 70,000 officially registered Protestants, comprising about 10 % of the total population. In 2014, I interviewed Rev. Gao Jianguo (高建國), who is a leading TSPM pastor in Wenzhou. Rev. Gao came to know the Lord while he was a student of Rev. James Taylor, the grandson of Hudson Taylor in Kaifeng, Henan. He went on to receive theological training at the Presbyterian Seminary in North China. After graduating from the seminary in 1950, he began his pastoral ministry in an independent CIM church in Wenzhou. At that time, all the Wenzhou CIM churches including those congregations in the surrounding rural districts formed an association to take care of the thousands of believers in the greater Wenzhou area. Gao, along with other CIM pastors Zhou Jinyao (周景堯) and Chen Gongquan (陳公權), were ordained by David Yang. In early 1957, he was elected President of the Association. However, in mid-1957, the Hundred Flowers Movement was followed within a few weeks by the Anti-Rightist Campaign in which most of those individuals who had criticized the government or the Communist Party in early 1957 then became targets of vigorous denunciation. Some lost their positions; others were sent off to labor camps. Rev. Gao was charged as a rightist and sent to labor camp for three years. In 1961, he returned to Wenzhou to work in a factory. He suffered during this period. In 1980, the government adopted a more relaxed policy on religion, and Rev. Gao was able to take up his pastoral duties once again, this time in a TSPM church which was formerly an independent CIM church. According to Gao, there were about a thousand church buildings being rebuilt and opened in the 1980s; some were large, able to accommodate more than 3000. The seating capacity of Gao’s church was about 1000. In the last three decades, the churches grew by leaps and bounds. At the present time, there are more than a million believers and 1500 registered churches in the greater Wenzhou area. This number would increase to more than 2500 if the house churches are included. Gao believed that the

phenomenal growth was due to their vigorous discipleship and evangelism efforts.<sup>65</sup> Gao is typical of many former CIM pastors who eventually became pillars of the Wenzhou TSPM churches after 1980.

In Wenzhou, the house churches are equally robust if not stronger than the TSPM churches. In 1951, many churches, especially those of the Little Flock movement and some CIM churches chose not to join the TSPM, but went underground. Many leaders were arrested and jailed, but the churches remained faithful and strong. In *The Phoenix Rises: The Phenomenal Growth of Eight Chinese Churches* edited by Lyall, the following was noted. The churches in Wenzhou were closed by the Red Guards in 1966, in common with other churches all over China. The leaders of the house churches called for three months of prayer and fasting. Small meetings resumed in 1967, only to provoke intensive opposition and fierce persecution. In 1978, when the government adopted a more relaxed policy towards religion, thousands of men and women, especially young people, were converted especially in the rural areas outside the city. The house churches in Wenzhou have continued to grow in the past three decades.<sup>66</sup>

What is the underlying reason for this phenomenal growth? Lyall wrote, “It seems to lie in the willingness of Christians to suffer for Christ. That has been the armor which has overcome the adversary ... Adopting this attitude, the Christians in Wenzhou have not been terrified by threats, but have summoned the courage to face whatever God might call them to experience.”<sup>67</sup>

This is what we call “the spirit after the type of Hudson Taylor” which was also the secret of the success of the CIM. Another reason for the growth of the Wenzhou church was her enthusiasm for evangelism and discipleship training. Rev. Gao claimed, in the interview, that this was the tradition of the CIM.<sup>68</sup> It had been the goal of the CIM to establish indigenous churches led by trained local leaders. In fact, it was because almost all the CIM churches in Wenzhou were independent that they were able to survive and grow after the departure of all the missionaries in 1951. Many Wenzhou residents are merchants, and as they expanded their

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<sup>65</sup> Gao Jianjuo (高建國), *Desheng zhi Ge (得勝之歌 Song of Victory)* (Hong Kong: Christian Communications International Ltd., 2009), pp. 6-9.

<sup>66</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *The Phoenix Rises: the Phenomenal Growth of Eight Chinese Churches* (Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1992), pp. 126-127.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 73.

<sup>68</sup> The interview was carried out in August 7, 2014 in Wenzhou. In that meeting I interviewed Rev. and Mrs. Guo at their home.

businesses to other parts of the country, they also carried with them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is rather amazing to see Wenzhou-like churches in many other parts of China.

### **5.5 The Church among the Hill Tribes**

The second example quoted in *The Phoenix Rises: The Phenomenal Growth of Eight Chinese Churches* is referred to as the church among the hill tribes. The five million Miao people, scattered across south-west China, are divided into many sub-groups each with its own dialect and distinctive dress. For instance, the Black Miao, differ from the Blue Miao, and again from the Flowery Miao. Over the centuries, as the culturally more advanced Han Chinese pushed southwards, the Miao were gradually driven to the mountainous and often barren uplands of Yunnan, and Guizhou provinces. They practiced primitive slash-and-burn agriculture. Despised by many Han Chinese and oppressed by tyrannical landlords and corrupt officials their lives were extremely difficult.

The Miao are traditionally animistic. Their religion consists of placating demons and wearing amulets to ward off evil spirits which are thought to cause disease and death. In 1896 Samuel Clarke of the CIM began to work among the Black Miao in eastern Guizhou. Two years later, another CIM missionary and a local believer Pan Sheo-shan were murdered by Miao bandits. The CIM missionaries did not stop their work among the Miao despite the tragedy. In 1905 and 1906, there was a great pandemic in these regions. Within a ten-mile radius, every family was poor and there were dilapidated houses everywhere. After heavy rains, when people's homes collapsed, they did not have money for repairs. Humans and animals lived in close quarters under the same roof. Personal hygiene was poor among these uneducated people. As a consequence, bubonic plague and typhus sometimes swept through villages, with people dying soon after they were infected. There was not enough time to bury the dead, and bodies were everywhere as the plague spread. At that time, the two CIM missionaries Dr. Arthur G. Nicholls from Australia and Gladstone Porteous from England rode on donkeys to these dangerous places from which others were fleeing. As long as someone was still breathing, they would feed him/her with medicines. They stayed with those who could not be saved, offering comfort and praying with them. These missionaries helped people rebuild their homes and restore their lives. They taught locals to segregate the living quarters of humans and animals, to protect their water sources and pay attention to personal hygiene. Many of the Miao abandoned their practices of worshipping ghosts and spirits, and became Christians. As people changed their ways of life, the missionaries began to teach them to read the bible and to pray. In the end, the

CIM decided to make Sapushan a base for their missionary work. They built a church, the first in Yunnan Province. People of different ethnicities - the Miao, the Yi and the Lisu came from all directions to hear the Word of God. The family of Wang Zhiming were among those worshippers. Wang Zhiming was mentored by Dr. Nicholls and became the President of the Sapushan Christian Association in 1944.<sup>69</sup>

At the same time, Samuel Pollard, a Methodist missionary, went to work among the Flowery Miao in a nearby area known as Shimenkan (石門坎) in Guizhou Province. Prior to his death from typhoid, he established a center for the thousands of believers. He planted churches, trained leaders, obtained justice for Miao Christians from officials and landlords, developed a unique script, known as the Pollard script, and used it when he translated the New Testament into the Miao language. He was a very effective missionary among the Flowery Miao, and is remembered by them as their spiritual ancestor. It is interesting, therefore, to observe that the Methodist churches established by Samuel Pollard disappeared completely after the 1950s, whereas the CIM churches continued to flourish despite the persecution after 1951. What was the reason for the difference?

Zhang Tan (張坦) wrote *Zhai Men Qian de Shimenkan* (窄門前的石門坎 *The Stone Threshold in Front of the Narrow Door*), a book about the phenomenal growth of the Miao church in Yunnan and Guizhou. He raised two questions: First, why was it that Christian missionaries took only twenty years to convert the Miao tribe to Christianity while the Chinese failed to convert them to Confucianism in two thousand years? Second, why did the Miao Methodist Church die out, while the Miao Church founded by the CIM was able to thrive? The answer to the first question is quite obvious. The missionaries came not with swords and guns, but with love and compassion, sacrificing their lives for the sake of the Miaos.

The answer to the second question is more complicated. The Methodist Mission had a very successful ministry in the first half of the twentieth century because of the hard work of Samuel Pollard, also known as Bo Geli (柏格理) in Chinese. In 1907 a people's movement to Christ among the Flowery Miao spread, and Pollard became its best-known missionary. He established a center for the thousands of new believers in Shimenkan (石門坎) along the border

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<sup>69</sup> Yiwu Liao, *God is Red: the Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished in Communist China* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), p. 100-102.



of Yunnan and Guizhou. The mission established by Pollard prospered for another 35 years until 1950 when all the missionaries were expelled by the Communist government. In the 1920s, the Christian population of Shimenkan (石門坎) made up 95% of the total population. By 1951, the membership of the Miao Methodist church in Shimenkan (石門坎) had dropped to 1167 members or 49% of the total population. By 1956, only 200 members were left, and in 1963, the church was closed down entirely.

On the other hand, the Miao Church founded by the CIM missionaries in Sapushan, flourished. In 1944, this church became an independent indigenous church in accordance with the policy of the CIM under the leadership of Wang Zhiming. By 1951, it had grown to a membership of 5000. In 1980, there were 12,000 members and now there are more than 30,000 members in addition to more than 100 places of worship in nearby villages.

What is the reason for the success of the CIM church in contrast to the failure of the Miao Methodist Church? Unlike the Methodists, the CIM was always a trans-denominational mission, with no intention to establish a denomination in China. The Methodists, however, like all other denominations, had its own historical heritage, culture, rituals and church polity. Their goal was to plant churches of their own kind with the same distinctiveness. Missionaries of the CIM came from many different denominations in their homelands, and were not interested in reproducing Western denominationalism in China. The goal of the CIM was 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 between churches was not uncommon. To the CIM, the church was not an organization, but an organism, the living body of Christ. Unity among churches was important and necessary, but uniformity was not needed. The CIM did not have any ecclesiastical authority over any of the Chinese churches. They were simply partners of the Chinese Church. However, these independent CIM churches would join together to form an association. Before 1949, there were twelve such associations in China. The West Yunnan Association was formed in 1944 with Wang Zhiming as its first President. This strategy had the advantage of giving each local church the flexibility and freedom to develop its own indigenous model. Thus we find that Miao music and dance were not uncommon among the

Miao churches.<sup>70</sup> This strategy gave ecclesiastical authority back to the local people. When the missionaries left in 1951, these CIM churches had no problem continuing their ministry for they were already quite accustomed to independence.

The polity of the Methodist mission was very different from that of the CIM. Zhang summarized their differences as follows:<sup>71</sup>

<u>Methodist</u>	<u>CIM</u>
Universal	Local
Centralized	Decentralized
Church is part of denominational mission	Church and mission separated
Propagation by clergy	Propagation by laymen

Since the Methodists believed in the universality of the church, the local Chinese were automatically part of the larger denomination. CIM churches, in contrast, were local autonomous churches without any official link with any other foreign organization, the CIM being only a partner of these local churches. While the Methodists were clergy-led, the CIM churches were in large part led by laymen. It is not difficult to see why the CIM churches survived even when challenged by Communist religious policies.

The Methodists differed from the CIM not only in their polity, but also in their theology. Methodism is characterized by its emphasis on helping the poor and the average person. These ideals are applied through the establishment of hospitals, universities, orphanages, soup kitchens and schools in accordance with Jesus' command to spread the Gospel and serve all people. Methodists are convinced that building loving relationships with others through social service is a means of demonstrating the inclusiveness of God's love. Thus, when Samuel Pollard went to Shimenkan (石門坎), he did not just share the Gospel with the Flowery Miao, but he also reformed their entire society. He brought the Flowery Miao out of animism into the light of the Gospel, out of ignorance to a place of education and dignity. He spread democratic thought, founded schools especially for girls, and built hospitals in China's undeveloped regions. He promoted civilized customs and fought for justice against corrupt officials and

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<sup>70</sup> Zhang, Tan (張坦), "Zhai Men" Qian De Shi Men Kan: Jidu Jiao Wen Hua Yu Chuan Dian Qian Bian Miao Zu She Hui ("窄門"前的石門坎: 基督教文化與川滇黔邊苗族社會 The Stone Threshold in Front of the "Narrow Door"): Christian Culture and Miao People's Society of the Border Regions of Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces (Kunming Shi: Yunnan jiao yu chu ban she, 1992), pp. 273-280.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 273-280

landlords. To use Zhang's words, the Gospel according to the Methodists was a social Gospel. The mission of the Methodists extends beyond the salvation of individual souls, to the reformation of society so that people may experience the abundance of God's grace even on earth. They committed resources to maintaining institutions, with fewer missionaries engaged in evangelism and discipleship training in churches. Therefore, when these institutions were taken over by the Communist Government and the missionaries left, the church immediately began to decline. The CIM had a different understanding of Christian mission. Hudson Taylor believed that the primary aim of Christian mission was to evangelize the whole of China in the shortest possible time. The CIM also built schools, hospitals and orphanages, but these were but means to bring the Gospel to the people. They did not think that it was their responsibility to reform Chinese society or to bring Western culture to the Chinese. They therefore committed relatively fewer resources to the maintenance of social institutions. Instead, most CIM missionaries were actively engaged in direct evangelism and discipleship training. They strongly believed in the separation between church and state, and made sure that they did not get involved in local politics. To use Zhang's words, it was a "spiritual gospel" that they were spreading, not a social gospel. It is interesting to note that in the 1930s, the Nationalist Government was very suspicious about what was going on in Shimenkan, but they were unconcerned about the CIM churches in the neighboring area.<sup>72</sup>

In short, the CIM Miao Church in Guizhou and Yunnan was marked from the beginning by a strong emphasis on sacrificial self-support. By the time of the Communist victory in 1949, the churches were already firmly established. Ninety percent of the Miao attended 19 CIM churches in the county, and the Gospel spread from there to other tribal groups. Sixty percent of the Yi and 80% of the Lisu were Christians in the Wuding area. It is no surprise that they were able to survive the difficult years. In the 1990s, there were 300,000 Miao Christians compared to only about 10,000 in 1949. By 2004, the TSPM recorded 1,179,000 Protestants in Yunnan with 73% of these belonging to tribal groups.<sup>73</sup>

In summary, all of the above evidence, albeit circumstantial, supports a strong link between the present phenomenal growth of the Chinese Church and the strategy adopted by the CIM missionaries in the last century.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp.240-272

<sup>73</sup> Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Oxford: Monarch, 2006), p.275.

## 5.6 The Church in Henan

The third example is that of the church in Henan. Henan is a modern-day center of Christian revival and a power-house of evangelism. The house church movement is well-established in this province, even though cults and sects are also active. In 1949, there were about 100,000 Protestants. On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, this number was reduced to only 78,000. However, in 1990, a local government handbook estimated that the number of Christians had risen to 800,000. By 1996, the TSPM estimated that the church had grown to a staggering 3.5 million. In 2004, the TSPM recorded 4,585,000 Christians in Henan, but the house church movement put the number at about 10 million. Without doubt, in the present day, Henan has the highest percentage of Christians among all the provinces in China.<sup>74</sup>

The CIM began its ministry in Henan during the days of Hudson Taylor. It was one of the nine inland provinces that Taylor targeted for outreach. In 1875, Henry Taylor arrived in Ju-ning with his assistant, Cheng, to preach to the local people there. The results were not encouraging.<sup>75</sup> In 1878-1880, there was a big famine in Shanxi and Henan. It was estimated that about 70-80% of the people of Henan died. The CIM took an active part in the relief work, and the local populace began to respond to the message of the missionaries more positively. In March 1885, J.A. Slimmon of the CIM established the first church in Zhoujiakou (周家口). By 1888, there were 60 members in this church.<sup>76</sup> At about the same time, Dr. Howard Frederick Taylor founded a clinic in Chenzhou (Chenchow 鄭州), and attempted to reach out to the local people through medical services. Henry Taylor went to Kaifeng (開封) and was also involved in medical services there. However, opposition and anti-Christian sentiments were strong, and progress was painfully slow. In 1885, there was only one baptism. This number increased to twenty-four in 1888, fifty-eight in 1896 and one hundred and seventeen in 1899.<sup>77</sup> During the Boxer Uprising in 1900, many CIM properties were destroyed and seven believers killed. Subsequent to that, prospects improved and by 1906, the church at Chenzhou had grown to 250. In 1907, a hospital was founded in Kaifeng by Dr. Whitfield Guinness and George A. Cox. In 1916, this hospital was treating more than 3000 patients per month, and by the 1930s, with 800 beds, it was the largest and most advanced among all the CIM hospitals. Apart from medical services, the CIM also founded schools to reach out to students.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 250.

<sup>75</sup> Henry Taylor, "Pioneer Work in Honan" *China's Millions* (month missing, 1876): pp. 80-81.

<sup>76</sup> J.J. Coulthard, "The First Church in Honan" *China's Millions* (month missing, 1888): p. 63.

<sup>77</sup> Alvyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905*, p. 347.

Nevertheless, these institutions were merely different tools of evangelism and their primary purpose was still to evangelize the Chinese people. In 1921, there were 12,418 believers in the CIM churches in this area. Despite the anti-Christian movement and the War, the church in Henan continued to grow to about 120,000 members by 1949.<sup>78</sup>

According to Zhang Xinghua (張興華), the Henan Church had two unique characteristics.<sup>79</sup> First, home gatherings or house churches were common even from the very beginning. This seemed to have been a tradition of the Henan church. Zhang cited that as early as 1888, Finlayson, a CIM missionary in Henan wrote in *China's Millions* that on Sundays, they gathered in the home of a believer for worship. Another CIM missionary, Coulthard made similar reports in *China's Millions* in the 1890s.<sup>80</sup> It is hardly surprising therefore, that Henan was to become a power house of the house church movement in more recent times. Another characteristic of the Henan church is that it had become independent as early as the 1930s. This was because of the presence of many capable local leaders. Since the Kaifeng Hospital was the largest CIM hospital in China, many physicians received training at this hospital. Many lay leaders in the Henan church were medical doctors or nurses who had also received theological training from their CIM mentors. These two factors were indispensable to the growth of the Henan church.

The house church movement was described by Dr. Yuming Chang in his book *Sowing Seeds of Faith: The Story of a House Church in China*. The book gives some insight into the resilience of the Henan house churches.<sup>81</sup> The house church described by Chang was located in the city of Kaifeng. They met at “Uncle Ren’s” inn. Members suffered a great deal under the Communists, but the church remained strong throughout the stormy years.

From Chang’s account, we see that the presence of capable, well-trained leaders in this house church was one of the keys for its survival. “Elder Gong,” for instance, was a former elder of the CIM Kaifeng church. Chang, was one of the student leaders from the Beijing Christian Student Group. Chang had been trained by Leslie Lyall and Wang Mingdao, and was very

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<sup>78</sup> Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Oxford: Monarch, 2006), p.227.

<sup>79</sup> Xinghua Zhang, “The China Inland Mission in China’s Henan Province (1875-1950). The Cases of Zhougiakuo, Chenzhou, Sheqizhen and Keifang” (PhD diss, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2011), p. 34.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>81</sup> Youming Zhang & Greene Lee, *Sowing Seeds of Faith-The Story of a House Church in China* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word), pp. 13-14.

involved in this house church. “Nurse Nie” was trained by CIM missionaries and served as head nurse of the CIM Kaifeng hospital prior to the communist take-over. Perhaps one of the most interesting leaders of this house church was Fang Zhenqian. He was converted by a CIM missionary, Henry Guinness. On the eve of the Chinese New Year in 1939, while Kaifeng was under Japanese occupation, Fang was apprehended by Guinness when he broke into Guinness’s home. Fang was unarmed and did not threaten Guinness with physical harm. Guinness handed Fang a Bible and told him to read John 3:16 ten times. While Fang read, Henry prepared a large bowl of noodles mixed with three eggs and cabbage for Fang, and invited Fang along with his mother to stay. Deeply touched by Guinness, Fang became a Christian. He was trained by Guinness and eventually became a leader of the church. In 1951, Fang was jailed when he refused to denounce Henry Guinness. He was later forced to leave Kaifeng and go to Xinjing, where he was martyred.<sup>82</sup>

The mutual bonding and support among the Christians in house churches was another factor for their growth. Lyall wrote, “The Chinese people were deeply impressed by the witness of the Church under persecution. The Christians’ patience under trial, their practical love of one another and compassion for the needy both inside and outside the church, did not go unobserved.”<sup>83</sup>

The third factor was what Lyall called the death principle or the spirit after Hudson Taylor. He asserted that ever since the Communist revolution in 1949, the church had to endure bitter suffering and grievous loss. Many of the church’s leaders had spent twenty years or more in prison or exile, separated from their families and their Christian friends and often without a Bible ... Chinese Christians came to regard suffering as a glorious privilege to be desired, not avoided.<sup>84</sup> “Uncle Ren” of the Kaifeng House Church articulated this principle thus:

The only reason I have remained in Kaifeng is because I was transformed from a selfish merchant who became a Communist to an evangelical servant of Christ Jesus to nurture people spiritually and physically in this house church. The children are my grandchildren. I want to look around from my deathbed and hold their hands before I go to the Lord, if He doesn’t come first ... For probably a hundred times the Bible teaches us to stand firm. Don’t be afraid. As

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. pp. 67-70.

<sup>83</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *The Phoenix Rises: the Phenomenal Growth of Eight Chinese Churches* (Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1992), p. 124.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 126-127.

long as God is with us, who can be against us? We must remember that the One who abides in us is greater than the one who abides in the world. Death means nothing to Christians because we are the ones who have the Son. We have eternal life. Even if something unexpected beyond our imagination suddenly happens, please take heart and be at ease.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, the fact that the house churches were truly indigenous was another significant factor for their preservation. The house churches were thoroughly Chinese. Bishop K H Ding (丁光訓) said, “The stigma of being a western religion has been pretty much removed.”<sup>86</sup> Since the church in Henan had lost its “foreign image,” it was able to attract new members in large numbers.

To conclude, the CIM missionaries must be credited with having sown the good seed and planted the churches in the 110 years prior to the Communist takeover. They nurtured the plants well, and the church flourished because it was well-rooted. Lyall was right when he said that the building had a solid foundation in a biblical faith. So the fierce persecution from 1951 onwards, and especially during the Cultural Revolution, failed to destroy the church. On the contrary, the Chinese Church discovered reserves of strength and came through the ordeal purified and strengthened.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Yuming Chang & Greene Lee, *Sowing Seeds of Faith-The Story of a House Church in China* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word), pp. 184-185.

<sup>86</sup> Leslie T. Lyall, *The Phoenix Rises: the Phenomenal Growth of Eight Chinese Churches*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.