

**CAPTIVATING GOD’S HEART: A HISTORY OF
INDEPENDENT CHRISTIANITY,
FUNDAMENTALISM AND GENDER IN CHIN LIEN
BIBLE SEMINARY AND THE SINGAPORE
CHRISTIAN EVANGELISTIC LEAGUE, 1935-1997**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joshua', written in a cursive style.

Sim Dao Wei, Joshua
25 June 2015

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Finally, I would like to stress that this study is not an "official" version of the histories of Chin Lien Bible Seminary and Singapore Christian Evangelistic League. It is, rather, a historical study of both institutions from the points of view of religion and culture. Thus, any view or understanding of this study should – if possible – be taken in this light.

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Summary

The first half of the twentieth century was an exciting time for the development of Protestantism in China and among the overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. This vibrancy and growth was not to be found in the Chinese churches that were planted by the Western missionary enterprise since the nineteenth century; rather, it was due to the formation of an independent Christian sector in China which produced many famous Christian personalities and indigenously-led organisations. A number of these personalities and groups rose to nationwide prominence in China by the 1920s and 1930s, and they started to extend their influence to the immigrant communities around Southeast Asia. This prompted the establishment of various independent churches and groups in the region.

This thesis examines two such independent groups, Chin Lien Bible Seminary (CLBS) and the Singapore Christian Evangelistic League (SCEL), that were founded after the famous Chinese revivalist-evangelist John Sung conducted his first revival meetings in Singapore in 1935. The study will investigate how the leaders of the two institutions appropriated the practices of certain fundamentalist independent Christian leaders to establish an autonomous enterprise that was focussed on evangelism and the defence of the faith between the period 1935 and 1997. The research also illustrates how the League and seminary served as extra-ecclesiastical platforms that groomed and expanded the leadership capacities of female Christians, allowing them to move beyond the defined boundaries of women's work to serve in mixed-gender scenarios. It argues that this enabled the women to partially circumvent the

double Chinese-Christian patriarchy as they gained considerable spiritual and moral authority over the men they worked with. Nonetheless, this did not imply an overturning of the patriarchy as the conservative beliefs of the women continued to domesticate them under the Christian patriarchy.

The dissertation is divided into three sections. First, it traces the independent Christian roots of the two institutions, showing how the founders drew on these roots to incorporate an ethos of Christian revivalism, doctrinal orthodoxy, and “faith missions” into their organisational models. In the second section, the study shows how local efforts to increase the self-propagative capacities of the Chinese churches in Singapore and Malaya led to the founding and development of SCEL and CLBS as complementary institutions. Both organisations were established to support the extensive growth in lay evangelistic work amongst the Chinese Christian communities during the pre-war period of 1935 to 1941. The thesis also argues that the unfolding of a global Christian battle between the fundamentalists and the modernists during the period of the Malayan Emergency caused the initial evangelistic ambitions and functions of both institutions to give way to an increasing emphasis on pioneering missionary efforts to the New Villages. The final section studies the involvement of both establishments in global fundamentalism and pioneering missions. In particular, it demonstrates how both organisations developed into a training and sending indigenous missionary agency during the 1960s to the late 1990s.

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List of Abbreviations

BP	Bible-Presbyterian
CB	<i>Christian Beacon</i>
CIM	China Inland Mission
CLBS	Chin Lien Bible Seminary
EPM	English Presbyterian Mission
FECCC	Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches
GWTS	Ginling Women's Theological Seminary
ICCC	International Council of Christian Churches
MC	<i>Malaysia Christian</i>
MCC	Malayan Christian Council
MCCC	Malaysian Council of Christian Churches
MEC	Methodist Episcopal Church
MCMC	Malaysia Chinese Mission Conference
NCTS	North China Theological Seminary
PYF	Presbyterian Youth Fellowship
SCEL	Singapore Christian Evangelistic League
SCCIU	Singapore Chinese Christian Inter-Church Union
SEAC	<i>Southeast Asia Christian</i>
STS	Spiritual Training Seminary
TCR	Twentieth Century Reformation
TTC	Trinity Theological College, Singapore
WCC	World Council of Churches
WMA	Women's Missionary Association
WWII	World War II
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

Note on Conventions

This thesis uses the pinyin system to romanise Chinese names and terms. However, for reasons of familiarity, certain names and terms (e.g. Quek Kiok Chiang) are romanised according to the original spelling in the sources. A selected list of romanised names and their corresponding Chinese characters is provided in the character glossary at the end of this thesis.

Malaya achieved its independence in August 1957 and the Federation of Malaysia was established in September 1963. In most cases, I have used the term “Malaya” for the pre-1960 period (seen in Chapters One and Two) and “Malaysia” for the post-1960 period (Chapter Three). This is because the term “Malaysia” only gained significant political meaning post-1960. Before 1960, the term was only used as a geographical signifier spanning the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, Malay Archipelago and the entire present-day Southeast Asian region. I have also used the term “Nanyang” to denote the Southeast Asian region for the pre-World War II period and “Southeast Asia” for the time since World War II.

Introduction

In September 1948, the venerable Chinese theologian, Rev Jia Yuming, was invited by the Singapore Chinese Christian Inter-Church Union (SCCIU) to give a series of talks on his widely-acclaimed theological treatise, *Perfect Salvation* (*Wanquan Jiufa*). Jia was on his way back to China after attending the first meeting of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC), a body founded by American fundamentalists, where he was elected Second Vice-President. Jia was considered the leading personality for fundamentalist Christianity in China then: he was the President of the fundamentalist League of Christian Churches in China, founded in 1929. The invitation by SCCIU was actually issued on behalf of the leaders of Singapore Christian Evangelistic League (Xinjiapo Jidutu Budaotuan). The President, Vice-President and Secretary of the League, Misses Leona Wu (Wu Jingling), Ng Phek Loan (Huang Biran) and Tay Swee Lan (Zheng Suilan) had studied under Jia in Ginling Women's Theological Seminary (Jinling Nüzi Shenxueyuan) in Nanjing during the 1930s. The women showed him around Chin Lien Bible Seminary (then known as Jinlian Lingxiuyuan), an independent Protestant educational institution that Wu founded with Ng's help in 1937.

Jia was impressed by what he saw. He was proud of the achievements of his protégées. Evidently, it was challenging enough for two female preachers to establish an independent seminary without direct support from a mission board. Moreover, the seminary was founded in Singapore, located far away from the centre of Christian support in China. Jia uttered these words of praise upon seeing the seminary: "Chin Lien – Faith, how precious, how precious

(*baobei*)!”¹ Chin Lien (*Jinlian*) is a Chinese translation of the term “Golden Chain”. It derives from the Biblical book Song of Solomon 4:9, describing the captivation of a groom’s heart by his bride’s golden necklace. This relationship is a metaphor symbolising the mutual love between Jesus Christ and the Church. In this circumstance, the founders of Chin Lien saw the seminary as the “golden necklace” of the Chinese Church in Singapore and Malaya. It was founded during a time when there was no other avenue for the fulltime theological training of Chinese Christian workers in the region.

Jia’s remarks drew from two particular strands of evangelical Christianity in China. First, like their counterparts in North America, Chinese leaders who upheld evangelicalism over a more liberal form of Protestantism became embroiled in the fundamentalist-modernist controversies which had spilled over from the West into Chinese Christianity by 1920. In the Chinese context, however, these controversies were also shaped by both the anti-Christian movement that arose from the New Culture Movement (calling for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on the West) and the indigenisation campaigns (campaigns to expunge Christianity in China of all foreign elements) that the joint Chinese and Western missionary leadership of the mainline Protestant organisations undertook. Essentially, issues concerning what constituted orthodoxy in Protestantism as well as its relationship to National Salvation (a key theme of the New Culture Movement) were being contested by parties on both sides of the controversies.

¹ Ng Peck Loan, “Huiyi Guoqu, Zanwang Weilai [Remembering the Past, Looking to the Future]”, in *Chin Lien Bible Seminary Special Celebratory Magazine for the Laying of the Foundational Stone of Jingling Memorial Hall* (Hereafter CLBS, 1988), ed. Quek Kiok Chiang and Tay Swee Lan (Singapore: Tiger Press, 1988), 6.

Second, “faith” also referred to Chin Lien’s adoption of the “faith missions” concept, a model of independent missions popularised by the founder of China Inland Mission (CIM), John Hudson Taylor. This model has two distinctive features: an all-consuming emphasis on direct evangelisation and the “faith principle” of not directly soliciting for financial support, unlike denominational mission agencies.² The model gained increasing currency in China after 1900 with the emergence of an independent sector of Christianity. By the 1920s, many individuals and groups who defended the classical evangelical heritage started to separate from the mission bodies, forming what Daniel Bays calls “independent Christianity”: a “sector of Chinese Christianity...which was independent of foreign missions, autonomous in operations, and indigenous in ideas and leadership.”³ The “independent” Christians did not just consist of fundamentalists. They also encompassed various Pentecostal groups, independent churches and theological institutions. For some groups such as Jia’s Spiritual Training Seminary (Zhongguo Jidutu Lingxiu Xueyuan) founded in 1936, the “faith missions” model suited their *modus operandi* as they kept their organisations independent of denominational financial support, running on extremely low costs and depending on the support of local Christians.

Jia, a prominent representative of this independent Christianity, saw this visit as an opportunity to strike up a trans-regional partnership with a like-minded seminary. He made a proposal to link Chin Lien with his Spiritual

² Joel A. Carpenter, “Propagating The Faith Once Delivered: The Fundamentalist Missionary Enterprise, 1920-1945”, in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter and William R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1990), 98-99.

³ Daniel H. Bays, “The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900-1937”, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H. Bays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 309.

Training Seminary as a feeder institution, sending students from Singapore to China for further study. The proposed partnership resulted in Chin Lien's adoption of the term "Spiritual Training Seminary (Lingxiu Shenxueyuan)" in its Chinese name. It would have also resulted in a potential exchange of students and teachers. Unfortunately, political events in China prevented these proposed exchanges from ever taking place.⁴

This thesis examines the histories of Chin Lien Bible Seminary or CLBS (Jinlian Lingxiu Shenxueyuan) and the Singapore Christian Evangelistic League (SCEL), independent Chinese Christian⁵ institutions founded after the famous Chinese revivalist-evangelist John Sung (Song Shangjie) conducted his first revival meetings in Singapore in 1935. The thesis locates the two institutions within the development of independent Christianity in China since the first half of the twentieth century. This development was extended to the overseas Chinese Christian communities in Singapore and Malaysia through trans-regional exchanges with various independent Christian organisations and/or personalities. New, independent churches chose to operate apart from the mainline ecumenical Church councils,⁶ implementing their own visions of Christianity, forming communities and building partnerships. CLBS and SCEL, part of this vast spectrum of independent groups, will be studied in the context of the growing autonomy of the Chinese churches in Singapore and Malaysia, and the post-World War II Protestant fundamentalist movement.

⁴ Ng, "Huiyi", 6.

⁵ I will use the term "independent Chinese Christian(s) or Christianity" to refer to people/communities both inside and outside of China.

⁶ See Ho Wing Onn, "A Study of: The Independent Christian Churches in Singapore" (Academic Exercise, Department of Applied Social Studies, University of Singapore, 1966).

The histories of CLBS and SCEL have been very much inter-connected since their beginnings. CLBS was founded for the purposes of training members of SCEL in the art of preaching and pioneering rural missions. The League was made up of numerous evangelistic bands, comprising mostly lay Christians who had experienced spiritual renewal in Sung's campaigns. As a result of this spurt in lay evangelism during the late 1930s and early 1940s, CLBS was established to provide the theological education that the band members required. The late Rev Quok Kiok Chiang (Guo Kechang), the longest-serving leader of SCEL and member of the Board of Trustees of CLBS, once likened the relationship to "the left hand and the right hand." Without either, he added, "crippling would result."⁷

In the next few sections, I will examine four themes that have shaped my approach to the thesis: (1) independent Chinese Christianity, (2) Protestant fundamentalism, (3) gender and, (4) Christianity amongst the overseas Chinese.

Independent Chinese Christianity

Daniel Bays was the first historian to coin the term "independent Christianity". In his edited volume *Christianity in China*, Bays identifies three broad categories: firstly, church federations or independent congregations that had broken away from the mission churches; secondly, a variety of movements and organisations with Pentecostal leanings that resembled a syncretic form of Chinese folk religion; and thirdly, charismatic individuals – pastors and

⁷ Quok Kiok Chiang, "A Few Thoughts on Chin Lien's Fortieth Anniversary", in *Chin Lien Bible Seminary Fortieth Anniversary Souvenir Magazine* (Hereafter CLBS, 1977), ed. Quok Kiok Chiang and Tay Swee Lan (Singapore: Tiger Press, 1977), 31.

evangelists, such as Sung and Jia – that had garnered huge support through their successful itinerant revivalist-evangelistic endeavours, the organisations they established and writings they published. Bays highlights that these individuals represented a phenomenon that saw a “drive towards ‘selfhood’ [or the use of popular individual appeal] in Chinese Protestantism.”⁸

Recent studies of various forms of independent Christianity by Lian Xi and Tao Feiya have also shown that various Chinese Christians were active agents who appropriated and synthesised elements of Christian and Chinese culture in order to promote their religious faith and identity.⁹ Very often, this resulted in a reinterpretation of their Christian and Chinese identities through overlapping lenses. Their work focusses on forms of independent Christianity which were arguably more self-consciously “syncretic” than the institutions studied here, mostly fitting into Bays’s second category although some groups/individuals can be found in the other two categories. However, they are useful in highlighting the initiative, strength, and dynamism of these movements when detached from missionary control.

Protestant Fundamentalism in the Chinese Context

The main studies that have shaped my approach for fundamentalism derive mostly from the North American context. These studies form an essential basis for examining the rise of fundamentalism in the Chinese context because the

⁸ Bays, “Growth”, 309-315.

⁹ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven: Yale University Press); Tao Feiya, “Pentecostalism and Christian Utopia in China: Jing Dianying and the Jesus Family Movement, 1921-1952”, in *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities*, eds. Ogbu U. Kalu and Alaine Low (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 238-252.

movement was forged out of partnerships that were built between conservative missionaries and Chinese Christians.

The study which has redefined the scholarship on fundamentalism is George Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. Marsden defines fundamentalism as a diverse and "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism." Evangelicalism refers to a wide-ranging mosaic of "Protestant traditions [and] denominations...which sprung forth from a series of revivals that swept the...Anglo-American world in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries".¹⁰ The ascendance of theological liberalism post- World War I provoked strong reactions among conservative evangelicals of various theological inclinations, producing a new fundamentalist movement united against the common enemy of liberalism. This fundamentalism was characterised by opposition towards social reform, a propensity to defend the faith militantly, and an increasingly pessimistic view of secular American culture.¹¹ By 1925, fundamentalism lost its position as a nationally influential movement, causing it to retreat and rebuild a subculture of its own in the 1930s and 1940s.

Marsden's study was a platform for Joel Carpenter's publication on the movement's rebuilding process in the 1930s and 1940s. Carpenter makes two compelling arguments. Firstly, he demonstrates that the fundamentalists developed a subculture of their own by cultivating "distinctive religious

¹⁰ The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, Wheaton College, accessed November 19, 2014, <http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/defining-evangelicalism>. See also George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4-7 and 11-101. Marsden was reacting against the more narrow definition of fundamentalism's roots found in Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1830-1930*, second ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), x-xix.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

communities...to sustain [their] doctrinal distinctives” to maintain their own way of life.¹² Secondly, he observes that fundamentalism’s revivalist roots allowed it to overcome its own cultural pessimism, enabling the movement to rebuild and re-emerge as a popular religious movement.¹³

These studies point out one thing in common: fundamentalism’s theological heritage and integrity were core constituents that animated the movement, endowing it with the capacity to rebuild amidst the external challenges that it faced. However, the dynamic behind this theological heritage only becomes intelligible when we examine the liberal theology and Social Gospel trends that fundamentalism opposed vehemently. William Hutchinson identifies three core beliefs that liberalism held by the early twentieth century: an intentional adaption of religious ideas to modernity, a naturalistic belief in God’s immanence in human civilisation and revelation through it, and “the [this-worldly] realization of the Kingdom of God in human society.”¹⁴ He highlights that liberalism affected the missionary enterprise in several ways. First, salvation was reinterpreted as a progressive, environmentally-influenced process, reducing the zeal for direct evangelism. Second, this positive outlook of human prospects contributed to an increasing emphasis on the civilising aspects of missions. Third, the missionaries also developed a propensity for inter-religious dialogues which ultimately undercut claims of Christian exclusivity.¹⁵

¹² Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10-11 and Chapters 6-12.

¹⁴ William R. Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 2.

¹⁵ William R. Hutchinson, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 103-104.

Two works by Lian Xi and Jun Xing which examine the transplantation and adaptation of liberalism and the Social Gospel to China clarify Hutchinson's contentions within the Chinese context. They argue that liberalism greatly weakened Christianity's sense of cultural superiority in China. Instead, the liberals sought to make Christianity socio-culturally compatible by nullifying Christianity's uniqueness while attempting to synthesise it with Chinese religions and philosophies. Lian highlights that the missionaries' efforts to harmonise Christianity with the Chinese religions resulted in an idealistic quest for a religious union, causing some of them to lose their faith. This union became all that the liberal missionaries cared to defend when their evangelical theology came under modern intellectual bombardment.¹⁶ In his study, Jun points out that the Social Gospel advocacy of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in China resonated with liberals attempting to make the Christian message relevant for the need of social reconstruction during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁷ The Social Gospel refers to a theological movement that sought to apply Christian teachings to contemporary social reform issues by reinterpreting traditional Protestant understandings of salvation in social terms, stressing human potential, optimism and imperative for social reform.¹⁸

An important work examining the fundamentalist reaction to liberalism in China is Kevin Yao's *The Fundamentalist Movement among Protestant Missionaries in China, 1920-1937*. Yao identifies "militancy in battling modernism [or liberalism]" as the hallmark of the conservative missionaries in

¹⁶ Lian Xi, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Christian Missions in China, 1907-1932* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 203.

¹⁷ Jun Xing, "Baptised in the Fire of Revolution: The American Social Gospel and the YMCA in China: 1919-1937" (Ph. D., University of Minnesota, 1993), 35-76.

¹⁸ Hans J. Hillerbrand ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Protestantism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), vol. 4, 231.

China, who were driven by “an urgent sense that the ‘fundamental Christian truth’...[was] being undermined by godless modernism”. These missionaries, however, did not share the North American fundamentalists’ pessimism about secular culture. Rather, they concerned themselves with the task of building theologically orthodox mission enterprises to ground the Chinese churches in the “fundamental truth” while protecting them from liberalism.¹⁹ Although Yao’s book is the first major project which has undertaken a broad analysis of fundamentalism in China, his findings focus on the missionary community rather than the Chinese fundamentalists.

Most studies which have examined influential Chinese fundamentalists have employed the biographical approach, thus preventing us from apprehending the full complexity of the movement’s teachings and innovations. Nevertheless, these studies have been helpful in correcting the generalised images of anti-intellectualism and narrowness often ascribed to fundamentalists.²⁰ Guo Weilian’s study of Jia Yuming observes that although Jia upheld the importance of orthodoxy, he promoted cooperation with the moderates and liberals before retreating into a separatist position by 1927 because of doctrinal issues.²¹ These studies remind us about the importance of analysing fundamentalism’s multiple intellectual and theological dimensions in order to recover the layers of its complexity and move beyond images of immutability commonly ascribed to such individuals and groups. This

¹⁹ Kevin Xiyi Yao, *The Fundamentalist Movement Among Protestant Missionaries in China, 1920-1937* (New York: University Press of America, 2003), 15-17 and 280-282.

²⁰ See, for example, Ying Fuk-tsang, *The Praxis and Predicament of a Chinese Fundamentalist: Chen Chong-gui (Marcus Cheng)’s Theological Thought and His Time* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2001).

²¹ Guo Weilian, *Fandui Heyi!?: Jia Yuming, Jiyao Zhuyi yu Heyi Yundong de Jiujiu* [Against Unity!?: Jia Yuming, The Tensions between Fundamentalism and the Unionism] (Hong Kong: Tiandao Books, 2002), 36-133.

framework will also allow us to investigate the various ways in which the movement was able to maintain the relevance of its traditionalism in the local socio-cultural context.

Feminising Independent Chinese Christianity?

When Protestant missionaries from the West evangelised the Chinese women during the nineteenth century, they were faced with numerous societal limitations such as the strict segregation of sexes, restricted access to native families and language difficulties. Kwok Pui-lan observes that such circumstances necessitated the “[s]egregation of the sexes in church life and the organization of religious meetings...[leading to] the emergence of female religious leader[s].”²² Bible women, or female evangelists, had to be employed; and although they were lower ranking than their male counterparts, they became “role models for women...assum[ing] a variety of leadership roles” amongst women.²³

Over the last two decades, several scholars have followed Kwok’s lead in uncovering the lives of early Chinese Christian women. Jessie Lutz’s edited volume *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women* has consolidated two decades’ worth of scholarship on these women. Particularly significant is the agency that they displayed when opportunities opened up for them. For example, the Bible women could “go to places where access to foreigners were denied” and “reach the rural villages by mobilizing...[their] own lineage network[s].”²⁴ Increased

²² Kwok Pui-lan, *Chinese women and Christianity, 1860-1927* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 80.

²³ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁴ Ling Oi Ki, “Bible Women”, in *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity, and Social Mobility*, ed. Jessie. G. Lutz (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 251.

opportunities for higher education allowed the graduates of Christian colleges to take on social service careers in institutions like Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), particularly as the traditional ideal of womanhood was extended into the public sphere to serve emerging ideas of nationhood.²⁵

The lives of Chinese women within the independent Christian sector have also received treatment recently. Connie Shemo examines the medical ministries of Kang Cheng and Shi Meiyu, two pioneering Western-trained female doctors who worked as Methodist medical missionaries in China and were proclaimed as models of modern Chinese and Christian womanhood. Chinese women were usually characterised by the missionaries as heathens who lived "narrow lives" that were "downtrodden", and who were "passive recipients of Christian benevolence".²⁶ Shemo argues that Shi subverted such conceptions by founding the independent Bethel Mission (with her close friend Jennie Hughes) to train native nurses and evangelists to reach the rural areas in China. By this time, gender barriers had broken down substantially, allowing Bethel to train males. When asked to explain Bethel's aim in 1925, both Shi and Hughes answered: "To train Chinese leaders in Christian work."²⁷ Shemo's study suggests that such conceptions started to find a certain level of equalisation with the roles of Christian men by the 1920s. This suggestion is affirmed by other research. In her paper, Dana Robert asserts that by the 1920s,

²⁵ Jessie G. Lutz, "Women's Education and Social Mobility", in *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women*, 411.

²⁶ Connie Shemo, "To Develop Native Powers: Shi Meiyu and the Danforth Memorial Hospital Nursing School", in *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women*, 293.

²⁷ Connie Shemo, *The Chinese Medical Ministries of Kang Cheng and Shi Meiyu, 1872–1937: On a Cross-Cultural Frontier of Gender, Race, and Nation* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2011), 216.

“the first generation of educated Chinese Christian women leaders” were taking on leadership roles that were usually occupied by men.²⁸

This gendered angle lends good analytical weight to the histories of CLBS and SCEL as both women and men played key roles in shaping the two institutions. In particular, female leaders, members and students outnumbered men since their establishment. Moreover, many female leaders sat in the key offices of both organisations. This is a significant matter, especially when we consider the preponderance of the patriarchal structure in ecclesiastical bodies whereby women are normally blocked from the top of the hierarchy (such as becoming ordained pastors or bishops). Although, Dana Robert reminds us that such a phenomenon gained increasing acceptance in China by the 1920s, most of these women ran organisations that stayed within the confines of women’s work. The women of CLBS and SCEL, working in a mixed-gender environment, were able to gain a substantial amount of religious influence as they could wield authority and make important decisions on a level that was equal or superior to their male co-workers.

Christianity amongst the Overseas Chinese

Most histories about the overseas Chinese Christians have been written in a “Church-centric mode”, focussing on specific churches and/or denominations and emphasising the contributions of missionaries and ecclesiastical authorities while downplaying the lives of the indigenous Christians. These Church-centric histories can be found in the works of Singaporean historians like Bobby Sng,

²⁸ Dana L. Robert, “World Christianity as a Women’s Movement”, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 30, no. 4 (2006), 180-186.

Theodore Doraisamy and Earnest Lau.²⁹ These men have framed the story of the Singaporean churches as a progression from a mission outpost to a multi-ethnic indigenous Church. Moreover, most of the history of Christianity in Singapore has only been constructed from English-based sources while a vast array of Chinese-language sources generally remain untouched. The first compilation of studies drawing extensively on Chinese-language sources was only published in 2013.³⁰

In the recently published volume just mentioned, the authors analyse John Sung's impact on the Chinese churches in Singapore and Malaysia. Although the studies yield useful assessments about Sung's continuing role as a historical figure, they fail to locate him and the Chinese churches within their larger historical contexts. In a more nuanced study, Robbie Goh examines the history of Singapore's Chinese YMCA, arguing that it symbolised the efforts of the Chinese Church leadership to play a bigger role in society by responding to the "pressing social needs of the day" and championing the rights of the Chinese-educated in a post-war Singapore that became engulfed in racial politics.³¹

Goh's work is representative of some recent scholarship that has moved beyond a Church-centric mode to examine the social and cultural roles of overseas Chinese Christian institutions. Clement Liew, for example, argues that the Catholic Church in Singapore played a crucial role in rooting its Chinese

²⁹ See, for example, Bobby E. K. Sng, *In His Good Time: The Story of the Church in Singapore 1819-2002*, third ed. (Singapore: Bible Society of Singapore, 2002) and; Earnest Lau, *From Mission to Church: the Evolution of the Methodist Church in Singapore and Malaysia, 1885-1976* (Singapore: Genesis Books, 2008).

³⁰ See Ye Shuqing ed., *Songshangjie yu Xinmajiiaohui* [John Sung and the churches in Singapore and Malaysia] (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2013).

³¹ Robbie B. H. Goh, "Singapore's 'Two YMCA's': Christianity, Colonialism, and Ethnic Fault Lines", *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2007), 56.

Catholics to the island. Beyond its core spiritual functions, the Church organised its members into enclaves, providing for their familial, economic and social needs, thus creating an indigenised Church community.³² In Zhu Feng's extensive treatment of the history of the Fuzhou Methodist settlement community in Sibul, Sarawak, he argues that the Methodist Church became the main provider and employer of the Chinese in the settlement, creating a community where Christianity became the main marker of Chinese identity.³³ More recently, Mei-Fen Kuo examines the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Sydney, Australia as a "site for religious worship, education and social engagement", grooming a group of bilingual commercial elites that became influential community leaders and successful businessmen.³⁴

These studies remind us that overseas Chinese Christian institutions cannot be studied merely as ecclesial bodies. A substantial proportion of data can be reconstructed to provide a broader picture of overseas Chinese Christianity as a microcosm of society rather than as a religious entity operating in isolation. By historicising these institutions within the broader social and trans-regional contexts, one will be able to use their histories to clarify their roles and functions in society. In George Marsden's study on Fuller Theological Seminary in North America, he highlights that "institutions stand midway between the people who run them and the larger movements and cultural trends in which they participate...[They] can be means through which to look at both

³² Clement Liew, "Rooting a Church in an Immigrant Society: The Chinese Catholic Community of Singapore 1832 to 1935" (M. A., Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1999).

³³ Zhu Feng, "Christianity and Culture Accommodation of Chinese Overseas – The Case Study on Chinese Methodist Community in Sarawak (1901-1951)" (Ph. D., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004).

³⁴ Mei-Fen Kuo, *Making Chinese Australia: Urban Elites, Newspapers and the Formation of Chinese-Australian Identity, 1892-1912* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2013), 266-267.

the more particular and the more general.”³⁵ I suggest that institutional histories, like those of CLBS and SCEL, can also act as windows into the development of independent Chinese Christianity in Singapore and Malaysia.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis investigates how CLBS and SCEL appropriated the practices of certain fundamentalist Christian leaders outside Singapore and were gradually integrated into global fundamentalist Christianity during the second half of the twentieth century. It also illustrates how the two institutions served as extra-ecclesiastical platforms that expanded the leadership capacities of female Christians, allowing them to move beyond the defined boundaries of women’s work, thus partially circumventing the double patriarchy of Chinese culture and conservative Christianity. Chapter One traces the independent Christian roots of the two institutions by examining the lives and works of John Sung and Jia Yuming, and their related institutions and networks in context of their growing fundamentalism from the 1920s to 1930s. It argues that the founders of both institutions drew heavily on the influences of these men, incorporating their teachings and practices into the organisational models. Chapter Two shows how local efforts to develop the self-propagative capabilities of the Chinese churches through independent revivalism shaped the formation of SCEL and CLBS as complementary institutions. Both organisations were established to support the extensive growth in lay evangelistic work amongst the Chinese Christian communities during the pre-war period. Subsequently, a growing premillennial

³⁵ George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 2.

urgency during the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), caused both institutions to increasingly emphasise pioneering missionary efforts to the New Villages close to home while simultaneously joining the global Christian battle unfolding between fundamentalists and modernists. The final chapter examines the two establishments' involvement in global fundamentalism and pioneering missions, particularly how they developed into a training and sending indigenous missionary agency during the 1960s to the late 1990s.

Note on Sources

I have made extensive use of the Chinese- and English- language sources that are located in the Cultural-Historical Centre (Wenshi Guan) of CLBS. Most of the sources on CLBS and SCEL are magazines that were published to commemorate their five-year anniversary milestones. The Centre holds an almost complete collection of magazines that were published since the end of WWII (1946-2005). However, most of the pre-war publications have either been lost or destroyed. Only a few sources, such as the League's first publications in 1936, the *Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band Magazine* and the notes from John Sung's first Bible study meeting in Singapore remain. For that period, I have also relied heavily on the earliest post-war sources (SCEL magazines) that have recalled and documented events from the late pre-war years (1940-1) in great detail.

I have also drawn on a monthly periodical, the *Malaysia Christian (Nanyang Jidutu)*³⁶, which was first published in 1951 as a quarterly by Quek Kiok Chiang and Timothy Tow (Du Xianghui), the co-founders of the

³⁶ It was renamed *Southeast Asia Christian* in January 1975.

fundamentalist Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore and Malaysia. It was turned into a monthly Chinese publication a few years later and Quek assumed the position of Editor. The leaders of CLBS and SCEL used this periodical to publish announcements and reports about the events that they organised from 1960. This periodical is a key source as it situates the development of both institutions within the worldwide fundamentalist movement. For the time period of my study, I could only locate the issues published between 1961 and 1987. Additionally, I have drawn on autobiographies and biographies of Quek, Tow and various church leaders associated with the two organisations. Finally, I will also be relying on some oral interviews that I have conducted with various leaders of CLBS and SCEL.

Chapter 1: Independent Chinese Christian Roots

Just two years before her death in 1972, Leona Wu reminisced about her higher educational experience at Nanjing's Ginling Women's Theological Seminary (GWTS) which had taught her the all-essential virtues of the Christian faith that kept her going on the less-trodden path of independence as the President of SCEL, and subsequently, as Principal of CLBS.¹ Born in 1894, Wu grew up as a third-generation Christian in a family from Fujian province, the daughter of a pastor with the English Presbyterian Mission (EPM). Wu completed her education in EPM mission schools. Upon graduation from the teachers' college in 1912, she was employed by the Women's Missionary Association (WMA) of the Presbyterian Church of England as a teacher (and in the later years, principal) in a kindergarten and then in a girls' school in Xiamen. In 1932, she enrolled in GWTS to read theology, graduating in 1934. Choosing not to return to the girls' school, she emigrated to Malaya after her father's death. She was recommended by the well-respected EPM missionary educationalist Alan Anderson to fill in a vacant role at a small Hokkien Presbyterian congregation in Kluang, Johor. Other than leading the congregation, Wu was also required to run the church kindergarten.²

Wu's experience, skills and connections would become pivotal in making her a pioneering independent Christian leader in Nanyang. Her twenty years' teaching experience would have also made her well-versed with issues

¹ Leona Wu, "Jinlian – Sanshiwu Nian – Jinian [Remembering 35 Years of Chin Lien]" in *Chin Lien Bible Seminary 35th Anniversary Souvenir Magazine* (hereafter CLBS, 1972), ed. Quek Kiok Chiang and Tay Swee Lan (Singapore: Tiger Press, 1972).

² Fan-Wu Wei Zhen, "Wu Jingling Yuanzhang de Gen yu Guo [Principal Leona Wu's Roots and Fruits]", CLBS, 1988, 11-14.

pertaining to the indigenisation of Christian schools in China. In general, the British mission schools were ahead of their counterparts in terms of nationalisation. This contradicts claims that the indigenisation of mission schools only started after the arousal of anti-foreign sentiments and calls for the restoration of educational rights in 1925-1926.³ Even before the outbreak of the Anti-Foreign Movement and the implementation of government registration for foreign schools, many EPM schools (and British schools) had already started transferring control to the Chinese Christians.⁴

WMA schools like those in Xiamen had begun training and then recruiting their graduates as teachers from as early as the 1900s.⁵ Wu benefitted greatly from the British educational system in China which was being developed rapidly to fulfil their commitments of prioritising social and educational services over direct evangelism. This drive to expand and develop education afforded her and other Christian women with opportunities to embark on their own careers or to even pursue higher education. Thus by the time Wu founded CLBS, she was actually an experienced educator with an expertise in managing at least kindergarten and primary education.

In addition, Wu's influence from the independent Christian legacies of John Sung and Jia Yuming would affect the development of SCEL and CLBS. Together with her co-leaders, she drew on these legacies and her own experiences as an educator to establish the two institutions as independent

³ See, for example the seminal work by Jessie G. Lutz, *China and the Christian Colleges, 1850-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).

⁴ Dan Cui, "British Protestant Educational Activities and the Nationalization of Chinese Education in the 1920s", in *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Glen Peterson, Ruth Hayhoe and Yongling Lu (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 149.

⁵ Edward Band, *Working His Purpose Out: The History of the English Presbyterian Mission, 1847-1947* (Taipei: Cheng Wen, 1972), 296-297.

Christian organisations. Growing up in China during the first three decades of the twentieth century exposed her to the phenomenon of Christian revivals.⁶ The many revival meetings ignited a strong fervour and zeal for evangelism – typically leading to the formation of multiple evangelistic bands which would proceed out from their respective churches.⁷ By the 1920s and 1930s, a new generation of independent Chinese revivalists (such as Sung), born around 1900, came to play a pivotal role in shaping Chinese Christianity.⁸

John Sung and the Evangelistic Bands in the 1920s and 1930s

John Sung (1901-1944) was a famous Chinese revivalist-evangelist whose preaching career was relatively short-lived – lasting a total of 12 years from 1928-1940. He was the son of a Chinese pastor from the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) in Xinghua (Hinghwa), Fuzhou. Sung secured a full tuition scholarship to study at Ohio Wesleyan University in 1920. Initially, his plan was to study theology, but he decided to switch to chemistry. Sung was an exceptional student graduating with a Doctor of Philosophy in chemistry within seven years. Thereafter, Sung reverted to his original plan by enrolling into Union Theological Seminary in New York where he was offered a generous scholarship to study a Master of Divinity.⁹

While at the seminary, Sung “converted” from his traditional evangelical faith to the liberal theology prevalent there during the 1920s.

⁶ Wu was an audience in one of John Sung’s revival meetings in Gulangyu, Xiamen in 1932. Leona Wu, “Yu Songboshi Tonggong de Yiduan Jingguo [An Account of Working with Dr Sung]” in *Singapore Christian Evangelistic League 40th Anniversary Souvenir Magazine* (Hereafter SCEL, 1975), ed. Kiok Chiang Quek and Swee Lan Tay (Singapore: Tiger Press, 1975), 7.

⁷ See, for example, Lim Ka-Tong, *Life and Ministry of John Sung* (Singapore: Genesis Books, 2012).

⁸ Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 135.

⁹ Lim, *Life*, 51.

Liberalism was a widespread theological response to the intellectual challenges of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: “a movement designed to save [American] Protestantism.” As George Marsden, from whom this quotation is taken, explains:

[T]he generations of Protestants that came of age between 1865 and 1917 were faced with the most profound challenges to their faith. Darwinism and higher criticism were challenging the authority of the Bible...Immense social changes plus rapid secularization...were eroding Protestantism’s practical dominance. In personal terms, this meant that many people brought up to accept unquestioningly the complete authority of the Bible...found themselves living in a world where such beliefs no longer were considered intellectually acceptable.¹⁰

Coinciding with the tide of liberalism was the rise of the Social Gospel, which emerged from the growing societal problems plaguing the rapidly urbanising North America in the late 1800s. Previously, American and British evangelicals alike had placed considerable emphasis on charity and social reform as a vehicle for meeting people’s spiritual needs, but now social and spiritual objectives gradually became divorced. Social Gospel advocates were generally disillusioned with evangelism, suggesting that it had made the faith “too otherworldly...and individualistic.” Instead, they “made social concerns central to their understanding of the gospel” – occupying themselves with “voluntary acts of charity” and “new progressive suggestions...for...reforming the social and economic order”. (Fundamentalists and other conservatives, by contrast, became increasingly disinterested in activities which did not involve evangelism, and for these Christians “Social Gospel” often became a term of disdain.)¹¹

¹⁰ George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 32-33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

Sung's shift to liberalism, however, did not last long. While still at Union Seminary, he experienced a personal spiritual crisis which turned him back towards evangelicalism – specifically the anti-modernist fundamentalism that arose during the 1920s. Sung left the seminary without completing his studies and returned to China charged with evangelistic zeal. He found a Chinese Church which was rapidly indigenising (in response to nationalist pressures) and also dealing with the challenges of liberalism and the Social Gospel. China experienced a relatively stable ten-year period (1927-1937) of unification under the Nationalist (Kuomintang) government. During this period, the strong anti-imperialist sentiments of the 1920s would jar the Chinese Christian enterprise into taking major steps to shake off its “foreignness”. The early 1930s would also see the beginnings of localised military campaigns by the Japanese in China, eventually leading to full-scale war.

This ten-year period saw John Sung impacting most of the major cities in China and Nanyang with large-scale evangelistic rallies, either on his own, or with the Bethel Worldwide Evangelistic Band. His rise to prominence began in early 1931, and by May, he was recruited by the Bethel Band, a four-man preaching team that would gain nationwide fame. The Band was commissioned by the Bethel Mission, an “entirely China-based operation” that was an “independent and self-supporting...enterprise”.¹² After leaving Bethel in 1933, Sung continued to lead highly successful revival campaigns that established numerous evangelistic bands.¹³ His soaring reputation allowed him to secure invitations from the leaders of the Chinese churches in Nanyang, who hoped he

¹² Bays, “Growth”, 315.

¹³ See, for example Lim, *Life* and Leslie T. Lyall, *A Biography of John Sung* (Singapore: Armour Publishing, 2004).

would bring forth revival in their churches to strengthen the autonomy of their congregations (this issue will be explored in Chapter Two).

Much has been written on the successes of Sung's revivals. Daniel Bays, for example, characterises Sung as "the single most powerful figure in Chinese revivalism in the 1930s".¹⁴ Lian Xi observes that Sung's successes were due to his use of "the key to mass revivalism: a sweeping, unrelenting attack on sin and insistence on public confessions...break[ing] down the guardedness and pride of individuals...forc[ing] them into a complete surrender to God."¹⁵ However, these techniques were not unique, as other successful China-based revivalists also employed similar strategies.¹⁶

Another way to evaluate Sung's historical significance is to examine his efforts to make Christianity a fully Chinese enterprise. The evangelistic bands that he established around China and Nanyang were intended to address the perennial problem of ensuring that converts from evangelistic campaigns, as well as spiritually revived Christians, would continue in their devotion even after the fervour of revival dissipated. The Christian life, he taught, should be cultivated through the disciplined exercise of spiritual practices like prayer, the frequent confession of sins and evangelising others.¹⁷ Sung knew that it was important to keep his followers in a self-running communal structure that reinforced such practices. On the other hand, Sung was clearly not in the business of setting up his own church, unlike his contemporaries Watchman

¹⁴ Bays, *New History*, 138.

¹⁵ Lian, *Redeemed*, 144.

¹⁶ See Daniel H. Bays, "Christian Revival in China, 1900-1937", in *Modern Christian Revivals*, ed. Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 163 and 165-168.

¹⁷ Li Zhenqun, "Songshangjie de Shenxue yu Shulingguan [Sung's Theology and Spiritual View]", in *Sung's Theology and Spiritual View*, ed. Chen Jinshi (Malaysia: Malaysia Bible Seminary, 2002), 34.

Nee (Ni Tuosheng) and Wang Mingdao (the most reputed Chinese fundamentalist of the twentieth century), both of whom established their own churches. Although Sung remained a strong advocate of an independent Chinese Christianity – one that would be free of missionary dominance and fully Chinese-led – he was equally mindful about the importance of Church unity and discouraged the creation of more denominations.¹⁸ The various bands he created were organised into Evangelistic Leagues that would partner the denominations and work within their structures.¹⁹

Sung's revival campaigns in Singapore during 1935 sparked a Church-wide spiritual renewal, leading to the founding of SCEL. Clearly enshrined into its Constitution (1936) is the principle of Three-Self (*Sanzi Zhuyi*): self-governance, self-support and self-propagation. The origins of this principle can be traced back to the early nineteenth century when mission administrators promoted the grand aim of “building a genuinely native church” that would develop along the lines of the principle of “Three-Self”.²⁰ Although this principle was never adopted as an official movement till after WWII (when it became the designation for the official Protestant Church in the People's Republic of China), both the Chinese Christians and missionaries commonly appropriated it to symbolise their desire for the eventual development of a fully indigenous Christianity divested of any Western missionary influence.

¹⁸ Lim, *Life*, 177.

¹⁹ There is one account of a group of more than 300 enthusiasts that broke off to form a new church with Sung's blessings. See Lian, *Redeemed*, 150, Lim, *Life*, 187 and Timothy Tow, *The Asian Awakening* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1988), 178.

²⁰ Peter Tze Ming Ng, *Chinese Christianity: An Interplay between Global and Local Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 68.

The Leagues were indigenously-run enterprises entirely free of any missionary involvement. Its evangelistic bands were independently managed under the Three-Self principle. Organised into districts, they functioned as autonomous groups mutually accountable to each other and to the League's executive committee – which was under the charge of a locally-elected President. Usually, the bands that made up a district came from a single church (hence districts were typically identified by the churches the band members came from, such as Hingwa Chinese Methodist Church district). The bands were not allowed to source for external donations and had to cover their own expenses. The League's overhead and other expenses were to be fully covered by contributions from the districts.²¹ The Constitution also required the members of the bands to remain fully committed members of their own congregations.²² Sung was not involved in the running of the Leagues in various places, though he wrote numerous letters to their Presidents and conducted spiritual training sessions for band members during his return visits.

The bands organised a minimum of one evangelistic session per week, using open-air preaching or door-to-door visitations. Regular Bible study sessions and sermons were also held to sustain the revivalist fervour and commitment of the members. By mobilising the laity, they served to “democratise” the role of evangelism in the churches, which tended to be overly-reliant on the pastors or evangelists for this work, with minimal lay participation.²³ The problem of overreliance was exacerbated by the laity's low

²¹ “Xingzhou Jidujiao Budaotuan Guizhang [Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band Constitution]”, in Zhuang Jiqing et al., eds, *Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band Magazine* (Singapore: Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band, 1936) (Hereafter SCEB, 1936), 80-82.

²² *Ibid.*, 80-82.

²³ Tow, *Awakening*, 52.

education levels, lack of training and “spiritual immaturity”. John Sung’s all-rounded approach to revivalism was meant to overcome such limitations by equipping them with the necessary skills in the absence of formal training.

The Evangelistic League was clearly influenced by Sung’s involvement in the Bethel Mission in China and was arguably modelled after its “independent and self-supporting” standard and its close collaboration with churches.²⁴ As its aim was to produce native nurses and “trained Chinese Christian leaders in self-supporting evangelism”, Bethel’s work represented an excellent practical training ground. Self-support was also built into its overall financial practices: Bethel was set up as a “faith mission”, “independent of any foreign mission board and depending entirely on God” for its support.²⁵

Like the Mission, the League bands were effectively commissioned to work with the churches to augment the work of evangelism. However, the League went a step further: the bands not only partnered the churches but sought to work within them while remaining fully autonomous, under the League’s guidance. The League was not a mission that employed full-time staff but rather a tightly-knit coalition of bands run by the laity. It promoted a bottom-up self-support mechanism that encouraged the members to be the main financial investors and drivers of the evangelistic work at multiple levels: band, district and League.²⁶

Sung’s practice of focussing solely on evangelism through revival meetings and evangelistic bands was characteristic of the fundamentalists

²⁴ Bays, “Growth”, 315.

²⁵ Shemo, *Chinese Medical Ministries*, 211.

²⁶ See, for example, Paul Sin-Hon Hang, *My Christian Testimony* (Singapore: Paul Hang, 1970), 16.

(whether Western missionaries or Chinese Christian leaders) of that day. This was in sharp contrast to leading Protestant bodies like the National Christian Council in China (the main inter-denominational and cooperative advisory body, organised under joint missionary and Chinese leadership in 1922) and the YMCA, which ran programmes like the Mass Literacy Campaign and the reconstruction of the rural areas to improve the crop cultivation processes of the farmers²⁷ in order to fit in with the New Culture Movement themes of the day. All these efforts were meant to promote a specifically liberal Christian concept of “social regeneration” relevant to the social context.²⁸ Jun Xing observes that the liberals made a “fundamental departure” from the evangelical understanding of original sin (depravity of men as the basis for all problems) in order to redefine sin socially. In this new definition, sin was caused by “social and economic forces [or problems] beyond individual control.”²⁹ Furthermore, they also attempted to Sinify the sociality of sin by aligning it with humanistic Chinese philosophies. The liberals argued that human nature was inherently “good” and was only “perverted” by negative societal influences.³⁰ As these assumptions came to diminish the importance of evangelism amongst the liberals, fundamentalists like Sung reacted by promoting direct evangelism as a core agenda.

This did not mean that the fundamentalists abandoned the provision of social services. Organisations like the Bethel Mission continued to engage in such work, but more selectively with specific spiritual objectives. Following the example of nineteenth-century missionaries who evangelised through both

²⁷ Jun, “Baptised”, 67-69.

²⁸ Lian, *Conversion*, 159-160.

²⁹ Jun, “Baptised”, 100.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

preaching and social services,³¹ the fundamentalists would continue to subordinate the use of such services to the chief goal of evangelism. To them, personal salvation was an essential basis for the meaningful provision of social services.³²

Jia Yuming and Conservative Theological Education in China during the 1920s and 1930s

The second major legacy inherited by CLBS and SCEL was that of Jia Yuming (1880-1964), known as the “Dean of China’s Theological Academy” and considered as one of China’s finest Christian theologians.³³ Jia was a prolific author, devoting his life to writings on doctrinal orthodoxy and Christian spirituality. Jia was trained by conservative American Presbyterian (North) missionaries to China during his days as an undergraduate and a theology student (1896?-1901) in Tengchow (Dengzhou) College in Shandong.³⁴ He benefited from a cross-cultural education at Tengchow College. Other than being exposed to a range of subjects from the Western sciences and languages to the Chinese classics, he was also well-trained with a Calvinist (Reformed)³⁵ theological background, and he stayed thoroughly evangelical throughout his life. Jia devoted a large proportion of his career to theological education in general and particularly to the development of fundamentalist theology in China. From 1915 to 1936, he worked at as a Professor at Nanking (Nanjing)

³¹ Yao, *Fundamentalist Movement*, 34.

³² Shemo, *Chinese Medical Ministries*, 211.

³³ Xie Longyi, *Jiduren: Jiayuming de Lingming Shenxue* [Christ Man: Jia Yuming’s Spiritual Theology] (Taipei: China Evangelical Seminary, 2008), 43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁵ Calvinism is the theological system associated with the Reformer John Calvin that emphasises the sovereignty and authority of God over all things in its understanding of Scripture, humanity, salvation, and the church. Calvinism is associated with Reformed theology and more specifically with Presbyterianism. See Hillerbrand, *Encyclopaedia*, 544-554.

Theological Seminary, North China Theological Seminary (NCTS) in Shandong, and GWTS and then as the Vice-Principal and Principal of NCTS and GWTS respectively. In 1936, he founded the independent Spiritual Training Seminary in Nanjing.³⁶

Jia's career mirrored the rise of fundamentalism in higher theological education in China, and the historical developments in NCTS during the 1920s and 1930s reflected the fundamentalist-modernist controversies discussed in the previous section. By the 1920s, four kinds of theological institutions existed: (a) schools of theology and religion within the setup of a Christian university, typically offering graduate level entry work; (b) union and denominational seminaries requiring senior middle school qualifications; (c) theological training schools requiring junior or junior middle school qualifications; and (d) Bible schools, which had the lowest level of entry requirements.³⁷ Whilst the institutions in categories (c) and (d) continued to offer evangelically-based education for the training of lower-level Christian workers for the grassroots, the theological orientations of categories (a) and (b) started to diverge, with the former taking a turn towards liberalism. A missionary scholar termed these distinctions as the "Classical-Dogmatic Type" (conservative) and the "Scientific-Historical Type" (liberal).³⁸ Peter Ng observes that liberal schools like the Yenching University School of Religion sought to "modernise" their theological curriculum by transforming the evangelical approach to a broader one resembling what would later become the field of religious studies, an

³⁶ Guo, *Fandui Heyi*, 60. The seminary moved to Chongqing during the war before moving back to Nanjing in 1946, and subsequently to Shanghai in 1949.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 74, quoting Samuel H. Leger, *Education of Christian Ministers in China, A History and Critical Study* (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1925), 41-67.

academic study of religion through “scientific and historical methods” like psychology and philosophy.³⁹

This liberal turn in theological education provoked a sharp fundamentalist response. The best example of this was seen in NCTS, whose curriculum fit the definition of a “Classical-Dogmatic type” based on “a supernatural revelation involving a distinct break into history from another realm” that is only revealed through the Bible.⁴⁰ The seminary had a relatively broad curriculum consisting of subjects like systematic theology, church history, comparative religion, English language and both the human and social sciences – all within an orthodox and anti-modernist perspective, geared towards the dual objective of affirming the historicity of the Bible and repudiating the assertions of theological liberalism.⁴¹ Among the churches and institutions in North America which supported NCTS financially, it gained a reputation as “a protest against the rationalistic teaching of the [liberal] missionaries” and was even compared to the fundamentalist Westminster Theological Seminary founded by the famous Princeton theologian John Gresham Machen in Pennsylvania in 1929.⁴²

Independence and self-support became key objectives for conservative theological schools during this period in order to become truly indigenous Christian organisations. Jia Yuming and his co-workers went a step further by leaving the conservative mission-supported schools to found independent theological schools that would be entirely self-supporting. The NCTS was an

³⁹ Peter Tze Ming Ng, “The Necessity of Particular in the Globalisation of Christianity: The case of China”, *Studies in World Christianity* 12, no. 2 (2006): 168-170. Also see, *Changing Paradigms*, 101-127.

⁴⁰ Ng, *Changing Paradigms*, 74.

⁴¹ Yao, *Fundamentalist Movement*, 151-152.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 163-164.

anomalous case among mission-supported seminaries. Although officially supported by the American Presbyterian Mission (North), it was explicitly identified as a “Chinese (i.e., locally-run)” school as it was largely under the control of the Chinese Presbyterian churches in Shandong and Jiangsu. Due to the tight global financial conditions during the 1920s and 1930s, the mission board was unable to provide much funding for NCTS. Only the missionary-teachers continued to draw their salaries from the mission board. As the seminary drew many students from the rural areas of China who were economically poorer, the local leadership kept NCTS as financially independent from the mission board as possible while catering to the needs of these students. It kept its expenses low and “encourage[d] financial commitment” from the Chinese churches.⁴³ Thus, like the Bethel Mission, NCTS did not have a fixed source of regular income and relied on the voluntary support of the Chinese churches and non-mission foreign funding to finance the school. In many ways, NCTS was run like a “faith mission” along the lines mentioned earlier in this chapter.

The independent Spiritual Training Seminary (STS) Jia founded in Nanjing was also clearly influenced by the “faith missions” principle. Students were not to solicit donations or borrow money to cover school fees or living expenses. Instead, they were to maintain an unshakeable belief that God would provide what they needed.⁴⁴ Unlike mission-run seminaries (including conservative centres like the NCTS), spiritual appetency rather than educational qualifications was made the main criterion for entry, effectively broadening its

⁴³ Yao, *Fundamentalist Movement*, 159.

⁴⁴ Xie, *Jiduren*, 56.

reach to a wider range of students. It is likely that the trend of “Scientific-Historical Type” religious studies in seminaries to the neglect of doctrinal orthodoxy caused Jia (himself a highly trained theologian) to lose confidence in the state of Christian intellectualism, and emphasise instead the importance of orthodox faith and spirituality. Jia argued that “theological studies should not lay particular stress on knowledge. [Instead] theological students should pursue a full life that is permeated with [Biblical] truth and abundant with spiritual strength”.⁴⁵ Nor was STS the first indigenously-run school to prioritise personal spirituality over intellectual development. In 1916, Dora Yu (the first female revivalist of nationwide acclaim) established the Jiangwan Bible School in Shanghai to train female evangelists.⁴⁶ Jiangwan had no form of academic qualification requirements, welcoming any female who had decided to dedicate herself to fulltime Christian work.⁴⁷

Despite its broad entry criteria, Jia’s STS sought to maintain academic standards, offering three courses with differentiated entry requirements, one of them a four-year theological course accepting only university and senior middle school graduates.⁴⁸ Although the curriculum was not as broad as that of NCTS, its four-year theological course was likely pitched at a level similar to that of its conservative North American counterparts. For example, Timothy Tow – who completed one year of theological studies in STS from 1947-1948 – was

⁴⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁶ Lian, *Redeemed*, 39-40.

⁴⁷ Silas Wu, *Dora Yu and Christian Revival in 20th-Century China* (Mandarin Translation) (Boston: Pishon River Publications, 2010), 164-166.

⁴⁸ Guo, *Fandui Heyi*, 59.

sufficiently qualified to transfer to the ultra-conservative Faith Theological Seminary in Delaware.⁴⁹

STS's focus on personal spirituality, then, cannot be taken to be inherently anti-intellectual. Jia advocated theological education as a way not only to intellectualise about God and the Church, but also to achieve a heightened spiritual experience.⁵⁰ Thus, the issues like “faith”, “independence” and “knowledge” were to be subsumed under a programme known as *spiritual cultivation (lingxiu)*, whose aim was to help the Christian to achieve what Jia called Christ's plan of “perfect salvation”. This meant that redemption could be attained at all levels of life in the person: soul, spirit and flesh (i.e., the outermost part of a human's being).⁵¹ Redemption, in this case, was not merely the otherworldly state of salvation that would be fully experienced only after death but should be experienced in all its fullness when one was alive, transforming a Christian into a “Christ Person (*Jiduren*)”. Jia believed that “one's rational faculties must first be spiritualized...and one's reason must undergo a ‘baptism by the Holy Spirit’.”⁵² The spiritualisation of the interior was meant to result in the progressive transformation of the exterior into a redeemed state – where one becomes the Way (*Dao*) to eternal life by “overcoming” sinfulness and “centring” one's life on God.⁵³ As Jia explained:

What one gains from intellectual inquiry of the Scriptures is knowing the Way.
 What one gains from learning the Scriptures by heart is the essence of the Way.
 What one gains from bodily learning of the Scriptures is the virtue of the Way.

⁴⁹ Timothy Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow* (Singapore: FEBC Bookroom, 2001), 116-124.

⁵⁰ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 76-77. Asad carries a reference to Marcel Mauss's contention that the “body should be seen as a developable means to achieving a range of human objectives”, including spiritual experiences.

⁵¹ Sze-Kar Wan, “Competing tensions: A Search for May Fourth Biblical Hermeneutics”, in *Reading Christians Scriptures in China*, ed. Chloe Starr (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 104.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁵³ Xie, *Jiduren*, 237-251.

[But] what one gains from the spiritual learning of Scriptures is the...transformation of the body into the Way.⁵⁴

Sze-Kar Wan observes that Jia's spiritual cultivation programme bears much resemblance to the "Neo-Confucian...understanding of the classics as a guide for moral cultivation [*xiushen*]." ⁵⁵ In cultivating one's self to live a proper Christian life, one is required to put to death the sinful self of the mortal body in order for the new Christ-like self to be "born again" in that mortal body. In other words, spiritual cultivation calls for a this-worldly enjoinment of one's spirit to God's, achieving the Confucian goal of "Heaven and man interlinked, Deity and man becoming one (*tianren xiangtong, shenren heyi*)" through a Christian paradigm.⁵⁶ Jia embraced the evangelical belief in original sin, and as a Calvinist he rejected any understanding of men as "inherently good" as he believed that the starting point to spiritual cultivation was a person's conversion to Christianity.⁵⁷

Jia's attempt to create a model of an independent and mature Chinese Christian, then, found its expression in Chinese clothing. Issues like self-support, faith and even knowledge acquisition were meant to be different forms of training and experiences that gradually transformed a Christian spiritually and morally – not into a Confucian sage (*Shengren*) but into a Christ-like figure. Jia's rendering contended that the Christian Way was better than the Chinese understanding of the Way as a path towards moral perfection. His particular theology, however, did not transform Christianity into a Chinese philosophy; rather, he made Christianity understandable through a Chinese framework.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁵ Wan, "Competing tensions", 104.

⁵⁶ Xie, *Jiduren*, 294-297.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 198.

Spiritual Cultivation as a Model for Chin Lien

Jia's model of spiritual cultivation essentially became the basis for running CLBS when Leona Wu founded the seminary. The school subscribed to an alternate version of the Three-Self principle, one which Jia called: the "Three-No's (*Sanbu*)": (1) no borrowing of money, (2) no lending of money for personal gain (giving money away is preferable to lending), and (3) no purchase on credit.⁵⁸ Although the students paid no tuition or dormitory fees, they had to raise their own money to pay for the various in-resident fees and daily expenses. Similarly, Wu and her co-workers worked without regular salaries, relying on the financial contributions of supporters.⁵⁹ Jia called this practice of going without any regular wage as the highest form of "faith" that a fulltime Christian worker could undertake, reflecting full spiritual dependence on God's providence.⁶⁰

Achieving a long-term lifestyle of independence became the chief aim of the seminary's curriculum, which was modelled after that of the "Classical-Dogmatic Type" adopted by most conservative theological schools in China. The curriculum of CLBS was considerably narrower in scope compared to NCTS – it comprised mostly church-centric subjects as opposed to the humanities and sciences. CLBS also offered a variety of practical skill-training courses to equip the students with skillsets for evangelism and religious education.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Wu, "Yu Songboshi", 7.

⁵⁹ "Prospectus", CLBS, 1972, 6-7.

⁶⁰ See *Nanzhong* (*Southern Bell*) (hereafter, *SB*), Oct 1934, 12-13.

⁶¹ See, for example, "Prospectus", 6-7.

Similar to the kind of training that Sung introduced into the evangelistic bands, seminary lessons were reinforced through compulsory participation in SCEL's weekly evangelistic work and its various meetings. Students were also required to cultivate spiritual disciplines such as daily personal devotions and communal prayers at fixed times.⁶² One student recalled that a typical day lasted for at least 14 hours, starting before dawn with personal devotions and daily chores before breakfast and ending past dinner time. Before retiring to bed, the students were required to attend a compulsory chapel session where ample time was given to prayer.⁶³ This highly-disciplined student lifestyle became the hallmark of CLBS's training and many students expressed a sense of being spiritually transformed and pushed to their limits.⁶⁴ They were being challenged to achieve the type of revivalist lifestyle that John Sung advocated, but in the mould and theology of Jia Yuming.

Chinese Christian Women in the 1920s and 1930s

This final section lays out core gender issues pertaining to the challenges, changing roles and status, and relations with the institutional ecclesiastical culture that Chinese Christian women were faced with in the 1920s and 1930s. These are key issues as CLBS and SCEL were dominated by women since their founding in the 1930s. Moreover, Leona Wu and her female successors continued to hold on to the highest positions of authority in both institutions for about 60 years, before these positions were taken over by a small group of male

⁶² Ibid, 6-7.

⁶³ Zhang Zhuen, "Shenxueyuan Shenghuo Diandi [Life in the Seminary]", CLBS, 1977, 24.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Gao Jingtai, "Daogao yu Budao [Prayer and Evangelism]", *Singapore Christian Evangelistic League 60 Anniversary Souvenir Magazine (1935-1995)* (Hereafter SCEL, 1995) (Singapore: Tiger Litho Press, 1995), 16.

pastors by the mid-1990s. In order to understand why women were able to play such an influential role in independent Christian institutions by the 1920s and 1930s, we must briefly turn our attention to the growing opportunities for social mobility that they had gradually begun to enjoy in China since the nineteenth century. Women were generally able to gain access to these opportunities through religious and parochial education, and leadership within the women's sphere in churches; thus they acquired more freedom to manoeuvre within (or even to overcome) the hierarchical strictures of Confucian patriarchy and conservative Christianity.

Cultures which adopted Confucianism as their basis of social organisation were built on two primary principles of human relations: an ordered hierarchy from the elder to the younger and a division between the genders governed by a superior-inferior relationship, with men occupying the superior position. This also meant strict gender segregation and role division, with the women occupying the "inner sphere" subordinated to the men's "outer sphere". Women were also required to practice the "three submissions" to men – to their father, husband and son at various stages in their lives – effectively reinforcing their subordinated gendered status.⁶⁵

Rigid patriarchal structures were also prevalent in most conservative churches, as their understanding of the Bible affirmed the injunctions that St Paul set forth for the Church in the New Testament. Women were subordinate and limited to lower-level leadership roles in churches (such as lay Sunday School teachers) because (1) the "subordination of women was inherent in the

⁶⁵ See Kelly H. Chong, *Deliverance and Submission: Evangelical Women and the Negotiation of Patriarchy in South Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 58-62, for a good concise discussion on Neo-Confucianism.

created order...[as] Eve came from Adam's rib as his loving subordinate, not his equal" and, (2) women had to bear the consequence of being the inferior gender because Eve was the first to sin at the Fall.⁶⁶ Moreover, most churches also prevented women from holding on to public teaching roles, as Paul's injunctions in the book of 1 Timothy forbade women to teach or to exercise authority over men. These injunctions generally limited women's roles to gender-specific activities such as teaching other women or children.

However, churches also provided the Chinese women with outlets to transcend the hierarchy. As Angela Wong puts it, the "religious space" that churches provided "served as an important 'extraterritory' for shelter away from home, a training ground for independence, as well as a bridge to the world."⁶⁷ Religious and parochial education became a primary avenue for these women to become more socially mobile. In the churches, missionaries taught the women how to read and write in Romanised scripts of the various dialects, using concise Christian tracts and books and simple hymn-like ballads, enabling them to attain a level of literacy which equipped them as native evangelising agents.⁶⁸ Some women – especially those who were middle-aged – were recruited as missionary assistants and Bible women, teaching women in the churches and evangelising in mission stations.⁶⁹ By the 1920s, higher education opportunities were offered in women's colleges like Ginling which were producing graduates trained for all sorts of professions – teaching, nursing, medicine, preaching and

⁶⁶ Margaret L. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 36, 44-45.

⁶⁷ Angela Wong Wai Ching, "Negotiating between Two Patriarchies: Chinese Christian Women in Postcolonial Hong Kong", in *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity, and Body*, ed. Jinhua Jia, Xiaofei Kang, and Ping Yao (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2014), 166.

⁶⁸ Kwok, *Chinese women*, 74-80. Also see Jessie G. Lutz and R. Ray Lutz, *Hakka Chinese Confront Protestant Christianity, 1850-1900: with the Autobiographies of Eight Hakka Christians, and Commentary* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 223-224.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

even law. These women (still a minority) could thus attain a certain degree of independence from their natal families as well as the possibility of re-negotiating and contesting inter-familial marriage arrangements.⁷⁰

During the nineteenth century, Chinese churches conformed to the practice of segregating sexes. Church activities and leadership were also divided by gender; men held the overall power, since only they could undergo the ordination required for the top positions of pastor or elder. Women, on the other hand, were provided with the rare chance to develop administrative capacities – something lacking in the “inner sphere”. By the early 1900s, there were reports of women serving at low-level non-ordained leadership roles in some denominations, transcending the gender division. By the 1920s, certain denominations were taking steps to ordain women.⁷¹

Despite the opening up of opportunities and greater social mobility for the Chinese Christian women – both within and outside the churches – the institutional culture of ecclesiastical patriarchy resulted in a paradoxical situation: whilst women were given opportunities to transcend the rigid Confucian patriarchy, they remained subject to a “glass ceiling” in churches based on the perceived divinely-ordered gender hierarchy.⁷² Despite the rise of theological liberalism and the Social Gospel in the Chinese Church during the 1920s and 1930s, the majority of mainline Chinese churches and independent churches (which were mostly fundamentalist and Pentecostal in theological

⁷⁰ Lutz, “Women’s Education”, 406 and 410-416.

⁷¹ See, for example, Kwok, *Chinese women*, 84-85.

⁷² Angela Wong also highlights this contradictory relationship in her chapter on “Negotiating Gender Identity: Postcolonialism and Hong Kong Christian Women” in *Gender and Change in Hong Kong: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and Chinese Patriarchy*, ed. Eliza W.Y. Lee (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 157-158.

orientation) remained conservative in outlook insofar as gender roles/hierarchy were concerned. Despite the steps taken to promote gender equality within some church hierarchies, huge resistance from within continued to limit any form of progressive measures that were taken.⁷³

Nevertheless, the pluralisation of the Christian landscape during this period created a variety of extra-ecclesiastical organisations that women could work in. Other than theological colleges, there was the rise in independent churches and indigenous faith missions where women played important roles. In many of these establishments (though not the actual churches, which tended to maintain patriarchal structures), women were able to occupy the highest leadership roles, manage the organisation and work with their male co-workers on relatively equal terms. Even though most of these institutions were fundamentalist in nature, their extra-ecclesiastical character meant that they operated in a more egalitarian structure. Operating outside a church setting enabled these institutions to circumvent Biblical gender injunctions for their more pressing goals of evangelism and training of Christian workers. The spaces that they created allowed them to uphold a broad ideological belief in the created order whilst giving women autonomy to work beyond the thresholds of the gender divide without subverting them. This highly contradictory picture of gender roles and relations within Chinese Protestant scene poses an important question: How did fundamentalist women leaders in extra-ecclesiastical

⁷³ See, for example, Hu Weiqing, “Kunan de Moshi: Jindai Lingdong Diqu Nüjidutu de Chuandao yu Zhengdao [A Model of Suffering: the Preaching and Sermons of Female Christians in the Lingdong Region in the recent times]”, in *Xingbie yu Lishi: Jindai Zhongguo Funü yu Jidujiao*, ed. Tao Feiya (Shanghai: Shanghai Renwenshe ke Xinlun Congshu, 2006), 292.

organisations negotiate the issue of patriarchy within the Church? We will return to these issues in a later chapter.

As we have seen, the legacies passed on to CLBS and SCEL are complex, interweaving and interlocking between issues pertaining to the formation of independent Christianity in China, conflicting fundamentalist-modernist visions of Chinese Christianity and gender roles within Chinese society and the churches. For the cases of Sung and Jia, the questions of independence and doctrinal orthodoxy were tightly interlinked as they established indigenously-run organisations that promoted direct evangelism, personal spirituality and fundamentalism. These legacies formed the bases of the organisational models that SCEL and CLBS appropriated, firmly establishing them as the progeny of independent Christianity through the line of Sung and Jia. Women who worked in these organisations were enabled to operate beyond gender boundaries despite the continued presence of the patriarchal limits within the ecclesia. How, then, did the founders and leaders of both institutions draw on these legacies (which can also be taken as conceptual resources)? How did they utilise, modify and adapt these resources to the context of Christianity in Singapore and Malaya? We will explore these issues in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: A Seminary for the Evangelistic Bands (1935-1960)

On February 4 1935, various church representatives and leaders of the Singapore Chinese Christian Inter-Church Union (Xinjiapo Jidujiao Huaqiao Lianhehui) met to set up a revival meetings preparatory committee. The Union was a Protestant inter-denominational body founded in 1931 by the Chinese church leaders from the Methodist, Presbyterian and Anglican denominations. Before this meeting, the SCCIU leaders had come to a general consensus about the gloomy spiritual state of their churches.¹ The Union decided that the best solution was to invite John Sung, the most famous independent revivalist in China, to conduct a series of revival meetings in Singapore during September that year.²

The new Singapore-based Union was made up of pastors who had migrated during the 1920s and 1930s and had probably experienced the numerous revivals in China during the early twentieth century. Revivals such as the 1909 Hinghwa Pentecost, and the nationwide campaigns of Dora Yu and Ding Limei (the first Chinese revivalist of nationwide acclaim) during the 1910s-1920s had brought many conversions. Rev Lim Hong Ban (Lin Hongwan), who eventually became the main advisory pastor for SCEL during the pre-war years, had been closely involved with the Hinghwa Pentecost.³ The

¹ Paul Hang, “Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Shiwunianlai de Huigu [An Account of the past 15 years for Singapore Christian Evangelistic League]”, in *The Fifteenth Anniversary Magazine of the Singapore Christian Evangelistic League* (Hereafter SCEL, 1951), ed. Paul Hang (Singapore: Xingzhou Nanyang Yingwu Gongsi, 1951), 235.

² *Ibid.*, 235.

³ Lim, *Life*, 33; Leona Wu, “Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Zhongtuan Shunianlai de Jianbao [A Concise Report of Singapore Christian Evangelistic League over the years]”, in *Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band Magazine: Fifth Edition* (Hereafter SCEB, 1946), ed. Paul Hang (Singapore: Xingzhou Zhongying Gongsi, 1946), 83.

1935 John Sung revivals paved the way for the introduction of the revivalist and fundamentalist strands of independent Christianity in Singapore through the formation of SCEL and CLBS.

Before Revival: Growing Local Consciousness and Autonomy in Chinese Churches

During the early twentieth century, the Chinese churches in Singapore and Malaya were becoming gradually more autonomous from missionary control. The missions had to rely increasingly on their Chinese pastors, preachers and Bible women to work among the multiple dialect communities. There were just too few missionaries, and their numbers were not increasing because priority was given to the more well-established mission fields in China and India.⁴

However, the growth of church autonomy was not just a result of a shortage of missionary manpower. Some mission organisations took steps to create self-governing and self-supporting congregations in Singapore and Malaya. In 1901, the eight Chinese congregations that EPM missionary J. A. B Cook had established over the past 20 years were organised into a Synod (at that time the highest intra-denominational body of authority within the Presbyterian Church), which increased in authority over the next few decades.⁵ The Presbyterians in Singapore and Malaya were no doubt also aware that some churches in Fujian and Chaozhou were already largely self-governing and self-

⁴ It can be also argued that the mission boards were forced to devolve power to the indigenous Christians from the First World War to the Great Depression as their finances were greatly affected. See Kwan Qi Xiang, "Connectionalism and Print: Network, Ideas and Community Formation in the Chinese-speaking Methodists of Malaysia and Singapore, 1936-1960" (M. A., Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2015 (forthcoming)).

⁵ Band, *Purpose*, 533 and 537; *The Presbyterian Church in Singapore and Malaysia: 90th anniversary of the church and 70th anniversary of the synod* (Singapore: 1970), 8.

supporting by 1913.⁶ The churches planted by the EPM and Reformed Church of America in South China were the first denominations to institute plans to create a Three-Self native Church. David Cheung underscores that the process of devolving power from the missionaries to the Chinese involved active steps taken by both parties to make the independent Church a reality. Cheung however notes that the missionaries continued to retain a “moral leadership” (in terms of capacity to advice) over the native pastors despite the theoretical equality in positional standing that the devolution in power afforded the natives *vis-à-vis* the missionaries.⁷

The Chinese Presbyterians in Singapore also worked keenly towards autonomy. Half of their ten congregations were self-supporting by 1919. By 1931, all the congregations represented in the Synod were required to self-finance. Congregations also contributed to a Home Mission Fund used to pay for the administrative costs of the Presbyterian elementary schools.⁸ From 1901 to 1925, local pastors took on the leading function of preparing the rules and regulations of the Church.⁹ The Chinese, in this sense, had the freedom to work out their own “doctrinal and administrative definitions” or way of church governance in their own contexts.¹⁰ This is not to say, however, that missionary influence was entirely absent from the Presbyterian Church. Missionaries such as Alan Anderson remained well-respected figures within the Synod and

⁶ See further evidence of how the Singapore Synod constantly used various South China Presbyterian Synods’ governing documents as blueprints for its own founding documents from 1901 to 1968 in *The Presbyterian Church in Singapore: 1881-1981, 100th anniversary commemoration volume* (Singapore: Presbyterian Church, 1981), 195-196.

⁷ David Cheung, *Christianity in Modern China, the Making of the First Native Protestant Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 318 and 338-343.

⁸ *Presbyterian Church in Singapore and Malaysia*, 27.

⁹ *Presbyterian Church in Singapore: 1881-1981*, 195-196.

¹⁰ George A. Hood, *Mission Accomplished? The English Presbyterian Mission in Lingtung, South China* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1986), 142 and 294.

churches, working largely as unofficial advisors/mentors to the Chinese pastors while partnering with them to minister to the congregations, plant new churches and establish schools within the region.¹¹

Similarly, the Chinese-speaking Methodist churches in Singapore and Malaya formed a separate Malaysia Chinese Mission Conference (MCMC) from the missionary-led Malaya Annual Conference, but only in 1936.¹² A recent study demonstrates that the establishment of the MCMC was part of the Methodist leaders' strategy of utilising intra-denominational, inter-denominational and revival platforms to achieve greater autonomy from the missionaries.¹³ This movement towards intra-denominational unity among the Chinese churches was also indicative of wider ecumenical cooperation which found its early expression in the Singapore Overseas Chinese Christian Nanyang Evangelistic Band (an inter-denominational band formed by pastors of the various Chinese churches) and the SCCIU in 1928 and 1931 respectively.¹⁴ Unlike the more liberal National Christian Council in China, the SCCIU was conservative theologically and used revivalism and evangelism as its main strategies to augment the growth of the Chinese churches during the pre-war years. As we shall see, SCCIU leaders displayed strong support for SCEL throughout this period, using the League as a platform to popularise evangelism amongst the laity.

¹¹ See *The Presbyterian Church in Singapore and Malaysia*, 9-10 and 17-18. Timothy Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story* (Singapore: Life Book Centre, 1995), 73, carries a more negative reference to the mentoring role of the EPM missionaries, who were seen to be influencing some Chinese pastors with modernist beliefs.

¹² Lau, *From Mission*, 132. Permission was given by The Malaya Annual Conference of the MEC (founded 1902) in 1932 to set up the MCMC. Also see Koh Tiang Peng, "Sung and the Unsung: John Sung's place in the memory and 1930s history of Singapore's Chinese Methodist Churches" (Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2014), 20-25.

¹³ Koh, "Sung", 28-30.

¹⁴ Hang, "Xingzhou Jidutu", 235. The Band was subsequently absorbed into the SCCIU.

An Evangelistic League for Revival

During the early 1930s, colonial Singapore and Malaya were suffering from the ill-effects of the Great Depression. Many Chinese immigrants were forced to relocate back to China. The Chinese churches suffered a sharp decline in membership and financial offerings especially after 1931.¹⁵ At the same time, anti-Japanese nationalistic fervour was spilling over into the Chinese communities in the region. After Japan invaded Manchuria in September 1931, strong anti-Japanese activism broke out in Malaya in the form of economic boycotts against Japanese goods.¹⁶ These developments shaped the mood of the local Chinese community and may have drawn the Christians away from active participation in their churches, thus contributing to the state of spiritual backwardness that the SCCIU leaders lamented in 1935.

The Chinese Methodist leadership also discussed this issue extensively, repeatedly complaining that “low levels of spirituality” meant that the members “were not mature enough to take on additional responsibilities, creating a continued need for missionaries.”¹⁷ Another problem was the lay members’ overreliance on their pastors, noted in Chapter One. During the revivals, John Sung castigated the churches for exploiting their pastors and treating them like domestic servants.¹⁸ The solution, was short-term spiritual renewal, but with a long-term follow-up strategy to ensure that converts were adequately integrated into local churches. Chapter One discussed Sung’s practice of setting up self-running evangelistic bands to sustain the effects of revival. Although the SCCIU

¹⁵ Sng, *Time*, 179-180.

¹⁶ Lee Ting Hui, *Chinese Schools in British Malaya: Policies and Politics* (Singapore: South Seas Society, 2006), 115-120.

¹⁷ Koh, “Sung”, 25-26.

¹⁸ Tow, *Awakening*, 52.

leaders did not articulate this strategy explicitly, expanding on their capacities to evangelise would have helped to boost their churches' transformation into autonomous, self-propagating indigenous entities.¹⁹

Sung's revival meetings in Singapore were a huge success. By the end of his first campaign (September 1935), a total of over 1300 people were converted. One hundred and eleven evangelistic bands comprising 300-400 men and women were formed, 80 men and women pledged to serve in fulltime Christian work and over a thousand Bibles were sold.²⁰ Leona Wu, who was Sung's Hokkien interpreter in the campaign, was elected President of SCEL. She took charge of the executive committee formed to oversee the running of all the bands. Sung visited Singapore eight more times, conducting more revival meetings and training sessions for the League members. During 1935 to 1939, he also traversed numerous cities and rural areas in Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Sarawak, Philippines and Siam, forming thousands of evangelistic bands. Wu accompanied Sung in most of these trips. According to Wu, the membership of SCEL increased to a high of 1256 (subdivided into 318 bands organised into 26 districts) at its peak.²¹ What this meant was that SCEL was able to extend its reach to almost every Chinese church in Singapore, establishing League bands and districts within their congregations.²² Wu herself also rose to prominence – becoming the unofficial leader of the various Evangelistic Leagues that were set

¹⁹ See, for example, the comments of Hinghwa Chinese Methodist pastor Paul Hang (Fan Xinfu) in Hang, "Xingzhou Jidutu", 236. Also see Koh's argument on how greater autonomy promoted the use of multi-denominational platforms in "Sung", 28-30.

²⁰ Zhuang, SCEB, 1936, 104.

²¹ Leona Wu, "Budaotuan Shiwu Nianlai Gongzuo Gaikuang [A General View of the Ministries during the last 15 Years in the Evangelistic League]", SCEL, 1951, 232.

²² There were 21 Chinese churches (excluding independent churches) in Singapore during this period. See *Xinjiapo Huawen Jidujiao Lianhehui 60 Zhounian Jimian Tekan 1931-1991* [Chinese Church Union of Singapore 60th Anniversary Magazine] (Singapore: Jidujiao Lianhehui, 1991), 41-42.

up across Nanyang.²³ Her ascension to a visible leadership position would also be indicative of the crucial roles that many women would play in the League and seminary, an issue that we will deal with shortly.

As discussed in Chapter One, the various evangelistic bands and districts collaborated with the churches by acting as their lay evangelistic arms while maintaining autonomy *vis-à-vis* the leadership of those congregations. The leaders of SCEL and the various churches had to create a relationship which would allow the band members to function within the ecclesiastical structures but under the authority of the League's executive committee. The collaborative nature of SCEL deserves our attention as it was the first of its kind to be imported from China and implemented in Nanyang.

An analysis of SCEL's three key features reveals how the bands and the Church leaders worked together to produce an unconventional extra-ecclesiastical structure that was accommodated and endorsed by the Church leadership. Firstly, women played a key part in SCEL activities and leadership. Out of the 567 members who joined the evangelistic bands by 1936, half (284) were women. Moreover, 69 of the 132 bands (each band had an average of two to six members) formed by 1936 were either made up of an equal number of male and female members or were dominated by women.²⁴ Between 1935 and 1950 (excluding the Japanese Occupation), a total of 36 women and 29 men were elected as district leaders. More significantly, 14 men and 13 women were elected into the various positions on the executive committee during this time

²³ *SB*, Oct 1936, 19.

²⁴ "Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Gedui Zuzhi Yilan [Overview of setup of Individual Teams in Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band]", SCEB, 1936, 93-103.

period.²⁵ Unlike extra-ecclesiastical women's organisations such as the YWCA, SCEL had a mixed-gender structure that promoted equal opportunity for service and leadership. Similarly, the first President of the Evangelistic League in Kuala Lumpur was also a woman and in the Sitiawan (Perak) Evangelistic League, at least nine out of 23 key offices were filled by women.²⁶ Male church leaders implicitly endorsed the mixed-gender structure by accepting invitations to participate in the League's leadership forums and evangelistic activities as advisory pastors, or simply as band members.

The example of the Hinghwa Chinese Methodist Church district of SCEL is instructive. Its 1936 report shows that while Paul Hang was elected as district secretary, the chairperson and treasurer were female. Although Hang eventually became the district advisory pastor, women continued to dominate the top posts, with only one man being elected into the office of secretary from 1935 to 1950.²⁷ In this case, we can observe that the autonomy of the SCEL district enabled it to bend the rules of the patriarchal order; it emerged as a distinct pathway where women could serve alongside men as lay evangelists. The League played an important role in empowering the women and broadening their leadership horizons beyond the normal confines of "women's work".

A second key feature of the League was to promote the key aim of self-propagation – evangelisation of the Chinese by the Chinese, whether church member or new convert, regardless of age or gender. Revival meetings and

²⁵ Hang, "Xingzhou Jidutu", 235-238.

²⁶ *SB*, Jul 1938, 21 and Dec 1940, 15-16. See Appendix A, Picture 4.

²⁷ Su Daqi, "Xinghuayin Meihui zhi Budaodui Gaikuang [Overview of Hinghwa Methodist Evangelistic Band]", SCEB, 1936, 69 and Yang Mingfeng, "Xinjiapo Xinghuayin Tiandaotangqu Budaotuan Shiwu Zhounian Gongzuo Baogaoshu [15th Anniversary Work Report of Singapore Tiandao Hinghwa Church Evangelistic Band]", SCEL, 1951, 246. Also see, Hang, *Testimony*, 16.

League activities served as recruitment points and training grounds for those who became interested in regular evangelism. Tables 1 and 2 show the diversity in gender, age and occupational breakdown of 58 men and women who dedicated themselves to fulltime Christian service during the 1935 revival meetings.²⁸ Anecdotal accounts also highlight the League's relative effectiveness in facilitating a growth of interest in evangelism.²⁹

<i>Age (years)</i>	Male	Female	Combined
>10 to ≤20	7	10	17
>20 to ≤30	5	9	14
>30 to ≤40	5	7	12
>40 to ≤60	1	13	14
<i>Unknown</i>	Nil	1	1
Subtotal:	18	40	Total: 58

Table 1: Gender and Age breakdown of the Fulltime Consecrators (1935)
Source: "Xingzhou Jidutu Zhongshen Fengxian Guizhuzhe", SCEB, 1936, 84-87

<i>Occupation</i>	Fulltime Consecrators
<i>Student</i>	7
<i>Homemaker</i>	6
<i>Teacher</i>	13
<i>Business / Finance</i>	2
<i>Industrial</i>	2
<i>Domestic work</i>	1
<i>Church worker</i>	4
<i>Others</i>	2
<i>Not indicated</i>	21

Table 2: Breakdown of Occupations of Fulltime Consecrators (1935)

Source: Same as Table 1

The League's success in promoting self-propagation is partly attributable to the zeal and evangelistic methods of the bands. It was reported that their work brought about such a sharp increase in attendance at the

²⁸ The total number of such commitments was 80, but roughly one-quarter of these individuals did not provide personal information about themselves.

²⁹ See, for example, Tow, *Son*, 85 and Quek Kiok Chiang, *My Thanksgiving Testimonies* (Singapore: Far Eastern Beacon Monthly, 2009), 376.

Presbyterian churches that “several congregations were faced with the necessity of erecting larger church buildings.”³⁰ The various bands set out at least once a week, in many cases, engaging in open-air evangelism at different locations in the city and villages. A perusal of the sermon topics for one band provides us with an in-depth glimpse of what they were preaching: (1) The new heart and the cross, (2) God created the world and its peoples, (3) The only one true God, (4) The prodigal son and the cross, (5) The prodigal son, and (6) Peace and true blessings.³¹

Although topics with a typical evangelical focus on sin, salvation and the differences between the “true God” and “false gods” (referring to folk religious practices) were regularly preached, the Prodigal Son was apparently standard fare, as it reconciled the Christian Gospel with Confucian sensibilities.

As one report explained:

We gave a detailed explanation of the parable of the prodigal son, allowing...[the crowd] to understand that even as sons and daughters, we regularly oppose our fathers’ wills. Even so, our fathers do not as such give up on us. They do not leave us despite of our wilfulness and evils. Instead, they shower us with untiring attention, giving us additional strength and courage.

Fatherly love was equated with God’s love, presented as a motivation for conversion.³² Some sermons also drew on parental images of God as links to the concept of filial piety. For example, one sermon drew on the well-known story of Ding Lan (from the *Twenty-four Stories about Filial Piety*, a famous Yuan Dynasty text) to charge that Ding’s efforts to make up for his wrongdoings

³⁰ Band, *Purpose*, 537-538. Membership numbers also rose in the Chinese Methodist churches in Singapore from 3388 to 5259 during 1936-1939, a 55.2% increase. See Koh, “Sung”, 24.

³¹ Zhuang, SCEB, 1936, 30. Also see, *SB*, May 1937, 21, for Sung’s directions to the bands on evangelistic methods.

³² *Ibid.*, 32-33.

by offering daily prayers to a carved image of his mother, though filial, could not provide true redemption.³³

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the League acted as an educational platform providing Christian education to the band members. Along with regular instruction in evangelistic methods, they were given Bible study sessions, prayer meetings and talks conducted either at a district or League level.³⁴ The leaders of SCEL sought to monitor the orthodoxy of these meetings by ensuring that only like-minded speakers were invited.³⁵ In his final instructions to SCEL, John Sung specifically urged leaders not to invite anyone with “unsound doctrinal beliefs”, using a favourite popular analogy: “Starvation may not cause death, but being poisoned will definitely lead to death.”³⁶ Church leaders shared Sung’s concerns; during the 1938 and 1939 Malaysia Chinese Mission Conferences, they urged all pastors to “pay heed” to “nurturing” the band members in “Biblical truth and knowledge”.³⁷

The evangelical position of SCEL and the influence of Sung’s teachings helped to create a cross-generational group of Christians imbued with a proto-fundamentalist belief and mentality (or a predisposition towards fundamentalism) – which matured into full-blown fundamentalism during the early post-war years. Whilst some from this group would eventually separate from the more liberal mainline denominational churches, others opted to stay and uphold orthodoxy from within. More importantly, I would argue that

³³ Zhang Qing Ho “Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Quanti Zhiyuan Xinchun Budaoji [Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band All-Committee Members Chinese New Year Evangelism]”, SCEB, 1946, 109-110.

³⁴ See, for example, Hang, “Xingzhou Jidutu”, 239-240, and Su, “Xinghuayin Meihui”, 69.

³⁵ “Xingzhou Jidujiao Budaotuan Guizhang”, 86.

³⁶ “Song Shangjie Boshi Yixun [The Last Teachings of Dr John Sung]”, *Singapore Christian Evangelistic League Silver Jubilee Commemorative Magazine* (Hereafter SCEL, 1961), ed. Tay Swee Lan (Singapore: Hong Boon Printing, 1961), unnumbered.

³⁷ *Malaysia Chinese Mission Conference* minutes, 1938, 32, and 1939, 39.

SCEL's proto-fundamentalism was a key factor earning the Church leaders' trust, as they could be sure that members of their congregations were being instructed with theologically "sound" teachings.

Theological Training for the Evangelistic Bands

The extensive work of SCEL and the other Evangelistic Leagues during the pre-war years created a huge demand for theological training; the regular training sessions conducted to equip the members were insufficient. As the unofficial leader of the various Leagues around Nanyang, Leona Wu felt that a theological training centre was sorely needed. Not only had she built up a good reputation within the network of Evangelistic Leagues in Nanyang and China, she was also able to tap on her close GWTS and EPM connections that had been incorporated into the network. Crucially, she recruited Ng Phek Loan (her ex-student in Xiamen who had also studied at GWTS) as a co-worker in Singapore. Ng became her lifelong right-hand woman, helping her in the administration of both SCEL and CLBS. Wu was also able to secure the long-term help of Quek Kiok Chiang and Timothy Tow (both of whom attended Presbyterian churches during the pre-war years)³⁸, part of the original group of 80 who had pledged to become fulltime Christian workers during Sung's 1935 revival meeting.

Leona Wu confided in Ng and several others her idea for starting a women's theological seminary.³⁹ Two of these women, Ang Soo Hua (Hong Suhua) and Tan Chu Ai (Chen Ciai), joined the first two batches of students in

³⁸ The Tow family attended Kluang Chinese Presbyterian Church in 1934, when it was under the leadership of Wu. The family (particularly Timothy Tow) became one of Wu's most loyal supporters throughout her career. See, Tow, *Son*, 60-62.

³⁹ Ng Phek Loan, "Jianzheng Zhuen [Testifying for the Lord's Grace]", in *Special 21st Anniversary Issue of Chin Lien Bible Seminary* (Hereafter CLBS, 1958), ed. Quek Kiok Chiang (Singapore: Wenlian Yingwu Youxian Gongsi, 1958), 7-8.

the seminary, graduating in 1939 and 1940 respectively. Ang also went on to become SCEL's first missionary, founding a mission chapel in Raub (Pahang) in 1940, while Tan was the first woman in Singapore to be ordained as a pastor in the Chinese Presbyterian Church, in 1957. The women's plan to establish a seminary faced much initial resistance even within SCEL and SCCIU.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the sources tell us little about the reasons behind the resistance. It is clear that some pastors and missionaries expressed scepticism and surprise at Wu's bold plan. We also know that the SCCIU was split in its opinion about starting a theological school: although recognising the need, they felt "unprepared" for the task.⁴¹ Some of the male SCCIU leaders, however, lent their support to Wu and Ng.⁴² Certainly the leaders of SCCIU and SCEL agreed on the need for a more comprehensive theological training programme to be started in Singapore and Malaya; where they differed was on how to achieve this outcome.

Compared to China, theological education in Singapore and Malaya remained relatively undeveloped throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The MEC was the only denomination that provided formal avenues of theological training in the region, with the Jean Hamilton Theological School for men and the Eveland Seminary for Young Women in Singapore. Although both schools initially catered to native Chinese and Tamil workers, differences in dialects and the low and often varying educational standards of their students caused the schools to shift their focus towards English-educated students by the late 1910s. The two schools operated separately for several decades then in 1941

⁴⁰ Ng Phek Loan, "Wode Laoshi Wujingling Nüshi [My Teacher Miss Leona Wu]", CLBS, 1977, 7-8.

⁴¹ Guok Koh Mou, "Jinlian Lingxiu Shenxueyuan Chuangzhu Ershiyinian Zhounian Jinian [Commemorating the 21st Anniversary of Chin Lien Bible Seminary]", CLBS, 1958, 13.

⁴² Ng, "Wode Laoshi", 7-8.

were integrated to form a full-fledged seminary called the Malaya Methodist Theological College (the forerunner of the present Trinity Theological College).⁴³

Despite this shift in attention towards the English-educated, the Chinese-speaking churches were not entirely neglected. Short-term pastoral schools were organised on an annual basis from 1925 to 1941, attracting an average of 30 to 40 pastors and Bible women each year. This platform was expanded and organised as a “separate multi-denominational Christian Education Conference” by 1938.⁴⁴ However, the provision of short-term training was clearly inadequate to meet the need of the Chinese churches – they still depended heavily on workers to be sent from China, where Christian workers were also in short supply.⁴⁵

Why then did the SCCIU think that they were not ready to start a seminary? One reason may have been that they preferred the conventional union (inter-denominational) model for a prospective theological college. Inter-denominational cooperation was actively pursued in China by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to promote cooperation and prevent replication of work amongst the various missions. Different mission organisations pooled their resources together to develop schools that were better staffed and equipped, such as Yenching University, Shandong Christian University and GWTS. However, founding a union college required considerable preparatory work and cooperation between the denominations, and the SCCIU leaders may have felt that this was simply not feasible in 1930s

⁴³ Lau, *From Mission*, 79-83.

⁴⁴ Koh, “Sung”, 30.

⁴⁵ Lau, *From Mission*, 74-76.

Singapore. By 1952, however, the organisation was able to found Singapore Theological College (later renamed Singapore Bible College), a genuine union college with the support and sponsorship of 39 Chinese churches from the four major denominations – Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans and Baptists – as well as other churches.⁴⁶

Thus, the absence of a large pool of Christian expertise and the lack of long-term financial security were likely key reasons why certain leaders were doubtful about Wu's plan to start a theological college independent of any denominational support.⁴⁷ As mentioned in Chapter One, Wu was heavily influenced by Jia Yuming's Three-No principle and was bent on starting a seminary that abided by this "faith missions" model, an independent entity unaffiliated to any church or Christian organisation (including SCEL), while accepting students from any denomination. This quest for independence stemmed from her understanding that "true" Christian faith should be preserved and cultivated by avoiding the theological liberalism of certain external bodies.⁴⁸ Wu would have witnessed the modernisation of theological education in China's Christian colleges and was keen to prevent such liberalism from making any inroads in Singapore. However, her insistence on such a model would almost certainly have raised concerns about her ability to find qualified teachers or even a good location for the school.

⁴⁶ *Singapore Bible College 20th Anniversary Souvenir* (Singapore: Singapore Bible College, 1973), 5; Sng, *Time*, 234.

⁴⁷ For comments to this effect see, for example, Tow, *Awakening*, 53, and Zhang Qing Ho, "Jinlian Lingxiuyuan Diwujie Biye Dianliji [Chin Lien Seminary's Fifth Graduation Ceremony]", SCEL, 1951, 182-183.

⁴⁸ Ng, "Wode Laoshi", 7-8.

It can be suggested that Wu and her supporters took certain steps to circumvent the opposition. Drawing on their earlier experiences of studying and working within the women's sphere, they forged a niche for the seminary, founding it as a school predominantly for women, calling it Chin Lien Women's Bible School (Jinlian Nüzi Lingxiusuo).⁴⁹ Their actions would take greater significance as they were essentially creating a new extra-ecclesiastical space that threatened to intrude into the "male preserve" of public teaching. Thus, although the women had the freedom to pursue their ambitions (Wu herself had resigned from the EPM in 1935 to take up full-time voluntary Presidency of SCEL)⁵⁰, they had to tread carefully to retain the support of the male leaders. However, the school's identity was ambiguous from the start as the demand for theological training caused it to enrol men as students. This encroachment into the "male preserve", however, earned the school support as it was filling a gap in theological education that the Union was unable to provide.⁵¹ Wu and Ng also utilised their leadership positions within SCEL to carve out a loyal support group – the all-women's prayer group inside the League – that was ready to support their plan.

The name "Chin Lien" itself was a strategy to legitimise the school's existence and to resist the assertion of patriarchal authority. "Chin Lien" can be interpreted from the perspective of a bride, as the golden necklace symbolises God's teachings or laws while the bride's wearing of it can be equated to her

⁴⁹ The school would attain Sung's endorsement in May 1939 when he attended the first graduation ceremony. He also suggested that the school should change its name to Chin Lien Women's Seminary (Jinlian Nüzi Lingxiuyuan), a name which was retained till 1946, before the term "Women's" was dropped entirely. Unfortunately, the available sources do not explain the circumstances and reasons behind these name changes.

⁵⁰ Goh Lok Chor, "Daonian Weida de Sanjie [Tribute to my Great Third Elder Sister]", CLBS, 1977, 5.

⁵¹ See, for example, articles in SCEL, 1951, 168-184, CLBS, 1958, 8, 12-13 and, CLBS, 1962, 1-2 for endorsement of church leaders.

desire to uphold and obey those laws.⁵² The use of this trope is suggestive for two reasons. First, the women testified that their ambition and authority to found the school was based on their reading of the Bible and their perceived understanding of God's will.⁵³ Bendroth, writing about fundamentalist women teachers in North America, notes that they justified the authority of their teachings on the basis of Scripture to counter gender-based arguments against that authority.⁵⁴ Second, the illustration of the marriage relationship has often been used as a metaphor for the mutual love between Jesus Christ and his spiritual bride – the Church. Based on St Paul's familial injunctions, wives are called to submit to their husbands and husbands are instructed to love their wives just as Christ loves His Church.⁵⁵ Here, the use of "Chin Lien" can be taken as a form of intelligent submission to or negotiation with the Christian patriarchy. By asserting that they were commissioned to be the golden necklace, the women were equating their seminary with the bride – submissive to the groom's authority through her upholding of God's teachings. Thus they were suggesting that their work was not a usurpation of male authority, but an act of obedience and service.

On May 14, 1937, CLBS finally opened its doors with a small enrolment – seven students and two teachers – at Butterworth Lane in Katong, Singapore.⁵⁶ One month later, it shifted over to 15 Green Lane, which became its permanent location after the war. Although it was intended to be a stay-in seminary for

⁵² Fan-Wu, "Wu Jingling", 13.

⁵³ "Wujingling Yuanzhang Yizuo Zailu [Extract of the Writings of Principal Leona Wu]", CLBS, 1977, 3.

⁵⁴ Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 83-84.

⁵⁵ From the Book of Ephesians 5:22-33.

⁵⁶ Zhang Qing Ho, "Jinlian Lingxiu Shenxueyuan Shisan Zhounian Jinianhuiji [The Thirteenth Anniversary Meeting of Chin Lien Bible Seminary]", SCEL, 1951, 177 and Timothy Tow, "In the Steps of Dr John Sung", CLBS, 1958, 12.

women, it soon began to enrol male day students. Due to the limited amount of available statistical data on the pre-war enrolment and student body size of CLBS, only some observations can be made about its demographics. An estimated 34 and 36 fulltime students were studying in the school in 1939 and 1941 respectively.⁵⁷ Compared to the 1934-35 and 1937 enrolments of 85 and 48 students at the reputed GWTS, CLBS's enrolment can be considered as fairly respectable.⁵⁸ During these years, the number of female students far outweighed the male students. For example, there were only six men in the 1939 batch and out of the 11 graduates that year, only two were male.⁵⁹ It is nonetheless evident that the seminary was evolving into a co-educational institute. After the period of initial resistance, CLBS eventually gained acceptance within SCEL. The 1946 and 1951 editions of the SCEL magazine clearly indicate that CLBS became an important player contributing to the League's ministries. Although constitutionally separate from SCEL, the seminary functioned like an arm of the League, training independent fulltime workers for the churches right from the beginning.⁶⁰

As women outnumbered men in both SCEL and CLBS, this enabled the emergence of all-women's prayer groups which supported the ambitions of these single Christian women.⁶¹ For example, when one of the first graduates, Ang Soo Hua, proceeded to Pahang one year after her graduation to start a

⁵⁷ Photographic evidence of 1939 and 1941 CLBS graduations in Cultural-Historical Centre.

⁵⁸ Edward Xu Yihua, "1949 Nianqian Zhongguo Jidujiao Nüzi Shenxue Jiaoyu Chutan [A Preliminary Examination of Women's Theological Education in China before 1949]", in *Xingbie*, 312; "Xuesheng Renshu de Fenlei [The number and types of Students]", *Jinlin Nüzi Shenxue Jikan 1937* (Nanjing: Nanjing Jinlin Nüzi Shenxueyuan Jikanbu Bianying, 1937), 34.

⁵⁹ Photographic evidence of 1939 CLBS graduation in Cultural-Historical Centre.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Ng Phek Loan, "Jinlian Lingxiu Shenxueyuan Gongzuo Gaikuang [A Brief Overview of Chin Lien Bible Seminary's Evangelistic Work]", SCEL, 1951, 241-243.

⁶¹ For example, see Ang Soo Hua's comments in "Pengheng Laohuo Kaihuang Budao Baogaoshu [Pahang Laut Pioneering Mission Report]", SCEB, 1946, 86.

mission chapel, the prayer group pledged their financial support, giving her a small monthly stipend. After securing a house in Raub, she used it as a base to initiate children's work, inviting them over for Sunday school classes and gospel rallies. These classes came with an educational element – literacy classes – that was meant to attract both the parents and their children.⁶² The success of her ministries allowed her to found more mission chapels such as in the adjacent town of Bentong after the war.⁶³ Ang epitomised an early prototype of the “Chin Lien” faith. After her conversion at the John Sung revival meetings in 1935, she decided to leave her husband⁶⁴: Like Wu and Ng, then, she was relatively unencumbered by any form of familial or social obligations when she left for Pahang.

The qualities of the ideal independent Christian worker were reiterated by Tay Swee Lan during the second CLBS graduation ceremony, using the Biblical story of Ruth to validate the type of independence that the seminary endeavoured its graduates to uphold. Ruth, a Moabite (a non-Israelite) who had become a freewoman after the death of her husband, insisted on leaving her hometown to follow her mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Israel. This was despite Naomi's repeated efforts to dampen Ruth's original conviction to follow her. Tay encouraged the students to follow Ruth's model when faced with discouraging situations that challenged their convictions to remain as evangelists. Such faith, she declared, “was like a golden chain that was worn on the neck.”⁶⁵ Tay drew on the “Chin Lien” trope to encourage the graduates to

⁶² Ibid., 85-88.

⁶³ Tow, *Son*, 79.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 79. Ang was one of two women married to a commercial artist. Both wives left their “unrepentant” husband to be fulltime workers after Sung's revivals.

⁶⁵ Zhang Ching Ho, “Xinzhou Jinlian Nüzi Lingxiuyuan Dierjie Biyedianli Ji [Record of Second Graduation Ceremony of Chin Lien Bible Seminary]”, SCEB, 1946, 105-106.

develop a true Three-Self faith during their careers – one that remained committed to their personal commissions and convictions, rather than to be lured away by the prospects of an illustrious career in a big church.

Renewing Revival in the Malayan Emergency?

On July 7, 1937, Japan launched a full-scale military campaign against China, provoking further outrage amongst the Chinese in Malaya, who re-launched relief aid donation drives and anti-Japanese boycotts.⁶⁶ The students and members of CLBS and SCEL carried on the evangelistic work faithfully despite the threat of war. Although it was reported that SCEL participated in the war fundraising efforts,⁶⁷ there is no evidence to suggest that this shifted their focus away from the chief mission of evangelism. In general, memories of the pre-war period do not indicate that such efforts became a high priority for the League. Rather, evangelism continued to be their all-consuming enterprise even after the bombing of Singapore began on December 8, 1941. The work of SCEL only came to a halt after February 15, 1942, when Singapore finally fell to the Japanese.⁶⁸

The Japanese Occupation (1941-45) caused a massive loss of lives and major disruptions to daily activities. Religious institutions, like all other institutions, were forced to stop some activities and were tightly regulated by the authorities. CLBS ceased formal operations, but prayer meetings and some evangelistic work carried on under the radar. The autonomy of the evangelistic

⁶⁶ Lee, *Chinese Schools*, 137-155.

⁶⁷ *SB*, Dec 1937, 1, in “Sung”, 45. See also, *SB* Mar 1938, 5, for an example of their campaign to donate winter clothing to China and how they incorporated the war into their prayer agenda for their monthly meetings.

⁶⁸ Zhang Ching Ho, “Zhaonan Shidai de Huiyi [Memories of the Syonan-to Era]”, *SCEL*, 1951, 296; Wu, “Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Zhongtuan”, 83.

bands allowed them to become self-propagating during a time when central control was non-existent, enabling them to search for available spaces to conduct their religious activities away from the eye of the authorities.⁶⁹

Both SCEL and CLBS emerged from the Occupation battered and depleted. Like other institutions which suffered from a substantial loss of lives, the League experienced a 67 percent reduction in membership. Only 392 members remained when it was officially re-established in September 1946 (see Table 3 for some anecdotal statistical comparisons of membership numbers in four districts).⁷⁰ Although SCEL did not experience any heavy loss in terms of its executive leadership, many influential members died during the war, including the wives and family members of several advisory pastors.⁷¹ Although CLBS was able to move back into the rented premises at Green Lane, it came at a huge expense. The war had wrecked much damage to the building.⁷²

Despite the suffering and loss, there was still cause for optimism. The mass evangelism of the 1930s had matured into a number of self-sustaining evangelistic enterprises – found in the form of the different preaching posts/mission chapels and the seminary that had survived through the war and were continuing in operations.⁷³ However, rebuilding efforts had to take place in a post-war environment of socio-political transformation. The Communist insurgency and the growing need to decolonise Malaya erupted into the Emergency. Most significantly, the British conducted large-scale civilian

⁶⁹ See, for example, Wu, “Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Zhongtuan”, 84.

⁷⁰ Zhang Ching Ho, “Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Shiwu Zhounian Jinian Dahuiji [Record of the Singapore Christian Evangelistic League Fifteenth Anniversary Meeting]”, SCEL, 1951, 143.

⁷¹ Wu, “Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Zhongtuan”, 84.

⁷² Tan Chu Ai, “Ji Xingzhou Jinlian Lingxiuyuan Fuxing zhi Jingguo [Remembering the Revival in Chin Lin Bible Seminary]”, SCEB, 1946, 116.

⁷³ Zhang, “Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Shiwu Zhounian”, 143.

relocation exercises to forestall Communist infiltration into the Chinese communities. As many as 600,000 Chinese living in the rural villages on the Malay Peninsula were re-organised into New Villages secured militarily. Missionaries (who were being redeployed after their expulsion from China following the Communist takeover) were also invited and partially funded by the colonial government to provide humanitarian work in these New Villages. The newcomers came in with a burst of enthusiasm, starting new work amongst the New Village Chinese, creating fresh opportunities for partnerships with churches in Malaya and Singapore. A recently organised ecumenical union of the churches, the Malayan Christian Council (MCC), collaborated with formerly China-based mission bodies to provide manpower and financial aid for the mission work in these villages.⁷⁴

<i>Districts</i>	1935-1941 (pre-war)		1949-1950 (post-war)	
	<u>Nos. of bands*</u>	<u>Band members**</u>	<u>Nos. of bands</u>	<u>Band members</u>
<i>Hinghwa</i>	4-10	18-33	Not stated	13
<i>Tekkha Life</i>	12-21	73-84	14	46
<i>Zion</i>	9-15	69	10	32
<i>Presbyterian</i>				
<i>Bethel</i>	4-6	18	6	12

Table 3. Comparison in District numbers between pre and post war years

Source: Reports in SCEL, 1951, 246-266.

*number of bands increased progressively during the pre-war years

**only Hinghwa and Tekkha have provided a rough estimate of how the number of members increased

At the same time, churches in Singapore were becoming increasingly concerned about the growing influence of anti-religious and secular-minded ideologies such as Communism, Social Darwinism and theological liberalism.

⁷⁴ David Khoo Sheng Li, "Winning Hearts and Souls: Missionaries in the New Villages during the Malayan Emergency" (Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2004), 21-23.

In particular, the 1950s saw the rise of anti-colonial nationalism amongst the Chinese-speaking populace in Singapore and Malaya. The most politicised of the lot were the Chinese middle school students who subscribed to an “anti-imperialist, class-based notion of politics.” Driven by the unequal treatment in educational policies of the post-war colonial government, they launched a series of constitutional protests against the British. The volatility that characterised this period made these students open to modern Chinese literary works as well as Marxism and Maoism.⁷⁵ Church leaders viewed such intellectual openness warily and worried that their Christian youth would be most vulnerable to them. “In the battle for faith in S.E. Asia”, one prominent leader commented, “the gathered community on Sunday is NOT as significant as the scattered community on weekdays. So, you young people have an important part to play in that battle [against Communism]...in S.E. Asia.”⁷⁶

For the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Singapore, the culmination of these concerns and the lack of youth work within the denomination finally led to the formation of the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship (PYF) by 1955.⁷⁷ The PYF was intended to promulgate joint youth programmes, and instruct the youth in the fundamentals of the Christian faith while indoctrinating them in the Church’s perspective on intellectual trends of that age. The PYF’s “Thousand Books Movement”, for example, was organised to meet the growing needs of the Chinese-educated youth who were spurred on by the “changing societal

⁷⁵ Hong Lysa, “Politics of the Immigrant Chinese Communities in Singapore in the 1950s: Narratives of Belonging in the Time of Emergency”, in Tan Jing Quee, Tan Kok Chiang and Hong Lysa ed., *The May 13 Generation: The Chinese Middle Schools Student Movement and Singapore Politics in the 1950s* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre), 29 and 43-53.

⁷⁶ “Greetings”, in *Nanqing* [Malaya Christian Youth] (Singapore: Nanchang Xingji Yingwu Gongsi, 1956), 4.

⁷⁷ *Presbyterian Church in Singapore and Malaysia*, 19.

environs” of the day to be interested in various “philosophies and societal problems”. The organisers asserted that these intellectual trends were a “problem of faith” and they urged the readers to be concerned about “the movements shaping today’s Malayan youth”.⁷⁸ The thrust of the campaign’s strategy was to introduce the youth to wide-ranging selection of non-Marxist Chinese humanities and scientific literature which was “suitable” and “compatible with Christian principles”. By 1956, they managed to secure over 9000 books from Hong Kong.⁷⁹

Unlike the 1930s, however, these efforts did not translate into an increased participation by youth in SCEL activities. The League did not respond to the post-war trend of youth work by instituting a youth wing. This may have been because CLBS’s regular influx of young students provided SCEL with an ever-ready youth section for its work, preventing the leaders from seeing the need for more youth recruitment. Nor did the League’s specific focus on evangelism seem to meet the demands of Christian youth work in that day – targeted at attracting youth into denominational churches which would cater to their spiritual and intellectual needs. Other than the growing popularity of the church-based youth fellowships, by the early 1950s, new student-led movements like the Youth for Christ and Varsity Christian Fellowship were better equipped to cater to Christian youth.

As we have seen, although SCEL retained much of its original structure, its numbers had shrunk visibly (see Table 3). Whilst the bands and districts continued to operate autonomously, the lack of manpower meant that

⁷⁸ “Qianshu Yundong [Thousand Books Movement]”, *Nanqing*, 32.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

evangelistic activities had to be scaled down. For at least four years (1946-1949) mass open-air evangelistic rallies were curtailed and organised only as yearly affairs on the first day of Chinese New Year.⁸⁰ Moreover, an Emergency law had come into power by 1948, restricting the organised gathering of large groups on the street.⁸¹ Tan Chu Ai (the leader of one SCEL district in a Presbyterian church) explained that after the war, they did not “gather as bands to go out [and evangelise]” but did personal evangelism at their own discretion.⁸²

In 1946, Wu and Ng travelled around the Malay Peninsula to visit the different mission chapels planted by SCEL and their various partners. A meeting with leaders from the Penang Evangelistic League resulted in the creation of the Singapore-Penang Prayer Fellowship (SPPF) retreat, a yearly prayer retreat that would unite the leaders from the different Evangelistic Leagues in Malaya and Singapore. This forum helped contribute to a heightened Malayan consciousness, one that called for a concerted effort to revive the Church and to evangelise the Chinese in Singapore, and Malaya and elsewhere in the region.⁸³

By 1948, post-war optimism had evolved into an explicitly premillennial urgency to evangelise the Chinese in Malaya. Premillennialism is a Christian belief that interprets signs of civilizational corruption as portentous of the

⁸⁰ Zhang, “Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan”, 108-110; “Xingzhou Jidutu Budaotuan Xinchun Budaoji [Singapore Christian Evangelistic Band Chinese New Year Evangelism]”, SCEL, 1951, 186-191.

⁸¹ “Xinjiapo Jidutu Budaotuan Shigong Jianjie [Short Introduction on Singapore Christian Evangelistic League’s Work]” (Hereafter SCEL, 2005), in *Singapore Christian Evangelistic League Seventieth Anniversary Magazine* (Johor: Economy Express Printing and Graphics, 2005), 130-131.

⁸² Tan Chu Ai “Zhonghua Jidujiaohui Xinjiapo Xiantangqu Shiwu Zhounian Gongzuo Baogaoshu [Fifteenth Anniversary Report on Singapore Zion Chinese Presbyterian Church District]”, SCEL, 1951, 248-52.

⁸³ Leona Wu “Xuyan [Foreword]”, SCEB, 1946, 2.

imminent return of Jesus Christ to rule the earth (see the next chapter for further discussion). The Leagues' leaders saw the Communist threat as a sign that the end times were fast approaching and that the need for evangelism was more urgent than ever. Letters written by John Sung to the League leaders during the final days of his life also encouraged their predisposition towards premillennialism. For example, Leona Wu recalled that Sung constantly referred to "the imminent arrival of the Lord".⁸⁴ In another letter, he urged the evangelistic band members in Nanyang to be "resolute" and "persevering" in the "last days".⁸⁵ The arrival of prominent Chinese Christian leaders and missionaries from China in the 1950s compounded this feeling of urgency to evangelise.⁸⁶

The League itself, however, failed to regain its pre-war dynamism. Its core evangelistic ministries were downsized and centralised into the five mission chapels and six Sunday schools spread around Singapore and Malaya. Moreover, the lack of new members meant that the League could not expand its current portfolios without straining its human resources. The rapid recovery of the Malayan economy after the war, however, may have allowed some members of SCEL to provide financial support for targeted and sustainable evangelistic work. This decrease in manpower and increase in the membership's financial capacity was recognised by the leadership, and they decided that it would make sense to focus on work that could be supported for the long term. During the meeting before the Silver Jubilee (25th Anniversary) celebrations for SCEL, a

⁸⁴ Leona Wu, "Fakanci [Foreword]", in Quek Kiok Chiang and Tay Swee Lan ed., *Xingbing Jidutu Shouwang Tuankan [Singapore-Penang Prayer Fellowship Magazine]* (Singapore, Hong Boon Printing, 1961), 1.

⁸⁵ John Sung, "Songshangjie Boshi zhi Nanyang Jidutu Budaotuanshu [Letter from Dr John Sung to the Nanyang Christian Evangelistic Leagues]", SCEB, 1946, 143.

⁸⁶ Sng, *Time*, 211-212.

mission fund was established to set up a sixth mission chapel.⁸⁷ Gone were the ambitions to renew the magnitude of the pre-war revivalist-evangelistic efforts. SCEL began to function as an indigenous mission agency by 1960, pooling resources to support long-term evangelistic work in specifically selected remote locations, mainly using CLBS graduates.

Meanwhile the leaders of CLBS had secured a permanent site, recognising the need for doctrinally sound theological education to train a new generation of evangelists to work amongst the rapidly increasing post-war Chinese population in Singapore and Malaya. The rented site in Green Lane was purchased in 1951. A new John Sung Memorial Hall/Women's hostel was built and the old building refurbished. All the construction and renovation was completed by 1956 with the site being dedicated in 1957.⁸⁸

Due to the lack of substantial data, we are unable to get a good sensing of the post-war enrolments. Some available statistics show that the student numbers hovered around a similar level to the pre-war period in those years (see Table 4). Although female students continued to outnumber male students during the post-war years, it is clear that by this point, CLBS had completely shed its image as a women's institution and transformed into a fully-fledged co-educational one.⁸⁹ A full list of faculty members was provided for the first time in 1958; out of 17 teachers, nine were female and eight were male. Crucially, the faculty that CLBS secured enabled the school to offer a range of subjects

⁸⁷ Wu, "Fakanci", 1.

⁸⁸ Leona Wu, "Benyuan Ershiyi Nianlai de Gaisu [Short Overview of the past 20 years in the Seminary]", CLBS, 1958, 9 and "Zhengxinlu [Credit Record]", CLBS, 1958, 16-28.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Hang, "Xingzhou Jidutu", 238, where he depicts the seminary as a co-educational institution, specifically highlighting that both men and women studied and graduated from CLBS.

like Church History, languages and missiology for its students.⁹⁰ This suggests that the educational standards would be raised substantially from the pre-war period, when the faculty had numbered only four.⁹¹ The new teaching staff included Timothy Tow, Quek Kiok Chiang, Tay Swee Lan and Ho Yew Sam (He Yousan) who pastored Zion Chinese Presbyterian Church from 1951 to 1987.⁹²

<i>Year</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Overall</i>
1946	Unavailable	Unavailable	17* ^a
1950	20	5	25
1953	19	2	21
1958	28	9	37

Table 4. Breakdown of student population and gender (1946-1958)

Source: See articles in SCEB, 1946, 116-117 and SCEL, 1951, 184, and photographic evidence of CLBS graduations in 1950 and 1953, and student body in CLBS, 1958, 29.

*It was reported that over 40 students studied between the years of 1946 to 1949

^a It was reported that upon rehabilitation in 1946, 21 students enrolled

Building Links to International Fundamentalism

Communism, however, was not the only concern of the League leaders and others who were part of the cross-generational group imbued with proto-fundamentalist beliefs. The emerging ecumenism amongst the mainline churches on both a local and global scale became a matter of grave concern. The formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948 and its associated body in Malaya, the MCC, was greeted with much suspicion by conservative Christians. A group of American fundamentalists almost immediately spearheaded the founding of a separate International Council of Christian

⁹⁰ Wu, "Benyuan Ershiyi", 10-11.

⁹¹ Ibid., 11.

⁹² *Memorial Service of the Late Rev. Ho Yew Sam (1914-1997)*, 8 January 1998, 10.

Churches as an alternative to the WCC, whose ecumenism was thought to be a specious form of Church unity grounded in theological liberalism.

Warning shots against the worldwide ecumenical movement were fired by Jia Yuming and the leadership of the ICCC in 1948 and 1949, who were invited by the SCCIU to give a series of talks in Singapore following a trip to Bangkok to counteract the advance of WCC into Asia – an invitation opposed by the MCC.⁹³ A worldwide face-off between the fundamentalists and the liberals was brewing, of which this incident was a local episode that contributed to the new-found fundamentalist resolve of Quek Kiok Chiang and the leaders of SCEL. Timothy Tow, who had left in 1946 to study under Jia in China and then at Faith Theological Seminary in Baltimore (closely associated with ICCC), had also returned to Singapore in 1950 fully committed to fighting for the fundamentalist faith. Tow had been ordained by the Bible Presbyterian Church, USA – a separatist body of churches formed in 1937 after a series of schisms that was linked to Carl McIntire, a founder of the ICCC.⁹⁴ Wu immediately invited Tow to join the CLBS teaching faculty.⁹⁵ By 1951, both he and Quek had joined the seminary's Board of Trustees.⁹⁶

Both men (who were young members of the cross-generational group) had been heavily influenced by the ICCC's strict separatist fundamentalist stance and leveraged on their leadership positions and connections to persuade the SCEL and SCCIU leaders to support that position.⁹⁷ In 1950, SCEL decided

⁹³ Quek, *Thanksgiving*, 394-395.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 133 and Tan Chu Ai, "Jinlian Shenxueyuan Liandaotuan Huanying Duxianghui Mushiji [Record of Chin Lien Bible Seminary Prayer Fellowship welcomes Pastor Timothy Tow]", SCEL, 1951, 229-230.

⁹⁶ Quek Kiok Chiang, "Benyuan Goudi Jingguo [How the Land was bought for the Seminary]", CLBS, 1958, 9.

⁹⁷ Tow, *Son*, 128; see also Carl McIntire, "Letter No. 17", in *McIntire Memorial*, ed. Quek Kiok Chiang, (Seoul: Truth & Freedom Publishing Co., 2005), 145.

(after much deliberation) to join up with the ICCC as an associate in the battle taking place in “this era of increasing apostasy and the last days”.⁹⁸ A similar development had taken place earlier in China, where Jia Yuming and other independent Christian leaders had formed the fundamentalist League of Christian Churches in 1929, rejecting the National Christian Council for its acceptance of theological liberalism and the Social Gospel.⁹⁹ Jia joined the ICCC as its Second Vice-President in 1948.

The SCEL’s 1960 constitution also reflected a definite shift towards fundamentalism, adopting a new 12-point statement of faith which affirmed fundamental doctrines such as Biblical inerrancy and the virgin birth of Christ.¹⁰⁰ By contrast, the SCCIU would eventually decline an invitation to join the ICCC as most of its leaders belonged to mainline denominations comfortable with the less conservative MCC.¹⁰¹ Instead, the SCCIU chose to adopt an approach of moderate conservatism by founding the Singapore Bible College in order to train evangelically-minded leaders who would be able to resist the tide of theological liberalism from within the churches, even though in fundamentalist eyes it was precisely the Union’s member denominations which represented these more liberal tendencies.¹⁰²

The event that has come to represent the advent of fundamentalism as a movement in Singapore and Malaya, however, was the schism within the Malaya Synod of the Chinese Presbyterian Church from 1952-1955, which

⁹⁸ Quek Kiok Chiang, “The Origin and Development of the Ecumenical Movement and the Worldwide Defence of the Faith particularly in Malaysia”, *Malaysia Christian* [Nanyang Jidutu] (Hereafter *MC*), Jul 1965, 2.

⁹⁹ Guo, *Fandui Heyi*, 78-79.

¹⁰⁰ “Xinjiapo Jidutu Budaotuan Tuanzhang [Constitution of Singapore Christian Evangelistic League]”, SCEL, 1961, 67.

¹⁰¹ Sng, *Time*, 230-231.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 232-234.

created the local Bible-Presbyterian (BP) denomination along with a local alliance of Christian organisations that identified themselves with the fundamentalist position of ICCC. Just as the ICCC was meant to combat the WCC, a new fundamentalist Malaysia Council of Christian Churches (now known as Singapore Council of Christian Churches) was established in 1956 as a less ecumenical alternative to the MCC. SCEL and CLBS, by virtue of their fundamentalist stance and connections, were drawn into this alliance as key partners. Tow and Quek (who were pastoring a Presbyterian congregation) sought to disassociate the Chinese Presbyterian Church from the MCC on the grounds of the latter's broad theological position, inter-religious activities and global ecumenical affiliations.¹⁰³ Three years of debate failed to bring satisfaction. As a result, they left the Synod and founded Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, which eventually expanded into a denomination. The new grouping took its name from the McIntire-led Bible Presbyterian Church in the US, but was completely independent from its American namesake.¹⁰⁴

We can draw two conclusions from this chapter. Firstly, independent Chinese Christian organisations such as SCEL and CLBS were able to collaborate extensively with the denominational churches, whilst remaining fully autonomous. I have argued that the formation of SCEL was part of the plan to boost the growth and self-propagative capacity of the Chinese churches. Revival and evangelism became the key strategies that the church leaders introduced to mature their congregations as they successfully transferred the responsibility for

¹⁰³ Tow, *B-P Church*, 72-73 and Quek, *Thanksgiving*, 399. Also see Sng, *Time*, 231.

¹⁰⁴ Tow, *B-P Church*, 33-34 and 74.

evangelism to the members of the evangelistic bands. As we have seen, they utilised inter-denominational and independent platforms such as SCEL and SCCIU that were fully administered by Chinese Christians – spaces free of any mission connection – to advance indigenous Christian participation. In fact, by the late 1930s to 1940, SCCIU was clearly at the forefront of creating a vibrant inter-denominational scene – organising religious education conferences, war fundraising campaigns and inviting famous Christians from China to conduct spiritual nurture/revival sessions.¹⁰⁵ More broadly, this suggests that certain models of independent Chinese Christianity – as represented by SCEL and CLBS – were able to exert substantial influence on the mainline Chinese churches in Singapore and Malaya during the pre-war years. Although these groups asserted their independence strongly, they did not develop within an entirely separate sector but, rather, grew in close interaction with the churches.

The second conclusion is that independence from mission or denominational control also generated a paradoxical effect where women were concerned. Whilst increased autonomy became a strategy to safeguard the doctrinal purity of the institutions, it also became a platform that liberated the women to take on important responsibilities in Christian service – not only within the women's sphere but also in mixed-gender scenarios where they exercised considerable spiritual and moral authority over men. Not only was an inversion of the double Chinese-Christian patriarchy accommodated within an extra-ecclesiastical platform, but it can be suggested that the women utilised such platforms to legitimise their roles and religious commissions. This also suggests that the Chinese Christians were able to transfer and adapt the

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, *SB* Feb 1940, 10-11 and Dec. 1940, 10.

egalitarianism of the independent Christian structures to overseas Chinese Christian communities almost seamlessly, demonstrating that independent Christianity also played an important role in advancing female leadership within mixed-gender domains outside China. The next chapter will examine how these contradictory issues played out in both organisations' involvement in international fundamentalism and the work of pioneering missions during the 1960s to the late 1980s/early 1990s.

Chapter 3: Fundamentalism and Missions in the Twentieth Century Reformation (1960 to 1997)

Since it is the last days, on the eve of the [second] coming of our Lord [Jesus Christ]/, peoples' hearts will falter and the truth will diminish, the Devil's power will extend the darkness till the ends/, [but] the believers bound by a sense of duty, will raise the banner of the Cross/, saving souls and preaching the gospel...may the Holy Spirit of Pentecost, overflow in our heart[s].

– Singapore-Penang Prayer Fellowship's "Fellowship Song (*Tuange*)", 1966 (modified from Hymn 177 of Jia Yuming's Hymnal *Shengtu Xinsheng* [The Heartfelt Voices of the Saints])

When Leona Wu passed away in October 1974 (at the age of 80), a four-day programme of funeral wake services was organised. Ng Phek Loan read Wu's testament during one service. In it, Wu "exhorted members of the League to...support the ICCC to the end" for "the sake of the Gospel and the fundamental faith."¹ How did the two institutions draw on the fundamentalist strand of their independent Christian heritage to build links into the global context of fundamentalism during the second-half of the twentieth century? How did their "bound sense" of premillennial "duty" – as depicted in the epigraph's reference to Jesus Christ's second coming – fit into the vision and mission of the ICCC movement? This chapter will trace the post-war histories of the CLBS and SCEL through the lens of the ICCC-led "Twentieth Century Reformation" campaign. Together with the local fundamentalist alliance of the Malaysia Council of Christian Churches (MCCC), they became key participants in this protracted movement. Quek Kiok Chiang's monthly periodical, the *Malaysia Christian (MC)*, was central in shaping its readership's involvement

¹ Quek Kiok Chiang, "The Singapore Christian Evangelistic League and the Twentieth Century Reformation Movement", SCEL, 1985, 80.

in the Twentieth Century Reformation. This chapter will also examine the important role that SCEL-supported women evangelists played in the pioneering missionary work of the remote areas in Peninsular Malaysia.

The *Malaysia Christian* and the “Twentieth Century Reformation”

In 1961, SCEL published its 25th Anniversary Silver Jubilee commemorative magazine. Prior to 1961, the League had published six such issues: the first four during the pre-war years and only two in 1946 and 1951.² The leaders of SCEL were clearly unable to sustain the regular production of the magazine after the war. Thus, Wu decided to borrow space from Quek’s *Malaysia Christian* periodical (later renamed *Southeast Asia Christian*), using it as a platform for SCEL and CLBS.³ After the MCCC was inaugurated in 1956 as a rival to the less conservative and more ecumenical Malayan Christian Council, *MC* was quickly transformed into its official organ.⁴ A dedicatory message for the first issue underscored in no uncertain terms that its editors (Quek and Timothy Tow) were committed to resisting the trend of heresy and false teachings during the “last days” by “painfully rebuking heretical teachings”.⁵

The message also reflected *MC*’s frequent use of dispensational premillennialist (hereafter dispensationalist) theology. Premillennialism as a doctrine has been present since the days of the early Church. Margaret Bendroth explains it as “a theory [or belief] about end times, stressing the downward trend

² Wu, “Fakanci”, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴ Quek Kiok Chiang, *Thanksgiving*, 399. The MCCC was later renamed as Singapore Malaysia Council of Christian Churches (SMCCC) after August 1965 and Singapore Council of Christian Churches (SCCC) by 1986. It comprised fundamentalist groups like the BP Church of Singapore and Malaysia, SCEL and the newly-organised Malaysia Pioneer Mission.

⁵ Guok Koh Mou, “Wei Nanyang Jidutu Chuangkan Xianci [Dedicatory Words for the *Malaysia Christian*’s Founding Publication]”, *MC*, July 1963, 2.

of human history” prior to the imminent return of Jesus Christ to rule for a thousand-year period, the millennium.⁶ During the end times, an anti-Christ will arise to oppose Jesus Christ. In the days leading up to the end times, the spirit of anti-Christ will already be at work, insidiously corrupting the church and civilization. The pessimism arising from such a belief shapes the way premillennialists read trends in human history and culture, which for them constitute a cosmic struggle fought between the supernatural armed forces of God and Satan.⁷

A separate but related doctrine, dispensationalism, was introduced to North America from Britain in the late nineteenth century as “a system of premillennial interpretation designed to order and explain... biblical prophecy”.⁸ The system consists of “sharp separations of various historical eras, or dispensations”.⁹ In each dispensation, “God tested humanity through a different plan of salvation. Humans failed each test, and each era ended in a catastrophic divine judgement” such as the expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the Flood.¹⁰ Dispensationalists believe that the current Age of the Church (dating from the death of Christ) is also heading towards such “catastrophic divine judgement”. The dispensationalist system transformed premillennialism into a compelling blueprint of human history that rendered all signs of civilizational chaos and degradation intelligible, which facilitated its gradual acceptance as the prime historical outlook of the conservative Christians in China by the 1930s and 1940s.

⁶ Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 41.

⁷ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 51.

⁸ Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 41-2.

⁹ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 40.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

These teachings were transmitted from North America during the early twentieth century. Premillennialism rose in popularity during the 1920s when the fundamentalist-modernist controversies in China surfaced.¹¹ Conservative missionaries would organise meetings modelled after popular conferences like the Keswick Convention in England, famous for its emphasis on holiness or “higher Christian life” teachings.¹² Many leading premillennialist teachers were invited to speak, causing Keswick’s teachings to become “rooted firmly in millenarian soil”.¹³ One such teacher was W. H. Griffith Thomas, who spoke at the 1913 Keswick convention and was later invited to address a missionary retreat in China in 1920. The latter event led to the formation of the fundamentalist Bible Union of China which also marked the beginnings of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies in the country.¹⁴

Once premillennialism became popular amongst the conservative missionaries, it was naturally disseminated to fundamentalist Chinese leaders, many of whom were part of the burgeoning independent Christian sector. Dora Yu, for example, became a famous advocate of Keswick teaching in China. The yearly two-week summer Bible schools that she started in 1910 became focussed on the premillennial theme of the “Lord’s Second Coming” by 1915.¹⁵ The ablest exponent of premillennialism, however, turned out to be a younger man – Watchman Nee – who had been directly influenced by Yu during the Fuzhou revivals in 1920. His premillennial beliefs were reflected in his highly-

¹¹ Guo, *Fandui Heyi*, 127-128.

¹² David Bundy, “Keswick and the Experience of Evangelical Piety”, in *Modern Christian Revivals*, 118.

¹³ Sandeen, *Roots*, 180.

¹⁴ Yao, *Fundamentalist Movement*, 55-56; Lian, *Conversion*, 144.

¹⁵ Lian, *Redeemed*, 39-40; also see, Silas Wu, *Dora Yu*, 170-171.

influential magnum opus, *The Spiritual Man*. By the 1930s, Nee also went on to start his own network of churches based on his personal teachings.¹⁶

One avowed Chinese premillennialist was Jia Yuming, who directly influenced key Singaporean leaders like Leona Wu, Tay Swee Lan and Quek Kiok Chiang and whose books were key theological texts for the fourth-year students in the CLBS.¹⁷ It can be argued that the hopelessness of the war in China during the 1930s to 1940s bred a surety in Jia's apocalyptic vision of premillennialism. In his theological treatise, *Perfect Salvation* (written in 1945), he asserted that increasing occurrences of war and suffering on earth, persecution of Christians, and corruption of Church doctrines supported Biblical evidence for premillennialism.¹⁸

Throughout the 1960s to the 1980s, the *MC* and *SEAC* frequently published selected extracts of Jia's works. A section of his *Perfect Salvation* which affirmed premillennialism was reprinted in *SEAC* in 1977. Quek inserted an editor's afternote declaring that bodies such as the ICCC, SCEL and CLBS "expressly stipulate...that Jesus will come before the millennium."¹⁹ As mentioned in Chapter Two, John Sung's teachings had conveyed a premillennial urgency for evangelism. Over time, Quek became a keen expositor of this teaching. Like many dispensationalists, he believed that one key sign of the end times was Israel's reestablishment as a nation in 1948,

¹⁶ Ibid., 163-173.

¹⁷ "Prospectus", 7.

¹⁸ Jia Yuming, "Erci Jianglin de Yesu [The Second Coming of Jesus]", *Southeast Asia Christian* (Hereafter *SEAC*), Dec 1977, 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

interpreted as a sure indication that Palestine was being prepared for Armageddon.²⁰

Participating in the Twentieth Century Reformation

The *MC* was hugely influenced by the American *Christian Beacon (CB)*; over the years, Quek translated a number of its articles.²¹ The *CB* was established in 1936 by Carl McIntire (the long-time President of ICCC), who remained as its Editor-in-Chief till shortly before his death.²² Although an independent newspaper, the *CB* remained closely connected to the ICCC and was lauded for having “undoubtedly done more than any other factor involved in bringing together this fellowship of churches [ICCC]”, being distributed to eighty-seven countries.²³ McIntire was a tenacious fundamentalist leader who was thoroughly committed to dispensationalism and used it innovatively to formulate the Twentieth Century Reformation (TCR) campaign, invoking the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The TCR became the core of the ICCC’s struggle against the WCC, which embodied the twin evils of liberalism and ecumenism. The *CB* was a key player in advocating and shaping the TCR. For many years, it sponsored a daily radio programme called the 20th Century Reformation Hour. At its height, the programme was broadcasted over 610 radio stations across America and also overseas by short-wave.²⁴

Members of the local fundamentalist alliance in Singapore and Malaya were drawn into the thick of this international religious face-off by 1950. The

²⁰ Carpenter, *Revive*, 98. See, for example *MC*, Jun 1963, 4 and Jun 1967, 2.

²¹ See, for example *MC* issues for Feb 1961, 1, Dec 1969, 1 and Jan 1971, 1.

²² Elizabeth Morgan, “The Christian Beacon”, in *McIntire*, 164.

²³ “Sixth International Council of Christian Churches World Congress Book”, in *McIntire*, 165.

²⁴ “Extract from ‘A Brief History of the Bible Presbyterian Church and its agencies’”, in *McIntire*, 163.

MC would become an important weapon, drawing on the ideas, theories and worldview propounded by the TCR. In November 1964, it published a provocative front-page article (translated from the *CB*) titled “The True Church and a Modern Counterfeit”. The article asserted that the “true” Church could only be founded on the basis of being faithful to “Biblical truth”. Citing opposition by Protestant reformers such as John Calvin and John Knox to what they considered as the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, the article excoriated the WCC for promoting heresy through new, liberal doctrines, and a “counterfeit” ecumenical unity in the twentieth century. The article appealed to church communities to emulate the Reformers by following the TCR to find “true unity” in the ICCC.²⁵

The *MC* consistently identified its related Christian bodies (such as ICCC, MCCC) as the true heirs of the Protestant Reformation. This also allowed the ICCC to present itself as God’s legitimate earthly force engaged in battle with the Devil’s WCC, which was seen as too friendly with the Catholic Church, other non-Protestant denominations such as the Coptic Orthodox Church, Communist-controlled state churches and even other religions like Buddhism and Sikhism. In an article that surgically dissected the differences between the two religious bodies, the WCC was accused of sharing the Catholic view of the original Reformation as “sinful” and “schismatic” rather than as an “imperative” necessitated by the deficiencies of the Church at the time. “Such thinking”, it charged, “was spreading in the leadership and publications of the [WCC]...surreptitiously destroying the faith of the Reformed [Protestant]

²⁵ R. B. Kuiper, “Zhenjiaohui yu Xiandai Xuwei [The True Church and a Modern Counterfeit]”, *MC*, Nov 1964, 1- 2.

churches around the globe.” The ICCC, by contrast, was “utterly faithful to the principles of the Reformation” and was leading the TCR to “recover these essential truths”.²⁶ Here, the *MC* became a tool that determined which organisations/communities stayed within the category of “true” Church, using the TCR standards as its benchmark.

The *MC*’s aims and theological position closely matched those of the SCEL. The League’s responsibility, as expressed by Quek Kiok Chiang on many occasions, was twofold: spreading the Gospel and defending the orthodoxy of the faith.²⁷ Writing in 1970, he underlined the SCEL’s faithful planting of preaching points/mission chapels staffed by Chin Lien graduates. He also summarised the League’s heritage and contributions to the battle for orthodoxy, emphasising its faithful adherence to John Sung’s teachings and its decision to support the ICCC, as well as its continual commitment to the TCR cause.²⁸

The League and CLBS were dedicated participants in yearly events like the World Prayer Day meetings and the Easter Sunrise services that were organised by the MCCC. An important display of the League’s commitment to the TCR was its participation in the fifth conference of the Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches or FECCC (the regional subsidiary body of ICCC in Asia) held in Taiwan in 1964. The key leaders of SCEL and the MCCC were all

²⁶ “Wanguo Jidujiao Lianhehui yu Pushi Jiaohui Xiejinghui de Fenbie [The Differences between the International Council of Christian Churches and the World Council of Churches]” *MC*, Sep 1966, 2. See also “‘Zhongjiao Gaige’ Zhizhenwei [The Truths and Lies about ‘Reformation’]”, *MC*, Sep 1970, 1.

²⁷ Quek Kiok Chiang, “Chongshen Bentuan – Guangfan Fuying, Weihu Zhendao – de Shuangchong Renwu [Restating our League’s – Spreading the Gospel, Defending the Truth – Dual Responsibility]”, Singapore Christian Evangelistic League 35th Anniversary Souvenir Number, 1970, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

involved.²⁹ This conference was perceived as part of the forefront of the battle against Communism in Asia. Communism/Communist leanings and ecumenism were often conflated by the fundamentalists, who saw the sympathies of the WCC liberals towards socialism and the participation of Communist-controlled churches (such as those in the Soviet Union and China) in WCC leadership, as signs that the Communists had “thoroughly infiltrated” the Council.³⁰

Fundamentalist mistrust of Communism was of course a global phenomenon. In his study, Kevin Yao observes that the Christian Fundamentals League for China (an ultra-fundamentalist alliance that was formed by conservative missionaries in 1927) “was a strong believer in the communist conspiracy theory, and its favorite strategy against modernism was to link it with Bolshevism.” Modernists were accused of being “misled by the Red propaganda which has been injected in our churches under the guise of intellectuality and science.”³¹ Similarly, the ICCC/FECCC leaders were highly convinced that there was a clandestine Communist plot to dominate the Church in order to achieve its ambitions of global supremacy. In a statement issued in 1964, they alleged that the Communists resorted to “insidious tactics” to bring important political and religious agencies (such as the WCC) under their influence – “infiltrating” the leadership’s thinking with socialist ideology,

²⁹ “Yuandong Jidujiao Lianhehui Jianjie [A Short Introduction of the Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches]”, *MC*, July 1964, 1-2; Quek Kiok Chiang “Yuandong Jidujiao Lianhehui Diwujie Daibiao Dahui Jilüe [A Record of the Fifth Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches Representatives’ Meeting]”, *MC*, Aug 1964, 1.

³⁰ See, for example, *MC*, Sep 1964, 2, May 1970, 4 and *SEAC*, Jan 1976, 1-2, July 1981, 2.

³¹ Yao, *Fundamentalist Movement*, 91.

inducements, intimidation and even bribery – thereby smoothing the path ahead for a future Communist revolution.³²

Chiang Kai-shek's written greetings to Carl McIntire and the delegates of the 1964 FECCC conference praised McIntire's past efforts of "resolutely opposing atheistic Communism" and "exposing international Communism's plot of thoroughly infiltrating Christianity". McIntire and the ICC, we must note, developed a close working relationship with the Kuomintang during the Cold War because of their strident anti-Communism.³³ Significantly, this was the only overseas regional conference which reported such a strong turnout from the core SCEL leaders; in other conferences, Quek was typically the sole representative. In April 1975, after Chiang's death, the League sent a letter to his widow Soong Mei-ling, noting that since its founding in 1935, the members "regularly remembered the respectable ruler President Chiang" in their fortnightly meetings and expressed a hope for God to "save our China soon (*Zaori Zhengwo Zhonghua*)".³⁴ In 1957, Leona Wu also congratulated her brother, Goh Lok Chor, for founding the Philippines branch of the Asia Christian Anti-Communist Apologetics Council.³⁵ This polemical anti-Communism would only wane in the 1980s when opportunities arose for foreign Christians to re-enter China.³⁶ The League's ideology, however, did not find its expression in a local context: *MC* and SCEL publications remained largely silent on the local Communist threat or even other issues like the merger

³² "Guoji Gongcan Zhuyi yu Jidu Jiaohui [Communism and Christianity]", *MC*, Sep 1964, 2.

³³ Zhan Wei Liang, "The Anti-Communist Movement in Taiwan Churches during the Cold-War Period" (M. A. Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan, 2012), 14; Picture of Carl McIntire and his wife being honoured by Taiwan with the Armed Forces Medal, in *McIntire*, 78.

³⁴ "Xinjiapo Jidutu Budaotuan zhi Jiangjieshi Furen shu [Letter by Singapore Christian Evangelistic League to Mrs Chiang Kai-shek]", *SEAC*, Apr 1975, 4.

³⁵ Goh, "Daonian", 5.

³⁶ "Dalu Defuying Men [The Door for Evangelism in China]", *SEAC*, Sep 1982, 2.

and separation of Singapore and Malaysia. Only a report about the 1964 FECCC mentioned that the delegates gathered to pray for the “unrest” in Singapore – referring to the 1964 race riots – every evening.³⁷

Chin Lien Graduates as Independent Evangelists to the Remote Regions in Malaysia

The 1950s to the 1970s were not just a time of rhetoric, however; they brought unprecedented opportunities for evangelism and missions in Singapore and Malaya/Malaysia. The forced relocation of the population (particularly the Chinese) into New Villages presented new openings to work in these reorganised communities. As noted in Chapter Two, churches and mission bodies were drafted by the colonial government to provide humanitarian aid to the New Villages. Other than the China Inland Mission (later renamed Overseas Missionary Fellowship), denominations such as the Presbyterians and Lutherans were heavily involved in this work. By 1959, out of 410 New Villages with no Malay majority, 333 (81%) had missionaries and/or local Christian workers.³⁸ In some cases, though, the presence of these workers was not long-term; in only half of these villages were the Christian workers resident.³⁹ This was despite the fact that Malaya had received 119 ex-China missionaries of the British mission boards by December 1952, by far the largest group of those who returned to the mission field after leaving China.⁴⁰ Evidently, most local

³⁷ “Malai Xiya Daidao [Pray for Malaysia]”, *MC*, Aug 1964, 4.

³⁸ Ray Nyce, *Chinese New Villages in Malaya: A Community Study*, ed. Shirle Gordon (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1973), 164.

³⁹ Sng, *Time*, 221.

⁴⁰ Lee Kam Hing, “A Neglected Story: Christian missionaries, Chinese New Villagers, and Communists in the Battle for the ‘hearts and minds’ in Malaya, 1948-1960”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 47, no. 6 (2013), 1990.

Christian workers and graduates of the theological colleges were unwilling to work permanently in these villages as they were considered unattractive.⁴¹

For the SCEL and CLBS leadership, however, these villages were “gaps” or “neglected spaces” that could be filled by the work of Chin Lien graduates.⁴² During the 1950s, SCEL became involved in outreach to the New Village Chinese. By 1960, six mission chapels in Malaya⁴³ and one on the Singapore island of Pulau Tekong had come under the League’s charge. The seminary and SCEL were also heavily involved in various long-term evangelistic projects, searching for remote areas in Singapore and Malaya where they could pioneer missions. By 1960, a more concerted and systematic strategy was implemented to sustain evangelistic work for the long term. In particular, four chapels along the east coast of Johor and Pahang, directly supported by SCEL, became the hallmark of this joint evangelistic enterprise between the two institutions. The four chapels became part of the series of anniversary mission chapel projects that the League undertook between 1960 and 1981.

Women were visibly at the forefront of this enterprise as most of these chapels were staffed on a long-term basis by female graduates from CLBS. They built church communities, oversaw evangelism, and raised funds for their church compounds. This was truly an anomalous circumstance as women became the main drivers of mission work, not only for the League, but also for the BP Church and Evangelize China Fellowship (led by Andrew Gih) based in Singapore. What steps did SCEL take to establish this strategy of sending

⁴¹ Quek, “A Few Thoughts”, 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴³ Raub and Bentong (run by Ang Soo Hua), Pekan Nanas, Tamping and Kelapa Sawit (started by Evangelize China Fellowship) and Jemaluang.

female CLBS graduates to these chapels in East Johor? What resources and conceptual repertoires did they draw on to establish and sustain the strategy? How did they secure the support of the male church leaders and justify this predominantly women-led mission enterprise within the limits of divine gendered order?

CLBS assembled a faculty that was well-equipped to train its students for rural work. Many of its teachers remained there for the long-term. In 1968, out of a total of 17 teachers, 10 were women.⁴⁴ More importantly, the female teachers instructed the students in the practical skillsets needed for outreach to the Chinese in the villages. Women taught courses in music, physical education and the English language. Subsequently Quek Swee Hwa (Quek Kiok Chiang's son and choir master at CLBS) was recruited to teach the Theory of Music, while new teachers were added for Child Education, Health Education and the English Bible.⁴⁵ The students were given a platform to train for the rigours of pioneering missions through activities such as children's Sunday Schools in neighbourhoods with no church.⁴⁶

At the same time, CLBS began to focus on nurturing students for the vocation of independent preaching. During the Occupation, some 20 alumni from its first three pre-war graduating classes had been either sent to the jungled interior of Pahang and Kelantan or to work in the churches (which were self-supporting as all missions funding had been cut off).⁴⁷ After the war, the

⁴⁴ "Jiaoyuan Heying [Picture of Faculty]", *MC*, May 1968, 4.

⁴⁵ "Prospectus", 7.

⁴⁶ See, for example, 'Wuke Shuxia' Lingtong Zhurixue Gongzuo Baogao [Under Five Trees' Neighbourhood Sunday School Ministry Report]", *MC*, Oct 1969, 5 and 7; Su Zorong, "'Chin Lien Sunday School' Ministry Report", *MC*, Sep 1970, 8.

⁴⁷ Tow, "Steps", 12.

massive reduction in the size of the League and its inability to attract younger members meant that the original revivalist vision of the pre-war years gradually became irrelevant. With the new developments discussed above, the seminary shifted from training members of the SCEL bands to training and recruiting students as indigenous evangelists for the League's chapels in East Johor and Pahang.

CLBS teachers acted as recruiters among their students, directing them to the various jobs being created by Christian organisations involved in rural work. Two sisters who graduated from CLBS recounted how they agreed to become SCEL-sponsored evangelists to the Evangelize China Fellowship chapel in Pekan Nanas after Leona Wu informed them of the opportunity.⁴⁸ The number of graduates remained small each year (five to ten), making it easy for the teachers to match the graduates with existing vacancies or newly created posts. As we can observe from Table 5, an average of one to two graduates per year (mostly female) were employed by SCEL and CLBS and they were frequently sent to work in the East Johorean chapels.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Female graduates</i>	<i>Male graduates</i>	<i>SCEL / CLBS sponsored</i>	<i>Other mission bodies</i>	<i>Singapore churches</i>	<i>Malaysia and Southeast Asia</i>
1966	7	2*	2	2	1	3
1970	3	1	1	-	1	2
1971	4	-	2	-	2	-
1975	4	3	3	-	1	3
1976	2	7	1	-	2	6

Table 5. Employment Destinations for students upon graduation

Source: See *MC*, May 1966, 4, May 1970, 3, May 1971, 4 and *SEAC*, May 1975, 4, May 1976, 3.

*One student was still unemployed upon graduation

⁴⁸ Su Junxian, "Wode Jianzheng [My Testimony]" and Su Junying, "Shangdi Jianxuan le Wo [God Chose Me]", CLBS, 1984, 62-64. For other such examples, see Ye Bide, "Wuludinan de Jidu Jiaohui [The Church at Ulu Tiram]", CLBS, 1977, 25.

The four chapels along Malaysia's East Coast became the core of the joint mission enterprise between SCEL and CLBS. Starting from Endau in 1960 (the building was only erected by 1965), each chapel was used to mark the key five-year anniversary milestones of the League and their progress in missions in the region. As these chapels were being built at regular intervals, this required the League members to make substantial monetary commitments.⁴⁹ At the same time, the women sent to work in these chapels came to be seen as models of the type of independent evangelists that both institutions endeavoured to groom. This was demonstrated through the frequent reports published in the *MC/SEAC* and various souvenir magazines throughout the 1960s to 1980s.⁵⁰

Reports of these women's work demonstrate considerable initiative and autonomy in the mission field. That said, a Christian patriarchal order was nevertheless present. For example, male leaders like Tow and Quek made occasional trips to these chapels to preach and conduct rites such as baptism and Communion, which only ordained ministers have the ecclesiastical authority to perform.⁵¹ The League also drew on partnerships with churches and male clergy to ordain its own pastors whenever a need arose. These men could then itinerate around the chapels to execute pastoral duties.⁵² Thus the substantial presence of female leadership in SCEL could not eliminate the patriarchal order in the mission chapels, and these women themselves remained subordinated to SCEL's executive committee.

⁴⁹ See, for example Tay Swee Lan, "Guowai Fuyingzhan Xunli [Ceremony for Overseas Gospel Stations]", *SEAC*, Nov 1976, 4.

⁵⁰ See, for example *MC*, Feb 1961, 3, Jun 1963, 2, Aug 1965, 4.

⁵¹ See, for example *MC*, Jun 1963, 2, Aug 1965, 4 and *SEAC*, Nov 1976, 4.

⁵² Teo See Eng, interview by author, 21 May 2015, Singapore.

Generally speaking, though, the women evangelists exercised considerable day-to-day authority as the sending agencies and male pastors were too far away oversee their work. Leaders like Leona Wu and Tay Swee Lan had also worked in similar capacities for the EPM – female preachers taking sole charge of rural chapels – during the early years of their careers.⁵³ Their experiences would have served as precedents, making it more acceptable for the women evangelists to hold such authority in the mission field.

In the reports on the mission chapels, men are often a mere backdrop for women's efforts or successes. For example, in a 1976 report on Endau, the resident woman evangelist discussed the first baptism ceremony ever conducted for the Endau and Hubong chapels. Although she mentioned that Quek Kiok Chiang had conducted the baptisms, her focus was on the "harvest" of converts, for which she credited the efforts of female evangelists who had preceded her.⁵⁴ It can be suggested that the instituted Christian patriarchy remained largely on an ideological and symbolic level in these chapels and that it was restricted to those tasks for which male pastors were indispensable. Women were the main actors in the daily operations of evangelisation, providing services and building the small religious communities under their care. It must nonetheless be emphasised that these women were not explicitly subverting the patriarchal order; they demonstrated a willingness to constrain their freedoms within the framework of their conservative faith by submitting to the divine gendered order and the authority of their sending agency.

⁵³ See, for example, *The Presbyterian Church in Singapore and Malaysia*, 77.

⁵⁴ Zheng Baozhen, "Xinglou Yinxitang Yijiuqilunian Baogao [1976 Endau Silver Jubilee Chapel Report]", CLBS, 1977, 26.

Over the long term, the seminary was particularly concerned with maintaining a team committed to the theological orthodoxy and the “faith missions” model of CLBS. Teachers like Timothy Tow, Quek Kiok Chiang, Tay Swee Lan and Ang Soo Hua were necessary partners in this project as their presence helped to develop and entrench a strong spiritual culture and identity in the school. CLBS objectives were clearly articulated in the 1972 prospectus:

- (a) To guide the students in the study and understanding of the Word of God.
- (b) To cultivate in the students purity in doctrine and life.
- (c) To train faithful and Spirit-filled workers and prepare them for effective Christian service as pioneering missionaries...in South East Asia.⁵⁵

The prospectus also affirmed the “faith missions” model, emphasising that “the Seminary has not...organised any fund raising campaign, nor run into debts nor raised any loan.”⁵⁶ As noted in Chapter Two, Wu’s plan of running CLBS on the “faith missions” model was linked to the notion of independence from any denominational control in order to safeguard the institution’s orthodoxy and to grow an authentic Three-Self Christianity. Initially, this model served as the basis of providing theological training for the evangelistic bands to grow the churches’ self-propagative capacity during the pre-war years and now, it became a core tenet of the seminary.

The leaders of CLBS and SCEL, then, drew on a range of strategies and conceptual repertoires to create a niche in remote missions. These models served both as historical precedents and contemporaneous references that enabled the leaders to recruit their students (especially the women) for Christian work in these remote regions. A 1973 essay by Tay Swee Lan utilised numerous

⁵⁵ “Prospectus”, 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

examples of Biblical and missionary women to explain that they displayed tremendous will and energy. She argued:

Typically speaking, the physical strength, capabilities, financial muscle and power of women are inferior to men. However women are more sincere and persevering in sentiment when it comes to dealing with people and things, and more sacrificial in spirit; hence women have been able to contribute substantially to mission work.⁵⁷

Timothy Tow corroborated Tay's argument in 1974, observing that most graduates from CLBS were women, whom he called – “the more humble handmaidens”. He went on to suggest that the humbler status of these women did not stop them from becoming pioneering missionaries for the more distant regions, commenting that they had “their footprints all over the remote corners...repairing fences [and] filling cracks”.⁵⁸ Thus he was seeking to promote an image of submissive Christian women while validating their pioneering missionary work as divine service.

Financing the Seminary and Mission Chapels

It must be mentioned that CLBS and SCEL obtained substantial support from their own members and/or local Christian supporters to finance their activities. The closely-related SCEL and the readership of *MC/SEAC* were regularly informed about the specific pecuniary needs of the seminary; open requests for monetary support were directed at them. In particular, the League was a constant financier of CLBS; the *MC/SEAC* and SCEL souvenir publications are replete with examples of how the leaders and members of the League supported the seminary through their financial offerings during the yearly leadership

⁵⁷ Tay Swee Lan, “Funü yu Xuanjiao Shigong [Women and Mission Work]”, *MC*, Sep 1973, 2 and 4.

⁵⁸ Timothy Tow “Zhuilian ‘Zhushinü’ Wujingling [Remembering ‘God’s Handmaiden’ Leona Wu]”, *MC*, Oct 1974, 2.

installation ceremonies.⁵⁹ In the same way, monetary needs for the East Johorean chapels were also advertised through these publications as readers were updated about developments in the mission field.⁶⁰

While it is evident that SCEL and CLBS used these publications as fundraising tools, what is more significant was that the two organisations only solicited funding from communities that were related to the MCCC/SMCCC and the regional Evangelistic Leagues (largely through the Singapore-Penang Prayer Fellowship) – Christians who identified with their independent stance and fundamentalism. This suggests that as long as fundraising did not contravene the standards of “faith missions” and was pursued within communities that were broadly identified as “true” believers, the leaders of the two institutions found it acceptable to request for such support.

Epilogue: The Problem of Ageing

From the 1970s onward, SCEL faced very different challenges – diminishing membership and an ageing leadership. During the year of the League’s fortieth anniversary (1975), Ho Yew Sam and Tay Swee Lan decided that it was timely to raise this unpropitious issue. Ho called for a more inclusive and outward-looking approach, arguing that the League should contact leaders from various churches, inviting them to support its work and “encourage their youth in church to join in enthusiastically.”⁶¹ Although Tay did not disagree with Ho’s strategy, she did not share his enthusiasm for the recruitment of young members,

⁵⁹ See, for example, *MC*, Oct 1969, 8 and Oct 1972, 4.

⁶⁰ See, for example, *MC*, Jan 1972, 4 and *SEAC*, Nov 1973, 2.

⁶¹ Ho Yew Sam, “Budaotuan Shishi Zhounian Ganxiang [My Thoughts on the Evangelistic League’s 40th Anniversary]”, SCEL, 1975, 8.

recalling Leona Wu's pointed complaint that young SCEL members elected to leadership positions, "failed to fulfil their duties, or to attend meetings, leaving the older batches [of leaders] with no choice but to continue serving in these positions."⁶²

As noted in Chapter Two, the League had not attempted to arrest the emerging problems of declining membership since the early post-war years. One important factor in this decline was the gradual shift from Chinese-stream to English-stream education in Singapore from the 1950s to the 1970s. When the People's Action Party came to power in 1959, the split between English and Chinese stream enrolments was equal (about 28,000 each). However by 1978, enrolments into the Chinese stream had fallen to a low of 5289, while those in the English stream peaked at 41,995.⁶³ The Chinese-speaking churches (and thus the predominantly linguistically Chinese SCEL) were also affected by this transformation as their younger members began leaving to join English-speaking churches.⁶⁴

The challenges facing the SCEL are demonstrated by the formation of a separate English-speaking Evangelistic League under the auspices of Life BP Church in 1971. Led by Timothy Tow's younger brother, this organisation was established to promote a lifestyle of evangelism among the English-educated youth in Life Church. What is striking is that the English League was started unilaterally by Tow, seemingly without any prior consultation with the leaders of SCEL, even though the congregation already had its own League district.⁶⁵

⁶² Tay Swee Lan, "Wo Suorensi de Wujingling [The Leona Wu I Know]", SCEL, 1975, 20.

⁶³ Edwin Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008), 302.

⁶⁴ Gabriel Koh Kai Beng, "The Development of the Mandarin and Dialect Church in Singapore 1950-2003" (Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2004), 33.

⁶⁵ See *MC*, Oct 1969, 8.

Although the SCEL leaders were welcoming of this new evangelistic body – inviting its members to attend one of their monthly meetings – there is no evidence of any substantial follow-up plan to work with this new entity and target the growing number of English speakers in Singapore.⁶⁶ The sources give no indication about what the leadership thought about it. This silence may reflect an implicit commitment on SCEL’s part to remain focussed on the Chinese-speaking population. Indeed, most Chinese-speaking churches did so, expanding their outreach efforts to lower income Chinese-speaking Singaporeans during the 1980s rather than trying to attract the English-educated population.⁶⁷

Calls for leadership renewal persisted through the 1980s and 1990s and although some more ink was spilt to debate about it, it is clear from photographic evidence of the 1985, 1995 and 2000 anniversary magazines that the average age of the League’s membership remained high.⁶⁸ Opinions about this situation remained divided. For example, one contributor for the 1985 anniversary magazine implored “the aged members of the League” to stop “taking the first place” and to “step aside to allow the next generation to succeed.”⁶⁹ Another contributor, however, urged the older and younger members of the League to work together to achieve a favourable process of leadership transition. Younger co-workers, he said, should patiently wait to “receive the baton” rather than “snatching” it.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ “Yingyu Xinjiapo Jidutu Budaotuan Chengli [The Founding of the English Singapore Christian Evangelistic League]”, *MC*, Feb 1971, 4.

⁶⁷ Sng, *Time*, 306-307.

⁶⁸ Photographs in SCEL, 1985, 68; SCEL, 2000, 76-83. Also see Appendix A, Picture 9.

⁶⁹ Yap Un Han, “Shi ‘Leling’ ne? Shi ‘Munian’ ne? [Is it the ‘Joyful Years’? Is it the ‘Twilight Years’?]”, SCEL, 1985, 21.

⁷⁰ Gu Huihuang, “Qiuzhu Xingqi Heyong de Jiebangren [May the Lord Raise Useful Persons to Receive the Baton]”, SCEL, 1985, 23.

By 1997, the key leadership positions of Principal of CLBS and President of SCEL were handed over from Ng Phek Loan (who had succeeded Leona Wu in 1975) to Teo See Eng (Zhang Shien).⁷¹ A teacher by training, Teo joined the League in 1977, working as its administrative secretary (*ganshi*) – a specially created non-executive committee position – for a number of years before becoming Vice-President in the early 1990s.⁷² Teo was officially commissioned by his Presbyterian congregation to work in CLBS after being jointly ordained by that church and SCEL.⁷³ Here, key leadership renewal was not exactly achieved by internal succession but, rather, through a long-time partnership with a specific church.

Teo's rise to power in 1997 marked the beginnings of the gendered transformation of CLBS and SCEL as men arose to dominate the leadership of both organisations after the deaths of the top female leaders, Ng Phek Loan and Tay Swee Lan (who died in 1998). This male dominance was particularly accentuated in CLBS; by 2003, for example, 10 out of its 15 faculty members were male pastors and preachers.⁷⁴ Such a trend reflected an increasing dependence on specific churches to provide leadership and theological expertise within the seminary. As these churches were largely conservative in nature, they adhered to a patriarchal structure and groomed leadership teams dominated by men. CLBS and to a lesser extent, SCEL increasingly drew on this pool of men. The pace of leadership renewal in SCEL was comparatively slower: as late as

⁷¹ “Huangbiran Guniang Jianshi [A Short History of Ms Ng Phek Loan]”, SCEL, 2005, 24.

⁷² Teo See Eng, interview by author. Also see, “Xinjiapo Jidutu Budaotuan Guwen Mushi Zhiyuan Zhengfu Quzhang Yilan [An Overview of the Advisory Pastors, Executive Committee Members and District Leaders]”, SCEL, 1995, 54.

⁷³ *The Chronicles of 90 Years of Zion Presbyterian Church*, 2013, 21.

⁷⁴ “Benyuan Changren Jiangshi Jianjie [The Seminary's Full-Time Lecturers]” and “Benyuan Jianren Jiangshi Jianjie [The Seminary's Part-Time Lecturers]”, *Jinlian Lingxiu Shenxueyuan Zaosheng Jianzhang* [2003 Chin Lien Bible Seminary Prospectus], unnumbered.

2000, three out of the eight executive committee members were at least over 70 years old.⁷⁵

This case of an ageing leadership and membership seems to be unique to both organisations (particularly SCEL) and does not seem to have been duplicated among other fundamentalist groups. Even in CLBS, renewal did take place by the end of the twentieth century, as evidenced by Teo's installation of a new leadership team for CLBS, although he encountered less success in the League. This situation reflects a common feature of independent Christianity that CLBS and SCEL continued to display: a personality-driven styled leadership where the authority was constantly wielded by certain influential individuals or a small team of leaders. This trait has been essential in keeping both organisations independent of ecclesiastical authority since their establishment, but it is clearly a double-edged sword.

Pastors such as Teo See Eng replaced women like Ng and Tay who had been influenced by the independent Chinese Christian tradition to steer clear of any denominational affiliations in order to maintain the independence of the seminary and League, thus ensuring that the finality of any decision lay within the authority of their leadership. The new male-led leadership continued with this practice; however, it is evident that their ecclesiastical ties influenced them to broaden and renew the seminary's curriculum, ensuring closer alignment of the students' training with the specific needs of their churches. This does not suggest that a weakening of CLBS's autonomy occurred because of this

⁷⁵ Photograph of Executive Committee, SCEL, 2000, 81.

influence; rather, it indicates the fostering of synergistic ties with specific churches after Teo's ascension to power. Teo's own Zion Chinese Presbyterian Church became a major employer of CLBS graduates when it intensified its efforts in establishing mission chapels all over Singapore and Malaysia since 1993.⁷⁶ Furthermore, by 2000, Teo expanded the original East Johor mission initiative by launching the "Distant Missions Ministry" project under the auspices of SCEL, aimed at sending seminary graduates to pioneer mission work in the remote regions of Southeast Asia and China which have little or no Christian presence (in some cases doing "covert" evangelism while teaching in the rural areas).⁷⁷ Courses on Christian apologetics, worship studies, heterodoxies, and various indigenous religions were added to equip graduates with the array of skills that were needed for pastoring congregations in these Chinese-speaking regions.⁷⁸ Thus, the evangelistic vision and complementary relationship of CLBS and SCEL were, once again, being retained and adapted to the fresh context of regional missions advanced by the new leadership.

⁷⁶ *Chronicles*, 29-51.

⁷⁷ "Xinjiapo Jidutu Budaotuan Shigong Jianjie [Short Introduction on Singapore Christian Evangelistic League's Work]", SCEL, 2005, 131-132.

⁷⁸ Curriculum for Diploma in Theology, 2003 Chin Lien Bible Seminary Prospectus, unnumbered.

Conclusion

Since the 1920s and 1930s, the “independent” Christian sector started to contribute significantly to the vitality of Protestantism in China. Daniel Bays estimates that by the 1940s, these groups may have accounted for up to 200,000 persons, approximately 20-25 percent of all Protestants.¹ This estimate, however, is unable to account for the extensive influence that some of these independent groups and personalities exerted on Protestantism in China and amongst the overseas Chinese. The “spiritual giants” of Chinese Christianity today or what Leslie Lyall – a China Inland Mission missionary who was one of John Sung’s biographers – calls the “notable contemporaries” of Sung all came from the independent sector.² In fact, many contemporary Church leaders and scholars attribute the predominantly conservative nature of the Chinese churches today to the long-lasting legacies of these spiritual giants. Bays, for example, accredits the “extensive growth of the ‘underground’ Protestant church sector” in China during the 1980s to the overseas followers of independent Christian groups such as Watchman Nee’s “Little Flock” churches and the True Jesus Church. These groups exported an “avalanche of information...books, pamphlets...[and] videos” that “swept through” many parts of China in the 1980s. Bays contends that these groups laid the foundations for the emergence of important underground churches then.³ Other accounts, however, have been scathing – focussing on the fundamentalist mentality that continues to persist in most of these churches. For example in 1999, one scholar

¹ Bays, “Growth”, 310.

² Lyall, *Biography of John Sung*, 211-212. These individuals include Wang Mingdao, Watchman Nee, Shi Meiyu and Wang Zai (a well-known revivalist who was once a close associate of Watchman Nee).

³ Bays, *New History*, 195-197. Also see, Lian, *Redeemed*, 215-220.

suggested that the Chinese churches were suffering from theological stagnation, contending that their persistent fundamentalist inclinations have kept them rooted to a theology which derived from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s and 1940s.⁴ The negativity underlying this criticism nonetheless goes to demonstrate the ingrained nature of fundamentalism which continues to endure within the churches in China and among some Chinese Christians overseas, of which independent Chinese Christianity has played an influential role in shaping and entrenching.

This study demonstrates that the extraordinary impact of independent revivalist-evangelists like Sung must be evaluated not only through the teachings that they imparted, but also by the practices and structures (or conceptual repertoires) of the various religious communities and sub-cultures that they created. These communities became the carriers and agents of these conceptual repertoires, utilising them to develop their ethos, forge new connections and pathways, and create indigenous Christian traditions that were rooted in the evangelical beliefs and independent Christian legacies that they had grown out from. Both CLBS and SCEL have shown themselves to have inherited this legacy as they appropriated the organisational models, theologies and teachings of Sung and Jia Yuming, adapting them to the context of Singapore and Malaysia.

At least three developments can be observed which evoke the influences of independent Chinese Christianity. Firstly, the widespread utilisation and popularity of the evangelistic band model during the pre-war era, which cannot

⁴ Chen Zeming, "Jiaqiang Zhongguo Jiaohui de Shenxue Jianshe – Jinan Huiyishang de Dahui Fayan [Strengthening Theological Education in China – Keynote Conference Speech in the Jinan Meeting]", *Jinling Shenxueji*, 1(1999), 6-7, quoted in Ying, *The Praxis*, 346-347.

be explained as a mere importation of Sung's brand of Christianity to the communities in Singapore and Malaysia. As I have argued, it was mainly the leaders of the denominational Chinese churches who facilitated this import as they sought to use revivalism as an organisational force to grow the Church's self-propagative function. It can be suggested that the establishment of SCEL was part of their wider strategy to build on the autonomy of the Chinese churches after the leaders successfully carved out a separate space for inter-denominational cooperation that was independent of missionary control by 1931. Although the Presbyterians were evidently ahead of the Methodists in terms of autonomy, ecumenical platforms would have served as an attractive proposition to strengthen overall indigenous autonomy as the various denominations could pool their resources together to pursue their own goals without having to accommodate the demands of the mission boards. The founding of Singapore Theological College by SCCIU in 1952 is a case to the point in this matter as it was established for the Chinese churches, entirely independent of missionary control. Further investigation on the intentionality of the Church leaders, as well as the intra- and inter- denominational politics between the Chinese churches and the missionaries will be required to make a proper case for this suggestion.

Secondly, the histories of both organisations serve as an example of how the roles of preaching and evangelism were "democratised" from the 1930s. As part of their plan to develop the self-propagative capabilities of the Chinese churches, the leaders sought to make evangelism a primary responsibility of the laity. They repackaged the practice as both a key spiritual discipline and an expression of faith, normalising it as part of a spiritually revived Christian

lifestyle. The two institutions also became avenues whereby women were empowered to be active participants and leaders in a structure which observed gender egalitarianism. Women were enabled to take on important responsibilities not only within the women's sphere but also in mixed-gender scenarios where they could exercise considerable spiritual and moral authority over men. In a way, the two institutions acted as an extra-ecclesiastical space which allowed the women to partially resist and circumvent the double Chinese-Christian patriarchy. The League and seminary also enabled women like Leona Wu and Ng Phek Loan to gain a certain amount of social mobility and leverage as their roles accorded them with an influence and authority which they may have been constrained to acquire if they had remained under ecclesiastical strictures.

A question remains about why women like Wu and Ng were able to retain control of both institutions for such a long time. One suggestion can be made to answer the question. By carving out a speciality in pioneering remote missions, the women received the endorsement and patronage of male pastors who perceived their expertise as an important enterprise. As mentioned in Chapter Three, only some of the New Villages had resident Christian workers and most locally-trained clergy were unwilling to undertake long-term rural assignments. Therefore, this exceptionality in grooming missionaries who were willing to go it alone in these regions meant that the pastors viewed the work of SCEL and CLBS as filling in an important lacuna that their churches were unable to cover. Such patronage ratified the unique status of the leadership of the women, encouraging their long-term pursuit in this line of work. This specialisation in missions however restricted their appeal to younger Christians

who were already leaving the Chinese-speaking churches in large numbers by the 1970s; the corollary was a drastically reduced pool of younger Christians that they could recruit from. At the same time, the failure to groom a younger generation of like-minded leaders to take over the reins compelled women like Wu and Ng to remain in power for a longer time than usual.

Thirdly, the independence of SCEL and CLBS did not reflect any sort of anti-foreign sentiment; they sought partnerships with like-minded foreign Christians for the cause of doctrinal orthodoxy, just as their predecessors like Jia Yuming did. This important development was seen in the two organisations' deepening connections with international fundamentalism after World War II. The heritage of fundamentalism that the SCEL leaders had inherited from independent Christianity and the new connections that leaders such as Quek Kiok Chiang and Timothy Tow established with the separatist ICCC drew SCEL and CLBS into the global religious battle against the liberally-oriented WCC. The drawing of these battle lines also resulted in the extensive use of the *Malaysia Christian/Southeast Asian Christian* periodical to shape, discipline, reorganise and reinterpret the dispensationalist worldview of the Christian communities that became part of the local fundamentalist alliance. The two organisations became active participants and advocates of the alliance's activities.

Looking Forward

In this study, I have used the histories of CLBS and SCEL as “windows” to highlight the close interconnections that existed between their independent

Christian heritage and fundamentalism. Such interconnections have rarely been studied by historians examining various independent Christian groups in China. Kevin Yao points out that most of these studies have been dominated by a cultural-social approach which has focussed mainly on Christianity's transformation into a localised religion, thereby causing scholars to deemphasise important aspects such as the theological and intellectual dimensions of these enterprises. In particular, Yao criticises Daniel Bays's approach to independent Christianity as being overly focussed on the foreigner-Chinese dichotomy, arguing that he "place[d] [an] overwhelming emphasis on the independence...of the indigenous Chinese Christians from the foreign missionaries and the distrust...between the conservative Chinese Christians and the 'Sino-foreign Protestant establishment' [or union bodies such as the National Christian Council in China]." ⁵ I believe that Yao is accurate in highlighting the underlying imbalance of the cultural-social approach. The over-emphasis on the independence and indigenous leadership of these Chinese Christians has downplayed other vital aspects, such as their religious beliefs, that were central to the formation of the various types of social structures, power relations and sub-cultures within their communities. Whilst not denying the value of the independent Christian framework, it may be worthwhile for future studies to consider synthesising their methods with the cultural-intellectual approach that historians of Protestant fundamentalism utilised: by tracing the relevant religious roots of the movement and studying how they drew on them to develop a distinctive ethos and identity within the contemporary socio-cultural environs.

⁵ Yao, *Fundamentalist Movement*, 2-7.

A second point relates to gender. In the recent years, some feminist scholars have become increasingly concerned with the growing support and participation of many women in conservative religious groups. In particular, these scholars have wondered why women, across classes and cultures, decide to participate in religious bodies that promote and perpetuate their subordination. Some feminist scholars have provided more sympathetic analyses of these groups of women, resisting the temptation of writing them off as anti-feminists or traditionalists who have been duped into believing in patriarchal structures. Many of these studies have shown that religious patriarchy can provide powerful resources and strategies for these women to renegotiate gender relations or to pursue their ambitions and goals. These scholars have tried to provide greater nuance by examining the variances in ideologies, practices and realities that underlie the religious patriarchies, thereby uncovering ways in which the gender order is subverted, resisted or broadened by women.⁶

The findings of this study go some way in affirming the assertions of these scholars. Further, the active integration of gender into this dissertation also addresses the problem of “gender-blindness” in the study of religion. Scholars have highlighted that there is a “relative lack of gender lenses for ‘seeing, thinking, and working’ religion”.⁷ The gender patterns elucidated through this thesis demonstrate that conservative religions cannot be seen merely as communities that subjugate their female practitioners under rigid structures. In fact, much latitude, variety and innovation can be observed in the practice of fundamentalist Christianity; both the Church leaders and women were able to

⁶ R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 203-210 and Chong, *Deliverance*, 3.

⁷ Jinhua Jia, Xiaofei Kang and Ping Yao, “Introduction”, in *Gendering Chinese Religion*, 2.

draw on the emerging practices of gender egalitarianism in independent Christianity to create – as well as broaden – new spaces and roles for female Christians. In fact, it can be argued that these Christian women were well aware that the gap between ideology and reality in religious patriarchies afforded them much flexibility and latitude in practice. As Dorothy Ko contends in the case of educated upper class women in late imperial China who did not challenge the prevailing gender system although they “craft[ed] space[s]” within it, the key to understanding how these women reinterpreted their prescribed gender role(s) is to distinguish between “the ideal norms [as] prescribed by...official ideology” and the way they practiced and negotiated these standards in actuality – often in ways that “defied...official norms.”⁸ Perhaps, future studies should consider the potential of institutional histories in overcoming “gender-blindness”. This is because particular processes of gender patterns – how they emerged, evolved and normalised – can be easily examined in direct relation with the teachings, practices and developments of the institution(s), thereby allowing scholars to make specific observations that can throw light on the general.

This study has sought to straddle the general and the particular in order to elucidate the theological and intellectual roots, beliefs and ethos that defined and fashioned an independent Chinese Christian community driven by the all-consuming passion for evangelism and the defence of the evangelical faith in Singapore and Malaysia. Whilst the religious influence of both institutions waxed and waned over time, their histories are indicative of a much more far-reaching issue: the presence of diverse Christianities and religious sub-cultures

⁸ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 8-9. I am grateful to one of the markers of this thesis for suggesting this reference.

that existed and continue to exist in Singapore and Malaysia. These stories are waiting to be discovered, unpacked and re-told to give us a wider understanding of the ways in which these conservative religions localised, grew, and catered to the needs of their communities.

Glossary of Selected Terms and Characters

Baobei	宝贝
Chen Ciai (Tan Chu Ai)	陈慈爱
Dao (Way)	道
Du Xianghui (Timothy Tow)	杜祥辉
Fan Xinfu (Paul Hang)	范新福
Ganshi	干事
Guo Kechang (Quek Kiok Chiang)	郭克昌
He Yousan (Ho Yew Sam)	贺友三
Hong Suhua (Ang Soo Hua)	洪素华
Huang Biran (Ng Phek Loan)	黄碧鑾
Jia Yuming	贾玉铭
Jiduren	基督人
Jinlian (Chin Lien)	金链
Jinlian Nüzi Lingxiusuo	金链女子灵修所
Jinlian Nüzi Lingxiuyuan	金链女子灵修院
Jinlian Lingxiuyuan	金链灵修院
Jinlian Lingxiu Shenxueyuan	金链灵修神学院
Jinling Nüzi Shenxueyuan	金陵女子神学院
Lin Hongwan (Lim Hong Ban)	林鸿万
Lingxiu	灵修
Lingxiu Shenxueyuan (Spiritual Training Seminary)	灵修神学院
Nanyang Jiditu (<i>Malaysia Christian/Southeast Asia Christian</i>)	南洋基督徒
Nanzhong (<i>Southern Bell</i>)	南钟
Ni Tuosheng (Watchman Nee)	倪柝声
Sanzi Zhuyi (Principle of Three-Self)	三自主义
Sanbu (Three-No's)	三不
Shengren	圣人
Shengtu Xinsheng (<i>Heartfelt Voices of the Saints</i>)	圣徒心声
Song Shangjie (John Sung)	宋尚节
Tianren Xiangtong, Shenren Heyi	天人相同，神人合一
Tuange (Fellowship Song)	团歌
Wanquan Jiufa (Perfect Salvation)	完全救法
Wang Mingdao	王明道
Wenshi Guan (Cultural-Historical Centre)	文史馆
Wu Jingling (Leona Wu)	吴静玲
Xiaofa	效法
Xinjiapo Jidutu Budaotuan	新加坡基督徒布道团
Xinjiapo Huaqiao Jidujiao Lianhehui	新加坡华侨基督教联合会
Xiushen	修身

Zaori Zhengwo Zhonghua
Zhang Shien (Teo See Eng)
Zheng Suilan (Tay Swee Lan)
Zhongguo Jidutu Lingxiu Xueyuan

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张施恩
郑遂蓝
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Appendix A

Selected Pictures



Picture 1. Ms Leona Wu
Source: Cultural-Historical Centre in
Chin Lien Bible Seminary



Picture 2. Rev (Dr) Jia Yuming
Source: Same as Picture 1



From Left to Right (Back Row): Leona Wu, John Sung, Ng Phek Loan
 Fourth from Right (Front Row): Tan Chu Ai
Picture 3. First Graduation Ceremony for Chin Lien Women's Bible School in 1939
 Source: Same as Picture 1



From Left to Right (Front Row, Centre): Leona Wu (holding the Bible), Ng Phek Loan
Picture 4. Sitiawan Evangelistic League welcomes SCEL President Leona Wu, 1940
 Source: Same as Picture 1



Third Row (Second from Right): Quek Kiok Chiang

First Row (First from Left): Leona Wu

Picture 5. Fifteenth Executive Committee and District Leaders for Singapore Christian Evangelistic League, 1949

Source: Same as Picture 1

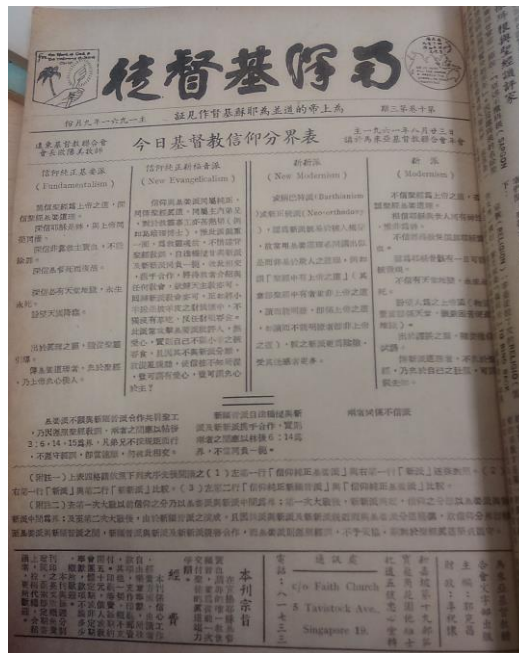


Back Row (From Left to Right): Tan Chu Ai (Centre), Quek Kiok Chiang, Timothy Tow

Front Row (From Left to Right): Tay Swee Lan (Extreme Left), Ng Phek Loan, Leona Wu

Picture 6. 1955 Graduation Ceremony for Chin Lien Bible Seminary

Source: Same as Picture 1



Picture 7. Front Page of Sample Malaysia Christian Source: MC, Sep. 1961, 1.



Picture 8. John Sung's 1939 Spiritual Nurture/Revival Meeting in Zion Presbyterian Church in Katong Source: SCEL, 1995, 61.



本团第六十一届团员大会改选职员后
出席职员、区长於忠心堂讲台前合影留念

Front Row (From Left to Right): Quek Kiok Chiang (Second from Left), Teo See Eng, Ng Phek Loan, Tay Swee Lan

Picture 9. 61st Singapore Christian Evangelistic League Executive Committee and District Leaders, 1995

Source: SCEL, 1995, last page (unnumbered)



Picture 10. Chin Lien Bible Seminary today

Source: 2011 Chin Lien Bible Seminary Prospectus Cover