

The Mission Strategy of the China Inland Mission in 1930s (From the Role of a Leader to the Role of a Partner)

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According to Lyall's reports, the second significant but subtle change in the mission strategy of the CIM was the change of its role from a leader to a partner. This change is recorded in *Three of China's Might Men*, as well as in chapter 12 of *A Passion for the Impossible*. This change is closely related to the great revival in the 1930s which resulted in the emergence of local Chinese church leaders. Lyall did not only report on this shift of mission strategy, he himself was in fact actively involved in the transition, first in his partnership with David Yang and later with Wang Mingdao.

Prior to 1900, the Christian missionary movement had to contend with the intense conservatism of the Chinese. The Chinese hated foreigners and despised all that they represented. Conversions were hardly won. However, the humiliation of the Imperial Court in Beijing during the Boxer Uprising in 1900 resulted in the crumbling of the opposition to Western culture. Many Chinese began to be more open to Western ideas. Radical reforms in education and in the political structure were introduced. Never before in the entire history of the Church had so large a non-Christian body been so physically and mentally accessible to the Gospel. Mission schools and universities where English was taught became increasingly popular. The success of the Revolution in 1911 under the leadership of Sun Yat Sen, a Christian, seemed to give the Christian church in China a boost. On the other hand, the First World War in 1914 dealt a severe blow to Western prestige, and China's failure to get back Shandong Province from the Germans at the Peace Conference in Paris disappointed her so much that anti-imperialist notions spread throughout the entire country. Politically, the situation in China during this Warlord period was chaotic; banditry, lawlessness and civil war continued through the 1920s and early 1930s. Many churches became stagnant and lifeless. In fact, the worst thing facing the church at this time was not so much the external challenges, but the internal spiritual emptiness of many believers. Lower moral standards and worldliness invaded the church. Lyall described the pathetic condition of these churches in his introduction to Marie Monsen's book, *The Awakening, Revival in China 1927-1937*:

The grossest sins were not uncommon among church members. Even among the leadership of the churches there were many who could not give a clear account of their relationship with Jesus Christ. They were spiritually blind men leading their equally blind followers. If the church was not only to survive the fiery trial but remain triumphant in its witness for Christ, its greatest need was for a deep and convicting,

regenerating, purifying and reviving work of the Holy Spirit. This need finally gained recognition in 1929 when the National Christian Council agreed to sponsor the “Five Year Forward Movement” with the slogan “Lord, revive Thy Church, beginning with me!”¹

Paradoxically, at this critical time, the wave of revivals that swept through the Chinese churches from the late 1920s through the 1930s seemed to be led mostly by independent preachers outside the traditional missionary enterprise, by fundamentalist preachers such as John Sung, Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee. Lian Xi (連曦) pointed out in his book *Redeemed by Fire*, that real signs of life and momentum for growth in the Chinese Church were also to be found in movements that exhibited a good deal of syncretism of traditional folk beliefs and Christian ideas, such as the Jesus Family and the True Jesus Church.² A careful examination of the reports given by CIM missionaries, particularly those of Lyall, reveal however, that many of these independent preachers were not exactly totally outside the Western missionary enterprise; they were in fact partners of the CIM as we shall explore in this chapter.

1. The Great Revival and the Emergence of Chinese Church Leaders in the 1930s:

1.1 Signs of the Times

According to Daniel Bays, today’s Chinese Christians have roots that go back over 200 years for Protestants and 400 years for Catholics. The events that took place in the first half of the twentieth century were particularly significant in shaping the present-day Chinese Church. Of these fifty years, the period between 1932 and 1934 was particularly important. He wrote, “If we take a historical telescope and focus just on two years, 1932-1934, we can see the transformation of Christianity in China in mid-stream.”³ Why was 1932-1934 so important to the development of the Chinese Church? What happened then?

On an autumn day in 1932, Pearl S. Buck, born in China of missionary parents and herself a Presbyterian Chinese missionary, addressed 2,000 Presbyterian women in the ballroom of New York City’s Hotel Astor. She had just received the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Good Earth*.

¹ Marie Monsen, *The Awakening: Revival in China, 1927-1937* (Shoals, Ind: Kingsley Press, 2011), p. 15.

² Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 2-3.

³ Daniel H. Bays, “Christianity in China 1900-1950: The History that Shaped the Present,” Global China Center, April 22, 2008, assessed March 4, 2015, <http://www.globalchinacenter.org/analysis/christianity-in-china/christianity-in-china-19001950-the-history-that-shaped-the-present.php>

The topic of her talk was “Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?” In her speech, she harshly criticized missionaries for being arrogant, ignorant, and narrow-minded. At the end, the audience was stunned. This event ignited a firestorm of agitated comment, for and against foreign missions in almost all quarters of American Protestantism. It was a sign of the times.

Another sign of the times, according to Bays, was the publication of a seven-volume study under the title *Rethinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry after One Hundred Years*. This report was widely circulated and read; its main theme was the demand for an overhaul in the thinking of the value of foreign missions. Though it greatly offended evangelical mission supporters, it was nevertheless very influential in Christian circles.

In 1932-33, Robert Service, the former college track star at UC-Berkeley, who went to China in 1905 with his wife Grace to establish the YMCA in West China, was forced into an unexpected early retirement. Though he had poured out his life in service to the Chinese people and in loyal commitment to the YMCA and its mission, he was sacked by the YMCA Headquarters in New York. In fact, he was but one of the many missionaries fired during that period because of dwindling contributions during the Great Depression. Many missionary societies faced a massive financial crunch in the early 1930s, cutting their support for expensive institutions especially hospitals and colleges. These negative signs all tell of the serious troubles confronting many missionary societies, especially mainline liberal denominations at the time.

Although missions were clearly in retreat in the early 1930s, this situation did not apply to the CIM and other evangelical missions. The CIM's John and Betty Stam's martyrdom in 1934 at the hands of the Communists was a story that gained much publicity and motivated many young people to go to the mission fields. While many mission societies lost their force, the CIM grew stronger during these stormy years. In addition, a host of new missionaries from small new missions or individual missionaries, almost all of them faith missionaries, arrived in China to make a huge impact on the church in China.

In short, we can conclude that in these two years, while the liberal missions were in retreat, the CIM and other like-minded missions were on the advance. The most important event at this time was the great revival in many parts of China, the emergence of some very outstanding Chinese Christian leaders and the establishment of independent Chinese churches apart from Western missions, especially outside the mainline liberal denominations.

1.2 The Beginning of the Great Revival

The Great Revival was in fact initiated by the Western missionaries themselves. Marie Monsen and Jonathan Goforth, Norwegian and Canadian missionaries respectively, were the foremost missionary revivalists in the movement. Monsen spearheaded the Shandong revival, while Goforth was responsible for the Manchurian revival. Both revivals were the first to gain nationwide publicity in China as well as internationally,⁴ and both missionaries were closely associated with the CIM though they were not missionaries of the CIM. Lyall called Monsen the pioneer of the revival movement. He wrote, “Her surgical skill in exposing the sin hidden within the church and lurking behind the smiling exterior of many a trusted Christian - even many a trusted Christian leader - and her quiet insistence on a clear-cut experience of a new birth set the pattern for others to follow.”⁵

Monsen had labored in rural Henan under the Norwegian Lutheran Mission since the early 1900s. In the 1920s, continual bandit attacks forced people to flee from homes and villages. The *Chinese Church Year Book (Zhonghua Jidugiaohui Nianjian)*, published by the National Christian Council of China (NCC), lamented that in 1925 the scourge of banditry in much of China, especially in Shandong, disrupted the regular work of the church.⁶ In 1927, Monsen saw for the first time how the unrest could be turned into an opportunity for revival. She wrote:

The first time I saw how the unrest was turning into a fulfillment of the Word that had been given us was an unforgettable moment. It was in one of our out-stations. What a sight it was! The congregation was five times as large as we had ever seen it, and three out of every five among them were women. I began to wonder whether a time would ever come when we should have to pray that more men would come to our meetings as we had prayed for women. Political unrest had ploughed deep furrows across the ancient traditions and prejudices, not least the mighty fortress of idolatry, and all that went with it. It was a thought hidden in the heart that all this was preparing for times of revival, which caused deep joy. And when revival came, we saw the word of promise wonderfully fulfilled.⁷

⁴ Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer, *Modern Christian Revivals*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 162.

⁵ Marie Monsen, *the Awakening: Revival in China, 1927-1937*, p. 16.

⁶ ZJN (中華基督教會年鑑 *Zhonghua Jidugiaohui Nianjian*), (1925), pp.6-7

⁷ Marie Monsen, *the Awakening: Revival in China, 1927-1937*, p. 27.

In spring 1927, Monsen and her fellow missionary were holding a series of Bible classes in their mission station with a group of sixteen women. On the fourth day, following discussion on infanticide, fourteen of the sixteen women broke down. “Oh, and I have killed three.” “And I five.” “I took the lives of eight of my children,” “And I thirteen, but they were all girls.”

Monsen added, “It was the first time in over twenty years on the mission field that these women yielded to missionary condemnation of infanticide and confessed their sin.”⁸ Monsen then had these women come and talk to her one by one and confess their sins before her. After pouring out her confession, one woman described her feelings in this way, “It was just as if I were a great bandit and after hot pursuit the soldiers caught me and dragged me before the Mandarin; and instead of denying everything, I confessed everything, and the Mandarin did not say, “Take her away and execute her,” but he said, “She has confessed, it is no longer held in her account. Go home in peace.” Monsen called this episode a miracle for she had found the key to unlock the doors of private emotions, leading to the rush of mass revival among converts.⁹ In fact, this key was used by many revivalists, Chinese and Western, in the Great Revival.

In spring of 1929, Monsen survived a twenty-three-day imprisonment at the hands of pirates off the shores of northern Shandong. Lian Xi wrote that it was this experience that transformed her from a little-known missionary, at best a regional revivalist in the rural hinterland, into a heroine.¹⁰ During her ordeal she reportedly “dispensed her motherly words” to the thieves including the chief of the pirates himself, about the second coming of Christ and his promise to deliver the faithful from the tribulations to come. Miraculously, the pirates responded to her message in a very positive way. One said, “We are bad. We were born bad. We do evil from morning to night, and from night to morning. You were born good. You don’t hate us like the other passengers.” The other pirates agreed. But Monsen replied that she was born with the same evil heart as they, and went on to tell them of the Savior who came to save all men and give them new hearts. They were clearly impressed, for they listened to her in complete silence. The next day was Sunday, the twenty-third day of Monsen’s captivity. She, along with all the other passengers were released.¹¹ That summer Monsen was invited to address the annual missionary

⁸ Ibid., pp.29-30.

⁹ Ibid. p. 31-32.

¹⁰ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 97.

¹¹ Bruce Garrison, *The Obstinate Horse and Other Stories from the China Inland Mission* (Shoals, Ind: Kingsley Press, 2004), pp. 13-20.

conference held at the seaside resort Beidahe. The occasion brought her national prominence among Protestants.

By autumn, with the help of her friends among American Southern Baptists in Cheefoo (now Yanti), Monsen was able to organize a series of revival meetings in Shandong. Of all the provinces in China, Shandong was perhaps one of the most chaotic and lawless. There were scores of bandit groups, often led by diehards with flamboyant nicknames such as Xu the Big Nose or the Two Tigers. One group was reportedly led by the cold-blooded Qiao the Old Mother under whom some one thousand outlaws roamed the countryside of the peninsula. As resentment against the unequal treaties spread, Westerners and their properties, including mission compounds, were no longer safe from civil strife and banditry. Nationalistic sentiments often led to boycott, intimidation and even violence directed against churches and Christians. But to Monsen, these were opportunities for revival and she was even more determined to preach the Good News of repentance. M. Crawford, a missionary who wrote *The Revival of Shantung (Shandong)*, said, "There was nothing sensational or emotional in the meetings, just a definite confidence in the promises of God and particularly reliance on John 16:8 'And when the Holy Spirit is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment'. Many had a terrible experience of the conviction of sin."¹² According to Crawford's report, the theological seminary & Bible school in Hwanghsien experienced great blessing. Every member of the faculty received special help. They became entirely new schools. In the hospital many staff were saved and some filled with the Holy Spirit. Tsining station and Laichow district experienced the best year they had ever had. In Pingdu district, souls were continually added to the church, with about three thousand in this one year alone. Crawford wrote:

Only time will show how much of this is of abiding value, but it is clear that something new has come into the life of the churches. Lives have been transformed, opium broken off, idols put away, enmities that have lasted for years have been put right, hopeless individuals have become humble men and women of prayer and soul-winners. Many, many have left their homes and their farms to seek the lost around them.¹³

The revival had indeed arrived in Shandong.

¹² Marie Monsen, *The Awakening: Revival in China, 1927-1937*, p. 64.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.63-64

Goforth, meanwhile, served in Manchuria. According to J. Herbert Kane, Goforth was China's most outstanding evangelist and revivalist in the early twentieth century. He had served in many parts of China, but his impact on Manchuria was the most significant.¹⁴ He was born in western Ontario and dedicated himself to ministry after reading *Memoirs of Robert Murray M'Cheyne*. After graduating from Knox College he applied to the CIM, but because of his church affiliation (Presbyterian) and the support of the Presbyterian students at Knox College, he changed his mind and went to China as a Canadian Presbyterian missionary. He first labored in the hinterland of the province of Henan without any success. To use his own words, he only touched the fringe of the appalling multitudes who desperately needed Christ.¹⁵ In 1907, he visited Korea, where the Great Revival was in full force. Returning from the trip via Manchuria, Goforth spoke about the Holy Spirit's work in Korea at several mission stations along the way. Such was the stir he created that Goforth immediately became convinced of his 'call to Manchuria.'¹⁶ Thus, he left Henan to conduct a series of revival meetings in Manchuria. His wife wrote, "Jonathan Goforth went up to Manchuria an unknown missionary ... He returned a few weeks later with the limelight of the Christian world upon him."¹⁷

Apart from Monsen and Goforth, there were other missionaries from the CIM who were also actively involved in the Great Revival. The most well-known were Elizabeth Fischbacher and Ana Christensen. Fischbacher's father, a successful businessman and very zealous for foreign missions, desired that five of his children became missionaries. He was eager to support them himself, rather than to have them receive support from a mission society. Elizabeth was the first to enter the CIM, serving with them for 13 years. While in Shanxi, she worked with David Yang, a well-known pastor, in the Hongdong Seminary to train Chinese preachers. Lyall wrote, "In the early 1930s echoes of revival in Shandong were heard in Shanxi. One of David Yang's Quwo missionary co-workers, Miss Elizabeth Fischbacher went to Shandong to observe the revival for herself and returned with a powerful and attractive new message."¹⁸ She later left the CIM to become an independent missionary and travelled all over China to conduct spiritual revival meetings. She had a great influence on Watchman Nee, and worked with him on literary and

¹⁴ Ruth Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, p. 201.

¹⁵ Rosalind Goforth, *Goforth of China* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1937), pp. 135, 177-78, 182-184, 187-188.

¹⁶ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 88.

¹⁷ Rosalind Goforth, *Goforth of China*, p. 135, 177-78, 182-184, 187-188).

¹⁸ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 24.

translation projects. She also helped Ernest Yin (Yin Renxian 尹任先 1887-1964), the president of the well-known Holy Light School.

Anna Christensen was a CIM missionary from Denmark. Like Monsen, Christensen was an effective revivalist. As Lyall said, her message was essentially the same as Monsen's: the exposing of secret sin, a call to thorough repentance, the need for restitution, the sufficiency of the blood of Christ to cleanse and deliver from all sin and the possibility of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The results too were characteristic: nominal Christians were truly converted; many lives were changed; new life flooded into the churches; Christians began to witness spontaneously to others.¹⁹ Her life touched many including the famous CIM missionary to the Lisu people, James O. Fraser.

1.3 The Emergence of Chinese Leaders in the Revival Movement

It is strange to note that no matter how influential these Western revivalists might have been, they were quickly eclipsed as the movement gained momentum. They were replaced by Chinese laymen who later turned into revival leaders. Lian Xi cited an interesting example. In February 1932, at the time of the Chinese New Year, a Baptist missionary from Laiyang in northern Shandong by the name of I.V. Larson went to the neighboring Huangxian to lead a revival. On the second day, his preaching was interrupted by a confession. One missionary reported: "There were confessions every day, and Mr. Larson never preached after the first day ... The Holy Spirit conducted the meetings." One Southern Baptist missionary wrote from Chefoo in July 1932, "Again we find the laymen there (in the Laizhou area) preaching in tent and other meetings, while the missionaries and evangelists are free to give their time largely to work elsewhere." After examining the reports on the Shandong Revival, an editorial in the February 1933 issue of the *Missionary Review of the World* concluded: "Several characteristics are noticeable. The Chinese preachers and elders, not foreigners, are the leaders."²⁰

Such phenomenon spread swiftly. Before long, this movement had spread beyond Shandong. Many denominational churches in other provinces in North China, including Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, Congregational churches also reported revivals. Moreover, many Chinese Christians pulled out from foreign-related churches to form their own congregations. By the

¹⁹ Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; The China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, p. 105.

²⁰ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 98.

summer of 1931, for instance, Baptist revivals had broken out in Pingdu and Laiyang in eastern Shandong, and a new church was formed.²¹ In Henan province, a number of women, “fruits” of Monsen’s revival in the spring of 1927 formed themselves into the ‘Widows Church’. A Chinese pastor called Liu Daosheng (劉道生), who was Monsen’s chief assistant at the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, led the revival himself.²² However, while it was true that many were attracted to these local revivalists, this movement as it developed, became chaotic, even bizarre. Monsen herself wrote:

But sad to say that there were dangers of many kinds in the interior of the country. In one place where meetings were to be held, the missionaries were troubled over an ill-reputed group in the mountains that always caused trouble. They had for instance, rivaled one another to see who could fast for forty days like Jesus, and had attempted to see which of them could lie for the longest time stretched out as Jesus was when He was nailed in the cross.²³

To use Lian Xi’s words, the movement became like a ship without an anchor.²⁴ Such chaos could not last long. As more and more people joined the movement, a certain degree of institutionalization became necessary. A number of independent groups began to emerge. The formation of the loosely organized Spiritual Gifts Society (Ling’enhui 靈恩會) in Feixian in the southern part of Shandong came about in 1930. According to Lian Xi, the Society owed its inspiration to a Pentecostal believer named Ma Zhaorui (馬兆瑞) who ran an orphanage named the Independent Assemblies of God in the Nationalist capital Nanjing. In 1928, Ma brought some orphans to Feixian to preach among the Presbyterian churches. Ma was able to influence two members of the Presbyterian Church, Yang Rulin (楊汝霖) and Sun Zhanyao (孫瞻遙), who then claimed to have the gift of the Holy Spirit and started the Spiritual Gift Society. Many of its members were from the Presbyterian mission in that area.²⁵ Their influence soon spread to other presbyteries in Shandong province including those in Yizhoufu (now Linyi), Qingdo, Denzhou (now Penglai), the provincial capital Jinan, and the Presbyterian stronghold Weixian (now Weifang). It also spilled over to other denominations including the Baptists and the Lutherans. In many cases, local branches of Ling’enhui were established. A report in The

²¹ Ibid., p.99.

²² Ibid., p.102.

²³ Marie Monsen, *the Awakening: Revival in China, 1927-1937* (Shoals, Ind: Kingsley Press, 2011), p. 86.

²⁴ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 98.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.98-99.

Chinese Recorder pointed out that by late 1931, the impact had been “felt ... over an extensive part of Shandong. It is the fruit of the work of the indigenous zeal and Chinese Zealots” who were convinced that they had been “entrusted with the gospel for the end time.”²⁶

Outside Shandong, the movement was particularly strong in Manchuria, which the Japanese occupied in September 1931 following the “Mukden Incident.” Within months of the Japanese occupation, native-led revivals broke out, often in larger towns where refugees filled the mission churches. The message of the speedy return of the Lord and deliverance from this evil world was particularly relevant to these hopeless refugees. The revivalists emphasized that wars, rumors of war, brigandage, corruption, oppression, floods, famine, and widespread ruin were signs of the end of the world and deliverance from evil. This gave hope to the people.

These revivals resulted in impressive increases in church attendance, monetary giving, and in dramatic changes in the lives of former opium addicts, bandits and the like. By the mid-1930s, this Spiritual Gifts Movement became more institutionalized. Many larger Ling’enhui groups began to erect church buildings, and form congregations with elders, pastors, evangelists and deacons. In 1936, the General Assembly of the Shandong Chinese Christian Spiritual Society was formed in Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong, although it did not exercise any real control over Ling’enhui churches in other parts of the province or in other provinces. At best, they maintained “ecclesiastical contacts” and a level of cooperation with the other Ling’enhui churches. During the 1940s and 1950s, Ling’enhui congregations with predominantly lower-class memberships were still to be found in several parts of Shandong, but with diminishing influence. On the whole, because of a lack of capable and educated leaders, this movement died out in the course of time.²⁷

A second group was The True Jesus Church (TJC 真耶穌教會) with its founder Wei Enbo (魏恩波). Wei was a poor farmer from the county of Rongcheng, about sixty miles south of Beijing. In 1902, he migrated to Beijing and started a business dealing in silk and foreign merchandise. While in Beijing, he came into contact with some London Missionary Society (LMS) members

²⁶ “Indigenous Revival in Shantung,” *The Chinese Recorder* Vol. 62 (1931): p. 767 – 768. *The Chinese Recorder*, Vol. 62 (December 1931): p. 767-68; “The New Spiritual Movement in Shantung,” *The Chinese Recorder* Vol. 63 (1932): 654.

²⁷ Lian Xi, “The “Spiritual Gifts Movement” in War-Torn China,” The Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity, August 30, 2010, assessed March 4, 2011, <https://www.calvin.edu/nagel/resources/files/XiASCH07.pdf>.

and joined the LMS church, although he was later excommunicated because of adultery. In 1916, Wei contracted tuberculosis, which led him to an encounter with an American missionary of Pentecostal background. This missionary allegedly laid hands on him and miraculously brought him back to health. Wei then became a Pentecostal and received the gift of the Holy Spirit and “tongue speaking.” He went through a short period of tutelage under the Pentecostal mission and then launched into an independent career of his own. In 1917, he claimed that he was “led by the Holy Spirit” to a river outside the city where he heard a loud voice from Heaven telling him to have a “facedown” baptism by immersion. He immediately dived into the icy water and baptized himself without a minister to officiate the sacrament. Then he felt cleansed both in his body and spirit, and went on to a thirty-nine day fast, one day shy of Jesus’ record. During this period, he saw a vision of Jesus, Moses and Elijah and the twelve disciples, at which point the Lord commanded him to launch a mission to correct the Christian church. He adopted a new name Paul Wei (魏保羅) and began to preach around Beijing. He preached the imminent coming of Jesus, while also denouncing the corruption of Western Christianity and calling for repentance and separation from foreign missions. In this endeavor, he discovered that it was much more effective to proselytize among existing members of mission churches than to preach to those who were outside the Protestant community. In late 1918, Wei began working on the official publication of the TJC which he called *The Universal Correction Church Times* (*Wanguo gengzhengjiao bao* 萬國更正教報). In these writings, he outlined his teachings including “facedown baptism”, the gift of tongues, the power of healing and exorcism, the seven-day observation of the Sabbath and the offering of 10% of one’s income to fulfill the principle of “sharing material possessions between the haves and the have-nots.”²⁸ The outbreak of the First World War and the anti-imperialist sentiments during the May Fourth era enabled him to recruit a large number of members from the mission churches into his group.

The TJC established its first foothold in Zhili, Shandong province. Wei extended the TJC’s influence into Weixian through the help of a fellow Pentecostal from Weixian named Zhang Ling-sheng (張靈生). Zhang Ling-sheng was appointed bishop, and his brother Zhang Dianju (張殿舉) an elder. By the fall of 1919, the TJC had reached beyond the provinces of Zhili and Shandong into Shanxi, Jiangsu and Manchuria. They had about one thousand followers, mostly

²⁸ Daniel Bays, “Indigenous Protestant Churches in China 1900-1937: A Pentecostal Case Study,” in *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity*, ed. Steven Kaplan (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 134-135.

made up of former members of Pentecostal missions, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Presbyterian Church, and some mainline denominations. About this time, according to Lian Xi, some sixty TJC churches united into one collective family, with all the members “offering their belongings to the Lord” and changing their family names to Ye (from Yesu, the transliteration of Jesus). They all lived in the “Jesus Compound”. This foreshadowed the start of the new Jesus Family in the western part of Shandong a few years later.²⁹

Wei did not live to see the fruits of his labor. He died of tuberculosis in October 1919, but the movement he started did not die down. By the early 1920s the TJC had also spread to the North and Central Chinese provinces of Henan, Hunan, Hubei, and Jiangxi. Many of its members came from the Seventh Day Adventist churches. In 1920, an able Confucian scholar and educator by the name of Gao Daling (高大齡) joined the TJC in Shanxi. Gao had been a Chinese-language teacher to the British missionary Timothy Richard and was the head of the Independent Chinese Church in the provincial capital Taiyuan. He recruited many believers from the mission churches into his church. By the 1920s, more than one hundred branches of the TJC church, with a total of more than ten thousand members, could be found in Shanxi alone.³⁰

The most successful ministry of the TJC was, however, to be found in Fujian. In 1923, Zhang Ling-sheng (張靈生 also known as Zhang Banaba), probably the most gifted evangelist in the TJC, went to Fuzhou, the provincial capital. Within a few months, he was able to baptize hundreds of people into the TJC, including a large number of Seventh Day Adventists. One of the most important gains that Zhang Banaba made in Fuzhou was the recruitment of a physician and former deputy head of a local hospital named Guo Duoma (郭多馬 Thomas Guo), who would soon emerge as a national leader of the TJC. Guo and his fellow elders spread the faith not only in Fujian, but also to the Fujianese communities in Taiwan, Southeast Asia and even Japan.³¹

In the mid 1920s, the TJC went through a major crisis when there was a split between Zhang Banaba and the other leaders. The division lasted until 1930 when the national conference of the

²⁹ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 50-51.

³⁰ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 775-776

³¹ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 55.

TJC excommunicated Zhang and reunited the movement under the collective leadership of Gao Daling, Guo Duoma (郭多馬), and Wei Yisa (魏以撒). Afterwards, the TJC continued to flourish, much benefited by the great revival of the 1930s.³²

Compared with the Ling'enhui, the TJC was much more effective and longer lasting. In 1922, there were more than 10,000 members. In 1949, TJC membership grew to 120,000 in seven hundred churches.³³ Today, there are 1.5 million members in 53 countries.³⁴ According to Lian Xi, its success was due to the ability of TJC leaders to articulate the TJC principles, rules and governance after the death of its founder Paul Wei. Gao Daling, a capable and educated leader of the TJC, played a central role in hammering out the basic teachings of the TJC. This later helped preserve the unity and identity of the church. Additionally, in 1924, the TJC began its first formal theological training program at The Truth and Holy Spirit School in Tianjin with Wei Yisa, the son of Paul Wei, as its head. In 1926, they were able to set up a more formal ecclesiastical structure. There were five levels starting from the “prayer house” at the bottom, and reaching up through local churches, provincial assemblies, national assemblies to the General Assembly at the top. There were deacons, elders, bishops and a “general bishop.” In finance, a more sustainable practice of tithes and special offerings replaced the initial call for “sharing material possessions among the haves and have-nots.”³⁵ All these measures enabled the TJC to survive and expand.

The third group was the Jesus Family (耶穌家庭). The Jesus Family was founded by Jing Dianying (敬奠瀛 1890-1957) who came from a learned, moderately prosperous gentry family near the village of Mazhuang, Tai'an County. He received a traditional education of Confucianism and Daoism when he was young. He lost both parents in his early teens and this likely traumatized him into a certain disenchantment with the world. At the age of twenty-two, he came to the city of Tai'an and enrolled in the newly opened Cuiying Middle School run by the American Methodist Episcopal mission. Perry O. Hanson, then the principal of Cuiying

³² Daniel Bays, “Indigenous Protestant Churches in China 1900-1937: A Pentecostal Case Study,” in *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity*, ed. Steven Kaplan (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 136-137.

³³ Carol Lee Hamrin and Jason Kindopp, *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), p. 108.

³⁴ “About the International Assembly,” True Jesus Church, accessed March 4, 2015, http://members.tjc.org/sites/en/church_landing.aspx.

³⁵ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 62.

Middle school recalled, “This young man [Jing Dianying] was unusually mature, had unusual knowledge of Chinese, and was a devout Buddhist ... And rather resented the idea of people coming from America to proselyte among his nationals.”³⁶ However, Jing eventually became a Christian through the influence of an American missionary, Nora Dillenbeck, when he served as her language teacher, but he was soon disillusioned with the corruption and problems of a church dominated by foreigners. Jing went back to his native village Mazhuang where he founded a small Christian business cooperative called the Saints’ Credit and Savings Society funded mostly by Dillenbeck. This Society dealt in textiles and grains, and at the same time organized the local faithful in regular prayer and evangelism.

In 1924, Jing attended a revival meeting in Tai’an organized by the Pentecostal mission and claimed that he received “baptism by the spirit.” Thereafter, he began to be very active in this charismatic movement, promoting tongue speaking, visions, spiritual singing and dancing, and even trances. In 1926, he returned to the village of Mazhuang where he started a Christian community of his own at home. He called this community the Silkworm and Mulberry-Tree House for the Learning of the Way (蠶桑學道房 Cansang Xuedaofang). It was a charity house for widows who could grow mulberry trees, raise silkworms, and weave while learning the Way. In the following year, the Saint’s Society, founded by Jing merged with this new community, and was renamed The Jesus Family (耶穌家庭 Yesu Jiating). At the start, there were about fifteen members, but it grew rapidly.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the political situation was chaotic. Banditry spread out of control, and many farmers had to fall back on whatever forms of mutual help they could find. The Jesus Family provided a certain level of security for the farmers and its association with the Christian church likely served as a deterrent to the lawless. In 1930, the Jesus Family was able to acquire a piece of land of about four acres with financial help from Dillenbeck. They started to build their own communal settlement of straw huts and brick houses. Members were challenged to sell their possessions and bring them to the Jesus Family for communal living. They earned their living by farming, while learning about the Way together. Life was difficult and they lived very simply. Yet, if food and other material provisions were not abundant, “spiritual food” and immaterial blessings were. Members were taught not to love food, clothing or big mansions, but to earnestly pursue heavenly visions, tongue-speaking and miracles while

³⁶ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 67.

eagerly waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus.

The phenomenal growth of the Jesus Family in the 1930s was attributed to several able leaders. The first was Dong Hengxin (董恆新 1907-1952). Dong used to be an opium smuggler, but converted to Christianity in the late 1920s. He entered the Baptist Seminary in Kaifeng, Henan. In the early 1930s, he joined the Jesus Family in Mazhuang. He was gifted in music, and became a prolific songwriter, composing numerous songs for the Jesus Family. Also in the leadership circle were two women, Zuo Shun-zhen (左順真 1907-1987) and Chen Bixi (陳碧璽 1904-1980). Zuo was the great-great granddaughter of Zuo Aongtang (左宗棠 1812-1885), the celebrated Qing scholar and governor general of Shanxi and Gansu. She attended a Presbyterian ladies' school in Beijing before she became a nurse at the Beijing National School of Midwifery Hospital, where she met Chen Bixi, a fourth generation Christian and a medical doctor in the hospital's department of obstetrics and gynecology. Both converted to Pentecostalism during a revival and were "baptized by the Holy Spirit amid floods of tears." They then organized a group of young women in the hospital to "preach the Gospel and heal the sick in Mongolia." They set up a base in Baotou and began both the preaching and healing work there. Knowing their story, Jing went to Baotou and persuaded them to join the Jesus Family. Their medical expertise as well as their organizational skills enabled them to play a vital role in the Jesus Family.

With these dedicated and gifted leaders, the Jesus Family flourished in the 1930s. During this period, apart from the political chaos caused by the civil war, famine, flooding and other natural disasters were not uncommon. In 1933, the flooding of the Yellow River left 18,000 dead and millions homeless. Many of these refugees were drawn into the welcoming embrace of the Jesus Family. At the same time, a number of intellectuals were also moved to join the community, including teachers, doctors, and other skilled workers. The infrastructure of the Jesus Family became more complicated. In addition to the farming department, which was the most basic work of the community, fourteen other units were developed including carpentry, blacksmithing, stone masonry, shoemaking, cooking, needlework, childcare, education, health care and etc. By the mid-1930s, the Jesus Family had spread beyond Shandong and similar settlements were established in Henan, Shanxi and Jiangsu provinces.

The Jesus Family was like a large traditional Chinese family. Members worked together on the Family farm by day, and shared the oversized brick beds in segregated quarters at night. Natural blood relations were replaced by "spiritual relations." The leaders played the role of parents,

and were respected and obeyed. Just like traditional Chinese families, arranged marriages in the Jesus Family became a norm. Husbands and wives lived separately most of the time. However, they kept several private rooms for couples to live together for short periods, usually lasting two to three weeks. Cohabitation was arranged and approved by the leadership circle. Children were placed under the care of the nursery department from birth. During infancy, mothers were allowed to visit their children four times a day. The idea was that parents should not develop any special love for their own children, which would be “incompatible with their love of Jesus.” The Jesus Family did not allow any private ownership of property. Spouses lived apart and children were reared communally. Discipline was strictly carried out. If members misbehaved by stealing food, using cosmetics, contemplating desertion, complaining about arranged marriages or were caught exchanging intimate letters with young men in the nearby city, they would be chastised. Beating, spanking and other forms of abuse were not uncommon within the Jesus family.³⁷

During the Sino-Japanese War, refugees poured into the Jesus Family. Sixty-four smaller Jesus Family units sprang up across China. According to Daniel Bays, by the end of the Sino-Japanese War, there were well over a hundred of these Jesus Family communities all over China, with a total membership of several thousand. All the Jesus Families were disbanded in 1953 by the Communist government.³⁸

All of the above groups had one common characteristic: they were all charismatic in their theology. Lian Xi termed them a Spiritual Gifts Movement.³⁹ Though they collectively had about half a million followers during the mid-1930s, they were isolated from the mainstream Protestant body. Consequently, their impact was limited.

However, there was yet another group of Chinese leaders who emerged from the 1930s revival. Like the former three groups, most of these leaders did not occupy any position of power within the ecclesiastical structure of the mission churches. Many did not receive any formal theological training, and they were not charismatic in their theology. They were not totally separated from the mission churches though most of them were truly self-supporting, self-propagating and self-

³⁷ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, pp. 64-84.

³⁸ Daniel H. Bays, *Christianity in China: from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 312.

³⁹ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 109.

governing. Their simple, evangelical preaching on sin, repentance, and redemption had tremendous impact on the masses, both in the rural areas as well as the urban cities. To use Lian Xi's words, "Their repudiation of the Social Gospel appeared commonsensical at a time of political chaos and foreign aggression, and their eschatological proclamation spread hope even as war, random suffering and gloom intensified."⁴⁰ As a result, their influence on the Chinese Church far exceeded both the former three groups and other national Protestant bodies such as the NCC or YMCA. The leading figures in this group were Wang Mingdao, Watchman Nee, and John Sung along with the Bethel Band. Since they were close partners of the CIM, it is necessary to analyze their work separately in another section.

1.4 The Underlying Causes of the Revival and the Emergence of Local Leaders

A critical analysis of the Revival movement shows that the basic issue underlying this movement was power. In the 1920s and 1930s, conditions throughout the entire country were chaotic. The civil war, with the increasing use of modern weapons, was terrible in the extreme. The tales of human suffering caused by the war defied description. Banditry and lawlessness persisted. Opium was cultivated in more provinces than at any time since 1911. Famine and floods were not uncommon. The Chinese Christians were particularly targets of hatred because of the anti-Christian movement. The situation seemed so hopeless that many local Christians and many missionaries confessed to an unprecedented depression in spirit. They were powerless and hopeless. The message of the revivalists, therefore, gave them hope. In many cases, this movement was much influenced by Pentecostalism. The typical message of the revivalists was repentance and public confession of sin, and once the Pentecostal fire was kindled, tongue-speaking, faith healing, dreams, special revelations, swoons, prophecies and exorcism followed. The strong emphasis on eschatological hope in the second coming of Christ and the setting up of the Messianic Kingdom was attractive to these powerless and hopeless peasants in the rural areas. Leading this type of emotional ministry did not require a lot of Biblical knowledge or theological training. This became a fast track to power. In the early phase of the revival movement, the majority of the revivalists were uneducated, but very controlling and dominating. Lian Xi said, "As it developed, the movement came to feed on its own intensity and created a behavioral norm to which all came under pressure to conform - what some psychologists of revivals have called the force of "crowd suggestion." Referring to the sensational public confessions of sins "from childhood up," one missionary reported, "Those who do not fall in

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

with these performances are accused of hindering the work of the Spirit. And it became widely accepted that if one has not this ‘spirit of exhilaration and spiritual fervor’, then he is still in his sins and a son of Satan.”⁴¹ Thus, we see that in many of these groups, autocratic leadership seemed to be the norm and oftentimes, abuses of power were not uncommon.

The second underlying cause was Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal movement emerged from the late-nineteenth century Holiness Revival in the United States. On January 1st, 1901, a student at Bethel College in Topeka, Kansas claimed that he was baptized by the Holy Spirit and received the gift of “tongues.” To the Pentecostals, “tongues” (the Greek word is *glossalalia*) was a heavenly language, not an earthly language, and it could not be understood by human beings unless interpreted by someone who had the gift of interpreting tongues. Tongue-speaking was considered a sign of baptism by the Holy Spirit, to be followed by divine healing, prophecy and exorcism. Before long, most of the students at Bethel College were speaking in tongues. In 1906, Pentecostalism came to Los Angeles and set up its base at the Azusa Street Mission. After 1906, the movement flourished across the United States. It soon turned into an international phenomenon. In the 1920s, independent Pentecostal missionaries, armed with nothing but the conviction of their baptism by the Holy Spirit and their millennial hope, sailed overseas.

Since China was the most needy mission field in the early twentieth century, many of these Pentecostal missionaries went to China. They were not members of any Mission Society. Their nondenominational background gave their converts a great deal of freedom to develop their own groups. The most interesting aspect was the striking resemblance between Pentecostal belief and traditional folk religion in China. According to Paul H. Cohen, the Boxers strongly believed that when they asked gods to attach themselves to their bodies, they would become Spirit Boxers, invulnerable to swords and spears. If one was “possessed” by the Spirit Boxer, one would chant an incantation and suddenly fall to the ground. Boxers were convinced that once possessed by the Spirit Boxer, they would go up to heaven.⁴² There was clearly a striking resemblance between the Pentecostal belief in the filling of the Holy Spirit and the Boxers’ belief in possession by the Spirit Boxer. In addition, the Pentecostals also believed in exorcism. John Wimber, a modern Pentecostal leader claimed that encounters with demons were a common experience among the Pentecostals. Missionary Alan Tippet called these events power

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 102.

⁴² Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: the Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 96-97.

encounters, the clashing of the kingdom of God with the kingdom of Satan. These conflicts and clashes might occur anywhere, anytime. The Expulsion of demons was most dramatic, though power encounters were far from limited only to those where Satan took the form of the demonic.⁴³ It is not uncommon for the Pentecostal to blame demons for calamities and illnesses. Chinese folk religions held a similar worldview. They believed that the entire Universe was inhabited by spirits, some good and some evil. All suffering and calamities were caused by evil spirits. Thus, the Pentecostal claim of the power of exorcism was easily understood and very attractive to the Chinese.

Finally, the sociological structure of Chinese society was another key factor influencing this revival and the emergence of local leaders. The Chinese had no concept of individualism, and the Christian message of the salvation of an individual soul was very foreign to them. A Chinese found his identity in his family and clan. Thus, religion was a clan's business, not an individual's personal faith. Religion and loyalty to the clan were inseparable. If a member of the family or clan did not participate in the rituals of ancestor worship, he or she would be considered rebellious and chastised accordingly. This is one main reason why the early missionaries found the Christian message not well received in China. They preached the salvation of an individual soul, which was a very foreign concept to most Chinese. Social work, although undertaken by many missions, was regarded by some as secondary and not really worth the diversion of funds from proper evangelistic work. They preached that drink was evil; Chinese drama should be forbidden; smoking, polygamy, and ancestor worship should not be practiced by Christians. All these were perceived as threats to the very existence of the clan system with the temple shrine as its religious, cultural and social center. As a result, the missionaries met with much resistance, culminating in the Boxer Uprising in 1900.⁴⁴ However, indigenous groups, particularly the Jesus Family, found a solution to this problem. They created a new type of clan or family. In this family, just like in any other clan in China, members found their identity and support. The only difference was that instead of worshipping their ancestors, they worshipped Jesus. That is why many Chinese were attracted to these groups instead of to the institutionalized churches dominated by foreign missionaries.

⁴³ John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 16.

⁴⁴ So Wing Yui (蘇穎睿), "Towards a New Model of Community Church in Hong Kong" (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1982), p. 91.

1.5 The CIM's Involvement in the Revival

As mentioned previously, a pioneer of the revival movement, Marie Monsen, was a close associate of the CIM. Many CIM missionaries were also involved in this revival. The more outstanding ones were Elizabeth Fischbacher and Anna Christensen. In fact, the revival had tremendous impact on CIM churches. Lyall described it in this way:

God had another answer to the defiance of Satan - revival! The cry for revival had for long risen from the hearts of missionaries and Chinese Christians alike. Formality, barrenness and coldness afflicted the Church. There was not enough fruitfulness and spiritual growth was slow. Much hidden sin within the Church reduced the power of her impact on the society around. But God had been preparing His instruments to arouse the Chinese Church ... He raised up leaders like Dr. John Sung, the eccentric scientist-evangelist, Andrew Gih, Hsien Mengtze, Marcus Cheng, Leyland Wang, Charles Li, John Li, Chia Yuming, and Ni Tosheng [Watchman Nee] to lead the revival nation-wide ... Their message was essentially the same: the exposing of secret sin, a call to thorough repentance, the need for restitution, the sufficiency of the Blood of Christ to cleanse and deliver from all sin and the possibility of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The results, too, were characteristic: nominal Christians were truly converted, many lives were changed, new life flooded into the churches, Christians began to witness spontaneously to others, while joy and love overflowed in Christian fellowship ... From all parts of China, reports reached Shanghai [the CIM headquarters] of a transforming work of the Holy Spirit among missionaries as well as the Chinese Christians.⁴⁵

From Lyall's description, we see that the revival he referred to was very different from the Pentecostal revivals. Tongue-speaking, exorcism, prophecy and divine healing were not the main emphasis. Rather, holy living and a passion for evangelism were the focus of the revival. To use his words, this was the transforming work of the Holy Spirit which in fact truly characterized revival in the history of the church.

First, there was a great revival among the CIM missionaries themselves. In August of 1934, CIM missionaries gathered together at Yutaoho, the CIM summer resort in Shanxi. The speaker was Elizabeth Fischbacher and her subject was the in-filling of the Holy Spirit as an initial experience, as well as a daily, constant and progressive in-filling. Lyall reported that during several days'

⁴⁵ Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; The China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, pp. 104-105;

waiting on the Lord, they were shown that nothing less than the fullness of the Holy Spirit was their supreme and urgent need. They were convicted of their own sinful nature, sins were confessed to God and to man, while other serious obstacles to receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit, such as prejudice and fear, were removed. Then one afternoon, the Holy Spirit revealed Christ to them, filling their hearts with great joy and peace. Many remained into the night, claiming an enduement of power and daily experiencing the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost.⁴⁶ In the same article, another missionary, a member of the English Baptist Mission, who had attended the same retreat, also shared that he felt enlightened and instructed, and there was a great and growing desire to receive power through the Spirit in a new and far greater measure than before. Many attendees felt the need to face again the question of sin in their hearts, or prejudice, or some hidden unwillingness to pay the price of power, which was a real surrender to the Master. Many began to take actions such as confessing with one another, making apologies or putting things right that had been wrong.⁴⁷ The results were obvious. Nineteen new centers were opened in nine different provinces. Tent missions increased and bore much fruit. There were further attempts to enter prisons where prisoners and jailers alike were converted. Work among children and young people received greater emphasis. The student class and the intelligentsia became increasingly interested. Much-needed opium refuge work was undertaken. Clinics based at the fourteen hospitals were used as spearheads for pioneer evangelism. The Hudson Taylor Memorial Hospital in Changsha was opened in 1936. In that year, there was a record total of 8,841 baptisms, double that of 1926. The total number of baptisms in the ten years from 1927-1936 was over 60,000 bringing the total membership of the CIM churches up to 95,000.⁴⁸

Revival among the CIM Chinese churches was even more spectacular. In 1926, when anti-foreign and anti-Christian propaganda were at their height, Paget Wilkes of the Japan Evangelistic Band held meetings in Shanghai and kindled fires in the hearts of a number of young Chinese Christians who later formed the Bethel Band. Prominent among them was Andrew Gih, a post-office official. He gave up his job and formed the Bethel Worldwide Evangelistic Band. Later John Sung joined the Band and collaborated with Gih in many powerful campaigns. Many CIM churches were impacted and encouraged by their work. When the Band came, all the churches in the area would form small voluntary preaching bands, each

⁴⁶ Leslie T. Lyall, "Revival Has Come to Us" *China's Millions* Nov. 1934: p. 204.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 205.

⁴⁸ Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; The China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, p. 107.

with its own flag and leader. Hundreds of such bands of lay witnesses became active in the wake of visits by the Bethel Band.

China's Millions reported on many such revival stories during this period. In Kansu, for instance, E.J. Mann, the CIM superintendent, reported revivals in Lanchow and Fukiang in Kansu. The evangelists, a Mr. Tuan and a Mr. Hu, associated with the Jesus Family, and a Mr. Chow, a member of the Bethel Band were invited to Kansu to lead revival meetings. These evangelists brought a two-fold message. First, they attacked sin heavily, exposing the evils in church life, such as pride, envy etc. This generally led to real repentance, and then came the upbuilding in which they stressed the need for humility, love and a spirit of sacrifice. Their methods were simple and free and they taught a number of Chinese hymns set to Chinese tunes, the singing of which was a special mark of their meetings. The meetings lasted for seventeen days. Splendid results were seen. One leader was drinking hard, and his supply of wine was poured into the garden while he wept as he thought of the harm he had done. Other leaders were growing opium and this had to be confessed and put away before they received peace. The whole church seemed reconverted and enabled to see things clearly. Many who had ceased to attend services came to the meetings and some were wonderfully restored, while quite a number of non-Christians were converted.⁴⁹

In Szechwan, it was reported that one of the Bethel Bands, consisting of two women and one man, all Chinese, had been holding special meetings in connection with the various CIM churches. These drew large audiences, particularly in Chengtu (Chengdu) and Luhsien. Hundreds professed conversion, and a heavy responsibility fell upon the Christian leaders to follow up on the work that had been accomplished. The reporter emphasized that this good news was the beginning of God's answer to many prayers for revival in Western Szechwan.⁵⁰

The report from Kweichow (Guizhou) by E.A. Crapuchettes of Anshun, was even more impressive. According to the report, bands were sent to the Miao villages in Guizhou to hold revival meetings. Unlike the revivals of the Pentecostals, there was no tongue-speaking, faith healing or exorcism. Instead, there were many conversions, repentances, prayers, and life changing stories. Many broke down crying out to God for mercy. Opium addicts broke away from their habits and confessed their sins in tears. A man called Simon had been smoking opium

⁴⁹ E.J. Mann, "The Revival in Kansu," *China's Millions* June 1935: pp. 105-106.

⁵⁰ W.H. Aldis, "The Situation in Szechwan," *China's Millions* LX. No. 3 (1934): p. 57.

for three years and accepted the Lord after many struggles. Crapuchettes wrote:

The Holy Spirit came upon us with many repenting and crying. The next afternoon, Simon came and it was a wonderful time. Everyone melted before the Lord and cried out for mercy. I've never had such an experience before. I was so conscious of the great love and mercy of God towards precious souls, and felt led as never before to give myself for His use. Simon's son, about twenty-five, cried out bitterly for his father and couldn't stop after the meeting closed. After the meeting, God worked powerfully in Simon's heart and he broke off the opium habit. Up to this time he had been hard-hearted and unyielding, He had smoked away all his money and his animals.⁵¹

Revivals also broke out in Peh Ma Tong among the Water West Miao, an isolated tribe with only a few cold Christians. Bands were sent there to share the Gospel. In the revival meeting, many broke down in a most pitiable condition. According to the report, many of these people were cold and unyielding until the break came, but afterwards were as humble and gentle as children. Crapuchette wrote, "A notable case was a young man whose brother was first blessed to receive Christ, but he insisted he had no sin and was perfectly all right, but in one of the meetings, although it was a freezing cold day, his face was running with perspiration, and he looked as though someone had thrust a dagger in his heart. But later he received great joy."⁵²

China's Millions also reported revivals among CIM churches in other provinces. Montagu Beauchamp, a surviving member of the Cambridge Seven, toured the country visiting many CIM stations and churches in 1936. He witnessed signs of revival in cities like Yengheng, Chowkiakow, Fukow and Kaifeng. In Kaifeng, for instance, Wang Mingdao from Beijing was invited to lead a series of meetings organized by the CIM churches. The church building was packed twice a day and many responded positively to Wang's powerful messages. Beauchamp remarked, "In 1886-1887, when I tramped through this province there was not a single missionary or Chinese church in Honan (Henan). This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."⁵³ But by far, the most impressive revival occurred in Shanxi. In the early 1930s, when echoes of revival in Shandong were heard in Shanxi, one of David Yang's Quwo missionary co-workers, Elizabeth Fischbacher, went to Shandong to observe the revival for

⁵¹ E.A. Crapuchettes, "Revival in Kweichow," *China's Millions* LX. No. 5 (1934), pp.84-86.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁵³ Montagu Beauchamp, "A Veteran Revisits Honan" *China's Millions* Jan. 1936: pp. 6-7.

herself and returned with a powerful and attractive message. In 1931 and 1932 Andrew Gih and Dr. John Sung of the Bethel Band led successful campaigns in some of Shanxi's main cities. Chinese Christians and missionaries alike experienced personal revival.

Lyall reported in *China's Millions*:

Over the New Year I was in Pingyang for the Southern District Conference of missionaries. The Bethel Band was still there when we arrived, and we hurried back on Monday to attend the meetings at Yufenghsien. How I praise the Lord for that week? It has brought to me one of the biggest blessings of my life. As the meetings went on it seemed as if the love of God just melted hearts and I have never been in meetings like those at the end, when hearts were so touched that sobbing came from all over the hall and church; it was nothing but the work of the Holy Spirit, for the addresses at those two meetings completely lacking excitement, were just simple messages on 'Looking to Jesus' and 'taking up the cross.' I have never before felt the barriers between us and the Chinese go down as they did during those days, for we were of one heart and soul, full of joy and praise to God; it was a real breath of revival. It is early yet to speak of results, but there surely must be far reaching ones. There was marked blessing among the thirty or so schoolboys who remained for the meetings, and it was a privilege to pray with one or two as they wept their way to the Savior. God bless the Bethel Band, and give us more like them! "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me praise His Holy Name."⁵⁴

Because of this revival, it was not hard for the Chinese churches to see the wisdom of becoming utterly dependent on the Lord instead of on a foreign missionary organization. Revival added spiritual impetus to evangelism. David Yang, the Chinese leader of the CIM churches in Shanxi envisioned starting the Ling Gong Tuan (靈工團 Spiritual Action Team) as a training camp for Chinese workers. They spent half the year studying the Bible and Pastoral theology, and the other half doing practical work in evangelism and other ministries. During the leaders' retreat, many experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit. Yang himself spent a whole day in prayer together with a few Chinese and missionary brothers and sisters, all of whom shared the same vision. Lyall, who was one of the participants, reported that during that retreat the Lord did a deep work in the hearts of many. It was no short-lived revival, for living waters began to pour forth and those present returned to their homes to witness in a new way to their gracious Lord Jesus. A short time later, Miss Fischbacher held a Bible School in Quwo and another leader was

⁵⁴ Leslie T. Lyall, "News of the Two Hundred: In Shansi," *China's Millions* LIX. No. 4 (1933), pp.67-68.

so greatly blessed that a number were converted in his villages. The blessing spread to the Hongdong Bible Institute where Miss Fischbacher also held meetings. Many students and missionaries received the Holy Spirit's fullness. Speaking in tongues was not common, although in some cases this sign was given. "Just now," said Yang, "I can think of a large number of brothers and sisters who three months ago were weak and powerless yet today they have become strong leaders in the firing line, to whom the Lord is entrusting the care of saved men and women ... the living water still flows and I believe that the Lord will give yet greater grace that His name might be glorified." That prayer was answered and the Spiritual Action Team became a training camp for many capable leaders of the CIM churches.⁵⁵

2. From the Role of a Leader to the Role of a Partner - the CIM and the Chinese Church

By the 1930s, three different groups of indigenous Chinese Church leaders had emerged. The first group included Cheng Jingyi, T.C. Chao, Liu Tingfeng, Wu Leichuan and Y.T. Wu who were associated with the Church of Christ in China and NCC. The second group comprised leaders of The True Jesus Church and the Jesus Family. The third group was basically evangelical in faith and included Wang Mingdao, John Sung, Leyland Wang, Andrew Gih, David Yang and Watchman Nee.

The CIM did not have any association with the first group because of the differences in theology. The CIM did not join the NCC because of its liberal theology and emphasis on social reform. The CIM also had great reservations about the approach and theology of the second group. Lyall wrote:

As in most historic revivals counterfeit movements arose, accompanied by excesses and much frothy emotionalism. One such, the "Jesus Family", with its unscriptural emphasis and inconsistent conduct caused havoc in many churches. At a later date this movement, by its communal life, attempted to improve on Communism, but, in spite of some commendable features, it never quite succeeded in living down its disastrous beginnings.⁵⁶

The CIM, however, had a very close relationship with the third group. They shared the same evangelical theology, and their views on political involvement, ecclesiology, and missions were similar. Unlike many of the conservative denominational missions, the CIM, being trans-denominational, had

⁵⁵ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 29.

⁵⁶ Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; The China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, p. 105.

greater flexibility and freedom to develop close partnership with these indigenous Chinese leaders. This key move not only strengthened these leaders, but also impacted the future development of the Chinese church in a significant way.

Lyall's book, *Three of China's Mighty Men* was important because it provided information on the CIM's strategy of equipping Chinese church leaders. The CIM's relationships with these three mighty men: David Yang, Watchman Nee and Wang Mingdao, represented three different ways of partnering with local leaders. The CIM's relationship with Yang represented an example of a very direct approach. Lyall said, "David had been brought up in a CIM church field and continued to feel warm kinship with the CIM and its ministry to the Chinese people."⁵⁷ I call this approach the strategy of mentorship. Its relationship with Wang Mingdao represented a second approach. Unlike Yang, Wang started the Beijing Church on his own without any support from Western missionaries. His church was truly three-self from the beginning: self-governed, self-supported, and self-propagated. Yet, CIM missionaries were able to work closely with Wang especially in the student ministry in Beijing after the Sino-Japanese War. I call this approach the strategy of partnership. Watchman Nee represented the third approach in which many CIM churches were entrusted to him as part of the Little Flock Community after 1949. I call this approach the strategy of trusteeship.

2.1 The Strategy of Mentorship

It had always been the policy of the CIM to train up local leaders to lead the Chinese Church. However, as the Chinese proverb says, "It takes ten years to grow a mature tree, but it takes one hundred years to grow a mature man." Despite the CIM's efforts, there were no outstanding local leaders in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, perhaps with the exception of Pastor Hsi of Shanxi. Local Chinese emerged in leadership positions only in the 1930s. In this study, two outstanding leaders are cited, namely David Yang of Shanxi and Wang Zhiming (王志明 1907-1973) of Yunnan.

Yang was born in 1900, the year that thousands of missionaries and Chinese Christians were murdered by the Boxers. To the Yang family, this tragedy had special meaning. Their pastor, Mr. Kay, a missionary of the CIM, his wife and little girl were murdered by the Boxers along with hundreds of local believers in Quwo, Shanxi. For eleven years, the Kays had faithfully pastored the Quwo church. Mr. Kay spoke fluent Chinese and was able to communicate the Gospel message clearly and relevantly to the local people. As the church grew, he started a school for

⁵⁷ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 34.

children in the area. The school, with its excellent academic record and discipline, achieved an excellent reputation within a short time. Yang's father was an early convert in Mr. Kay's church. In August of 1900, the Kays were captured by the Boxers in Quwo and decapitated with Boxer swords. The Yang family barely escaped the massacre. Yang was born in that fateful 'Year of the Rat.'

Yang attended the local Christian primary school, followed by the provincial Christian Middle School at Hongdong, the Hoste Middle School, where he received sound Christian education from CIM missionaries. At that time, the headmaster was Rowland Hogben, a stern but deeply respected teacher from England. The school emphasized not only academics, but also sports. However, the most important part of its curriculum was its building up of the students' Christian character. Once a year, there was a school outing to the famous Kwang Sheng Si Springs, from which Hongdong and its neighbor city, Wanan derived their fertility. The annual fair to honor the god of the springs was also a good opportunity for evangelism. The teachers of the School would take the students to the fair and train them to do evangelism. After graduating from Hoste Middle School in 1923, Yang went to the Presbyterian Seminary in Tengxian, the best theological seminary in North China, to receive his theological training and preparation to serve as a pastor in the Chinese church.

Yang's character & passion was much influenced by his mentors at the Hoste Middle School. According to Yang's son Dr. Yang Anxi, Yang had the following traits.⁵⁸ He was a stern but loving father. He lived simply, and always warned his children not to be money-minded. He was a man of a faith, trusting the Lord for His providence and supply. He was a righteous man and hated corruption. In 1948 when he was invited to preach in the Nanjing church which General Chiang Kai-shek attended, he rebuked the corruption and sins of the high ranking officials in government at the risk of being arrested. To his surprise, Chiang came to thank him for the rebuke and reminder. He was a compassionate man. During the Sino-Japanese war, he worked closely with CIM missionaries to care for hundreds of refugees and wounded soldiers at the risk of his own life.

These character traits were also evident in Headmaster Rowland Hogben and other missionary

⁵⁸ Yang Anxi (楊弟兄) "Si Zai Yesu Qian, Huo Zai Yesu Qian—Huiyi Wo de Fuqin Yang Shaotang Mushi 死在耶穌前 活在耶穌前——回憶我的父親楊紹唐牧師," *Shigong zhi jia/ Fuyin jianzheng ji luntan 事工之家/福音見證集論壇*, accessed March 4, 2014, www.ctestimony.org/2004/20041106.htm.

teachers. Yang's character was obviously much influenced by these men during his school years. A turning point for Yang came in 1924 when he was sent by the seminary to attend a convention in Kuling, south of the Yangtze in the province of Kiangsi for the deepening of spiritual life. There he listened to many celebrated preachers including a missionary who spoke about the problems of spiritual experience. He wrote:

I did not pay much attention because I was confident that I was a saved man. From a child I had received excellent religious education and I sincerely believed. Moreover I was being trained at a theological college in preparation for serving the Lord in the future. How could it be that I was not saved? Nevertheless I asked the Lord not to let me return to College empty-handed. So, besides listening to the addresses, I was busy writing up my notes. But, praise the Lord, when I did not even know what grace was, in my weakness and ignorance the Lord saved me. There came to me a burden of sin which so weighed upon me and bound me that I said to myself, 'If the Lord's power to save is so limited and insufficient to give me peace and deliverance then I really doubt if Jesus is alive at all.' But thanks to my gracious Lord Jesus, early on the morning of the seventh of July He found this lost sheep. The blood of the Cross flowed into my heart and the burden of sin fell away. For the very first time I enjoyed a true relationship with Jesus Christ and from that day until now the Lord has continued to do His marvelous work in my life.⁵⁹

After graduation in 1925 Yang refused offers of well-paid Presbyterian pastorates to return to his home province of Shanxi to serve in the CIM church. His main area of service was in the thirteen churches in the surrounding thirteen counties and Quwo was his base. He worked closely with the two lady missionaries of the CIM, one of which was Elizabeth Fischebacher. She and Yang, along with the Bethel Band, brought great revival to the churches in Shanxi, adding spiritual impetus to evangelical outreach. As a result, many new converts were added to the church. The shortage of manpower then became a serious problem for the Shanxi church. In the 1930s, the CIM was determined to implement a policy of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation in place of missionary control for its churches all over China. This policy was not easily accepted by the many local believers who were content with the old paternalistic arrangement. Most of them were poor; how could they then be expected to assume financial responsibility for pastors, teachers and evangelists? Lacking support, not a few Chinese evangelists left Shanxi for areas where foreign missions still paid considerable salaries to their

⁵⁹ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 20.

young workers. This created tension between the CIM and some local pastors.

A report in the February 1936 issue of *China's Millions* entitled *Problems of an Indigenous Church* highlights some of these difficulties. It was an account of a Church Conference held in Anhwei:

For months before the Conference there had been a general fear that the Conference would not be organized, resulting in a break-up of the plan of co-operation between the Churches and the Mission for the self-support of the Provincial Church. Twenty-two delegates, representing most of the churches, came to the Conference, but there were several of the most important Church leaders who did not come, because they felt sure the Conference would not be able to transact business. During the first session, when the Conference met to elect its officers, the dissatisfied leaders had formed a plan to elect the Mission's provincial superintendent as chairman of the Chinese Conference! When the superintendent refused to accept the office, the business session stopped, the intention of the leaders being to disband without any further attempt at organization . . . Pastor Hsieh Mengtseh, the speaker of the Conference, urged the leaders to think carefully over what they were doing. He was led of the Lord to talk plainly to the delegates, both publicly and privately, holding up the standard of the Scripture for the work of the ministry. Largely through his spiritual ministry to the Conference, the Conference was organized with one of the Chinese pastors as the chairman, and it was agreed that the plan of co-operation with the Mission for the gradual financial independence of the Anhwei church be carried on for the next three years.⁶⁰

It was through mature leaders like Hsieh Mengtseh in Anhwei and Yang that the CIM was able to carry on its plan of partnership. In fact, as Chairman of the CIM Church Council for the Province of Shanxi, Yang bore the burden of achieving this goal. He had only five to six Chinese workers and a few volunteers to help him - such a great challenge. Despite these difficult conditions, Yang conceived the idea of starting up the Ling Gong Tuan (靈工團 Spiritual Action Team) to train more local pastors and evangelists. His main co-worker, a Biblewoman, gave up the thought of leaving Shanxi in order to join Yang in this new venture. This ministry proved very successful in achieving the goal of partnership between the CIM and local Chinese church leaders.

⁶⁰ "Problems of an Indigenous Church" in *China's Millions*, February, 1936, p. 31

Another potentially explosive issue among CIM churches had to do with the understanding of the “fullness of the Holy Spirit.” As mentioned previously, the Revival in the 1930s was much influenced by Pentecostalism. After Elizabeth Fischbacher, Yang’s co-worker in Quwo, brought back the spirit of revival to Shanxi from Shandong, many believers and students began to experience “the fullness of the Holy Spirit.” Such experiences led to new joy and freedom in fellowship. Mutual confession of the sins of criticism, jealousy and lack of love punctuated their prayers, and some even started to speak in tongues. Reports of the events in Shanxi reached headquarters in Shanghai, and some CIM missionaries had grave concerns. In 1935, J.O. Fraser was asked to visit the province to meet the missionaries at Yu-tao-ho to investigate the situation. Fraser gave a positive report regarding the revival in Shanxi and the fears of the Shanghai leadership were removed. Nevertheless, this showed that there was indeed tension among CIM missionaries regarding the understanding of the “fullness of the Holy Spirit.”⁶¹

Understandably, Yang, a co-worker of Fischbacher, and an active agent of the Shanxi Revival, was deeply concerned about the understanding of the concept of the “fullness of the Holy Spirit.” His view and attitude on this issue would affect the partnership between the CIM and the Chinese Church. Yang was well aware that it would not be by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God that he would accomplish anything for God. This was not the first time Yang had known this concern. He had thought about and read on the subject a good deal. Once he wrote, “I sincerely and with faith received the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the Lord did a gracious work in my heart. Afterwards, in all directions the Lord’s power was truly present, but still I dared not confidently say that I had obtained His fullness. At times, my heart was truly dissatisfied.”⁶² In other words, on the one hand, he realized that the Lord had promised the fullness of the Holy Spirit to all believers, yet on the other hand, he dared not confidently claim that he had actually experienced that fullness. He wrote, “The prior aim in preparation for Christian service was to seek ‘power from on high.’ As for myself, the more I sought, the farther away I seemed to be.”⁶³ He always experienced this kind of struggle.

It was not until early summer in 1934 that Yang had a breakthrough at the Southern District Leaders’ Retreat. During the retreat, participants were touched by the message brought by John Sung. They confessed sins to one another; prejudice and jealousy was burnt up; pride and self-

⁶¹ Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, pp. 36-37.

⁶² Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 26.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

assurance were transformed by the fire of love. They were definitely filled by the Holy Spirit. Yang spent an entire day in prayer together with a few Chinese and missionary brothers and sisters, all of whom shared the same sense of need. Yang shared that his struggles were absolutely and clearly solved. He concluded that although he had previously received the fullness of the Holy Spirit, yet he lacked the release of the Spirit. He made the distinction between the ‘fullness of the Holy Spirit’ and the ‘release of the Holy Spirit,’ and this provided a theological framework for his understanding of the ‘fullness of the Spirit.’ Pentecostals were of the mind that one did not receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit when one first came to faith, and that it was necessary to be baptized by the Holy Spirit in order to be filled by the Holy Spirit. This was what they called the second blessing, the sign of which was tongue-speaking. This was not accepted by most of the Evangelicals for they believed that every believer received the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This exactly was the position that Yang held. However, many Christians did experience the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit at Revivals just as Yang observed during the retreat. Yang attributed this to the ‘release of the Spirit’ rather than the second blessing. He did not believe that tongue-speaking was the sign of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Biblically speaking, the English word ‘release’ is much closer in meaning to the Greek word *paraoo* in the New Testament than ‘fill.’ Yang recalled that when he committed himself utterly to Jesus, the fetters of the flesh were loosed; his outlook was changed and he knew a great power. Previously, though he had been filled with much joy and praise, he had been unable to give expressions to them. He could only whisper ‘praise the Lord.’ Now, joy flooded his breast and in a loud voice he shouted “Hallelujah.” Power immediately filled his whole body. He was filled with joy and grace and he laughed without restraint.⁶⁴ Yang’s understanding of the fullness of the Holy Spirit was well received by both the CIM and the Chinese Church, and by both pro-charismatic and non-charismatic believers. Pentecostalism was no longer an issue in the CIM Church.

The New Testament Greek word *koinonia* seems to most accurately describe the relationship between Yang and the CIM missionaries. *Koinonia* is much deeper than partnership for it carries the meaning of fellowship, sharing and intimate relationship.⁶⁵ While it was true that Yang was nurtured and equipped by CIM missionaries, it was also equally true that many of the CIM

⁶⁴ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 28.

⁶⁵ Walter Bauer, William Arndt, and Gingrich F. Wilbur, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: a Translation and Adaptation of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen Urchristlichen Literatur* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p.439.

missionaries, including Lyall, were nurtured and equipped by Yang in return. In 1931, financial necessity and a need at the Hoste School, took Yang to Hongdong to be the acting principal. During vacations, however, he continued to speak at church conferences, and that year he took Lyall with him, allowing him to preach his first messages in Chinese. As Lyall travelled and lived with Yang, he (Lyall) felt he was observing a true man of God, a skillful exponent of Scripture capable of adapting his teaching to suit the agricultural life-style of his hearers, and a wise and much loved leader.⁶⁶ In 1935, Lyall was deeply depressed facing his own personal crisis. That summer, he attended the annual district convention of the southern Shanxi churches. Yang spoke. Lyall wrote, “David Yang emphasized that the believer must know the experience of the cross in daily life and needs to be totally abandoned to God’s disciplinary processes — an attitude which would certainly involve a common sharing in tribulation, in the Kingdom and in patient endurance ... this message penetrated deeply into my heart at a time of acute personal crisis.”⁶⁷

Adeney was another CIM missionary who was built-up by Yang. As a young missionary, Adeney joined the Ling Gong Tuan (靈工團 Spiritual Action Team) and he was much influenced by Yang’s example. He wrote that Yang always tried to attain a deeper fellowship with the Son of God. Yang invited Adeney to spend time with him in prayer. Adeney found him stretched out upon the mud floor of his simple room crying to God, confessing his own weakness and sinfulness and asking for cleansing and the filling of the Holy Spirit - this from a man whose life was already characterized by humility and Christlikeness. This made an indelible impression upon Adeney.⁶⁸ Lyall and Adeney were typical of the many missionaries who were blessed by Yang’s living example.

Wang Zhiming was also illustrative of the ‘mentorship strategy’ adopted by the CIM. In 1998, he was one of ten 20th century Christian martyrs memorialized with a statue above the Great West Door of Westminster Abby. These statues represent those who died in the name of Christ in a century marked by the greatest number of martyrdoms in the history of the church. Wang Zhiming was a Miao pastor little known outside his home in Wuding County, Yunnan at the time of his execution on December 29th, 1973. Wang was born in Wuding in 1907, the year after

⁶⁶ Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.45.

⁶⁸ Carolyn Armitage, *Reaching for the Goal: The Life Story of David Adeney: Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Mission*, pp. 58-59.

Christian missionaries Samuel Pollard, a Methodist missionary and Arthur G. Nicholls, a missionary of the CIM first began to work there. Wang was educated in CIM schools and mentored by Nicholls. He later taught in a CIM school for ten years. After Arthur Nicholls left in 1944, Wang took charge of the church work in Wuding, Luquan and was elected chairman of the church council in Wuding. He was ordained in 1951 at the age of 44. When the Communists took over in 1950, he refused to participate in the denunciation meetings held to humiliate landlords. This was undoubtedly one of the reasons why Wang was declared a counter-revolutionary even before the Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), at least twenty-one Christian leaders in Wuding were imprisoned, and many others were sent to camps, denounced or beaten. In 1969, Wang, his wife and sons were arrested. On December 29th, 1973, Wang was executed in a stadium in front of more than 10,000 people. The largely Christian crowd was not cowed into submission by the spectacle, but rather many rushed the stand where they berated the prosecuting official. When Wang was arrested, there were 5,500 Christians in Wuding. By 1980, the church had grown to about 12,000. Wuding now has over 30,000 Christians and more than 100 places of worship.

Though Wang had died, his spirit persisted. His teaching, life example and boldness for Christ had tremendous impact on the Miao people. Despite persecution and hardship for more than thirty years, the Miao church survived and flourished. It has become one of the largest congregations in China today. Without any doubt, Wang inherited that love and passion from the CIM missionaries who had sacrificed their lives for the Miao people.

To conclude, this strategy of mentorship adopted by the CIM proved to be an effective way of growing the Chinese Church. Apart from Yang and Wang, there were many other local Chinese leaders who had been mentored by CIM missionaries. James O. Fraser, a British CIM missionary, pioneered work among the Lisu in Yunnan and brought many to Christ. He was known for his ability to organize the people into strong indigenous churches that became models for church-planting ventures. He maintained a consistent policy of training Lisu converts to be self-supporting and to pay for their own books and church buildings. They also raised their own funds for the support of pastors and evangelists. Fraser also left church government in the hands of Lisu elders. After Fraser's death in 1938, John and Isobel Kuhn accepted the torch of leadership and continued to partner with the local Lisu church. The Lisu church survived despite severe persecution from the communist government. It is estimated that there are between

100,000 to 200,000 Lisu Christians in the Lisu church today.⁶⁹

2.2 The Strategy of Partnership

As a non-denominational mission, the CIM's objective was to plant autonomous and independent local churches rather than denominational churches with foreign heritage and tradition. Thus, relative to denominational missions, it was easier for the CIM to enter into partnership with independent local leaders. Among these, Wang Mingdao and Marcus Cheng (陳崇桂 1883-1963) were most prominent. It is interesting to see what this partnership entailed. Among the independent local leaders, Wang Mingdao was perhaps the most controversial yet influential. According to Lian Xi, many preachers in the Great Revival made no more than a fleeting appearance on the scene; none occupied any position of power within the ecclesiastical structure of mission churches. Yet collectively, their simple, fundamentalist preaching on sin, repentance, and redemption helped shape the Christianity of the masses. Their repudiation of the Social Gospel made sense during a time of political chaos and foreign aggression, and their eschatological proclamations gave hope in the face of war and random suffering. As a result, their influence on the Chinese church at the grassroots level far exceeded that of prominent denominational clergy and the leaders of national Protestant bodies such as the NCC and the YMCA who doggedly promoted a reformist Christianity. A leading figure within this group of independent local leaders was Wang Mingdao (1900-1991).⁷⁰

Lian Xi correctly analyzed the impact of Wang Mingdao on the Chinese church, but he was wrong to limit Wang's impact only to the grassroots. In fact, Wang's impact on the intellectuals and students especially those at prestigious universities in Beijing far exceeded his impact on the peasants in the rural areas. However, Wang's attack on liberalism and corruption in the denominational churches offended many.

The partnership between the CIM and Wang Mingdao was never a formal one. Though it was the CIM which first invited Wang to preach at an eight-day conference in Zen Huang in 1923, after which invitations from other churches followed thick and fast, Wang never joined any organization sponsored by the CIM.⁷¹ The partnership between the CIM and Wang was personal

⁶⁹ Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, pp. 66-67; Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible; The China Inland Mission, 1865-1965*, p. 134

⁷⁰ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, pp. 110-111.

⁷¹ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 112.

and informal, but very effective and influential. Lyall and Adeney were the most prominent among all the CIM missionaries who collaborated with Wang.

There were striking similarities in the backgrounds of Lyall and Wang. Both were born at the turn of the century, Lyall in 1905 and Wang in 1900. Both lost their fathers early in life. In fact, Wang's father died before he was born. Wang's father was Wang Dehao (王子厚), a doctor at the Methodist Hospital in Beijing. Dr. Wang, distraught with fear and strain, killed himself at the end of June during the Boxer Uprising. His shocked and sorrowing pregnant wife was within a month of her time and on June 25th, 1900 gave birth to her fifth child, a son. No midwife being available to deliver the baby, the grandmother performed the task. After the Boxer Uprising, Mrs. Wang and her two surviving children, Wang and his elder sister, received compensation from the Government, and bought a house in Gan-yu Hutung where she rented out rooms to lodgers. The people living in the same courtyard were little more than riff-raff, with low morals. Wang grew up in a rough environment. Lyall lost his father when he was only five years old during one of their mission trips. Such traumatic experiences had tremendous impact on both men. On the one hand, they were haunted by the fear of loss and separation their entire lives and at times felt depressed. On the other hand, they were determined to live meaningful lives, even if it turned out short and unpredictable. Wang wrote, "I am determined to achieve a great task before my death and thereby leave a legacy behind me."⁷²

Both received their early education at Christian schools. When Wang was nine years old, his mother sent him to the London Missionary Society (LMS) Cui Wen Primary School in Beijing. Although religion was taught in school, the students were never shown how to live out a Christian life. It was not until 1914 that he came to know salvation through the witness of a senior student. Wang wrote, "From that day, I had a belief, a purpose of life, a reforming passion and I ceased to live out my days aimlessly."⁷³ Likewise, Lyall received his early education from Kingsmead School at Holylake, a Christian school founded by his step-father Arthur Watts. Such experiences proved significant to their personal growth and spiritual development. Wang was able to get away from the evil environment of his home, which had already made its mark on his own language and conduct. Besides, his exposure to the Christian faith led this young man to think seriously about the meaning of life. The Bible raised in the boy's mind such questions

⁷² Mingdao Wang (王明道), *Wu Shi Nian Lai (五十年來)* (Jiulong: Xing chen chu ban she, 1967), p. 23.

⁷³ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 106.

as “What do men live for?”, “After death what?”⁷⁴ To Lyall, his Alma Mater provided a support system for him, not only during his formative years, but also throughout his entire life.

Both Lyall and Wang were school teachers before they entered into the Christian ministry. After graduating from high school, Wang was offered a teaching post at a Presbyterian Primary School in Baoding. He was actively involved in student ministry at the school. He arranged prayer meetings, Bible study groups and voluntary social service groups for students. He soon earned the respect of the students and the Principal. Though eventually dismissed by the School Authority because of his insistence on being baptized again by immersion, his experience as a school teacher proved vital in his later ministry, especially his involvement with the student ministry in Beijing. Lyall was also involved in student ministry at both the Kingsmead School in England and the Hoste Middle School in China. In fact, when he was at Cambridge, he was actively involved in the formation of the new Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. With backgrounds so much in common, it is no wonder they were able to form such a close partnership in the student ministry in Beijing from 1946-1950.

Both Wang & Lyall had been through what the Bible calls “the desert experience.” According to the biblical record, many of God’s servants, like David, Moses, Elijah and Paul, spent a number of years in the “desert” before they were used by God. In the “desert”, they realized their limitations and vulnerability and came to rely on God totally. Thus, the term “desert experience” refers to the experience of those who go through a difficult time in their life, yet ultimately emerging from this ordeal spiritually triumphant. After Wang was dismissed by the Presbyterian Primary School in Baoding, he returned home to find that his mother and sister thoroughly disapproved of his giving up a good teaching post. Even his best friends showed little sympathy. He met with opposition on all sides. He was depressed, disappointed, and so disturbed that some even suggested he was mentally ill. Just at this time, an older cousin, a military doctor, invited Wang to stay at his country home outside Beijing. There for sixty-two days, Wang found peace amid the mountains and streams and there he spent long periods in prayer and study of the Bible. This was Wang’s ‘desert experience’, his own personal training school. Emerging from the ‘desert’, he appeared to be a different person. His friend, Chen Zihao, once very critical of Wang, believing that he was out of his mind, recognized that the grace of God actually rested upon him. In fact, this was the turning point in Wang’s life. From then on,

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.105.

he decided to serve the Lord through preaching and eventually became one of the most popular preachers in China.⁷⁵ Lyall also went through a similar “desert experience.” In 1922, Lyall was confused about his future and depressed about the uncertainties in his life. He travelled alone to Strasbourg and spent time with the Lord. Through the reading of James McConkey’s *The Surrendered Life*, he came to realize his spiritual poverty and surrendered to God all his talents, time and future. He wrote, “From earliest years my chief interest had been in China, and my hope had always been to live my life to God there. Now, following my Strasbourg experience, God began to lay the burden of China’s needs more heavily in my mind.”⁷⁶

It was not by co-incidence that both Lyall and Wang had similar experiences with the Japanese during the Sino-Japanese War. In 1941, the Japanese set up a puppet organization known as ‘The Society for the Support of Christian Churches of Peking’ with the purpose of taking all the Christian churches under the tight control of the Japanese authorities. Wang was invited to attend the inaugural meeting, but he refused. In January 1942, the Chairman of the Society sent a personal representative to see Wang to urge him to join the Society; he also carried a warning as to the consequences if he were to refuse. In spite of the threat to the Tabernacle and its probable closure, in spite of fears for his aged mother and his young son, in spite of the anticipation of his own probable arrest by the ruthless military police, he sent a letter of refusal to a Japanese official called Konto. After several months, Wang was summoned to a discussion at the Japanese Cultural Investigation Bureau. Early that morning, knowing that this might be the end of his life, he rode off on his bicycle to see the Japanese official Mr. Takeda, singing, ‘Onward, Christian Soldiers.’ During the meeting, Wang explained courteously to Mr. Takeda that his church, on principle, could not associate itself with any organization or establishment. He then said, “As I obey the Lord whom I have served and as I keep the truth which I have believed, I will not obey any man’s command that goes against the will of God. I have already prepared myself to pay any price and make any sacrifice but I will not change the decision I have made.”⁷⁷ Strangely enough, when Wang refused to discuss the matter any further, the Japanese authorities ceased to trouble him or his church any more though they did succeed in installing a man as Wang’s gatekeeper, whose job was to spy on Wang and the activities of the church. However, before long, those activities led to the gatekeeper’s conversion!

⁷⁵ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, pp. 111-112.

⁷⁶ "The First Party of the 'Two Hundred.' Personal Testimonies of New Missionary Recruits," *China's Millions* 55 (1929): p.153.

⁷⁷ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 126.

Lyall had a similar experience. In 1937, Lyall was assigned to care for the churches in Hebei, an occupied area during the Sino-Japanese War. He came to know that the Japanese military unit there had turned a CIM church into a brothel, installed with Korean prostitutes. He immediately hurried on his bicycle to lodge a protest with the local Japanese commander, demanding that the church be cleared of the women immediately, arguing that the property was owned by a British organization. Strangely enough, the Japanese authority accepted Lyall's demand and returned the church property to the CIM.⁷⁸ Both Lyall and Wang demonstrated their tremendous boldness and passion for their mission. Though each knew well that such acts might cost their lives, they still went ahead because of their commitment to their faith.

Both Lyall and Wang were gifted writers. Wang started to write and publish the *Spiritual Food Quarterly* in 1927. This magazine lasted for more than twenty-five years, its pages reproducing Wang's own sermons and Scripture expositions. It eventually achieved a nationwide circulation and had a tremendous influence on the church of China. Wang also wrote a number of books and booklets, including *A Cry amid the Evil World* (惡世中的呼聲 *Eshizhong de husheng*), *The Past Fifty Years* (五十年來 *Wushi nian lai*) and *The Treasures of Wang Mingdao* (王明道文庫 *Wang Mingdao wenku*).⁷⁹ Lyall, was a prolific writer of many important books and articles about the Church in China, and also a frequent contributor to *China's Millions*.

Yet, the most important similarity was that they both shared the same evangelical faith and vision. The theology of Wang Mingdao was polemical, in reaction to the two trends then current in the first half of twentieth century China. First, Wang reacted against the spread of liberal theology. Dr. Gang Song rightly pointed out that in the early twentieth century, China was dominated by liberal theology especially among the intellectuals. Many theologians, such as Zhao Zichen emphasized the humanity of Jesus, while denying his divinity. To the liberals, Jesus was the supreme example of sacrificial love toward humankind, and Christians had the mission of following the example of Jesus in reforming this world. They did not put any emphasis on the miracles of Jesus, the resurrection or the second of coming of Jesus. It was against such a

⁷⁸ Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, p. 50.

⁷⁹ Wing Hung Lam(林榮洪), *Wang Mongdao yu Zhongguo Jiaohui* (王明道與中國教會 *Wang Ming-tao and the Chinese Church*), (Hong Kong, China Graduate School of Theology, 1982), p.10

background that Wang strongly emphasized both the humanity as well as the divinity of Jesus.⁸⁰ The only way to “reform” this world was not so much to start political reform in accordance with Christian principles, but to evangelize this world so that people would come to realize their sin and repent. Such believers would be called ‘born again Christians.’ It was because of the death and the resurrection of Jesus that man can be reconciled to God and have the hope of eternal life.⁸¹ Second, Wang objected to the trend of denominationalism in China. Because of his bad experiences with denominational churches, he harbored negative feelings towards the Protestant community dominated by liberal missionaries. Lian Xi wrote, “Most of Wang’s tirade against missionary Christianity was carried out in his *Spiritual Food Quarterly*, which provided him with a platform for animating controversy. An article he published in 1935 accused “60 or 70 percent, even 80 to 90 percent, of the church leaders and preachers of being false masters.”⁸² That is the reason why he started his own church called the Christian Tabernacle in Beijing without any support from any missionary society. It was a self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing church. However, despite his stance against denominational churches, he nevertheless continued to preach in these denominational churches when invited. In fact, he spent almost half his time preaching in thirty different denominations all over China even after the Christian Tabernacle had been established. He was convinced that he had been called by God to crusade relentlessly against a whole sweep of ‘evils’ in Chinese Christianity, ranging from worldliness and lifeless formalism to theological modernism.

Likewise, Lyall shared the same evangelical faith and vision. Lyall was brought up in an age when liberalism was at its height. He was actively involved in the battle against the modernists at Cambridge as well as in China. He and all the other CIM missionaries believed that their goal was not to build a denominational church in China, but to partner with the local Chinese to build up a Chinese Church. Thus it was no co-incidence that Lyall and Wang could work so closely as partners in spreading the Gospel of Jesus.

⁸⁰ Gang Song (宋剛), Ji Yao yu Bense Zhijian: Chia Yuming, Wang Mingdao yu Ni Tuosheng Sixiang Bijiao Chuyi (基要與本色之間：賈玉明、王明道與倪柝聲思想比較芻議 Between Fundamentalism and Localization: A Comparative Study on Theological Thoughts of Jia Yuming, Wang Mingdao and Ni Tuosheng) in *Busi Jiu Bushing* (不死就不生), ed. Shih Hao Lin and Fu Chu Chou (Taipei: CCLM Publishing Group Ltd, 2012), pp. 336-359.

⁸¹ Wing Hung Lam (林榮洪), *Wang Mingdao yu Zhongguo Jiaohui* (王明道與中國教會 *Wang Ming-tao and the Chinese Church*), pp. 126-143.

⁸² Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 129.

The Christian Student ministry in Beijing (1946 to 1954) was unique. It was the fruit of the partnership between CIM missionaries and local Chinese leaders especially Wang Mingdao. The details of this ministry will be discussed in Chapter Five, and here we shall focus only on the nature of the partnership between Lyall and Wang. It began with God's provision of the mansion at No. 33 Hsi Tsung Pu Hutung as Lyall's home. Lyall had been invited to hold Bible classes at four of Beijing's universities: Peking, Tsinghua, Yenching and Fu Ren as well as at some of the other fifteen colleges. These students needed space for their monthly meetings, and Lyall invited them to hold their meetings at his home, which became the headquarters of this student fellowship. Lyall served as advisor and teacher, but most of the administration and planning was done by several capable student leaders. The group grew rapidly and the students started to publish a Gospel Magazine as a tool for evangelism. In spite of the tense political situation, the Christian student committee proceeded to arrange a conference of their own to follow the Inter-Varsity Fellowship National Conference held in Nanjing in July 1947. On August 16th 1947, the students had their first conference, with about 120 participants. The speakers were David Yang and Wang Mingdao. Many students were converted and they experienced a wonderful revival. By 1948, the group had grown to about 200 members. Apart from Bible studies and preaching by Wang Mingdao, they also invited speakers like Andrew Lu of the Pocket Testament League, Bob Pierce of Youth for Christ and Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators to give powerful messages. In addition to fellowship meetings and bible studies, they met daily to pray for China at this critical time. They sent out their first missionary to north-west China, a medical doctor who joined the staff of the Borden Memorial Hospital in Lanzhou, Gansu. The hospital was operated by the CIM and had originally been founded to reach Tibetans and Muslims with the Gospel. Lyall accompanied some Christian students to visit the wounded in the hospital. Lyall and the Beijing students started a soup kitchen at No.33 to serve the young students who were refugees from the civil war up north. Lyall provided active support, advice and pastoral care for all the students.⁸³

What was the role of Wang Mingdao in this Christian student group? According to Leung Kalun, Wang's role was relatively passive initially. It was upon Lyall's invitation that he offered his advice and suggestions to the group, often via Lyall rather than directly to the students. The planning of the first conference in 1947 was a typical example. According to Wang's diary, Lyall

⁸³ Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, p. 104.

visited Wang twice during the planning stage to obtain his advice regarding this conference.⁸⁴ It was only after Lyall's departure from China in the reluctant exodus in 1950 that Wang began to take a more active role as the students' advisor. Many of the students, especially the leaders, were in fact members of Wang's Christian Tabernacle. One of the founders of this student group Zhang Xihuan (張錫煥) was an intern at the Tabernacle. Wang's diary showed that he spoke to student groups on many occasions, and was one of the main speakers at their conferences. There was undoubtedly a very close relationship between Wang and the students. The Beijing Student group was the only group to protest against Wang's arrest in 1956. Consequently, many of the student leaders were also arrested and imprisoned.⁸⁵ However, the impact of this student group was far-reaching. Wang Shaowu (王紹武), one of the student leaders, commented that this Student Association was God's special tool to achieve His special purpose in a particular time. While some of the leaders might be arrested and kept in prison, many others were dispersed into many different parts of the country. Though they suffered a lot for the sake of their faith, they did not give up; on the contrary they spread their faith throughout many parts of China.⁸⁶ The partnership between Lyall and Wang was based on a very intimate friendship between two men who had deep mutual respect for each other. Lyall wrote:

Saying goodbye with Wang Mingdao, with whom I had enjoyed much close fellowship and partnership in the student work, was not easy. His autobiography *These Fifty Years* had just been published, and he presented me with one of the first copies off the press. An antique fan which had belonged to his family for generations and which Mr. Wang presented to us as a parting gift has been a constant reminder, if such were needed, to pray for the Lord's good and faithful servant during his twenty-two years of imprisonment. During that time he had no Bible but was daily sustained by the Scriptures which he had memorized and by favorite hymns which he sang to himself.⁸⁷

Marcus Cheng was another Chinese leader who partnered with the CIM. Cheng was perhaps one of the most outstanding Chinese evangelical theologians in the twentieth century. He was born in Hubei Province. He studied at the Covenant Mission lower middle school in Wuchang

⁸⁴ Leung Ka-Lun (梁家麟), *Tamen Shi We Le Xinyang, Beijing Jidutu Xueshanghui yu Zhonghua Jidutu Budaohui* (他們是為了信仰: 北京基督徒學生會與中華基督徒佈道會) (Xianggang: Jian Dao Shen Xue Yuan, 2001), p. 73.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-133.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁸⁷ Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, p. 106.

and was baptized at the Covenant Mission. He continued his studies at the British Wesleyan Methodist senior middle school in Wuchang and graduated in 1906. He excelled in English and played a major role in the establishment of the Covenant Mission Seminary in Jingzhou, Hubei. While teaching at the Covenant Mission Seminary, he engaged himself in a vigorous program of self-study of theology, foreign languages and Chinese literature. In 1921, he had an opportunity to visit the American Covenant headquarters in North Park, Chicago. He made special arrangements at the nearby Wheaton College to do an accelerated BA degree in one full year of course work. He received his degree in 1922 at the age of 38. Upon his return, he was frustrated with the Covenant Mission for their prejudice against local workers. He left in 1925 and ended up being chaplain to the troops of the warlord “Christian general” Feng Yuxiang (馮玉祥 1882-1948) for two years. In 1927, he moved to Shanghai and became the editor and proprietor of a Christian magazine, *Evangelism* (Budao zazhi 佈道雜誌), which became very popular under his editorship.

In 1928, Cheng joined the faculty of the Hunan Bible Institute in Changsha, Hunan Province. As pointed out by Daniel Bays, Chen’s experience there was indicative of the sensitive nature of Sino-foreign relations in the Christian realm.⁸⁸ This seminary was founded by Frank Keller, a former CIM missionary who had a personal link with the wealthy Stewart family of Los Angeles, founders of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA). The Stewart family enabled Keller to create the Bible Institute in Changsha known as BIOLA in China. Except for Keller, the entire academic staff was Chinese. Keller recruited Cheng as a full professor at the seminary. Cheng took a leading role in developing the program of instruction, and was evidently very popular among the students. Keller gave Cheng the freedom to develop the seminary, and permitted Cheng to continue publishing *Evangelism*, even supporting this effort financially. He allowed Cheng to continue his evangelistic and revival tours around the country. Once Keller retired in 1935, however, the situation changed. Charles Roberts, the business manager as well as the liaison with BIOLA, was rumored to succeed Keller. The entire faculty and students protested against this. Cheng and other staff members wrote to the BIOLA Board claiming that Roberts was unfit. However, Roberts prevailed in this power struggle, eventually succeeding Keller as president. Cheng resigned from the Seminary in 1937 in great disappointment. He attempted to return to the Covenant Mission Church, but was rejected by the Covenant Mission group in China. These incidents show us that many mission groups in those days were extremely

⁸⁸ Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, p. 138.

reluctant to lose control over their organizations. They believed that Cheng was too independent and had great reservations about giving him full autonomy to run the institution funded by them.

89

The policy of the CIM was very different from those of many denominational missions. The CIM's goal was not to control, but to partner with local churches. Its major concern was theology. Cheng graduated from Wheaton College; he was an outstanding theological educator, with a very similar theological position to that of the CIM. He was targeted by Houghton, for recruitment to partner with the CIM in theological education. In 1938, Houghton invited Cheng to go to Sichuan. However, at the time, Cheng was not ready to work under the control of any mission organization. Houghton wisely gave Cheng considerable leeway, helping him continue to publish *Evangelism* and sending him on evangelistic and revival tours in free China. Five years later, in 1943, Houghton urged Cheng to set up an independent evangelical seminary not under the control of any mission organization, with Cheng himself as the president. Cheng accepted the offer with enthusiasm. Thus, the Chongqing Theological Seminary was born in 1944 with the purpose of training workers for the Chinese Church especially in the Western provinces.

There were a number of characteristics about this partnership. As president, Cheng was given full authority to develop the Seminary. It was an autonomous and independent institution, free from control of the CIM. Though the CIM was a partner in this Seminary, it was not the only source of funding. The whole seminary followed the CIM faith mission principle, looking upon the Lord as the chief supplier. Cheng seemed happy with this arrangement.⁹⁰ The major role of the CIM in this project was to send outstanding teachers to teach in the seminary. From 1945 to 1948, there were only five Chinese teachers; the other eighteen were CIM missionaries. When confronted with criticism that the Seminary was too Western, Cheng explained that the real issue was not so much whether their teachers were Chinese or Westerners, but whether they were qualified and capable or not. He argued, "Let us ask: who is more qualified to teach New Testament Greek than Mr. Benson? Who is more qualified to teach Church History than Mr.

⁸⁹ Ying Fuk-Tsang (邢福增), *Zhongguo Jiyao Zhuayi Zhe de Shijian yu Kunjing: Chen Chongqui de Shengxue Sixiang yu Shidao* (中國基要主義者的實踐與困境: 陳崇桂的神學思想與時代 *The Praxis and Predicament of a Chinese Fundamentalist: Chen Chonggui (Marcus Cheng)'s Theological Thought and His Time*) (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2001), pp.62-71.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.81.

Ellison? In view of the shortage of qualified Chinese teachers in China these days, this strategy of partnership seems to be the best solution. Besides, as these teaching staff were paid by the CIM, it really cut our expenses to a great extent.”⁹¹

The Chongqing Seminary was Cheng’s home and base of operations for almost a decade. In 1953, he retired to Dalian in the Northeast. The seminary existed until 1959 when it was forced to merge with Nanjing Theological Seminary. The Chongqing Seminary, a product of the partnership between the CIM and Cheng, had great impact on the Chinese church in its training of local workers in the twentieth century.

2.3 The Strategy of Trusteeship

Among all the partners of the CIM, Watchman Nee was perhaps the most controversial. The relationship between Nee and the CIM was obscure and complicated. It was obscure because of the lack of reliable reports pertaining to their relationship. It was complicated because of the changes in Nee’s view of the Church through his different stages of life. Nevertheless, from available literature, we can still make some inferences about the partnership between Nee’s Little Flock and the CIM. I term their relationship “the strategy of trusteeship.”

According to a 1932 report in the Shanghai-based *Chinese Christian Intelligencer*, dozens of Presbyterian and CIM churches in the neighboring areas had turned their backs on their denominations/missions to join the Little Flock. Particularly ‘hard hit’ were congregations under the CIM.⁹² Lyall confirmed this report. He wrote that this new movement of the Little Flock gradually began to attract some of the best and most spiritually minded Christians away from their own churches. He said, “Entire congregations, especially in the province of Chekiang (Zhejiang), in some cases broke away from their own parent associations in search of this promised ‘freedom’ of which Mr. Watchman Nee preached and wrote. The China Inland Mission work was hard hit.”⁹³ It seems clear that many CIM churches joined the Little Flock, but the pertinent question is whether the CIM voluntarily entrusted their congregations to the Little Flock in partnership, or were their “sheep” stolen by the Little Flock?

Nee was born in 1903 into a respectable Christian family in Shantou, Guangdong. Nee’s paternal

⁹¹ Marcus Cheng, *Lamps Aflame* (London: China Inland Mission, 1949), pp. 76-77 and 114.

⁹² Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 170.

⁹³ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 62.

grandfather had been converted at the Congregational mission and was one of the earliest local ministers in China. Nee's father worked in the Swatow Customs Service and was a humble man, respected by his children. His mother Lin Heping had also been educated in a mission school though she was only a nominal Christian. Nee received his education from Trinity College, a school run by the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Late in 1919, Dora Yu (余慈度 Yu Cidu 1873-1931), a medical student who became an evangelist, visited Fuzhou to conduct an evangelistic meeting at the Congregational Church. Through the ministry of Yu, both Nee and his mother had emotional born-again experiences that impacted the rest of their lives. Nee was seventeen at that time. Yu introduced Nee to an English missionary Margaret E. Barber, who exerted great influence on the development of Nee's theology and life.

In the 1920s, the anti-Christian movement brought the outburst of indigenous evangelism to a new level. Many independent preachers began to emerge onto the scene. Nee's own adjustment to the rise of nationalism was swift. In late 1922, he had 'discovered through the scriptures' that denominational divisions in the church was unbiblical. He withdrew his membership from the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1922, Leland Wang, a native of Fuzhou, his younger brother Wilson (Wang Si 王峙) who was a fellow student of Nee's at Trinity, together with Nee held their first informal meeting for 'the breaking of bread' in Leland Wang's home. This little group was in fact the original assembly of the Little Flock. By the end of 1923, under the leadership of Leland Wang, this group had grown to thirty, and most of them were students. They were quite an independent group and very original in that they adopted for the first time the wearing of gospel shirts, the beating of drums and singing hymns to attract attention when they preached. In 1925, differences of opinion arose between Leland Wang and Nee over the issue of the interpretation of the Scriptures. Nee left the Fuzhou group to join Miss Barber. Her instruction in the deeper aspects of Christian life, the work of the Holy Spirit and the walk of faith left a lasting impression on him. Barber became his confidante and adviser. Meanwhile, he continued to publish the *Revival Magazine*, started in 1923, and began to write his first book, *The Spiritual Man*.

It was in 1928 that Nee's life work really began. In that year, he moved permanently to Shanghai and established his own congregation at Hardoon Road in the British Settlement. He believed that God had called him to gather the Little Flock in China and thus called his church the Little Flock. Nee emphasized that the Little Flock was not a new movement, group, organization or denomination. It was simply a gathering of those who would bring God's plan to fruition. He

wrote in an open letter published in 1928 in *Revival*:

God's purpose for today is speedily to complete the body of His son and to destroy His enemies and bring in His Kingdom. But we may also say that God's purpose in this generation is actually being hindered by the church. We firmly believe that before long God is going to gather together all His children into one so that His church will not merely cease to be a hindrance but will work with God to complete His eternal purpose. We humbly hope in the hands of God we may have a small share in His glorious work.⁹⁴

In other words, unlike many other independent revivalists who wanted to break down denominational barriers and unite churches on the basis of common spiritual experiences, Nee's goal was to destroy the institutional church, which according to him, was moribund, corrupt and apostate. Nee was not only critical of all the denominational churches, but also of churches established by independent local leaders such as Wang Mingdao, John Sung and Wang Zai for their spiritual shallowness.⁹⁵

Nee recruited two gifted female co-workers, Li Yuanru (Ruth Lee 李淵如 1894-1969) and Wang Peizhen (Peace Wang 汪佩真 1899-1969) to work with him. By late 1933, there were already more than one hundred Little Flock assemblies. They spread fast into major cities along the eastern seaboard and interestingly, they attracted many educated men - doctors, nurses, university staff, businessmen and army officers - into their groups. In Beijing during the 1930s, the Christian Assembly consisted almost entirely of 'top honor students from Yenching (燕京), Tsinghua (清華), Beijing Union Medical College (北京協和醫學院), and Beijing University (北京大學). In 1949, there were more than 700 such churches with a total membership of about 70,000. All were under the leadership of Chinese nationals and financially independent.⁹⁶

On the surface, Nee and his group seemed an ideal partner for the CIM in building up the Chinese church. Both were evangelical in faith. Nee's mission was to spread the Gospel and build up the Church in China rather than to reform the country. In addition, Nee had close relationships with many CIM missionaries. He was much influenced by Elizabeth Fischbacher,

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.60.

⁹⁵ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: the Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, p. 171.

⁹⁶ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 65.

a gifted CIM missionary who had led many revival meetings in China. Charles H. Judd, another CIM missionary and Lyall's father-in-law, was his close friend. When he first arrived in Shanghai, he was a constant visitor at Mr. Judd's home on Woosung Road. However, despite several attempts to discuss cooperation between the CIM and Little Flock, all efforts failed. In 1938, while Nee was in London, Mr. Norman Baker of the CIM had a long discussion with Nee on the subject of indigenous church policies in China. Nee wrote a letter to Baker after studying 'The Principles and Practice of the China Inland Mission' and expressed strong disapproval of the document which, as he understood it, advocated a mission-imposed autonomy which did not allow the churches to determine their own pathway. The controversy between CIM and Little Flock was at its height when W.H. Aldis, Home Director of the CIM, wrote a gracious letter to Nee pleading with Nee for more tolerance and Christian fellowship among Christians of like faith in China before he (Nee) left England. But Nee refused to accept the request and returned to Shanghai without changing his view.⁹⁷ Thus, we can conclude that in the 1930s, the Little Flock and CIM were not partners in any ministry. Just as in many other independent churches at that time, many believers left CIM churches and switched to Little Flock of their own volition. What was the bone of contention foiling partnership? Theology, particularly the doctrine of the church, was the major issue. Lyall summarized Nee's position quite clearly:

Denominationalism is a sin, a degenerate form of organization ... It follows that if denominations are sinful, they must be the enemy of the spiritual man. Therefore, all believers ought to come out of such unclean organizations and encourage others believers to follow them. Since all churches in the New Testament are identified only by the name of a particular geographical locality, churches patterned on the New Testament can only exist on the basis of locality, independent from all other such local churches and completely autonomous as to government and finance: 'one church, one locality.' No other forms of church government can be justified from Scripture. Because present-day churches have departed from the principles laid down in Scripture, true Christians must repent and should endeavor to set up local churches on Biblical and apostolic principles. Churches must stand on the ground of undenominational local churches, meeting solely in the name of the Lord.⁹⁸

To CIM leaders, such a narrow-minded and extreme view was not in accordance with its convictions. Though the CIM was trans-denominational and had no intention of setting up a

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.75.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.66.

denomination in China, they were not anti-denominational. Nee's view led to the denial of all other churches as not true churches at all and his insistence on the total breaking of fellowship with them was divisive and sectarian. There was no way for the CIM to partner with Nee if he insisted on such a position.

By 1950, however, the situation had changed materially. On the one hand, CIM leadership had decided to withdraw its missionaries from China, even though they were the last missionary society to do so. They realized that the continued presence of missionaries was an embarrassment and a hindrance to the Chinese church which was accused of being a tool of Western imperialism. Meanwhile, Nee had also changed his position somewhat. According to Dr. Ying Fuk-Tsang, Nee struggled greatly with the establishment of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement led by a progressive Christian Wu Yaozong. Since this Three-Self Church was the only church approved by the Communist Government, Nee could not maintain his old position that the Little Flock was the only true church in China. He faced the 'fight or flight' dilemma. If he chose 'flight,' he would have had to disband the Little Flock and all the believers would be scattered into different underground house groups. This was exactly the strategy they adopted during the Sino-Japanese War when the Little Flock refused to join the United Church under the control of the Japanese. Nee eventually chose to 'fight' instead. His vision was to take over the leadership of Wu Yaozong in the Three-Self Church. Knowing that Wu was not popular among the evangelicals, he tried to garner support from all the evangelical leaders, while leading his Little Flock to join the Three-Self Church.⁹⁹ This is what Nee called the 'united church' under the umbrella of the Three-Self Church (教會合一). Both Lyall and Phyllis Thompson mentioned the discussion between the CIM leaders and Nee at CIM headquarters in 1950. They wrote that the bitterness of earlier years, when many churches founded by the CIM had been taken over by the Little Flock movement, was a thing of the past. They discussed a possible partnership between the CIM and Little Flock.¹⁰⁰ As a result of this discussion, some of the CIM churches in Zhejiang were entrusted to the Little Flock. In addition, the collections in the CIM library in Shanghai were also given to the Little Flock as a gift.¹⁰¹ However, Nee's attempt to take over

⁹⁹ Ying Fuk-Tsang (邢福增), *Fandi, Aiquo, Shu Ling Ren – Ni Tuosheng yu Jidutu Juhui Chu Yanjiao* (反帝, 愛國, 屬靈人- 倪拆聲與基督徒聚會處研究 *Anti-Imperialism, Patriotism and the Spiritual Man: A Study on Watchman Nee and the 'Little Flock'*) (Xianggang: Jidu jiao Zhongguo zong jiao wen hua yan jiu chu ban she, 2005), pp. 38-40.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.39.

¹⁰¹ Leslie T. Lyall, *Three of China's Mighty Men*, p. 93; Phyllis Thompson, *China: the Reluctant Exodus: the Story of the China Inland Mission's Withdrawal from Communist China* (Littleton, CO: OMF, 2000), pp. 97-99.

Wu's leadership in the Three-Self Church failed. He was arrested in 1952 and the court sentenced him to twenty years' imprisonment. He died in 1972 while still in prison. Many other leaders of the Little Flock were also imprisoned, and like many other churches in China, most of the Little Flock churches went underground. Lyall wrote, "Surely enough, Watchman Nee was to spend fifteen years in prison before his death in 1972, and many members of his assemblies were to suffer too. But thirty years on the Little Flock assemblies would also be sharing in the growth of the house churches and in the nurture of new believers all over China."

102

To conclude, we can say that the efforts and the sacrifices of the CIM missionaries in building up the Chinese indigenous church were not in vain. By 1949, there were more than 950,000 communicant members in CIM churches, one of the largest groups in China, second only to the Church of Christ in China. More importantly, almost all CIM churches were independent under the leadership of Chinese nationals.¹⁰³ This was very significant to the survival of the Chinese church despite the storms it was to face in the following fifty years.

¹⁰² Leslie T. Lyall, *God Reigns in China*, p. 124.

¹⁰³ Phyllis Thompson, *China: the Reluctant Exodus: the Story of the China Inland Mission's Withdrawal from communist China*, pp. 44-45.