

2008

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**The Cross Beyond the Wall:
Protestant Christianity in Communist China**

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2007-2008**

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**"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

**This paper is dedicated to the hundreds of thousands of Chinese Christians whose voices
deserve to be heard, and to those who spent countless hours on their knees for me.**

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Introduction

The room was stifling from the hot China summer as thirty Chinese college students piled into the fifteen by twenty foot space. The smell of dirty, sweaty bodies hung in the air. I sat huddled in a corner of the over-crowded room. The young student next to me bounced and wiggled with delight as he told each person around him about his conversion to Christianity three weeks prior. “Greg” hugged his little Bible as if it would sprout legs and run off like a puppy. “Mary” scrunched up on the other side of me. She looked very intelligent with glasses and inquisitive eyes but glanced around timidly.

Students continued to arrive in twos and threes under the cover of night to attend this underground Bible study. My two friends and I were the only foreigners in the room. The leader of the study was an American-born Chinese who lived in the city. It was a rare privilege to attend such a meeting. Many foreigners would only dream of such an opportunity. As I looked around the room, chills ran down my spine. I was looking at the faces of the underground church of China. This trip, in the summer of 2006 was my third to China but my first to the northern regions, and certainly my first in an underground church.

Two weeks later, my friends and I traveled to another town where we had a very different religious experience. Sunday morning we walked about a mile to the outskirts of the town. Rising above the skyline of small, humble houses and sheds was a proud steeple atop a large church. A cross rose from the steeple, piercing the bright blue sky and casting a shadow on the road in front of the church. Writing decorated the whitewashed panel above the double-doors that stood open. I imagined it said something like “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”¹ Cheerful singing reached my ears. When I walked through the large doors into the one-room church, I stood a moment to take in my surroundings. I saw perhaps thirty rows of pews leading up to a large platform built of bamboo. A podium stood in the center, displaying a fiery red cross. Behind the podium stood the choir dressed in home-made robes of grey and red fabric. The choir seemed large for such a small congregation, yet all was dwarfed by the size of the church building. A few musicians stood in front of a large black cloth adorned by a deep crimson cross. The same characters that were above the door outside, appeared

¹ Matt. 11:28 New International Version

above the red cross. Clearly, the congregation had saved for some time to afford such lavish decorations.

My friends and I sat in the back pew. The congregation sang several hymns with hearty voices, clearly not afraid to be heard by any passer-bys. The doors and windows stood open to let in what little breeze stirred the stifling subtropical heat. There was no air conditioning and the fans hanging from the vaulted ceiling did little good.

After several beautiful songs, the pastor walked to the podium. She was an elderly woman with a deep voice that echoed in the microphone. One of our translators told us what verses she was reading but did not translate the sermon. As the pastor spoke, I looked around at the congregation of about thirty-five that seemed so small in a church built to accommodate twice that many. Most of the congregation was elderly and nearly all were women. (Some Chinese churches suffer from lack of membership while others struggle to fit all the congregants in on Sundays.) A few children played in the back of the church and outside the doors. An elderly woman sat in the doorway holding a baby and caring for the playing children. Perhaps she was on “nursery duty.” Several men hung around the windows, just within earshot of the sermon. They seemed to be regular loiterers, but they were reluctant to enter.

This scene was such a paradox to the cramped and excited house church I had experienced only weeks prior. In those few weeks I experienced something few westerners have been privileged to experience—both sides of Chinese Protestant Christianity: the house church and the government-sponsored church. In the government church there was a sense of reverence and solemn faith fed by a more traditional, orthodox sense of faith and a general rudimentary understanding. In the underground church there was a sense of raw excitement, enthusiasm, and unbridled eagerness tempered with a lack of education or understanding for the entirety of the Bible. The difference in the Chinese churches was not in faith itself but in how their faith was presented.

The similarities and differences between the two Chinese Protestant churches are important, but there is a third side to the Chinese faith that both haunts and helps the underground and the government-sponsored churches. It is the Chinese government itself and I experienced this force as well. Just a week after our time at the underground church,

several government investigators raided three houses owned by Christians. A Korean pastor involved in the underground work was arrested and deported in a matter of days without a trial. The house in which the underground church met was also visited by security guards searching for an excess of Christian materials or evidence of illegal activity. Such raids are common (though not the norm), as are arrests and even torture and death of Christians. Similarly, a few weeks after our visit to a Three Self Church (it is legal in China for foreigners to attend Three Self Churches), the congregation received a visit from the authorities who inspected for illegal children's ministries or contraband Christian materials. Some might say our visits to the churches provoked the attention from authorities, but the locals assured us that such raids are routine in the province.

The state of the Protestant Church in China is unique. Christianity is legal only in the government-sponsored Three Self Patriotic church (TSPM). While on the surface it appears divided between the legal Three Self churches and the illegal underground or house churches, the two sections are interdependent in their endeavor to serve the Chinese. Though there are many differences between the two categories of Protestant churches, there are also similarities. The differences help the church serve the people of China more effectively while the similarities bring the two churches together in common bond. An outsider looking in would surely see two groups working against each other and the government, but upon further examination, one discovers a tenacious church that reaches beyond the surface of Chinese culture into its very heart and soul.

One must also recognize the significant role the Chinese government plays in the development and modern state of Chinese Christianity. The government creates a complicated web of hindrance and help that creates a three-way relationship between the Three Self Church, the underground church and the government. Much of this triune relationship remains obscure to the rest of the world and many questions arise with the topic. Do the underground and government-sponsored churches exist because of or in spite of each other? How are they different? How are they the same? Why does each church exist and is there a need for both? What is the government's relationship to each church? What is the extent to which the persecution takes place? What is the government's true stance on Christianity in China?

There are other questions that arise with the topic of Christianity in China, but all questions fit into three major categories concerning modern Chinese Protestant Christianity: the underground church, the government-sponsored church, and the relationship of the government with the two churches. As China enters the international world through trade relations, the upcoming 2008 Olympics, and increased social interactions, it is important to understand the state of Chinese society, including Protestant Christianity. This requires an exploration of this triangular relationship and its development in post-1979 China, and examination of the purpose and need for both the underground church and the Three Self Church in modern Chinese Christianity as well as similarities and differences within the two.

A house divided cannot stand against the storm. Likewise, neither the underground church nor the government sponsored church can stand alone in the unpredictable storm that is Chinese government and culture and still effectively serve the Chinese Christians. Just as the foundation and the roof are equally important but serve different purposes in creating a house, the underground church and the Three Self church are equally important, but serve different roles in China's Protestant Church.

Background

To understand fully the modern relationship between the underground churches, the Three Self churches, and the Chinese Communist government, one must understand the development of this triune relationship. The path that the government, culture, and Chinese Protestant church traversed through the twentieth century was difficult, riddled with bloody revolutions, rocked by opposing political factions, and impacted by charismatic leaders. These events developed both positive and negative sentiments toward Christianity that continue to affect modern Chinese Protestantism.

Christianity has maintained a constant—yet sometimes minimal—presence in China since the first Nestorian missionaries arrived around 635 AD, in the early years of the Tang Dynasty. “Traders, members of converted tribes, soldiers of fortune, and

possibly even Tibetan Christians visited the reemerging China of the sixth century.”² Christianity was developing a missionary spirit and mindset. By the sixth century, western missionaries were well established within a short distance of the major Chinese cities. In the seventh century Christianity established itself as a permanent inhabitant of Chinese society. Although Christianity was introduced on four distinct occasions into Asian culture, it continually ebbed and flowed through China since the first introduction in 635 AD.

The most notable establishment of early Christians is the Da Qing Pagoda in Shaanxi Province. It was constructed by Nestorian Christians around 635 AD. Chinese said the monastery was constructed “by monks who came from the West and believed in one God.”³ Today it stands on a hillside about three hours drive outside the former capital city of Xi’an.

Though many question the doctrine of the Nestorian Christians, (namely its claim that Mary gave birth only to a human Jesus, not a divine Jesus and that these two identities of Jesus remained loosely connected) historians note this as the first entry of Christianity into Chinese society.⁴



Da Qing Pagoda. Jen Clapp

The Nestorians traveled the Silk Road from 635 to 845 AD (during the height of the Tang Dynasty).⁵ Christianity enjoyed relative security until the later years of the Tang when a surge of anti-foreign sentiments arose. The Byzantine Empire governed significant

² Martin Palmer, The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 2001), 44

³ Palmer, The Jesus Sutras, 43

⁴ Kenneth Scott Latourette, “Christianity in China,” Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 152 (1930): 63

⁵ Bob Whyte, Unfinished Encounter: China and Christianity. (England: Fount Paperbacks, 1988), 33

portions of the known world from its capital in Constantinople. Khalid ibn al-Walid, (the “Sword of Allah,”) united Arabia and began the spread of Islam to Europe and India.⁶ China and India established trade relations, allowing the introduction of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam into Chinese society.

China came under the Tang Dynasty just before the arrival of Nestorian Christians. The previous four hundred years “of petty states, civil war, and short-lived dynasties” caused nation-wide division and general social unrest.⁷ The Tang emperors took control and developed China into one of the most powerful empires in the world. During the height of this power, the Nestorian missionaries arrived from the west. “Thus, when Christianity arrived in the seventh century, its missionaries entered a culture where the appearance of new religions—Buddhism, and Taoism—and experimentation with their ideas and practices were part of the cultural psyche.”⁸ Nestorian Christianity slid into society with relative ease. The lack of political or military expansionism in the Nestorian motives gained trust from the Chinese toward the western religion.⁹ The desire to “adapt to a society with deeply-rooted values of its own...” allowed Chinese to accept Nestorian Christianity without sacrificing dedication to heritage and tradition.¹⁰

This welcoming environment greatly aided the introduction of Christianity into Asian culture. Had missionaries arrived in any other dynasty, they likely would have met hostility and skepticism for such foreign teachings. But, the Tang prided themselves on their openness to other cultures and invited Christianity as a new and unique religion. However, this welcome did not last. The undercurrent of Confucian principles remained strong in China and later spearheaded the opposition to all “foreign religions.”¹¹ Around 845 AD Nestorian Christianity lost favor with the Tang government, but not before a few years of prosperity.

In 751 AD Arab Muslims conquered most of Central Asia. Again China fell into a state of feuding lords and divided government. The Uighurs, a Turkic steppe tribe, rose to

⁶ Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras*, 83

⁷ Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras*, 84

⁸ *Ibid.* 121

⁹ Whyte, *Unfinished Encounter*, 39

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 39

¹¹ Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras*, 121

power. Though the Tang dynasty, according to historians, lasted from 618 to 907 AD, the year 751 marked the recession of Tang power and the rise of the Uighurs.

There was a significant Christian minority among the Uighurs.¹² “The Christianity of the Uighurs and their friendliness toward the Chinese gave the Church in China immense prestige.”¹³ By 781 AD the Church was again well established in Chinese society. Several Christians served as advisors to key leaders in Central Asia and as a result, “the Church in China was patronized by the emperor and entered its golden age, achieving greater power and wealth than perhaps at any other time in its history.”¹⁴

It is important to note that the Chinese paid little attention to identifying the denomination of Christians in China. Nestorians clearly were the largest denomination, but other denominations may have also entered China by this time in much smaller numbers. Also, with the Uighur Christians influencing the Chinese church, it is difficult to determine how much of the Nestorian doctrine experienced significant alteration.

After a time, the church began to lose ground. The Confucian bureaucracy and Taoist hierarchy resented the growing power of the Buddhists, and other faiths. Christianity was caught in the backlash that resulted.¹⁵ In 845 AD the Emperor Wu Zong seized all gold, silver, and bronze statues from every temple, monastery, center of worship, and private home throughout China proper.¹⁶ Christians were effectively cut off from their western and eastern counterparts. Between the eighth and tenth century the church almost disappeared from China entirely. But, a small group of Christians, led by a series of charismatic individuals, held on for dear life with prayer and continued practice of Christianity, in hopes that one day the church would return to its glory days of the mid-Tang Dynasty.

For over one hundred years Chinese Christianity seemed a dimming flame that would soon be snuffed out completely. Indeed Christianity disappeared from public view.¹⁷ However, an unlikely tribe came to its rescue just as the last centers of Christianity were falling. Genghis Khan unified the Mongol tribe and conquered most of

¹² Whyte *Unfinished Encounter*, 41

¹³ Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras*, 234

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 234

¹⁵ Whyte *Unfinished Encounter*, 38

¹⁶ Palmer *The Jesus Sutras* 236

¹⁷ Whyte *Unfinished Encounter*, 39

Asia, including China. However, the conquest of China was completed under Genghis' grandson, Kublai Khan in 1264.¹⁸ Kublai became the ruler of China. Kublai's mother, Sorkaktani, was a devout Christian and advocated for the Chinese Church. Via the Mongol Empire Christianity was reintroduced to Chinese society.¹⁹ China experienced a time of peace. Christians again arrived from other countries and Chinese priests and Christian leaders received training from foreign churches.²⁰ Christianity thrived until 1260 when the Mongols were defeated by the Marmaluks of Egypt. When the Mongols collapsed, the church in China crumbled to its knees but refused to fall. It maintained a strong presence despite severe persecution.

However, the second arrival of Christianity arrived during the height of the Mongol empire. In 1243 Pope Innocentius IV sent a Franciscan monk to China to address the very real threat of the Mongols invading Europe by introducing Christianity to the invaders from the East. Seven years later Louis IX, the French monarch, sent another monk to Mongolia, this time for a very different reason. What was once an effort to diffuse a Mongol attack on Europe became an endeavor to recruit their aid in the fight against the Saracens.²¹ (Interestingly, upon returning to Europe, the monk reported a prominent presence of Nestorian Christians within the court of the Mongol rulers even though they were no longer respected or prominent members of Chinese society.²²) The relationship between China and the Franciscans remained political for some time. The next to travel to the Land of the Dragons was Marco Polo. Though the explorer first set out with two Dominican monks, the monks changed their minds and returned to Europe. Marco Polo completed his trip and reappeared in Europe with a surprising request: one hundred missionaries from Europe. The Khan wanted men who knew the western sciences and education that could, with skill and plain argument, prove that the religions of East Asia, including Islam, were untrue. Even more surprising was the Khan's promise to convert to the church, along with his potentates, if the pope did send these

¹⁸ Ibid. 41

¹⁹ Morton H. Fried, "Reflections on Christianity in China," *American Ethnologist* vol. 14, no. 1, *Frontiers of Christian Evangelism* (Feb., 1987) 96.

²⁰ Palmer *The Jesus Sutras*, 250.

²¹ David Aikman, *Jesus In Beijing*, 28.

²² Ibid. 28.

missionaries.²³ Unfortunately Rome did not send 100 missionaries as requested. Instead they sent one lonely Franciscan missionary named Giovanni of Monte Corvino.

Monte Corvino received support from Kublai's grandson. Over time the Franciscan denomination built a strong presence in China despite furious opposition from the Nestorians. The Franciscan arrival by way of Monte Corvino and other Franciscan monks not only represents the second introduction of Christianity but also the establishment of the Chinese Catholic Church.

Though the Nestorians enjoyed relative freedom and stability during the Mongol Dynasty and the Franciscan Church had an easy introduction into Chinese culture, the rise of the Ming Dynasty brought suffering and persecution. The Ming Dynasty came to power on the heels of a peasant rebellion against Mongol rule. What began as a revolt against foreign rule evolved quickly into a massive "de-foreignization" of the country. Christianity to this point came via foreigners—Nestorians and Franciscans from Europe and Christians from Uighur tribes. Thus, Christianity was viewed as a foreign idea and met great hostility.

The third introduction of Christianity came with the Jesuits. Matteo Ricci, an Italian monk, arrived in China in 1582. Highly educated and well trained in the Chinese language and culture, Ricci gained great respect from Chinese authorities. He and many other Jesuit missionaries gained approval and acceptance through their training in clock-making and other fine crafts that the Chinese had not yet mastered. Several of Ricci's first converts were members of the high ruling courts. The important distinction in the Jesuit mission work is their efforts to show the similarities between Christian and Confucian ethical principles.²⁴ The Jesuit's efforts at social and political influence as well as Christian missions went a long way to bridge the divide between the East and West. The Jesuits were so well established in their diplomatic skills and influence that "the Jesuits were not toppled from their powerful influence in Peking even when the Ming Dynasty fell in 1644 and was replaced by the Manchus..."²⁵

Historians pay special attention to the "Rites Controversy" during the years of Jesuit influence. As the Jesuit fame and impact grew in China, many European

²³ Ibid. 28.

²⁴ Ibid. 32.

²⁵ Ibid. 32.

denominations became angry at the Jesuit's belief that Chinese ancestor worship was ceremonial reflecting Chinese history and tradition, not spiritual or religious acts of idol worship. Not only did this argument reflect the depth of cultural understanding within the Jesuit community in China but also the lack of cultural sensitivity within the European churches toward Chinese tradition. In the end, the Jesuits appealed to Emperor Kangxi himself to make the final ruling. Naturally, the emperor (who was thought to be a Christian himself) sided with the Jesuits. This conflict surely harmed the trust that Chinese had for European churches. Perhaps it also fed the concern that Christianity was purely a western idea that did not belong in China.

The Jesuits continued to hold a strong presence in the Chinese courts as astronomers, linguists, and positive diplomatic influencers, even as the Mongols were replaced by another foreign empire—the Manchu Dynasty. Unlike previous missionary enterprises into China, the Jesuits focused on fostering respect and acceptance from the literate upper classes. However, over time the Manchu emperor became dissatisfied with the quality of training in Chinese language and history the Jesuits possessed. The Jesuits lost favor with the ruling class and the emperor. Thus, the third introduction of Christianity into China came with great success and deep impact in the middle and upper classes of society.

In 1807, Robert Morrison, the first documented Protestant missionary to China, set out for the Land of Dragons²⁶. Not long after, all major denominations of Europe began sending missionaries. They penetrated every province, opening schools and hospitals in the name of Christianity and world missions. China, however, was in the throws of anti-westernization conflicts with Europe. “When the Chinese government refused to open seaports to foreign trade, the Europeans sent gunboats and soldiers in to establish ‘open trade.’”²⁷ While the western governments forced economic trade upon the Chinese and introduced opium to society, the missionaries continued to arrive. The Qing (Manchu) government accused Christians of spreading imperialist and capitalist ideals in their work. Thus, Christianity and imperialism became synonymous to the Chinese, not

²⁶ Latourette, “Christianity In China,” 63.

²⁷ Wayne Dehoney, The Dragon and the Lamb: The resurgence of Christianity in the People's Republic of China (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1988), 18

because of its actual association (though one might argue there was a significant connection) but because they arrived from Europe in the same timeframe.

During this time period interaction between Chinese and Europeans were represented by various religious denominations. Between 1850 and 1890 there was a widespread movement opposing western Christian churches in China. The Chinese people also overthrew the Qing Dynasty and established the famous "Taiping Heavenly Kingdom," during the largest peasant uprising in Chinese history. The "kingdom" lasted from 1851 to 1864. The peasants of the "kingdom" claimed to be true followers of the true God and they preached the Bible in their own way, introducing the Taiping Bible as an addition to the Old and New Testaments. They also used their religious platform to spread revolutionary political messages.

Upon the complete dissolve of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, Sun Yat-sen led another revolution. Sun Yat-sen and his wife were both Christians, educated in America and other countries. Yat-sen remains a "George Washington-like" figure in Chinese history as a revolutionary political leader

In 1922 the Anti-Christian Student Federation launched themselves into combating Christian infiltration of Chinese society. Their "social theory" held that

"(1) at present society is organized about capital; (2) Christianity supports the evils of capitalism; (3) the World's Student Christian Federation and Christianity are supported by capitalism and are the spearhead of capitalism; (4) the purpose of the anti-Christian Federation is to fight to the end this capitalistic combination."²⁸

Furthermore, leaders in the Chinese government declared the Christians only concerned themselves with amassing great numbers of followers. In the eyes of the Chinese, western leaders could not possibly contribute to the positive growth of the Chinese society through education or medical services because they did not understand Chinese culture.

In 1924 the Anti-Christian Student Federation held an "anti-Christian week" during the Christmas holiday (December 22-27, 1924). The Federation's sole purpose was to expose the harms of Christianity and the benefit of non-religious lives.²⁹ The accusations against Christianity included promotion of sectarianism, superstition instead

²⁸ Lewis Hodous, "The Anti-Christian Movement in China," *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 10, no. 4. (Oct., 1930), 490

²⁹ *Ibid.* 491

of science, prayer and trust instead of initiative, and above all, Christianity “is the religion of imperialistic countries who oppress China.”³⁰

By 1925 there were a staggering 8,000 missionaries in China. To westerners, this was a “golden age” of Christianity as the success of the religion to them was in numbers. Unfortunately, the Chinese saw all westerners in the same light. “The Chinese themselves bracket opium and missionaries as the twin curses of the country.”³¹ A Mr. Shen published an article asserting that religion was not in any way needed to save China.³² One Chinese Christian stated, “Protestant Christianity was forced upon China in the salvos of gunboats through the intrigues of merchants... and unequal treaties.”³³ Thus the general attitude toward western religions was, “not only did you force it upon us, we do not need it to create a successful society.” But, China fell into despair as the Manchu dynasty collapsed and China succumbed to western imperialism. Opium addicts became the bane of China and society buckled under their weight. Floods and droughts ravished the country and threw China into despair. Warlords took control and divided the lands and people among themselves. It was a time of turmoil for all of China.

Emerging victoriously from the “Long March” and defeating Chiang Kaishek’s Nationalist Party, Mao Zedong took control in the year 1949. He immediately set out to unite the fractured country and destroy all things foreign. “Churches remained open under Chinese leadership, but the pastors and the members were harassed and placed under constant surveillance and suspicion; many were persecuted.”³⁴ Some churches were closed and converted into factories or warehouses.

There were a series of important revolutions in China between 1949 and the late 1980s. Each had a notable impact on the Chinese church and contributed to the rollercoaster ups and downs of government-Christian relations. In the Maoist period between 1949 and 1976, the communist People’s Republic of China was established as a result of the Chinese Civil War. The 1956 Hundred Flowers Campaign which welcomed

³⁰ Ibid. 491

³¹ Dehoney, *The Dragon and the Lamb*, 18

³² Hodous, “The Anti-Christian Movement in China,” 489

³³ Chen Zemin, vice principal, National Christian Seminary, Nanjing, China, as reported in *China Notes*, Winter 1984-1985, p. 320.

³⁴ Dehoney, *The Dragon and the Lamb*, 21

freedom of expression and pluralism was countered by the Anti-Rightist Campaign just a few months later.

Beginning in 1958, the Great Leap Forward ravished the country. Mao sought to transform China from an agrarian-based society to an industrial powerhouse, at the cost of an estimated 550,000 lives.³⁵ The Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976 brought the wrath of the Red Guard against the “Four Olds”—old ideas, old customs, old culture, and old habits. Christianity was considered one of these “olds.” The Red Guard nearly destroyed Christianity, but it hung on by a thread.

This violent phase of Chinese history came to a close with the Tiananmen Square Revolution in 1989. In each of these stages of Chinese revolution, Christianity was under fire as an old, non-Chinese, anti-revolutionary idea. However, through each revolution a series of unorthodox Protestant leaders arose and attempted to forge relationships between the Christians and the changing Chinese government.

Y.T. Wu emerged as the first prominent spiritual leader and political representative of the Chinese Protestant Church. In May 1950, nineteen Christian leaders representing all denominations of Protestantism, called for an emergency committee. Y.T. Wu was one of the leaders. They discussed many issues threatening the Chinese church, including the new government’s hatred for all things foreign. Persecution was increasing despite the government’s promise of religious freedom. “The committee met with Premier Zhou Enlai, [one of Chairman Mao’s top lieutenants,]... [and] asked for an ‘official guarantee’ of religious freedom and a cessation of persecution.”³⁶ The meeting lasted all night and by morning the committee had formulated a proposal for “a church that would be entirely Chinese, patriotic, and free from all foreign influence. The formula was simple; ‘Self-Government, Self-Support, Self-Propagation’—the ‘Three-Self Patriotic Movement.’”³⁷ Zhou Enlai accepted the proposition and pledged government support. He also promised religious freedom but did not fully support Chinese Christianity. Zhou suspected a cover-up of anti-imperialist campaigns and thus remained skeptical. Wu proved his suspicions correct in the 1950 “Christian Manifesto.”

³⁵ William Harms, “China’s Great Leap Forward,” *The University of Chicago Chronicle*, vol. 15, no. 13. (March 14, 1996) <http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/960314/china.shtml>.

³⁶ Dehoney, *The Dragon and the Lamb*, 35

³⁷ *Ibid.* 35

Y.T. Wu was the principal draftsman of the Manifesto, which took a stand against imperialism, declaring the church must “purge imperialistic influences from within Christianity itself”³⁸ Wu called imperialism “the world’s deadliest enemy,” and communism the “world’s only road to safety.”³⁹ Many Christians hesitantly accepted the manifesto while others vehemently rejected it. The Communist Party threw it out entirely.

In his early life, Wu entertained no sympathy with the Communist ideologies. He received theological training in America at Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University and was considered an extreme pacifist. However, his ideologies changed over time. In the late 1930s, Wu enthusiastically supported a “social gospel” as a reaction to “unrestrained individualism and capitalism...”⁴⁰ He concluded that China needed physical reconstruction as well as spiritual reconstruction through the love of Christ. The new “social gospel” in the United States impressed him and he believed such a movement would benefit China. Perhaps at this point he began his search for a political party that would make this physical and spiritual reconstruction come to pass. By 1950 he was a full supporter of the Communist party. In 1957 as the Great Leap Forward began, Wu probably viewed this as the physical reconstruction China needed. It is unclear what drove his gradual change in thought through his life. This change seems hard to believe, but it clearly impacted China deeply.

After the Communists gained control in China, Wu began working closely with the government. The Three Self movement was established. He served as the president of the TSPM movement from 1949 to his death in 1979. “The survival of the church may be regarded as the principal achievement of Wu in his capacity as leader of the Three-Self Movement.”⁴¹ All ties with western Christianity were severed during the campaign to abolish imperialism promoted by foreign missionaries in China. This move, influenced by the Korean War, agreed with the general movement of the government toward isolation from western influences. Wu aimed to develop an attitude of hostility “[toward] the U.S., the West, and the global Christian missionary movement” in Chinese Protestant

³⁸ Gao Wangzhi, “Y.T. Wu: A Christian Leader Under Communism,” in Christianity In China from the 18th Century to the Present, ed. Daniel H. Bays (California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 344

³⁹ Aikman, Jesus in Beijing, 149

⁴⁰ Gao Wangzhi, “Y.T. Wu: A Christian Leader under Communism,” 339.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 343.

churches.⁴² Propaganda successfully portrayed Western Christians, particularly Americans, as vultures, waiting to destroy the economy and heritage of China at every possible point. In conjunction with his extensive propaganda, Wu promoted a more liberal, politicized Protestantism for the sake of the government rather than for religious purposes. His form of Protestantism placed a great deal of control over the church in government hands, giving authorities license to influence the teachings of the church, particularly regarding political topics.

The “Christian Manifesto,” written in 1950, sought to redefine Christianity as a faith. Its real title is *Direction of Endeavor for Chinese Christianity in the Construction of New China* and it proclaimed “The only acceptable Protestant Christianity for China... would be one defined as being against ‘the imperialists’—i.e., against the U.S.”⁴³ “The manifesto required its signatories to acknowledge that during the 140 years of Protestant missionary presence in China, ‘Christianity consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, became related with imperialism.’”⁴⁴ The manifesto did not blame the church for bringing imperialism to China but mourned the use of the church to spread imperialism to Chinese society—a significant distinction. Wu was not calling the church itself bad, only how some westerners used it to accomplish their goal of imperialist trade. Wu, by now a staunch communist, wanted the church to support the new Communist government and reflect the revolutionary changes in China.

As pressure from the Communist government on the church increased, many Christians retreated to the safety of house churches, seeking relief from government influence. Furthermore, “In the countryside, many churches were effectively closed down in the early fifties... and house-meetings were the only way by which Christians could continue to worship and enjoy fellowship together.”⁴⁵ This move to the underground church later proved vital to the salvation of Chinese Christianity, but it was not an easy transition. The government fought vehemently to maintain control over the situation.

The Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) officially began in 1954, though the movement was operative as early as 1950. Leaders called a conference to realize the three

⁴² Aikman, *Jesus In Beijing*, 155

⁴³ *Ibid.* 150

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 151

⁴⁵ Tony Lambert, *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*, (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Pub. 1994), 13

self morals—“self-government, self-support, and self-propagation in the Chinese church.”⁴⁶ The government created the Religious Affairs Bureau which operated under the Communist party (CCP), directing the TSPM movement. The faction was “led by church leaders mostly liberal in theology and sympathetic to CCP aims.”⁴⁷ The TSPM gradually destroyed independent denominational churches and brought the rest under their control.

By 1958, just four years into the movement, most of the city churches closed their doors. The government called it a movement toward unity. However, this unity was one of complete government control and minimal religious freedom. In Beijing alone sixty-one churches closed their doors, leaving only four to serve the entire city. Only twenty-three of the original two hundred churches remained open in Shanghai.⁴⁸ Those churches that did remain open became outlets for political propaganda and indoctrination. At this point, the fracture between the “government sponsored church” and the “underground church” became visible and indicative of further division. Independent “underground” churches, free from political control, sprouted throughout the countryside and within cities. Church leaders like Watchman Nee and Wang Mingdao added fuel to the fire of general suspicion toward the government, fostering the fracture.

Wang Mingdao opposed the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and despised the Communist regime. He also criticized Modernist Christianity for “rejecting all of the following doctrines: “the inerrancy of the Bible, the Virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement (the traditional Christian belief that ‘Jesus’ death on the Cross was a sacrifice to ransom man for sin’), the physical resurrection of Christ, the second coming of Christ.”⁴⁹ Wang summarily called for the abolition of Modernism within the church for its hypocrisy and lack of faith. The doctrinal criticisms furthered the split between the TSPM and underground churches. “While Wu... and others saw the struggle as a way for the Communist Party to control Chinese society, including religion, Wang perceived the new pressures from the Three Self as a Modernist threat against his own espousal of

⁴⁶ Aikman, Jesus In Beijing, 153

⁴⁷ Lambert, The Resurrection of the Chinese Church, 13

⁴⁸ Ibid. 13

⁴⁹ Aikman, Jesus In Beijing, 157

traditional core Christianity.”⁵⁰ Wang was wary of the manner in which the Modernist Christians were presenting their theology in a forceful manner upon Protestants in the name of patriotism. Yet, Wang did not connect himself with any foreign churches.

It is interesting to note that during these interactions among the government, Wang Mingdao, Y.T. Wu and others, and the enactment of various regulations and manifestos, the idea of patriotism remained central. Yet, they rejected the idea of imperialism and all that it brought to China. The government made no concerted effort to remove Christianity completely, only to contain it and mold it into something adaptable to “the new China.” Perhaps they identified Christianity more as a product of the glorious Tang Dynasty rather than a product of the more recent western imperialism. After all, the Christian Manifesto did not blame Christianity for the problems of imperialism. It only mourned that Christianity was used as a tool for advancing imperialism.

As the number of independent churches grew, the government became increasingly concerned. In 1953 the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) launched an attack on all independent religious meetings and in 1958 outlawed them altogether, declaring henceforth “all so-called ‘churches, worship-halls, and family-meetings’ which have been established without permission of the government must be dissolved.”⁵¹ Attacks on Christians and raids of religious meetings became common throughout the country.

The actions of the government in 1953 and 1958 were contradictory to a 1954 article which granted religious freedom in China. Chairman Mao’s philosophy on handling religion (“idol worship” as he called it) was suddenly hands-off, but cautious.⁵² He made a distinction between forces that had potential to destroy his plan for a new China and those that were simply “non-antagonistic” differences among people. Religion fell under the latter category. Mao expressed hope that such differences could be addressed through dialogue, debate, and open discussion, declaring:

We cannot abolish religion by administrative orders; nor can we force people not to believe in it. We cannot compel people to give up idealism, any more than we can force them to believe in Marxism. In settling matters of an ideological nature or controversial issues among the people, we can only use democratic methods,

⁵⁰ Ibid. 156

⁵¹ Lambert, The Resurrection of the Chinese Church, 16

⁵² Brown, G. Thompson, Christianity in the People’s Republic of China. (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1983)

methods of discussion, of criticism, or persuasion and education, not coercive, high-handed methods.⁵³

Christians believed the relationship between the government and Protestant Christians was improving. Though noninterference with religious practice was the new official policy, reality proved different. As stated before, the 1958 offensive against Christians and private churches throughout China was violent.

Mao's push for religious freedom was marginal and met some opposition from the Communist Party. According to the CCP's interpretations of the Chinese Constitution, "religious freedom was narrowly defined" as something granted only within the parameters of a religious building (a mosque, church, temple, etc.) and did not include ceremonies or public displays.⁵⁴ Not only do the Party and government have the right and duty to promote atheism, they made a significant distinction between religion and superstition. Religion was declared "misguided [but having] some legitimacy due to its historical and social origins."⁵⁵ Chairman Mao declared Christianity a "non-antagonistic" religion. However, it was still perceived as antagonistic and threatening to the political structure built by Mao and the CCP. With these philosophies, "Christians could be singled out and deprived of their rights as citizens, not because of their religious faith, but because of their 'rightist sympathies' or because of their relationship with foreign missionaries."⁵⁶ Though they were perceptions remaining from the long and winding history of Chinese Christianity, this anti-Christian sentiment continued beyond Mao's reign.

In this anti-Christian environment, the church leaders faced the decision whether to sever ties with the official church completely or to find some other means of compromise with the new Chinese government. Most of the Protestant Christian leadership pursued the second option, hoping to improve the political hostility toward Christianity, but some left the official church.

The situation seemed to improve as the government took steps toward a greater degree of religious freedom with yet another Constitution and an affirming letter to the

⁵³ Mao Tse-tung, "On the Correct Handling of Contradiction Among the People, January 1940,"

⁵⁴ Brown, *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*, 77

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 78

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 78

Protestant church leaders. Unfortunately, threats to Christians continued as the third revolution—the Cultural Revolution—began in 1966. This revolution was even more violent for Christians than the 1956 Hundred Flowers Campaign and the early years of the Great Leap Forward. Undaunted by yet another round of persecution, Christians continued to meet in homes and secret hideouts for worship and fellowship. The church in Zhejiang Province developed a particularly active underground movement during the 1960s.

The Red Guard infiltrated every detail of daily life, looking for “counter-revolutionaries,” jailing countless and sending more to labor camps and “re-education.” Christians tried desperately to stay out of the path of such revolutionaries, but hundreds of thousands were taken to prisons, labor camps, and re-education programs. Almost every Chinese experienced some form of suffering during the Cultural Revolution. Despite arrests, labor camps, and other forms of torture, the house church movement gained even more momentum. Underground meetings grew in size and number, particularly in Zhejiang Province and this unofficial church continued to move toward complete independence from the TSPM church.

During the Cultural Revolution, the Religious Affairs Bureau and the official churches closed their doors. The country was in shambles after the revolutions economically and socially. In 1978, two years after the Cultural Revolution ended, the first Three Self Church reopened its doors to a broken China. Repression of the Chinese church continued, but the number of Christians continued to grow and the resilience of the church proved itself once again. Throughout 1980 the churches slowly began rising out of the rubble of Mao’s revolutions.

In the post-revolution years, the government released yet another statement regarding religion. “Religion, while being an opiate and hallucinatory, should be distinguished from ‘feudal superstition.’ World religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism with scriptures, doctrines and religious rites, were to be allowed ‘freedom of religious belief.’”⁵⁷ The enforcement of this statement was similar to the previous declaration regarding religious freedom—existent on paper but minimal in action. Though this declaration offered religious freedom, the government depended on the

⁵⁷ Lambert, *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*, 35

promotion of science and reason and the disintegration of the social classes to dissolve any desire to pursue such “world religions.” The government fully intended to keep a close watch on any religious activities. The Christian’s hesitant reaction to this new freedom was understandable considering the history of such government rulings.

The opinion of the government toward religions is very interesting and worth noting. Previously, they were called opiates to society and hallucinogens. In this statement the government unveils their hope that citizens would abandon “world religions” in favor of science and technology. Europe experienced a similar change in attitude during the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment as the Philosophes and scientists placed emphasis on reason and science instead of faith and simple acceptance. However, China’s anti-religious sentiment seems to be a symptom of their reactions with Western powers. After all, they have endured threats of colonization and “westernization” by England and other powers. Their interactions were far from friendly or sympathetic to Chinese culture, which was—and remains—secular. Therefore, skepticism was a natural response to Protestant Christianity. One might imagine the confusion within the government as they tried to address such western beliefs that grew faster than they could respond.

From 1966 to 1976, during the Cultural Revolution, the Three Self Patriotic Movement laid dormant. The TSPM was minimally active in Beijing beginning in 1971, but only to maintain organized worship services for foreigners. After all, appearance is everything. Then, without warning, churches reopened throughout China in 1979. At the Third National Christian Conference in October 1980, the government declared, “It is the duty of our Three Self Patriotic Association to unite all Christians in the country. We cannot let Christians who take part in house-gatherings be labeled as a group apart.”⁵⁸ The government seemed to pursue a different tactic of controlled permission rather than rampant opposition. TSPM offices opened in the major cities throughout China. Chinese Christians were overjoyed, but still wary of this new tolerance. After all, religious freedom was not without restrictions. All religious activities must henceforth take place within parameters laid by the TSPM and the Communist Party’s Religious Affairs

⁵⁸ Ibid. 45

Bureau. Christianity was legalized, but house church activity remained illegal and highly persecuted.

In March 1982 the most influential document regarding religion in China was published. "Document 19," as it came to be known, disclosed plans for long-term control of religious affairs in China. It declared that all organizations fell under the jurisdiction of the CCP, including religious organizations. The document maintained the opinion that religion was "the opiate of the people," but the CCP made a fundamental change.⁵⁹ Under the old regime these destructive religions had to be wiped from society. The new CCP conceded that religion existed naturally within a society and would thus disappear naturally from any society after the development of socialism and communism. In their opinions that was the natural progression of human nature and society.

Document 19 placed limitations on the freedom of religious belief. It stated that religious belief should become "the private affair of the individual citizen."⁶⁰ Furthermore, the state was only responsible for protecting "normal" religious beliefs and practices. All religions were prohibited from involvement in politics, schooling, or judicial activity in any way under Section 4 of Document 19. The government limited religious practices to designated areas and buildings under the control of the Religious Affairs Bureau. By these means the government hoped to build an impermeable barrier between society and religious practices, effectively starving Christianity out of society. Any religious activity—prayer, reading scripture, singing, etc.—could not exist outside the church (the only exception being among immediate family members). Though these regulations were strict, unnecessary force was not permitted in the disbandment of house churches or in the implementation of Document 19.

To this point, the government did not put forth a concerted effort to squelch the underground church entirely. In 1982, the government officially turned its focus toward the house church movement. The China Christian Council (CCC) united with the Three Self Movement to create the "Liang Hui" (Two Organizations) that worked under the Religious Affairs Bureau on such issues as "dissident" underground churches. In the same year, the Religious Affairs Bureau issued a decree: no longer would Christian

⁵⁹ Ibid. 54

⁶⁰ Ibid. 56

pastors “be permitted to preach outside an area specifically designated for their activity or in a location that was not designated a church, or to any community not assembled under Three Self auspices.”⁶¹ Later the decree entitled “Regarding Normal Religious Activity” state that “all ministerial activities and religious meetings of every church must be held within the church building.”⁶² This limited all pastors in their work, but targeted the dissenting underground pastors leading illegal churches. As expected, most of the underground church took offense and thus rejected the official church.

At the end of the Cultural Revolution, the state of the Chinese church remained unknown to the outside world. In 1988, a pastor of a Protestant TSPM church wrote the following letter to friends outside China describing the TSPM churches:

The vast majority of the preachers and believers in the ‘open’ churches have long ago lost all confidence in the Three Self, and are halfhearted. Many pretend to agree with it, but secretly oppose and resist it. Since 1979 many apostates and people who betrayed the Lord and their brethren have been appointed pastors. This has aroused strong dissatisfaction among the great number of good Christians and cries of discontent are heard everywhere.⁶³

This report revealed the true state of the Protestant church, yet one must not conclude that the Three Self Churches had been completely corrupted. Nor can anyone assume that the churches were not doing any good. Liu Zhenying (known as Brother Yun), a pastor and key leader in the underground church movement during this period stated

We know there are many true followers of Jesus attending the government-sanctioned church in China today. I personally know many of them and have grown to appreciate them. It is not with the caged birds in the Three Self churches we have a problem, but with the corrupt leadership and the political power used to control the people.⁶⁴

As China and the Protestant church moved into the “modern” period of post-Maoism, this was the general attitude of Chinese Believers and church leaders. They were not opposed to the government sanctioned churches; they were only opposed to some of the restrictions placed on such churches. Brother Yun articulated that the leaders of the Three Self churches placed unacceptable restrictions on the pastors. Outreach to children

⁶¹ Aikman, *Jesus In Beijing*, 163

⁶² *Ibid.* 163

⁶³ Lambert, *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*, 203

⁶⁴ Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man* (Mill Hill, London and Grand Rapids MI: Monarch Books, 2002), 54.

under the age of 18 was banned and in some places certain doctrines could not be taught, “such as the second coming of the Lord Jesus.”⁶⁵ Pastors were also restricted in the teaching of divine healings and the entire book of Revelations was banned. These restrictions are similar to those seen earlier in the development of TSPM church doctrine. Many pastors felt that it was better to gather underground than submit to such restrictions. This continued the split between house churches and Three Self churches and brought Chinese Protestantism to its current state.

In 1989, the infamous “Tiananmen Square Rebellion” took place and Christians turned out to participate. Banners reading, “God So Loved the World” and “Let righteousness flow down like a river” waved in the crowd. Nanjing Seminary students demonstrated on their own campuses and Beijing seminary students marched to join the masses in Tiananmen Square, some carrying crosses. Though this demonstration ended with bloodshed and chaos, churches throughout China saw a wonderful thing: students previously uninterested in Christianity—or any religion for that matter—suddenly began attending churches of every kind, legal or otherwise. Revival spread through the universities across China. Churches opened their doors despite the government’s oppositions. Thus, Chinese Protestantism entered its “modern” stage. It was a split church with many of its members participating in illegal meetings. They endured many restrictions and ongoing persecution. However, Christianity spread like wildfire and continues to do so even though government sentiments have changed little.

The government responded to this national revival in 1990 with a republication of Document Number 19 and reiterated the requirement that any religious activity be registered with the local offices of the Religious Affairs Bureau or the Three Self. Registration laws were made public in the 1994 Document Number 144 and Document Number 145. Unfortunately it was also more difficult to comply with them because of bureaucratic “red tape” and unclear regulations. These documents forbade foreigners from participating in any religious activity in China without expressed permission from the national government and they openly outlawed any foreign ties with the underground church. These acts served as reminders of the iron fist with which the government held

⁶⁵ Ibid. 54.

Chinese Protestant churches. At any moment the government could clench its benevolent fist and take away any religious freedom it so benevolently allowed.

This is how the policy remains in 2007. Christians live in constant fear that one day their freedom could be revoked without warning and China would fall back into revolution and bloodshed. But the church, both government-run and underground, continues to grow in spiritual maturity and in numbers. Even today it is difficult to calculate the number of Christians in China due to the secrecy of the modern underground church. Many calculate more than 100 million Chinese Christians exist in the house churches alone.⁶⁶ Other experts say 15 million is a more likely number.⁶⁷ If that is true, the number of Protestants in China has grown more than twenty times since 1949.⁶⁸ Regardless of the varying estimations, it is safe—even conservative—to place the range between fifteen and twenty million Chinese Protestants. This is an enormous number by Western standards, but only a fraction of the total 1.347 billion Chinese. Even if the population of Chinese Protestant Christians is near 100 million, that is a mere 1% of the total population.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, this is undoubtedly the fastest growing Protestant church in the world. The Chinese Communist Party worries about the impact this growing group has, and will continue to have on society and politics.

The next sections will unfold details of the current TSPM and underground Protestant movements in China separately, focusing on the difficulties that each church endures. Though these are not exhaustive lists, they include the most influential obstacles Christians must overcome and the manner in which they do so. The unique relationships between the government and the official and underground Chinese Protestant churches are also important to understanding the current status of Chinese Protestant Christianity. This relationship also leads to unique difficulties within the two churches.

⁶⁶ Michael Haverluck, "Experiencing God in China," *Voice of the Martyrs*, February 2006. 6

⁶⁷ Jacqueline E. Wenger, "Official vs. Underground Protestant Churches in China: Challenges for Reconciliation and Social Influences," *Review of Religious Research*, 46, no. 2 (2004): 169-182

⁶⁸ Tony Lambert, "Counting Christians in China: A Cautionary Report," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27 no 1 (2003)

⁶⁹ Patricia Clarke, "Explosion of Faith: the rapid growth of the church in China has brought on a leadership crisis," *The United Church Observer*, 60, no. 8 (1997) 28.

The Three Self Patriotic Movement Churches



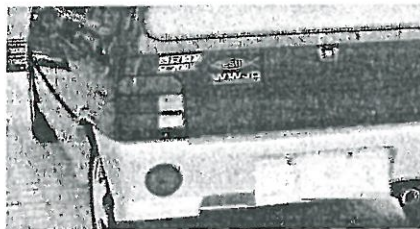
A TSPM Church in rural Shaanxi province I visited in summer 2006

It is impossible to generalize the current government's sentiment toward Christianity in China since China itself is extremely regionalized. "To extrapolate from conditions reported in various regions of the country and then to draw general conclusions is dangerously misleading."⁷⁰ Though the government has made no significant change to its policy on religion since the mid 1980s, the enforcement thereof has varied drastically in time and place.

Throughout history there were five general types of church-state relationships in China, varying in restrictiveness from "(1) a hands-off policy, to (2) regulation, to (3) restrictions, to (4) control or repression and, finally, to (5) persecution."⁷¹ China exemplifies the coexistence of all relationships from (2) regulation to (5) persecution depending on the time and place. Western Christians working in China often compare the openness of the Chinese government towards Christian activity to an accordion—opening and closing with little predictability.

Despite this unpredictable nature of religious freedom, most Chinese Christians—at least those involved in the TSPM churches—have become fairly open about their faith. "Politically, China hasn't changed [its authoritarian practices] at all. But as far as religion is concerned, it is much, much freer."⁷² Below is an example of this newfound freedom of expression.

⁷³ "WWJD- What would Jesus Do?"



⁷⁰ John S. Peale, *The Love of God in China* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005), 59

⁷¹ Ibid. 61

⁷² Simon Elegant, "The War for China's Soul," *Time*, 20 April 2006,

⁷³ Marvin Olasky, "Wildfire: How Christianity is Changing China," *World Magazine*, 24 June 2006, 21

“WWJD” bumper stickers are not yet as common in China as they are in the United States where we enjoy extensive freedom of religion and expression. Nonetheless, it certainly reflects an improved state of freedom in China, and the willingness of the Chinese to embrace that freedom.

Regardless of freedom of expression and religion, the current relationship between the Chinese government and the Protestant church, both state-sponsored and underground, remains a delicate and complicated bond. That the government has likened Christianity to opiates and addictive substances is a result of the tumultuous history, and indicative of their rightful skepticism.⁷⁴ As noted before, Christianity arrived in China through interactions with western and eastern cultures. Later, the same cultures that brought Christianity also brought opiates, war, dissent, and other cancers of the Chinese society. “To most Chinese, Christian missionaries seemed to be the ideological arm of foreign aggression.”⁷⁵ Other Chinese viewed Christian missionaries as having imperialist intentions.

Despite the government’s best efforts to purge these western hazards, Christianity stayed within the Chinese society. Furthermore, it quickly grew to a staggering size and brought in many western thoughts and ideologies that opposed Chinese tradition (i.e. the previously noted “Rites Conflict” between the Jesuit missionaries and the European churches). It is no wonder the government remains suspicious of this religion. The CCP cannot be faulted for their skeptical or negative reaction toward Christianity. Largely due to this cynicism of the government, the relationship between the TSPM churches and the government is strained.

Currently, the government offers a moderately hands-off relationship to all registered TSPM churches that follow the “rules of engagement.” Regardless of the government’s openness, each official church throughout China shares several similar difficulties. First, there is the difficulty of adhering to the list of demands. Many of the requirements seem normal. Others are difficult to adhere to. The first restriction the government places on the TSPM churches comes in the form of legal restrictions. The atheistic government requires each church to accept seven rules of the Three Self

⁷⁴ Tony Lambert, *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*, 35

⁷⁵ John King Fairbank, *China: A New History*, 221

Patriotic Movement to which Christians must strictly adhere in order to maintain legal registration with the government. Below are the seven rules quoted from a release by the Chinese government.

1. (Christian Believers) must fervently love the People's Republic of China, support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government, uphold the unification of the motherland and the harmony among ethnic groups, and work steadfastly on the road of socialism.
2. (Christian Believers) must strictly abide by all the laws, regulations, and policies of the Communist Party and the State and strive to be patriotic and law abiding citizens.
3. (Christian Believers) must actively work to increase the material wealth and cultivate the spiritual morals of the socialist civilization. They must comply with the government's labor codes and strive to contribute to the development of the "Four Modernizations" established by the Communist Party. When scheduled religious activities are in conflict with production and work schedules, the economic activities must take priority.
4. A permit must be obtained from the county State Administration for Religious Affairs [Communist Party members] in order to establish religious meeting points. No unauthorized meeting points are allowed.
5. (Christian Believers) must actively cooperate with the government to carry out thoroughly, the party's religious policies to the letter. (They) shall not persuade and force others to believe in Christianity. (They) shall not brainwash teenagers under 18 with religious beliefs. (They) shall not bring children [under 18] to religious activities.
6. One should see a doctor for medication when sick. (Christian Believers) must not resort to prayer alone for healing so as not to endanger people's health and lives.
7. Christian Believers shall not preach their religion outside the church building and specific places which have been designated for religious activities. They shall not preach itinerantly. They shall not receive self-proclaimed evangelists into their homes, churches or meeting points.⁷⁶

These restrictions placed barriers between the official church and the rest of the population, effectively isolating each church within its own region. The degree to which the government enforces these requirements varies greatly from city to city, but they silence the message of Believers and force them to be selective in their ministry. At best, under these policies the members of the TSPM congregations may stand at the doors of

⁷⁶ "Seven Rules of the Three Self Patriotic Movement," *China News and Church Report* (Chinese Church Research Center), December 3, 1993 and *The Empty Cross*, Voice of the Martyrs, 2006, 7.

their churches and wave at those passing by. If someone might happen into the government-designated church building the members would then be free to discuss religious ideas with them—assuming, of course, that the visitor is over the age of 18. It's understandable that the church complains they feel restricted in their beliefs and ability to offer assistance to their fellow citizens.

Each church also struggles with the lack of trained and experienced leaders, limited or nonexistent theological training programs, a lack space or large enough churches, a limited supply of Bibles and other religious materials, abundance of threatening cults and cultish activity, and, to a limited degree in the TSPM churches, the threat of persecution. These are the most important difficulties of the government sponsored churches in China addressed in this paper. Each affects the church in a unique way but the means by which the Chinese Christians have overcome these obstacles is impressive to say the least.

The most visible effect of such restrictions and difficulties lies in the demographics of the Chinese church. Obviously there are few young people in the churches since it is illegal to invite anyone under the age of eighteen. Sunday schools for children are generally forbidden, though some churches do operate children's programs.⁷⁷ Unfortunately they cannot operate them openly.

The majority of TSPM church attendees are older. Converts in 1990 consisted of 47% over the age of 60 and 26% between the ages of 40 and 60, but this has begun to change in recent years as college students especially show interest in Christianity.⁷⁸ Furthermore about 80% of the Chinese Protestant Church is female.⁷⁹ Today, "half or more than half of all the theology students in seminaries in China are women."⁸⁰ It is difficult to determine whether this phenomenon is a result of government policies, but it has made a significant impact on the church itself.

Another consequence of the largely female population is in marriage. During my summer visit to China in 2006 I met two young women who held leadership positions in

⁷⁷ Tony Lambert, "The Present Religious Policy of the Chinese Communist Party," Religion, State, and Society 29, no. 2 (2001): 125.

⁷⁸ Fenggang Yang, "Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 44, no 4 (2005)

⁷⁹ Peale, The Love of God In China, 83

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 83

a TSPM church in a city within Shaanxi province. “Aurora” and “Mary” are both dedicated to serving the church. As we sat sipping Chinese tea, the two women confided that they wished there were more Christian men to lead the church. They also voiced concern that they might not find men to marry since there are so few of them in the church. I found this to be a common concern of Chinese Christian women, even as the national population continues to show a strong overpopulation of men due to the government’s “one child policy.”

As “Aurora,” “Mary,” and I continued to talk, they divulged another struggle within the TSPM churches: lack of trained leaders. Their stories were long and sometimes confusing, but both explained how they felt God calling them to service in another church a few hours east of their city. Their current church’s leadership threatened to cut all ties of communication and support if they left. “I know the pastor only wants me to stay because he will not be able to find leaders to take our places,” Aurora mourned. “It is a very confusing position to be in. I want to do what God wants, but there are so few leaders,” Mary added. “The pastor was not concerned with our call to serve, only of the fate of his Sunday schools.” This lack of leadership is a national problem. “In the government-sanctioned churches, the clergy/laity ratio was 1:508 in 1982 and 1:556 in 1995. Clergy shortage has been a chronic problem throughout China. The government insists that, among other things, only seminary-trained people can become ministers.”⁸¹ Unfortunately, “Students from these national seminaries are far too few to meet the demand for trained and educated pastors and church leaders.”⁸² This has caused a great void in the leadership of the church, as “Aurora” and “Mary” described. Though this problem continues to grow, little movement has been made to address it.

Compounding the lack of leadership is the lack of proper theological training. Though the government requires all TSPM clergy to receive theological training, “the more than 20 seminaries and Bible schools cannot keep up with the demand.”⁸³ There were approximately 3,000 graduates of Religious Affairs Bureau and CCC approved seminary schools nation-wide in 1999, but only 1,300 were ordained.⁸⁴ As a result of the

⁸¹ Yang, “Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald’s: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China.”

⁸² Peale, *The Love of God in China*, 81

⁸³ Daniel H. Bays, “Chinese Protestant Christianity Today,” *China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 496

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 496

limited number of leaders, many congregations are very large because there are no other leaders to start new churches.

Of those Chinese who receive seminary training, some do not receive training out of a sense of patriotism to their country, or even because of their faith, but out of desperation. Many turn to seminary "as a way out of their restrictive conditions, especially in the countryside."⁸⁵ This creates dissimilarity in the convictions and teachings of each leader, concocting a mix of "feudal superstition, witchcraft, sorcery, and the like" from teachers and laymen.⁸⁶ This in turn makes the church more vulnerable to cult-like interpretations of the Bible. It is unclear as to whether the underground church or the TSPM have greater problems with this or are more susceptible.

Though there is a dire shortage of clergy, there is certainly no lack of people attending the TSPM churches. The small church buildings throughout China cannot handle the numbers of Chinese turning out for Sunday services at TSPM churches. "Almost all urban churches lack physical spaces."⁸⁷ Some pastors have convinced local authorities to allow multiple services, but this proves only a temporary problem. Pastors reported that "almost all of such services were quickly filled to physical capacity as well."⁸⁸ This is more than a "space" issue. Pastors complain that the lack of clergy coupled with the minimal space prevents them from serving their members as they desire. Those churches that hold multiple services must clear their sanctuaries quickly to prepare for the next crowd. This prevents the members from fellowshiping with each other and keeps the pastors from interacting with their congregants.

Poor leadership, poor theological understanding, and vulnerability to cult activity are very real threats to the Chinese church. But, it is important not to generalize all teachings in TSPM churches or be too harsh on its meager leadership. There are many qualified pastors leading theologically sound TSPM churches that teach Bible-based concepts. More pastors are receiving proper training in both official and unofficial seminaries and training centers. As mentioned at the start of this paper, one cannot generalize China, nor can one generalize the church.

⁸⁵ Peale, *The Love of God In China*, 81

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 81

⁸⁷ Yang, "Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China."

⁸⁸ Yang, "Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China."

Obtaining religious materials presents another difficulty of the official church. This is a result of restrictions on the numbers of Bibles and other religious materials printed each year. "Prior to 1840, the government of the Qing Dynasty strictly prohibited the printing and circulation of the Bible."⁸⁹ Between 1949 and 1955 alone an estimated 212,000 Bibles and 138,000 New Testaments were distributed.⁹⁰ Since 1992, an estimated 10 million Bibles have been distributed, but this only covers a small number of the estimated millions of Christians in China.⁹¹ The China Christian Council (CCC) carries the responsibility of publishing Bibles, Christian literature, and hymn books, but the numbers "fall strikingly short of the needs of the millions of Chinese who become Christians each year."⁹² "Only Amity Press can legally print Bibles in China," and only bookshops affiliated with the CCC and TSPM churches are permitted to sell the materials.⁹³ One pastor made note of this regulation by the TSPM and CCC, saying "If we obey their 'Three Self principles' we can get Bibles, if we do not obey the TSPM they are very hard to obtain."⁹⁴ Thus, the pastors feel trapped. They could choose to obey the government rules that so many of them disagree with in order to receive the Bibles they so desire. Or they could ignore the somewhat questionable rules and not receive the Bibles. Both decisions come with great consequences. Furthermore, both options are followed by great argument among Christians worldwide. Should churches strictly adhere to the laws of the land? At what point should Christians disregard the law in favor of faith?

Though possessing a Bible is not forbidden, there are not enough Bibles to satisfy the demand. Wang Guishen discovered the source of the scarcity while attending an official church: "only Three-Self church members are allowed to purchase Bibles. The name of the buyer is noted and the number of Bibles available for purchase is limited. 'I was not a member of that church...'"⁹⁵ The government simply controls how many Bibles are printed and regulates where each Bible goes. Some Chinese Christians run

⁸⁹ Tang Yuankai, "Spreading the Bible in China," *Beijing Review*, 1 June 2006

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Patricia Clarke, "Explosion of Faith: the rapid growth of the church in China has brought on a leadership crisis," *The United Church Observer*, 60, no. 8 (1997) 27.

⁹² Freddie Sun, "Underground In China," *Christian Mission*, Summer 2006, 8

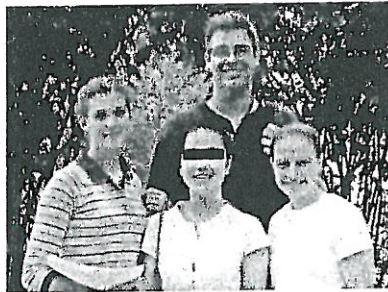
⁹³ Michael Haverluck, "Experiencing God in China," 4

⁹⁴ Tony Lambert, (1991) 84

⁹⁵ Gary Lane, "China: In the School of Suffering," *Voice of the Martyrs*, March 2007, 5.

illegal printing presses for Bibles and other literature. Bibles are available at TSPM churches, but they sell quickly and there is not enough supply to meet the demand of the Chinese Christians.

Availability of the Bible aside, many Chinese do not even know the Bible has been translated into Chinese. “Rose,” one of my English students at an agricultural university in Shaanxi Province was astonished to find that she could read the Bible in Chinese. “I never knew such words were in my own language! Now I will understand them so much better,” she exclaimed when she saw my Chinese/English copy of the Bible for the first time. “Rose” could not contain her excitement as she received her own copy from one of my contacts a few days later. She explained that she and most of her friends were not aware of the availability of Christian materials in their native language, despite the translation into several dialects of Chinese for some years now. Some might argue this is a result of strict government control over information. However, countering that argument are the countless Chinese Christians who have requested Chinese Bibles of their own. The answer lies somewhere between the government’s uncanny ability to control the spread of information and the simple lack of materials. After all, how can one know there are Bibles in Chinese if the books are so rare that few own a copy?



“Rose” as she receives her own Bible

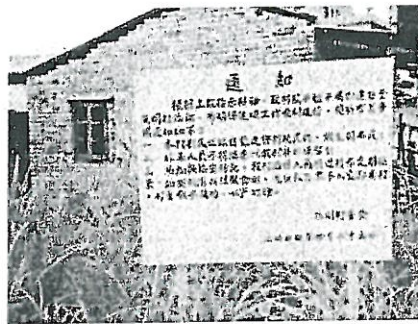
Though China’s constitution provides freedom of religious belief, persecution and public suppression presents yet another threat to Christians, even those attending the official churches. Those churches that abide by the rules, remain loyal to the government, and maintain a conservative presence in the community go about their business with little fear of government interruption. However, the fear cannot be calmed completely. Public propaganda is a constant form of persecution and a continual reminder to be cautious.

96



The photo above shows a young girl standing in front of a sign saying “Beware of Evil Religion.”⁹⁷ The second sign, shown below, is a reminder not to participate in or tolerate non-registered Christian events.

98



Though most major cities do not have such signs, they dot the countryside where Christianity is more prevalent and tourists are few. This has a great demoralizing effect on Christians and non-Christians alike, reminding them of the limitations on their freedom of religion. They also serve as a constant reminder of the constant presence of their government.

In addition to the public signs warning people of religions, there is an extensive “anti-cult” training program. “Every student from kindergarten through 12th grade is required to study the dangers of ‘evil cults’ for five hours each semester.”⁹⁹ Below is a page from the “evil cult” (xi jiao) book distributed to school children, subtitled “When evil cults cheat people, pretend to care about you, and make you feel very close to them, you are trapped without being aware.”¹⁰⁰

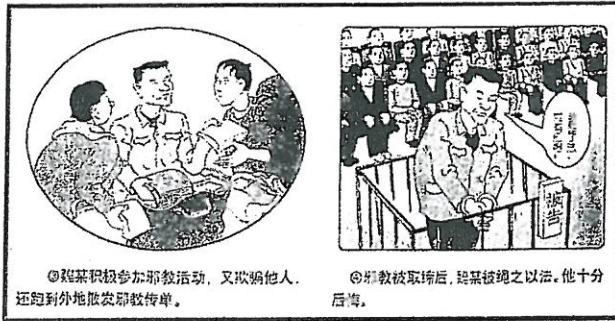
⁹⁶ Lane, 5

⁹⁷ Lane, 5

⁹⁸ Tom White, “Who is King?” *Voice of the Martyrs*, March 2007, 2

⁹⁹ Lane, 7

¹⁰⁰ Lane, 7



¹⁰¹ It portrays “Mr. Wei,” an active cult member who is found guilty of cheating others and distributing “cultish pamphlets.”

According to various Chinese documents, “a cult is any organization which is ‘illegal’ e.g. Qigong etc., which ‘defies’ its leaders, (c) ‘initiates and spreads’ beliefs and practices which are ‘superstitious’ and ‘heterodox,’ which ‘fabricates’ and spreads such beliefs and practices in order to ‘excite’ doubts and to ‘deceive people,’ and which engages in ‘disturbing social order’ in an ‘organized manner’ that causes ‘injury’ to the lives and properties of citizens or the PRC.”¹⁰² Ten of the fourteen government-identified cults within China are loosely Christian, several of which have congregations in America.¹⁰³

Unfortunately, since Christians are the only major force in China who do such things, this “anti-cult” movement is geared primarily toward Christians. “Mr. Wei” represents the Chinese Christian who has presumably done all these things against the will of the government. This national anti-cult campaign requires all citizens to report any “cult activities,” and even church leaders, who have presumably sworn allegiance to the government before taking a leadership role in the TSPM church. Designed much like the American anti-drug campaign with publications, news releases, school programs, and propagation of social disgrace for those involved in such “cults,” the Chinese anti-cult campaign has brought countless “Mr. Wei’s” to trial for committing crimes against the government through their religious activities.

Despite all these difficulties, the TSPM church remains strong and, for the most part, unhindered in its growth. Churches in large cities often welcome several thousand every Sunday. In Nanjing, St. Paul’s has 5,000 regular attendees. Zhejiang province is often referred to as China’s Jerusalem by Believers because 15%-20% of the population is Christian.¹⁰⁴ When the TSPM churches were established as the formal religion of

¹⁰¹ Lane, 7

¹⁰² Peale, 72

¹⁰³ Peale, 73

¹⁰⁴ Elegant, (2006)

China, nobody would have predicted this miraculous growth today. But the TSPM churches are only part of the Christian movement in China. Their brothers and sisters in the underground church are greater in number, but suffer more severely.

The Underground Church Movement (“Jiatinghui”)

If the numbers of the TSPM churches are impressive, the underground churches are even more remarkable, especially considering the bigger obstacles they must overcome compared to their TSPM brothers and sisters. In 1988 “most Sino-missilogists believe[d] that twenty million Protestant Christians in these ‘house gatherings’ [was] a reliably conservative figure.”¹⁰⁵ Today experts estimate between forty and seventy million Protestants in China but the government only recognizes ten million registered members of the government churches.¹⁰⁶ There is no way of knowing how that number has grown in the last nineteen years. Conducting a true count of underground Christians is impossible by the very nature of the underground status.

As stated before, the underground church movement began in the mid 1900s amidst the Cultural Revolution when the TSPM churches were closed. Christians began meeting in secret to encourage each other in their faith despite the turmoil around them. Today they continue to grow and now exist in all twenty-two provinces in China, as well as the autonomous regions. “Areas of most rapid growth are in the southern coastal provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong, as well as interior Sichuan and Henan.”¹⁰⁷ Inner Mongolia also has some active underground churches. Each underground church is different. They vary in size “from ten to two thousand.”¹⁰⁸ Some provincial government officials turn a blind eye; others actively suppress it.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Wayne Dehoney, *The Dragon and the Lamb: The resurgence of Christianity in the People’s Republic of China* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1988), 64

¹⁰⁶ Kaite McGeown, “China’s Christians Suffer for their Faith” *BBC News* (9 Nov. 2004) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3993857.stm>.

¹⁰⁷ Dehoney, 64

¹⁰⁸ Dehoney, , 65

¹⁰⁹ Professor Richard Madsen, interview by Neal Conan, *Talk of the Nation*, National Public Radio, 24 August 2006.

Chinese Christians attend the underground church for a variety of reasons. One of the common explanations is availability. “All churches are required to register [...] the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).”¹¹⁰ (Though the CCP is separate from the government, many government officials are Communist Party members.) The government document, “Measures for the Registration of the Places for Religious Activities” released in 1994, requires each church to have proof of a permanent place of worship, regularly attending members, and a legal source of income before it can become a registered church. These are very similar to the requirements for the Three Self Churches to maintain legal status (listed in section 2, pg 26). Especially for rural Christians, these requirements are impossible to meet. Income itself is nearly impossible since poverty still runs rampant throughout China. For this reason, among others, there is a greater concentration of underground churches in rural China.

Another reason many Chinese Christians choose to attend illegal churches rather than TSPM churches is ideological. Wu Guo Yin, a member of an underground church exclaimed, “That is really a preposterous idea... (The TSPM) is headed by a Communist who doesn’t believe in God, yet he feels he can stand at the door between us and our God.”¹¹¹ “Brother Yun explained “In the house churches we simply couldn’t adhere to such control and interference. We believe that Jesus is the head of his church, not the government. We broke away from the Three-Self Church and took a firm stand against all attempts to bring us under its control.”¹¹² Wu Guo Yin and Brother Yun express the primary reason for the development of the modern underground Christian movement in China—disdain for the CCP and its attempt to control religions in China. “Most unregistered churches do not believe that Christianity should collaborate with a government that does not love or honor God”¹¹³ Unfortunately, many underground Believers also feel betrayed by TSPM churches because “in many cases TSPM pastors inform the government of house-church activities resulting in the arrest and

¹¹⁰ Freddie Sun, “Underground In China,” *Christian Mission*, Summer 2006, 7

¹¹¹ Michael Haverluck, “Experiencing God in China,” *Voice of the Martyrs*, February 2006. 6

¹¹² Brother Yun, *The Heavenly Man* (Mill Hill, London & Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2002) 55

¹¹³ K.K. Yeo, “Home Grown: Church and State in China (Christianity),” *The Christian Century*, 123.1 (10 Jan. 2006).

imprisonment of house-church leaders and members. Thus, to the house churches, the TSPM is an agent of the government.”¹¹⁴ However, it is important to remember:

The members of the underground who refuse to join the ‘Patriotic’ churches are hence not extremists who perversely refuse all government contact and legitimate control. They simply want to choose their own churches and pastors, and to worship freely according to the dictates of conscience. For this they will worship in caves, be baptized at night in ice-rimmed rivers, and live underground. They are willing to endure crippling fines, imprisonments, labor camps, beatings, torture and death.¹¹⁵

“Policies which prohibit teaching certain Biblical passages, such as the second coming of Christ,” personal conviction regarding political control, and ability to meet the requirements to register a church are common reasons a church might remain underground.¹¹⁶ Other Chinese Christians have joined the underground movement out of a sense of loyalty and personal experience rather than for political reasons. “When my wife had an accident last year, no one did anything for us except our church, which helped me take care of my wife and my [shop] stall. People in my official church never did that,” said Chen Rufu, a snack food stall owner.¹¹⁷ This is an example of how the underground church has “strong ties with family and community.”¹¹⁸ This is only one example and it is important to remember that what is true for one community may not be true for another (called a “part to whole” fallacy by academic debaters). However, I spoke with members of various underground churches that voice similar sentiments for themselves and on behalf of their fellow underground congregants. Additionally, reports on Christian university students note that “many prefer the clandestine groups because they offer a more intimate environment in which to worship and study the Bible with like-minded colleagues.”¹¹⁹

Some Chinese Christians attend the underground church because they do not feel safe making a public statement of faith by allying themselves with a TSPM church.

¹¹⁴ Bob Fu, “Chinese Police Record their Torture of Christians,” *Voice of the Martyrs*, June 2003. 7

¹¹⁵ Paul Marshall, “China’s Persecuted Churches,” *Religion, State, and Society: The Keyston Journal* 26 no. 1 (1998), 12

¹¹⁶ Carla Yu, “The Church Under Communism: Bibles are legal but China continues to repress Christian worship,” *British Columbia Report* 10 no. 14 (1999): 59

¹¹⁷ Michael Haverluck, “Experiencing God in China,” *Voice of the Martyrs*, February 2006. 6

¹¹⁸ Jacqueline E. Wegner, “Official vs. Underground Protestant Churches in China: Challenges for Reconciliation and Social Influence,” *Review of Religious Research* 46 no. 2 (2004) 176

¹¹⁹ Jen Lin-Liu, “At Chinese Universities, Whispers of Jesus,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 51 no 40 (2005)

Suspicion of government intentions, fear of the consequences of an open declaration of belief, are natural and have made many people cautious over making contact with formal church structures. The wounds caused by experiences of being denounced by fellow Christians [during the Cultural Revolution and in other instances], experiences of imprisonment or being sent to the countryside, all these things have had their effect.¹²⁰

Other Chinese Christians do not sever ties with TSPM completely when they join underground churches. In fact, there is a great degree of cross-pollination between the two churches. It would be difficult to determine how much cooperation takes place between various underground and TSPM churches since many would be hesitant to divulge that information. But, it does occur that some underground and TSPM pastors cooperate and even work together in various efforts.

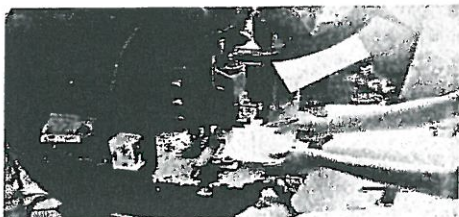
This cooperation even exists within the congregants. "Some underground church members attend aboveground church services, while some aboveground church members are active in underground gatherings."¹²¹ There is even a minimal sharing of resources between the two churches. "Some buildings are used by both official and unofficial congregations."¹²² Whatever the reason Christians are active in the underground movement, it is certainly not for safety or stability. Nevertheless, the underground church continues to grow at an equal or faster rate than the TSPM churches.

Like the TSPM church, the underground church has difficulties. Some of these difficulties are similar in both and some are unique to each church. One of the similar difficulties is the lack of Bibles and other Christian literature. As stated before, the government strictly monitors the production and sale of Bibles. Most legally printed Bibles are only sold to members of TSPM churches, forcing the underground church to turn to illegal suppliers. Underground printing presses like the one shown below only meet a fraction of the demands for materials.

¹²⁰ Bob Whyte, *Unfinished Encounter: China and Christianity*, 403

¹²¹ Fenggang Yang, "Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China."

¹²² Jacqueline E. Wegner, "Official vs. Underground Protestant Churches in China," 170



An illegal printing press produces Bibles and Sunday school materials.

123

Underground Christians are creative in their printing processes and they must work hard to carry these materials to churches with the greatest need. In the photograph below, Christians carry Bibles and leadership training materials on their backs to underground churches and illegal pastoral training centers hidden deep within rural China.



124

“They [are] called ‘donkeys,’ Their task [is] to carry a precious cargo to brothers and sisters in China, a cargo that all Chinese Christians long to hold, to study, and to call their own—Bibles.”¹²⁵ Some books and pamphlets are printed secretly within China. Others are brought in illegally by international Christians. *Christian Aid*, a non-profit organization based in America, ships illegal materials into China and creates underground training sessions throughout the country.

To some people this raises ethical issues. There is debate over civil disobedience versus faith. People use scripture to convincingly argue both sides. Some say it is a matter of personal conviction. Others respond that there is no room for personal conviction in this scripturally based argument.

All the materials printed in China and imported illegally are still not enough. Some churches only have one Bible for the entire congregation. One underground

¹²³ Gary Lane, “China: In the School of Suffering,” 6

¹²⁴ Ibid. 7

¹²⁵ Carl Lawrence and David Wang, *The Coming Influence of China* (Artesia, CA: Shannon Publishers, 2000) 115

Christian wrote the following after receiving his own copy of the Bible, which communicates the sentiments of countless underground Christians:

When I received this Bible, many brethren wanted to have one also. I am not the only one who was greatly helped by the Bible; at least 5,000 others were benefited. Brothers and sisters, I want to tell you one thing. Since I obtained this Bible, tens of thousands of Christians are hoping that they can have a copy of their own someday so that they can read it any time without waiting for a borrowed copy. Though freedom of religion and Bibles are said to be available in China, in fact we can't enjoy them. At this time, there are tens of thousands of Christians in our province alone and many are praying with tears about this matter.¹²⁶

"In 1966, the Red Guards made a concentrated effort to burn all Bibles, hymnals and other Christian literature. They did their job well. Today, it is still not uncommon to see a group of several hundred people with only one or two Bibles."¹²⁷ One Believer from a rural village said, "I know of one village where there are 5,000 Believers and four preachers, but not one complete Bible. One person has a New Testament which begins with the thirteenth chapter of Mark and goes through the book of Titus."¹²⁸ One Christian reportedly traveled over 100 miles to borrow a Bible for only a day or two at a time. There are some stories of Christians hand-copying Bibles for other congregations. I heard such stories on several occasions during my trips to China.

The resourcefulness of Christians to obtain Bibles and religious materials is remarkable, but it does not address the second problem within the underground church. Because house churches tend to be in rural areas, they also have a greater number of peasants attending. "The mass of China's Christians still come from the grassroots levels, and include disproportionate numbers of women, elderly and illiterates..."¹²⁹ This presents a very different problem. Illiteracy is still very common among Chinese peasants. Therefore, an undetermined number of Christians cannot even read the Bible. This is a greater problem within the underground church than the TSPM because of the greater numbers of peasants and undereducated members. Perhaps this is an instance of

¹²⁶ Ibid. 37

¹²⁷ Ibid. 34

¹²⁸ Ibid. 35

¹²⁹ Ka Lun Leung "Cultural Christians and Christianity in China," trans. Stacy Mosher. China Rights Forum 4 (2003)

the negative consequences of separating from the Three Self church movement within China.

In early America the churches served as centers for religious education and general education—reading and writing. Perhaps one solution to this problem of illiteracy within underground churches would be to promote general education within the churches as well as spiritual guidance, but there is no true solution to this problem. It is a social difficulty that the church must work around.

One can imagine this issue of illiteracy has deeper implications than simply not being able to read the Bible. Often, “if the father of a home is converted, he is zealous for the Gospel and immediately starts a meeting in his home. He automatically becomes the leader. He begins to teach and preach even though he has been a Christian for only three months.”¹³⁰ No superior leader is there to ensure the new leader can even read the Bible, let alone have a firm understanding of Biblical doctrine and related constructs. “Without proper Bible training, heresy becomes a major problem.”¹³¹ For this reason many cults sprout from Christian house churches. Eastern Lightning, or “Lightening from the East,” is one of the fastest growing sects in China. They claim as many as 300,000 followers and believe “that Jesus has returned as a plain-looking, 30-year-old Chinese woman who lives in hiding and has never been photographed.”¹³² Another sect, “The Shouters,” rewrote the Lord’s Prayer, shortening it to “‘Oh Lord Jesus,’ and taught followers to holler the phrase while stamping their feet in unison.”¹³³ “The Disciples” apparently misinterpreted verses in the Bible about all men being evil. They believe “that the devil exists in all people—and can be beaten out of them.”¹³⁴

These cultish sects that emerge from the underground Christian movement not only give Christians a bad name, they confirm government suspicions of cultish behaviors. One could spend a great deal of time arguing whether these groups should be categorized as truly “Protestant Christian,” but that would accomplish little. Clearly it is a

¹³⁰ Dehoney, *The Dragon and the Lamb*, 64

¹³¹ Lawrence, *The Coming Influence of China*, 61

¹³² “Jesus Is Back, and She’s Chinese: A bizarre religious sect is preying on China’s rural Christian congregations,” *Time International*, 5 Nov. 2001

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

threat to the underground Christian movement and potentially dangerous to Chinese actively seeking Christianity.

There are other threats within the leadership of the underground church. “They lack systematic leadership skills and exposure to the outside world and creativity to meet all the new challenges of current China, and are very cautious in developing cooperation with outsiders.”¹³⁵ It is unclear whether this is a symptom of the structure of the underground churches or simply a difficulty the church has not yet overcome. For some this is a “breaking point” that drives them to the TSPM. It is a very serious matter. Chinese culture is very social and communal.

To have a church that is not open to the common people of China limits their service to society. However, one might also argue that similar difficulties are seen within various American churches. Some individual congregations are highly involved in the community. Other American churches are inward focused, lacking any great desire to serve ‘outsiders,’ remaining isolationist. In China, the same phenomenon in the underground church presents a lack of ability to meet current society and the “outside world.” It is a problem of great concern and consequence that deserves attention but it is also not a problem isolated only to the underground movement of China. It is fair however, to point out that the TSPM church has, in many cases, done well to overcome this problem because of greater visibility within the communities and more freedom to practice openly.

There are three distinct layers of leadership within the house churches. The top level, the “Lao Da,” meaning “First Brothers” is made of older Believers, usually in their 40s or older. “Most have prison experiences and some are still fugitives. They command well-earned respect from the people.”¹³⁶ Unfortunately people in these positions lack leadership skills.

The second level of leadership is called “Lao Er,” or “Second Brothers.” These leaders are usually in their 20s and 30s and are often in charge of at least one congregation and several meeting points. The Lao Er are often aggressive in their

¹³⁵ Lawrence, *The Coming Influence of China*, 58

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 58

evangelism and church planting, and are more likely to actively work alongside the TSPM churches.

The lowest level of leadership in the house churches is the “Lao San”—the “Third Brothers.” These are the youngest leaders, sometimes not even in their 20s. The Lao San usually come from the lower societal levels and lead simple lives. Their ministry also usually occurs within the same socioeconomic groups. It is safe to assume that the Lao San are likely the least literate of the leadership groups.

The leadership system is established and many Christians step into these positions whether they are prepared or not. There is another issue with leadership in the underground church. Most of the leaders at all levels have spent some time in prison.¹³⁷ One underground minister in Anhui province said, “The persecution never stops. There are always some of us locked up. Some have been in and out of jail more than ten times. Right now we have fourteen church members in jail and twenty-one key members (leaders) are on the government’s wanted list.”¹³⁸ Leaders who spend months and years in jail leave parishioners to their own devices. Most of the time other leaders take over until their fellow church leaders return. This persecution only makes the church stronger and the members more passionate about their faith. “If it weren’t for our arrests we would not be such a strong team,” rejoiced one pastor who has suffered a number of prison sentences.¹³⁹

Because the underground churches are illegal, they do not have adequate meeting places. This is a great difficulty as house churches look for places to meet in safety. As stated before, some meet in the TSPM church buildings. Others must meet underground in caves, in small houses, basements, fields or woods. Da Qing oil fields serve as a meeting ground for several small groups of Christians.¹⁴⁰ On the coastal regions some small underground churches meet on boats out in the ocean or on the rivers.

On one of my trips to inner Shaanxi province, I met with church workers leading an illegal Bible school for children in an apartment owned by a Korean minister in the underground church. It had boarded windows to avert prying eyes. Foam and mattresses

¹³⁷ Ibid. 60

¹³⁸ “The Bitter Cup,” *The Cross: Jesus in China*, 4 hours DVD. China Soul for Christ Foundation.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

around all the walls, ceiling, and floor sound-proofed the apartment so neighbors could not hear the activities and report them. Unfortunately, this hideout was discovered while I was in the city. The police arrested and deported the Korean workers while the landlord faced trial. The outcome remains unknown.

The lack of Bibles and other resources as well as the minimally trained leadership are two great trials of the underground church, but the perhaps the greatest is persecution. The government systematically hunts down members and leaders of house churches. No area is out of the reach of the Chinese government. Reports of persecution and imprisonment come from every province in China and vary in severity from a mere “overnight in the slammer” to deforming physical torture and several years in jail. A Believer in Hubei Province wrote the following letter:

On May 27, 2001, around 8am, several Gongan (Policemen) of Zhongziang County of Hubei Province all of the sudden broke into the house Ma YuQin... They took away three Christians who had come to her to look for jobs since the persecution was too great in Lichuan for them to survive. At that moment, Li Enhui came to Ma's place to pay her a visit and was therefore arrested. Ma YuQin was arrested on her way going to the market. Her husband was out of town and their five-year old boy was therefore left at home unattended. Later in the afternoon, at 2 o'clock, a sister Yu Zhongju from Yanshan village... came to visit Ma. She was henceforth arrested also. Around 11pm, when Gong Shengliang was about to lay down in a family who received him, he all of the sudden heard someone banging the door. Gong was thus alarmed. He quickly put on his clothes and climbed up to the roof, and managed to get himself out of the danger eventually. But the two sisters in that place, Liu Dongjuan and Li Tongzhzhou, were not quick enough to escape the arrest of the police. Liu was almost beaten to death on the spot. She was later taken to the hospital. Even the doctor found it hard to believe and said to them, “What did this teenage girl do that you had to beat her so harshly?”

These few days all of those arrested have been badly beaten by the Gongan. Ma YuQin and her son, Longfeng, were all beaten almost dead. Li Enhui fell unconscious and was waken[ed] by cold water and beaten again. They did this nonstop for seven days and seven nights.¹⁴¹

This sort of report is not uncommon. Brother Yun, a house church leader, spoke of his arrest experiences in his autobiography.

¹⁴¹ Shixiong Li and Xiqui (Bob) Fu, ed., Religion and National Security in China: Secret documents from China's security sector (Bartlesville, Oklahoma: the Voice of the Martyrs Inc., 2002) 99-100

Suddenly I heard a loud noise! Several PSB officers kicked down the door to my room. They grabbed me and held me down on the bed. One officer lay on me, pinning me down with his weight. With one hand he held me by the throat. With his other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out his ID card. He shouted, "I come from the Public Security Bureau. Where do you come from?"

Two other PSB officers took a rope and tightly bound my arms behind my back, as well as binding the rope around my chest, back and waist. One of the officers noticed a red wooden cross that was attached to the wall, with the words "for God so loved the world" inscribed on the horizontal piece of the cross. On the left and right were written, "He hung on the cross" and "He took our sins upon himself." The officers read those words and laughed loudly. They tore the cross from the wall and tied it to my back with the ropes. Then they started to kick me furiously. Blows reigned down on my legs, arms, chest, and ribs. For the first time I had the honor of literally bearing the cross of Christ on my body! They triumphantly marched me off, bloodied and bruised, to Shangnan township. As I was paraded through the streets, a police car drove slowly in front. Through a loudspeaker they proclaimed, "This man came from Henan to preach Jesus. He has seriously disturbed the peace. He has confused the people. Today the Public Security Bureau has captured him. We will punish him severely."¹⁴²

Some personal accounts are heart-wrenching and include much more heinous torture than beatings. Cattle prods and clubs are regular torture devices in the PSB interrogation rooms. Sister Aizhen Miao, a house church leader, was forced to kneel on a brick while a policeman electrified her in the mouth with a cattle prod. Xiangdong Cai was arrested on August 11, 2002 in his town of Kongzhuang. The policemen stood on his arms and legs while they forced water into his stomach and lungs.¹⁴³

In April 2000 Pastor Li De Xian was arrested by the PSB. "Pastor Li has been arrested thirteen times in six months for 'illegal preaching' in Hua Du" the report read.¹⁴⁴ The police put Pastor Li in chains with steel cuffs screwed tightly around his ankles and his shins. A steel bar was bolted between his legs, spreading his feet wider than his shoulders. The police then cuffed his wrists to the bar forcing Pastor Li to bend his shoulders between his knees, causing great pain in the lower back. The jailers left the

¹⁴² Yun, *The Heavenly Man*, 62-63

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 7

¹⁴⁴ John Foxe and Harold J. Chadwick, ed., *The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2001) 390.

pastor in this position for several days.¹⁴⁵ These forms of torture and persecution are common during prison sentences.

In the same year the police beat Pastor Lin Mingying from Fujian Province to death for not joining the registered church. A few days after his death Pastor Mingying's family went to claim the body. "They found Lin's head had been smashed open and his whole body was covered in deep bruises."¹⁴⁶ To keep Pastor Lin's wife from speaking of the beatings the government offered her 20,000 Yuan.

BBC News Corporation and *Time Magazine* published similar stories in the past few years. In 2004 *BBC News* reporter Kate McGeown published the prison experience of Peter Xu Yongze, the founder of one of the largest religious movements in China. Peter endured being hung across an iron gate. As the gate was opened, his body was pulled and stretched, just like on the racks of Medieval torture chambers. Peter's attackers left him hanging in that position for four hours.¹⁴⁷ McGeown explains the increase in reports of torture and persecution are a result of fear on the part of the government. "The number of Christians in China has continued to rise, exacerbating this perceived threat and causing authorities to clamp down still further on unregistered churches."¹⁴⁸ The government perceives Chinese Christians as a threat to their authority and the status quo of China.

Simon Elegant, a reporter for *Time Magazine* in Nanjing, China wrote of persecution of a different sort. In the city of Hangzhou, southwest of Shanghai, local Christians funded the construction of a church that would serve around 5,000. "About 2:30 pm...uniformed police and plainclothes security officers appeared at the construction site."¹⁴⁹ They brought backhoes and razed the church. Witnesses reported the police attacked bystanders indiscriminately with their nightsticks. This is not the only report of its kind and it certainly was not the only unregistered church to be destroyed.

I interacted with a few Christians who have spent time in prison for their faith during my trips to China. Below is a photo of a few friends from southern China.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 390.

¹⁴⁶ Hattaway, *China's Christian Martyrs*, 480-481.

¹⁴⁷ Kate McGeown, "China's Christians suffer for their faith," *BBC News*, 9 Nov. 2004.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/ft/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/3993857.stm>. 10 May, 2008.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Simon Elegant, "The War for China's Soul," *Time*, 20 Aug. 2006.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1229123,00.html>. 10 May, 2008.

“Linda,” in red on the far right, has experienced at least one short prison term because of her involvement in the underground church. She served as my translator on two occasions and has always been ready to share her faith, despite the threat of persecution. “Lucy,” the woman standing in the middle, owns a wonderful restaurant in southern China. By day she manages the restaurant but by night she is a leader of one of the largest underground movements in the region. Her congregation has grown so large that it has split at least four times to avoid detection from the government. “Lucy” has not divulged any contacts with authorities, but she certainly has at least been interrogated. The other men and women in the photo are Chinese Christians from various provinces that I have befriended over the years. None are open about their personal experiences though all are more than willing to share their faith with anyone who will listen.



Persecution accounts trickle from every corner of the country. Some leaders, like Brother Yun and Peter Xu Yongze serve numerous prison sentences and endure countless beatings. However, the church remains strong. Christians say, “We knew what we were getting into when we chose to follow Christ. We knew it would be a road of suffering. But, Jesus is worth the price.”

In my own experience with sharing the Gospel in China, these men and women do not make the decision to become Christians quickly, nor do they take it lightly. They risk physical suffering at the hands of the government, losing their jobs, and they face disownment from their families. Chinese culture finds its foundation in honor. Some see the decision to become a Christian—especially if that means involvement in the underground church—as a dishonor to the family. However, few who make the decision to “pick up their cross and follow Christ” turn back on their decision. Many pay dearly. They take comfort in Jesus’ promise in Matthew 10:37-39,

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;
anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;
and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of

me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Despite threats and hardships, the underground movement continues to thrive in modern China. But we only understand the TSPM church and the underground church as two separate groups. In fact, they rely heavily on each other. Each fills unique needs within their communities and reaches a slightly different audience. However their relationship with each other and with the government is a complicated matter.

A House Divided Cannot Stand

There is wide social and economic stratification in Chinese society. Because of the government restrictions on the TSPM and underground churches, neither can meet the needs of all people, so a natural “division of labor” developed between the two churches. In recent years the TSPM church experienced a significant increase in the number of businessmen and government officials attending services. Because most of them live in the city, where the TSPM churches are typically located, many upper-middle class Believers gravitate toward these congregations. There are, however, always exceptions to this rule. Many of these Believers explore Christianity after interacting with a western culture. With the increased market economy, a greater number of businessmen network internationally and begin to explore faith for the first time. Some are even implementing faith-based morals in their businesses. The TSPM church serves these new Christians in the urban setting well and provides a relatively safe environment for curious people to explore Christianity for the first time with little fear of negative repercussion in their jobs, family, or from the government.

The official church also continues to build relationships and a rapport with the government that is still wary of Christianity. The government recognizes that Christian businessmen are moral and ethical in their deals. Furthermore, their employees are happier and more productive. Mr. Wang, a CEO in a successful company, began using Bible-based character training for his employees after becoming a Christian himself in

2004. Communist Party members have noted the difference in Mr. Wang's company. Bribery is not the norm as is the case in most other companies. Party members have noted "CEO's who become Christians have only one set of books and pay their taxes honestly; they no longer have mistresses or win contracts by proffering prostitutes to customers."¹⁵⁰

The TSPM church offers a legal face to this transforming aspect of Christianity and continues the dialogue between government officials and Christians. One might argue that without the official church, the government would have worked harder to stamp Christianity out of China completely rather than offer a sort of political truce. After all, that is what the TSPM church was in its infancy—a truce between government and religion during the height of the Communist era.

On the other hand, the underground church, located primarily in the countryside, serves a variety of purposes. First, it is the primary church for peasants who cannot travel to attend TSPM churches in the cities. More importantly, it offers more relational Christianity than the TSPM churches through small Bible studies and more relationship-based congregations. TSPM churches on the other hand, are not permitted to offer Bible studies or evangelize—even though many do. The underground church does both, thus filling the gap left by the government regulations.

Also, at the risk of generalization, the underground church tends to raise more passionate and dedicated Christians. It is very unlikely one would risk losing job and family, or face potential imprisonment and persecution unless one truly believed in the teachings of Christ. Underground churches offer a support network for those who have decided to make such a commitment. They serve the entire family—including those under the age of 18 that the TSPM church cannot serve.

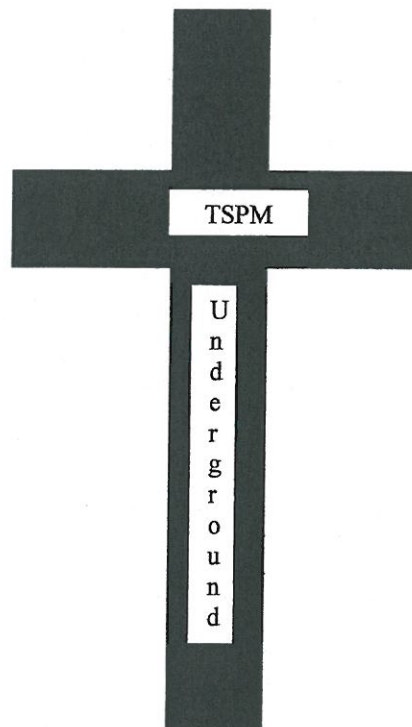
Countless strong and dedicated Christians emerge from the TSPM. One should never assume or even think that all Christians in the underground church are, by their very nature, stronger than Christians in the TSPM. However, many of the emerging Christians in the underground church are well-grounded in their faith, benefiting from a strong social network and dedicated conviction of their beliefs. They must pay a greater price for their faith, thus many commit more strongly. As it is said, those who pay dearly for something appreciate it more than those who have to sacrifice less.

¹⁵⁰ Marvin Olasky, "Wildfire: How Christianity is Changing China," *World* 24 June 2006, 19

A new development in the underground church is on the college campuses. College-age believers are choosing to meet in underground churches rather than attend official churches “because they offer a more intimate environment in which to worship and study the Bible with like-minded colleagues.”¹⁵¹ More importantly, it offers a venue for the bright minds of China to gather and debate religious topics in a more non-restrictive manner. TSPM churches are controlled in the topics they may address. This new development has brought more underground church groups into the cities and onto the college campuses.

For these reasons, among others, both the underground church and the TSPM church are vital to Chinese Christianity. Though they may seem to be working against each other at times, they rely on each other to reach every level of the Chinese society. However, this relationship is not an equal one.

Imagine a cross, like the one seen below. The crossbar represents the TSPM church while the upright represents the underground church in this relationship. Without either piece the cross would become just two pieces of wood. But with both pieces, it creates the meaningful shape of the cross. In the same way, one part of the Chinese church on its own would not be as effective or meaningful without the other.



¹⁵¹ Jen Lin Liu, “At Chinese Universities, Whispers of Jesus.”

The underground church serves the grassroots Christian movement in China. However, one cannot think of it as more important or effective than the TSPM churches. The house church movement meets the relational and physical needs of Chinese Christians at a very basic level. It harkens back to Chinese cultural Christianity of old while the TSPM churches are often more western in their traditions. This seems contradictory to logic since the majority of the missionary-based churches went underground during the Cultural Revolution. However, much of the western tradition has been pushed out of these underground churches.

Throughout the history of Chinese Christianity one of the primary concerns of the government has been that the “western religion” of Christianity was not Chinese in tradition. Chinese Christians find pride in their heritage as well as their faith and today many work to bind their faith and their heritage in positive ways. Furthermore, the government works tirelessly to minimize or eliminate the influence of the western church on Chinese churches. Perhaps this is a throw-back to the old fear of imperialism and the history of politics and religion mingling in negative ways.

The Three Self Patriotic church creates the crossbar. It is equally important but serves a different group of people in a different manner. Just like there is some cross-over between the underground and official church in a variety of ways, the two pieces of the cross connect. The official church finds its foundation primarily in government-regulated Christianity instead of Christianity with a distinctly Chinese identity—one designed to meet the unique and specific needs of the Chinese people. The underground church strives to achieve this Chinese Christianity. This is ironic since one of the reasons for creating the TSPM churches was to strip all western influences from Chinese Protestant Christianity and build a markedly Chinese church.

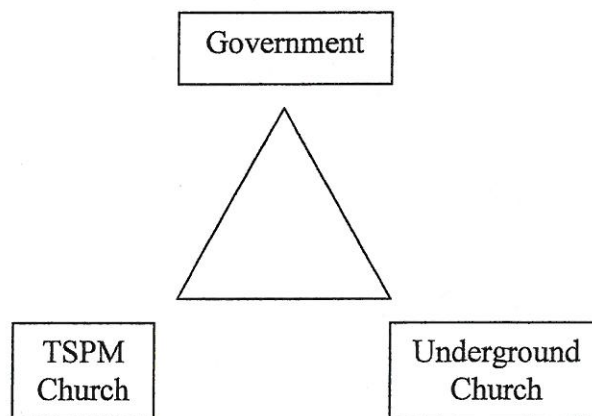
Regardless of the government’s relationship with each of the churches and the fundamental differences, the most important thing is that neither would be as successful at engaging the Chinese culture or meeting the needs of their brothers and sisters without the other.

“It is not ‘either/or,’ Mr. Han Wenzao of Nanjing told me in regards to the house church versus the open church. ‘We need both. When we put up a church building, it is a witness to the whole city. It arouses curiosity and interest. It causes people to raise questions and to come and

see. On the other hand, many people have found a new spiritual lifestyle in the small home congregations. Their faith has been deepened by the new intimacy not realized in the larger public meetings. They find a special fulfillment in participation in the small group.”¹⁵²

Even more simply, both churches are needed to meet the demands of all the Believers. There are not enough accommodations or facilities.¹⁵³ Both fill unique roles and no matter how separated they appear, the two churches are tied in faith, culture, and purpose.

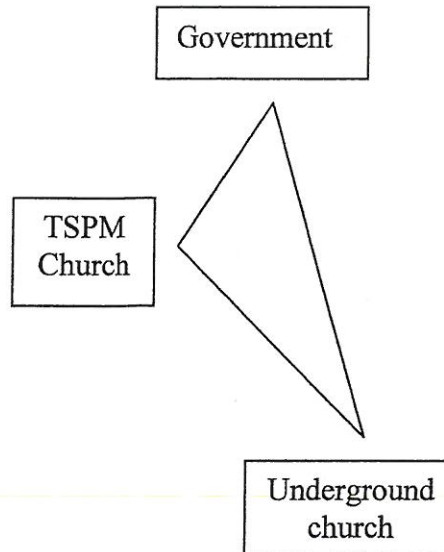
Not only is the relationship between the Three Self Church and the underground church unique and rather complicated, the relationship of each with the government is complex. Ideally, the government would view all Christians as equal, and therefore equally subordinate, creating a right triangle.



However, this is not the case. The fact that the underground church is illegal makes this sort of relationship impossible. Therefore, the connection between the three tends to appear more like a scalene triangle, with the government keeping the TSPM church closer to itself and working to suppress the house churches.

¹⁵² Dehoney, *The Dragon and the Lamb*, 65

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 65



With the government on top, the TSPM church has a closer relationship with it and succumbs to greater control from the government. Therefore, the official church is represented by the middle point on the triangle. Certainly not the top, but by no means is the government sponsored church at the bottom of the relationship triangle. It also sits high on the shape of the triangle to represent the higher social class it tends to attract.

The underground church serves as the lowest point of the triangle because the government continues to try to stamp it out of Chinese society completely. Also, underground Believers are often considered lowly members of society who have dishonored their parents and their Chinese heritage. My friend “Flora” explained this cultural phenomenon to me. Despite the recent move toward westernization, this social construct is difficult to change. Many still believe the underground church represents all things old that China is still working to escape—something radical, counter-revolutionary, anti-Chinese. These sentiments are difficult to overcome. For these reasons, the underground church is the bottom point on the triangle.

Despite this complex triangular relationship and the many difficulties within, it is clear that both official and unofficial Protestant churches continue to thrive. But as China continues to develop its market-based economy and the country becomes more transparent to the rest of the world, will this change? Some believe the Chinese government will become more open to Christianity in the coming years. After all, the government has recognized the benefits of having Christian morality in the marketplace.

But, the raids continue throughout the country, stories of persecution continue to be told, and Christians remain in prison. The government maintains regulatory laws.

Poor infrastructure and commerce regulation—recent lead paint and food poisoning problems coming from China—could cause an economic downturn. The young economy was built quickly with little infrastructure needed to support it. Analysts also point to the government's secretive management of the Chinese economy as a potential weakness. Regardless of where the country is going in 2008, one hundred-and-one years after the first western missionary landed in China, Christianity is a cultural faith and it remains strong. The church continues to expand in spite of government efforts to limit or reverse growth. Furthermore, a unique relationship has developed between the legal and underground churches which, despite its flaws, meet the needs of a society desperate for answers outside their government. Christians in the house churches and the TSPM churches across China are praying fervently that their government would one day release them from bondage and allow complete religious freedom. But, until then, they are more than willing to continue to follow their God, no matter the cost.

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