

# THE MANY FACES OF GLOBAL PENTECOSTALISM

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## PENTECOSTALISM AS SUFFERING: HOUSE CHURCHES IN CHINA (1949-2012)

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### Background of Chinese House Churches

In the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, China was regarded as the 'darling of mission' as far as western missionaries were concerned. Soon after the Chinese empire was forced to open treaty ports and offer settlements to western countries, thousands of missionaries of all denominations were sent to China. No matter how much missionaries had sacrificed for the Chinese millions and their contribution to modernization and to humanitarian improvement in China, Christianity was stigmatized as a subtle force of western imperialism. The Boxer Uprising in 1900 and the Anti-Christian Movement in the 1920s demonstrated utter hatred against missionaries through verbal and physical violence assisted by governmental back-up. The latter campaign was even fueled by the communist power in China, assisted by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Some Chinese Christians had resented being controlled by western missions and became independent. They founded indigenous

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churches based on the 'three-self' principles (self-support, self-propagation, and self-governance) first introduced by Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society and Rufus Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission in the nineteenth century. These churches expanded quickly as the gospel was preached in the Chinese language and developed in the local culture. Signs and wonders accompanied the preaching, which concretely answered the physical and spiritual needs of the people.

Meanwhile, the communist party grew stronger through military support from the USSR and other ideological influences. It was determined to take over the sovereignty from the Nationalist Party, but this plan was interrupted by the Second World War. To fight against the Japanese, their common enemy, the Nationalists and Communists joined forces. But once WWII ended, they brought the country into the turmoil of civil war. Eventually, the Nationalists headed by Jiang Jieshi retreated to Taiwan and the Communists led by Mao Zedong came to power. The People's Republic of China was founded on October 1, 1949; but beforehand, many businessmen and Christians had already fled to Hong Kong and other countries as they had predicted that oppressive political campaigns against capitalism and Christianity would soon happen. It did not take long for their prediction to come true.

To regulate Protestant and Catholic Christianity effectively, the communists established the National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches (National TSPM) in 1954 and the Catholic Patriotic Association in 1957. Those Protestants and Catholics who could not align themselves with the official churches went underground. Although most of the house churches were developed from indigenous churches whose practices were in line with Pentecostalism, some do not follow this trend. No matter whether the house churches are Pentecostal, non-Pentecostal or Catholic, they are all illegal and face the risk of persecution for their faith.

### The Birth of the Unfriendly Twins: Three-Self and House Churches

The atheism of the communists did not give birth to the Three-Self Patriotic Movement immediately after 1949; rather it was formed

through a gradual process. Being inspired by the premier, Zhou Enlai, Wu Yaozhong, who had not been a significant Christian leader, drafted a manifesto called 'The Pathways for Chinese Churches to Contribute to the Establishment of the New China' in 1950, also called the 'Three-Self Declaration'.<sup>1</sup> The communists used the missionary terminology to develop their own political agenda and impose it on churches. Instead of showing love and loyalty to God, churches should bear this attitude to the party. The Declaration instructed churches, stating, 'Under the leadership of the government, the church must reject imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism so that they can diligently participate in the building of an independent, democratic, peaceful, united, and affluent new China'.<sup>2</sup> It demanded of churches

to clearly identify the evil of imperialism in China, to know about the fact that Christianity was used by imperialism, to drive out the influence of imperialism within Christianity, and to be alert of any conspiracies of imperialism, especially American imperialism, using religion as a way to develop dissident power.<sup>3</sup>

The Declaration was first signed by more than forty church leaders but many others disagreed with it and kept silent under political pressure. It was signed by 320,000 people between August 1950 and December 1951. On September 23, 1950, the government's official newspaper, *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*), announced that through signing the Declaration, 'all religious believers obtain a new direction. It is only by following this direction that the religious sector can develop its own normal religious business'.<sup>4</sup>

The antagonism against the 'American imperialism' was fueled by the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. The policy of 'resisting the United States and aiding Korea' was applied not only to the War itself, but to churches. In April 1951, the State Administration of

<sup>1</sup> Chinese Romanization: *Zhong Guo Ji Du Jiao Zai Xin Zhong Guo Jian She Zhong Lu Li De Tu Jing*.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Deng Zhaoming, *The Vicissitudes of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in the 1950s and Its Predicament Today* (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 1997), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *A History of Wenzhou Churches* (*Wen Zhou Di Qu Jiao Hui Shi*), p. 101. Since this book was published for internal use of churches in Wenzhou with confidentiality, the author, publisher, year, and city of publication are not provided in the book.

<sup>4</sup> *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, pp. 102-103.

Religious Affairs held a meeting to discuss Christian organizations receiving American subsidies. It was attended by church leaders of all regions, including Ni Tuosheng (Watchman Nee, 1903-1972), founder of the Little Flock, and Jing Dianying (1890-1957), founder of the Jesus Family. The meeting declared, 'Under the leadership of the people's central government, imperialism which has invaded Chinese people's culture for more than a century must be eventually, thoroughly, eternally, and completely terminated'. To achieve this goal, the meeting formed the Preparatory Committee of the Resisting America and Aiding Korea Three-Self Reform Movement of Chinese Christianity.<sup>5</sup> It decided that churches that had received American sponsorships should register and achieve self-support without delay.

To wipe out all 'counter-revolutionary' and 'imperialist' churches thoroughly, the Committee launched an Appealing Movement in the whole country. Wu justified this action with Matthew 23, which was about Jesus criticizing the Pharisees and scribes.<sup>6</sup> Missionaries like F.W. Price of the Church of Christ of China<sup>7</sup> and E.H. Lockwood of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) were publicly accused of working as spies for the United States in the name of mission. Chinese church leaders like Chen Wenyan of the Chinese Methodist Church, general secretary Liang Xiaocuo of the Chinese Young Men's Christian Association, and the renowned independent preacher, Gu Renen, were condemned as making connection with American missions. They were rebuked as 'American imperialists' and the 'running dogs of American imperialism'.<sup>8</sup> By the end of 1951, there were 108 public accusatory assemblies in the

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Zhaoming, *The Vicissitudes*, p. 12. Chinese Romanization: *Zhong Guo Ji Du Jiao Kang Mei Yun Qiao San Zi Ge Xin Yun Dong Cou Bi Hui Wei Yun Hui*.

<sup>6</sup> Zhaoming, *The Vicissitudes*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> F.W. Price was ordained as a missionary of the Presbyterian Church of the United States in 1923. He was the principal of the Nanking Theological Seminary until 1952. He was closely related to Jiang Jieshi and his wife and worked at the Church of Christ in China from 1948 to 1950. Since the communists took over, Price and his wife were under persecution for three years and expelled in 1952. Frank (Francis) Wilson Price Collection at the George C. Marshall Research Foundation, <[http://marshallfoundation.org/library/documents/Price\\_Frank\\_Wilson.pdf](http://marshallfoundation.org/library/documents/Price_Frank_Wilson.pdf)> (accessed May 16, 2012)

<sup>8</sup> Liu Jianping, 'China's Christianity Appealing Movements during the Korean War', *Twenty-First Century Bimonthly* 121 (October 2012), pp. 123-33 (124), <<http://www.21c.org.cn/>>

whole country.<sup>9</sup> To enforce communist education within churches, church leaders were required to attend the 'Three-Self' learning classes so that they would understand the political situation and be self-critical about their political position.

Since foreign support was cut off and church leaders were arrested, many churches and Christians organizations, including schools and hospitals, were either controlled or shut down by the government. Those Christian schools that were allowed to remain were managed by communist members appointed by the government and had to teach dialectical materialism, historical materialism, and the new democracy. By 1953, Christian education was diminished, including theological training. Many Bible colleges were forced to merge together, and Christian publishers were monitored by the government. All their publications were censored and those considered to be pro-American and anti-Soviet Union were destroyed. The Three-Self Steering Committee also reinterpreted the Bible according to communist ideology. Missionaries were forced to leave the country, and by the end of the 1950s, fewer than five missionaries remained in China.<sup>10</sup>

In 1954, the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee was formed.<sup>11</sup> Since denominational churches were deprived of foreign support, they were forced to incorporate into the Three-Self system. Churches that had been independent from missionary support before 1949 and had implemented the missionary version of 'three-self' refused to be part of the system. They condemned the Three-Self churches as 'Babylon' and 'the whore' since their ministers were appointed by the atheistic government.<sup>12</sup> Among the religious dissidents, Wang Mingdao (1900-1991) was the most prominent person rebuking the system. He and his wife were arrested after his final sermon, entitled as 'The Son of Man Is Betrayed into the Hands of Sinners', on August 7, 1955. He was sentenced to a fifteen-year imprisonment but later was given life im-

<sup>9</sup> *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>10</sup> *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, pp. 106-107

<sup>11</sup> Chinese Romanization: *Zhong Guo Ji Di Jian San Zi Oi Guo Yun Dong Wei Yun Hui*.

<sup>12</sup> Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 206, 212



prisonment and was released at the age of eighty. His co-worker in Guangzhou, Lin Xiangao, was also arrested.<sup>13</sup>

Indigenous Pentecostal and charismatic churches were under more severe political attack. Some churches that tried to incorporate themselves into the Three-Self system institutionally and to follow the communist ideology doctrinally soon disappeared. Miraculous practices including healing, exorcism, dancing, and singing spiritual songs were condemned as 'depressive', 'leading people to spiritual gloom, producing a pessimistic, world-denying, and escapist sentiment, being unhealthy to the contemporary society'. Their teachings on the end time and imminent second coming of Jesus were criticized as 'hyper-political, hyper-national, hyper-world, and unrealistic'.<sup>14</sup> Although they did not receive any foreign support, they relied on donations from Christian landlords and capitalists, which for the communists meant that they approved of feudalism, bureaucratic capitalism, and imperialism.

The leader of the True Jesus Church, Isaac Wei, son of the founder, Paul Wei, was arrested and disappeared in 1957. The 'Spiritual Gifts Society' was seriously attacked.<sup>15</sup> Watchman Nee was arrested in 1952 based on the charge of organizing a 'counter-revolutionary cooperation' and was sentenced to imprisonment for fifteen years in 1956. As he was severely ill in prison, he was released in April 1972 but passed away in less than two months.<sup>16</sup> The Jesus Family was 'reformed' by a working team sent by the Preparatory Committee of the Resisting America and Aiding Korea Three-Self Reform Movement for four months. In 1952, their leader, Jing Dianying, was accused of collaboration with the Japanese during the occupation in the Second World War and of working with the British and Americans to oppose communism.<sup>17</sup> These indigenous Pentecostal churches did not reappear in the country after 1976. They were oppressed not only by communist atheists but also by adherents of the TSPM. The incidents of betrayal in that period sowed

<sup>13</sup> Zhaoming, *The Vicissitudes*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>14</sup> Zhaoming, *The Vicissitudes*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>15</sup> Zhaoming, *The Vicissitudes*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>16</sup> Zhaoming, *The Vicissitudes*, pp. 38-41; *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>17</sup> Deng Zhaoming, 'Indigenous Chinese Pentecostal Denominations', in Alan Anderson and Edmond Tang (eds.), *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* (Oxford: Regnum International, 1996), p. 114.

the seeds of mistrust between the Three-Self and the house churches, and even today, they have not been completely removed.<sup>18</sup>

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the communists launched a series of political movements, and Christians were one of the main targets of political attack. In the Anti-Right Movement in 1957,<sup>19</sup> they were identified as the 'right-wing' and had to be re-educated. In the Great Leap Forward Movement in 1958, they were condemned as the 'exploiting class' who helped the capitalists and were forced to do labor work. Under the leadership of the TSPM, many church buildings were converted into factories as a way to support the government's scheme of increasing production. Churches in the same region were merged into a few churches to save expenses and to achieve 'unity'.<sup>20</sup> All denominations were eliminated and churches used the same form of liturgy in their services. Regarding this 'ecumenical achievement' in 1958, the official Christian periodical *Tian Feng* said:

The Western churches had called for 'collaboration' and 'unity' for forty years but achieved nothing. We surpassed them within a short time (three days only). What we Chinese Christians have been hoping for in the last forty years has been realized in this generation ... This is indeed 'one day as twenty years!'<sup>21</sup>

In Henan province, officials announced '15 Nos' against Christians in 1959: 1. No preaching outside the church building; 2. No prayers for healing; 3. No exploitation; 4. No discrimination and harassment against women; 5. No illegal meetings; 6. No hindrance of production; 7. No wandering; 8. No membership of teenagers and children under 18 years old; 9. No protection for landlords; 10. No attack against socialism and collective economy; 11. No rumors and pessimistic counter-revolutionary propaganda; 12. No setup of churches and house meetings; 13. No private ordination; 14. No

<sup>18</sup> Zhaoming, 'Indigenous Chinese Pentecostal Denominations', pp. 442-43.

<sup>19</sup> The movement identified five types of people who were a threat to the society, including landlords, rich farmers, counter-revolutionists, bad people, and the right-wing. They were called the 'black five'.

<sup>20</sup> For example, the number of churches in Shanghai decreased from 140 to 8; Guangzhou, from 52 to 1; Beijing, from 66 to 4. The number of people in attendance for Sunday services decreased drastically. See *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Zhaoming, *The Vicissitudes*, p. 97.

fusion of Christian doctrines and the Party's policy; 15. No overseas connection.<sup>22</sup> The severity of persecution against Christians accelerated during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. Torture and public humiliation were justified because Christianity represented imperialism, superstition, and theism, which were condemned as the enemies of the Revolution. Christians were commanded to confess their 'crime' in public, but some of them took the opportunities to preach about the gospel, healing, and heaven. Many Christians secretly worshipped in houses, and cases of baptism in the Spirit and healing frequently happened. Some of the persecutors converted to Christianity because of the gospel message and personal experience of healing. They changed from a persecutor to protector for Christians when they were worshipping in houses.<sup>23</sup>

In those ten years, the legal Three-Self churches stopped public worship and activities; house churches were the only form of Protestant Christianity that remained active and growing. In 1976, Wang Hongwen, one of the members of the Gang of Four and the expected successor of Mao Zedong, sent a decree to all provinces and counties to kill all Christians. But soon afterwards, he was arrested with the other three Gang members, Jiang Qing (Mao's wife), Zhang Cunjiao, and Yao Wenyun.<sup>24</sup> The government was subsequently controlled by reformists led by Deng Xiaoping who allowed public worship and returned church buildings and land to congregations. Church leaders and Christians were released, including Wang Mingdao. The TSPM resumed its work under the leadership of Ding Guangxun (or K.H. Ting, 1915-2012), a former Anglican bishop and president of Nanjing Theological Seminary since 1952. He founded the China Christian Council (CCC) to deal with 'pastoral work' such as printing the Bible and hymn books and training ministers.<sup>25</sup> Nowadays, TSPM and CCC, called the 'two associa-

<sup>22</sup> Zhang Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches* (Zhong Guo Jia Ting Jiao Hui Liu Shi Nian) (Hong Kong: Revival Chinese Ministries International, 2010), p. 4. The author was followed and investigated by the police for nine years as he was collecting materials and interviewing house church leaders for this book. He eventually was sentenced to imprisonment for two years in 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>24</sup> *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, p. 137.

<sup>25</sup> Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 210.

tions' (*liang hui*) in short, are monitored by the State Administration of Religious Affairs and Ministry of Civil Affairs.<sup>26</sup>

Although the government has been more open to religions since the 1980s, house churches remain illegal and their suffering has not ended. They refuse to register as a Three-Self church because their faith, based on their understandings of the Bible, cannot compromise with the Three-Self rules. For instance, the government prohibits cross-provincial evangelistic activities, but house churches believe that preaching the gospel to the end of the world is a biblical teaching which they have to follow. They resist the law which prohibits Christians from preaching to children and teenagers under eighteen and connecting with foreign Christian organizations. They feel offended by the regulations which only allow those who have a preaching license to preach and grant the authority to the State Administration of Religious Affairs to appoint ministers for a particular church.<sup>27</sup> They believe that these rules violate the missionary nature of the church and hinder Christians from fulfilling the Great Commission.

Most of the house churches in China share the common vision of mission and principles as the followers of Christ, but the level of persecution that they bear as the cost of their vision varies from region to region. It depends on the attitudes of the local government towards house churches. Economic and geographical factors can also affect their attitude. The following explains two extreme cases: Henan and Wenzhou. They are one of the poorest and richest areas in China respectively and reflect the contrasting harsh and gentle treatment meted out to house churches.

<sup>26</sup> 'Articles of the National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches', <[http://www.ccctspm.org/quanguolianghui/zhangcheng\\_sanzi.html](http://www.ccctspm.org/quanguolianghui/zhangcheng_sanzi.html)> (accessed May 16, 2012). The Catholic churches in China are managed by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishops' Conference of Catholic Church in China, which is called 'one association, one conference' (*yi hui yi tuan*). They are also monitored by the State Administration of Religious Affairs and Ministry of Civil Affairs. See 'Articles of the Chinese Catholic Church in China' and 'Articles of the Bishops' Conference of Catholic Church in China', <<http://www.chinacatholic.cn/index.php/yhyt/zczd/400-tianzhujiao-zhujiaotuan-zhangcheng>> and <<http://www.chinacatholic.cn/index.php/yhyt/zczd/399-zhongguo-tianzhujiao-aiguohui-zhangcheng>> (accessed May 16, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> <<http://www.chinaaid.net/2006/07/7.html>> (accessed April 27, 2012).

**Henan: Suburban House Churches**

Henan is an inland province in the east of China. According to the census launched by the National Bureau of Statistics of China in 2010, Henan has the third largest population. Of the Chinese population, 7.02% is from Henan, 94,023,567 in total.<sup>28</sup> It is one of the poorest provinces in China. Most of the people are farmers and sell their blood for extra income. Due to the unhygienic equipment for blood transmission, many people have been infected by the HIV virus. Henan is therefore notorious for its 'AIDS villages'. Churches provide support to the AIDS patients and take care of hundreds of orphans who have been affected by the fatal virus.<sup>29</sup> Since farmers cannot afford to pay for medication, the last problem that they want to have is disease. If one member gets ill, the whole family will collapse. In this difficult circumstance, healing is good news, and people become Christians because of the miracles that happen to them or to their family members.<sup>30</sup> This social hardship indirectly contributes to the prominence of the Christian population in the province and the whole country.

Henan has been the cradle of Christianity in China. Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission started his mission in this province in 1883.<sup>31</sup> He established churches with local Chinese, including Lao Yian, Ma Cuansheng, Sung Fun, Bo Cunshen, and their wives. Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Anglicans, Seventh Day Adventists, and Assemblies of God also launched missions in the province until 1949.<sup>32</sup> In the last 63 years of the communist regime, Henan is also the home of three major networks of house churches: China Gospel Fellowship (also called Tanghe Fellowship) led by Shen Yiping; Fang Cheng Fellowship led by Zhang Rongliang; and the Born-again (also called Word of Life Movement) led by Xū

<sup>28</sup> The largest population is in Guangdong, 104,303,132 (7.79%) and the second largest is in Shandong 95,793,065 (7.15%). <[http://www.stats.gov.cn/was40/gjtjj\\_detail.jsp?searchword=%C8%CB%BF%DA%C6%D5%B2%E9%B7%D6%B5%D8%C7%F8&channelid=6697&record=2](http://www.stats.gov.cn/was40/gjtjj_detail.jsp?searchword=%C8%CB%BF%DA%C6%D5%B2%E9%B7%D6%B5%D8%C7%F8&channelid=6697&record=2)> (accessed April 30, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Zheng Cun Qiao, *Why Is Henan a Christian Province but Full of Vicious Sedit?* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2006), pp. 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> Qiao, *Why Is Henan a Christian Province*, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 1.

Yongze. Another large network is located in Anhui province called Fu Yang Church led by Chang Xianqi.

Zhang Rongliang is regarded as one of the most prominent leaders of house churches in China. He was secretly baptized in 1969 and became a brigadier of a rail-building team of a hundred workers. As he was categorized as a 'poor farmer' by the government,<sup>33</sup> he was promoted to be a chief leader of workers and vice-secretary. In 1970, he made a vow to become a communist member and believed that the eternal life taught by Christianity was consistent with socialism. Unfortunately, his Christian identity was found when he was caught in an evening prayer meeting. He was sent to religious classes to be brainwashed by police and security guards and forced to abandon his faith. During this trial, he was encouraged by some elderly Christians, presbyters, and deacons of churches of the former China Inland Mission which had joined the TSPM, but they also betrayed him. They reported to the police about his house meetings and contacting other persecuted Christian leaders. He was detained in 1974 and sentenced for seven years of imprisonment in 1976 due to his so-called 'counter-revolutionary crime'.<sup>34</sup> After the Cultural Revolution, he was vindicated by the reformists and was released in 1980, but he was not excited about it since he considered prisons and labor camps as his Bible colleges. As he answered a British pastor's question about his theological training in 1985, he said, 'Prisons are the Bible colleges for house church pastors. Security guards are our teachers. Whips and truncheons are teaching tools. We experience God's presence in prisons more than in a comfortable classroom of a Bible school.'<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> During the Land Reformation in the 1950s, the communist government categorized people in villages into five classes. First, there were landlords who owned land and employed workers to work for them. This class was condemned as the enemy of the whole country. Second, rich farmers, who had land and employed workers to work for them, but they also worked on the farm. Third, middle-class farmers, who had land for self-supply and only employed temporary workers. There were three types of middle-class farmers: rich middle-class, upper middle-class, and lower middle-class. Fourth, poor farmers, who did not have much land and worked for others for a living. Fifth, employed farmers, who did not have any land and totally relied on employment for a living. They were the major supporters of communism. <<http://zh.wikipedia.org/zh-tw/%E8%B4%A%B%E5%86%9C>> (accessed May 14, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, pp. 33-37.

<sup>35</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 46.

After being released, he immediately rejoined some churches in Henan and was amazed by the revival when he saw many young people involved. The revival was also spread by some former members of indigenous Pentecostal churches. An elderly woman, Zhang Oirong, had participated in Jesus Family before 1949. She talked about being filled with the Holy Spirit and miracles and encouraged young people to preach the gospel bravely.<sup>36</sup> Some zealous youth ministers, both men and women, were dedicated to evangelism and were called 'Fire ecstasies'. They adhered to 'preaching with mouths, preaching with blood, preaching with pens, preaching unceasingly to Jerusalem as there was nothing that they desired in the world'. Gao Guofu was the most prominent youth preacher in the early 1980s and was sentenced to serve in Xihua Labour Camp as a result of his evangelistic work.<sup>37</sup> Unsurprisingly, the number of house church members grew rapidly. According to the statistics in 1985, there were 18,361 members in 46 Three-Self churches and over 100,000 in house churches in Fangcheng.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Zhang still felt that he and his church had not fulfilled the command of the Great Commission, so he organized the 'Gospel Month' in 1994. He encouraged his members to fast and commit themselves to preach the gospel in a particular village. The church provided tracts, videos, Bibles, and books for them to introduce the gospel to villagers, but they also believed in the use of spiritual gifts, which is stated in the creed endorsed by leaders of the house church networks in Henan.<sup>39</sup> Some of them preached in public, which was illegal, and were persecuted by the local authorities. The persecutors got sick or died immediately and the evangelists prayed for their forgiveness and recovery. The miracles that people experienced and witnessed convinced them of the living God, and they were converted.<sup>40</sup> As the community was growing, Fangcheng Fellowship has become the mother church of thousands of churches in the whole country, claiming more than ten million members.

<sup>36</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 41.

<sup>37</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 45.

<sup>38</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> 'The Creed of Christian House Churches in Henan', in Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 140.

<sup>40</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, pp. 53-54.

Although the practice of spiritual gifts had been common in Fangcheng Fellowship, it did not emphasize Spirit baptism until Dennis Balcombe preached about it in the 1980s. He was born in El Centro, Southern California in 1945, but he believes that he was born for China. He felt this calling at sixteen and went to Hong Kong in 1969.<sup>41</sup> He founded the Revival Church in the colony, and a mission to China has been the main vision of the church. He entered China for the first time in 1978 when the country was open for foreigners to visit again after almost thirty years.<sup>42</sup> Local leaders requested that he preach for ten hours a day for about two weeks. Eight hundred leaders representing about 100,000 house church Christians gathered inside and outside a small room to hear the message of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Some of them were laughing, crying, and speaking in tongues, but some senior Christians had never seen such reactions in the Spirit, having been told by missionaries about the cessation of spiritual gifts, and they were skeptical about what was happening.<sup>43</sup> They were also concerned about the suffering that members had borne for the church and would not want them to be misguided by cults and wrong teaching.<sup>44</sup> But their doubts could not extinguish the hunger for revival; the leaders of Fangcheng invited Balcombe to preach all over the country about Spirit baptism. Many Christians were empowered by the experience and prepared to preach the gospel.

To avoid being seen by the police, Balcombe sometimes pretended to be a dead corpse lying in a cart to be taken to burial, or he laid in a coffin and the local Christians took him into the village to preach.<sup>45</sup> However, as his work became more influential, the police began to inspect his activities in Henan. In 1990, Zhang was imprisoned for one year and two months because of inviting foreigners to preach. After his release, he sent a young woman, Lü Xiaomin, to preach in churches. She was caught by the police, but was eager to have a taste of prison like other experienced preachers. As she was in the prisoners' room, she began to sing in the Spirit, 'In

<sup>41</sup> Dennis Balcombe, *One Journey, One Nation: Autobiography of Dennis Balcombe, Missionary to China* (Chambersburg: eGenCo. LLC, 2011), p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Balcombe, *One Journey, One Nation*, p. 156.

<sup>43</sup> Balcombe, *One Journey, One Nation*, p. 161.

<sup>44</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 48.

<sup>45</sup> <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=ssRwcpjFRYk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ssRwcpjFRYk)> (accessed May 15, 2012).



difficult time, we are tested; in difficult time, we grow'. She was locked up for nine days and was guided by the Spirit to compose eight songs. She has written more than a thousand songs which were collected into *Song of Canaan* and are sung all over China.<sup>46</sup> In 1994, Balcombe visited Fangchen with seven other foreigners at the Chinese New Year. They were discovered by the police and were detained for six days. Their arrest became international news and within a few days was reported by the Voice of America. President Bill Clinton was concerned about the case and the American ambassador in China negotiated with the Chinese Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Zhang and his co-workers were released after two weeks as the police realized that the incident had caught international attention. Balcombe was strongly criticized by the vice-chairperson of the National TSPM, Han Wenzao, in his article published in *Tian Feng* in 1994.<sup>47</sup> The government also annulled his visa for seven years from 1995, but his church in Hong Kong continued to send thousands of Bibles to Chinese Christians and organized mission trips to the mainland.<sup>48</sup> He founded the Revival Chinese Ministries International to serve house churches in 1997. Its branches in Australia and Germany work for the same goal.<sup>49</sup>

Zhang is not only concerned about evangelism and being filled with the Spirit but also unity with other house church networks as he sees that unity is the foundation of revival.<sup>50</sup> In 1996, he invited leaders of the four major networks to discuss this matter. They continued to meet once a year and invited ministers from other provinces and Taiwan to speak at their meetings. In 1998, they gathered together in the north of China to draft *A Declaration of Faith of Chinese House Churches*, stating their understandings of the Bible, the Trinity, Christology, soteriology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. They were hoping that by announcing their common faith to the government and churches inside and outside of the country, people would not consider them as cults. It was signed by Chen Yiping (Tanghe Church, Henan), Zhang Rongliang (Fang-

<sup>46</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>48</sup> Balcombe, *One Journey, One Nation*, p. 161.

<sup>49</sup> <<http://rcmi.wordpress.com/about-rcmi/what-we-do/>> (accessed May 11, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> 'The Creed of Christian House Churches in Henan', Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 141.

cheng Fellowship, Henan), Chang Xianqi (Fuyang Church), and Wang Junlü (representative of other house churches) on November 26, 1998.<sup>51</sup> In the following year, 36 leaders gathered again, but this large group was quickly found by the police. Their cash of 100,000 Chinese Yuan and their mobile phones were confiscated.<sup>52</sup>

Zhang was charged with interruption of social order and sent to labor camp for three years. After being released, he was invited to speak about the house churches and mission overseas, but the security office refused to issue him a passport, so he applied for a travel document with another name. He successfully traveled to Chicago for a Chinese Christian conference, went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, attended ecumenical meetings in Hong Kong, and visited Australia, Singapore, and Egypt.<sup>53</sup> However, he was arrested in 2004 for counterfeiting travel documents and was sentenced for seven and a half years of imprisonment. The parliament of the European Union demanded his immediate release in 2006, but this only happened on August 31, 2011. During his imprisonment, he suffered from diabetes and was sent to Xinmi County People's Hospital from September 9, 2005 to January 23, 2006. His hands and feet were locked up on the sick bed.<sup>54</sup>

House churches in Henan represent the growth of Christianity among the poor, who have been exploited by local officers politically, economically, and medically. Through the preaching of a mighty God, hope of eternity, and the concrete experience of miracles, Christianity has been a source of self-empowerment to the oppressed. Because of their humble social and economic context, Christians in Henan have painfully borne any persecution and oppression imposed by the security office and religious bureau without questioning the legitimacy of these unreasonable actions. However, what happens in Henan does not represent the circumstances in all other provinces and regions. Especially in a wealthy city like Wenzhou, Christians of the house churches have more bargaining

<sup>51</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, pp. 136-39.

<sup>52</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>53</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House Churches*, p. 31.

<sup>54</sup> News report of China Aid Association, July 2006, <<http://www.Chinaaid.net/2006/07/7.html>>; News report of China Aid Association, 14 September 2011, <<http://www.chinaaid.net/2011/09/7.html>> (accessed April 27, 2012).

power developed from their economic superiority to fight for rights from local officials.

### Wenzhou: Urban House Churches

Wenzhou is on the east coast of China, adjacent to the East Sea. Its geographical location provides economical privileges to the city. Its harbor is one of the twenty major harbors in China. There are more than 150 rivers running across the city, providing abundant fishing and agricultural produce. It has three major railway systems, three motorways, and an airport.<sup>55</sup> Its outstanding natural water resources and infrastructure provide citizens with easy access to knowledge, religions, and culture of the outside world. They can also actively engage in business and trading, especially when the former president, Deng Xiaoping, implemented the 'open door' policy and strategy of 'letting a few get rich first' in the 1980s. Wenzhou business people responded to this policy before any other parts of the country. They invested in small businesses such as clothes and eyeglasses. Its shoes, being famous for good quality, have won the city the title, 'Shoe Capital'. The commercial success has been recognized by the central government by calling it 'Wenzhou model'.

Wenzhou is not only an eminent business center, but also a Christian center.<sup>56</sup> David Aikman recorded that about ten percent of the population is Christian, not only business people, but also government officials.<sup>57</sup> This expansion of Christianity earns Wenzhou the title 'China's Jerusalem', where religious freedom seems to be securely guaranteed through the trusting relationship between the entrepreneurs and government officials instead of through the law. House churches in Wenzhou are registered not as 'Three-Self churches but as 'places of religious worship'.<sup>58</sup> These house churches are not only above ground but are also eye-catching mega churches. Their gigantic buildings marked by a red cross on top accommodate over a thousand people. Churches openly hold Christ-

<sup>55</sup> *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>56</sup> Cao Nanlai, *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2003), p. 204.

<sup>58</sup> Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*.

mas celebration events and arrange performances by children, teenagers, and adults, followed by huge banquets.<sup>59</sup> These events attract migrant workers, bosses, students, government officials, Christians, and non-Christians alike. Flocking to the same church on one occasion caused traffic congestion and the Public Security Bureau intervened.<sup>60</sup> As most of the affluent business people are Christians who are known as 'boss Christians', their increasing financial power enhances their political bargaining power.<sup>61</sup>

In 2002, the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) prohibited any Sunday school to be held for children under eighteen, but some pastors complained about the ban to Ding Guanhun, who was the chairperson of the National TSPM and the China Christian Council. Ding accepted their complaint and wrote a letter to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Although the CPPCC did not reply to Ding's letter, Wenzhou pastors, with the assistance of business Christians, negotiated with the government in Beijing and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce. The SARA eventually withdrew the ban.<sup>62</sup> In the context of China where religious freedom is not protected by law, materialistic wealth does not necessarily lead to spiritual poverty and secularization as it does in the West; rather, it enables upward social mobility for elites. They enjoy more privileges in the society; even though belonging to an 'illegal' house church, they are less likely to be prosecuted. To a large extent, Christianity in Wenzhou is shaped by 'boss Christians', not only because of their financial support and diplomatic influence, but also their spiritual engagements. They regard their business as a way of serving God, which is similar to Max Weber's observation of Calvinist Protestants who perceived working hard as a way to fulfill God's calling. Some of them also preach in services and sponsor evangelistic resources.<sup>63</sup> They endeavor to achieve a 'holistic economic-spiritual-moral way of life'. They consider themselves as integrated into western modernity because capitalism and Christianity are parts of western civilization.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>59</sup> A video of a Christmas celebration in 2008 is available online, <<http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/NTLERLo5DZs/>> (accessed May 5, 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Nanlai, *Constructing China's Jerusalem*, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Nanlai, *Constructing China's Jerusalem*, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, p. 206.

<sup>63</sup> Nanlai, *Constructing China's Jerusalem*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>64</sup> Nanlai, *Constructing China's Jerusalem*, p. 166.



'Boss Christians' arise in Wenzhou not just because of the geographical, economic, and political advantages, but also due to the Christian foundation developed by the forerunners who persevered through all the political trials. It is incredible that 'China's Jerusalem' was once designated by the communists to be an 'experimental site for an atheist zone' in 1959.<sup>65</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, Christians and leaders in Wenzhou were as severely persecuted as those in other provinces, but they managed to form a general council in the turmoil. In 1967, five Christians gathered together in a loft to pray every Friday night in the mountain area of Ruian County. They were burdened by the persecution against the church and were devoted to pray for millions of lost souls and the revival of the church. In less than a month, the prayer group expanded so quickly that the loft was too small for them. Many villagers were healed through their prayers and the number of Christians in the village increased. About 300 Christians of other villages also joined it. There were about 271 groups for about 50,000 Christians in Ruian. The same happened in other counties, including Pingyang, Leqing, Yongjia, Dongtou, and the city center.

As the number of Christians was growing rapidly, leaders designated several meeting regions, and regional leaders formed a council in their own county in 1970.<sup>66</sup> As the political persecution worsened and civil war took place in Wenzhou, council leaders formed a general council to lend strength to each other. They met twice in 1971 and chose three people to be chairpersons. Thirty of them would represent their counties to attend a meeting every three years, and several hundred people would attend the annual meeting. Since the majority of the general council was youth, they decided to hold several meetings for young people every year. Before the establishment of the general council, churches in Wenzhou had identified themselves according to western denominationalism, so they had not had much contact with each other. If the TSPM is the official mechanism to erase denominationalism by force, then general councils of this kind represent the effort of house churches to bring about unity.

<sup>65</sup> Nanlai, *Constructing China's Jerusalem*, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, pp. 120-22.

Members of the council agreed to baptize with full immersion and use one bread and one cup to celebrate the communion. Healing, exorcism, raising the dead to life, and signs and wonders continued to happen. At a prayer meeting in the city, many people were filled by the Holy Spirit and firemen came to put out the 'fire'.<sup>67</sup> Churches in Wenzhou experienced an unprecedented revival from 1971 to 1980. It was the 'brightest' and 'golden' period, but persecution was also severe. One of the chairpersons of the general council, Miao Zhitong, was mercilessly tortured and other members were sent to labor camps. Several hundred Christians worshipped loudly on Sunday regardless of the threat of local officers as they were prepared to bear any suffering. Despite all humiliation, torture, imprisonment, and political propaganda, local officials never succeeded in eliminating house churches during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>68</sup>

Although reformists had been in power since 1978, persecution against house churches in Wenzhou continued but in a different form. As the TSPM functioned again, house churches were forced to register as Three-Self churches; otherwise, they were identified as illegal religious groups. From 1997 to 2000, when former president Jiang Zemin was amazed at the crosses and Buddhist mirrors hanging on many religious buildings during his visit to Wenzhou, the local State Administration of Religious Affairs launched a 'destroy-the-mirrors-and-remove-the crosses' movement. Many non-Three-Self church buildings and Buddhist temples were destroyed, imploded, or confiscated.<sup>69</sup> These church buildings were built by local Christians with their own saving and effort, but some leaders of the TSPM supported the action.<sup>70</sup> The prosperous scenario of house churches has just happened in the last ten years. As their survival depends on the relationship between the boss Christians and local

<sup>67</sup> *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, pp. 126-28.

<sup>68</sup> *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, pp. 132-34.

<sup>69</sup> Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, p. 204.

<sup>70</sup> *A History of Wenzhou Churches*, p. 184. In Yongjiang County, a group of Christian raised money to build a church as the brother's house was too small for the group. They did not only spend their saving, but also built it up themselves. One of them was an old man over seventy years old and his back was injured when building the church. When he saw the building being demolished, he was grieving tearfully. The leader of the Three-Self reported to the police about his grief and they twisted his arms immediately. He fainted on the ground out of sharp pain.

officials rather than the law, they remain in a vulnerable position and their activities and leaders still have to be kept secret.

### An Ambivalent Reality

It is undeniable that more recently, persecution against house churches has been less serious than from 1950 to 1980, but the idealistic goal of respecting individuals' religious freedom in China is still a long way off. The positive sign is that the 'open door' policy allows Chinese and foreigners to travel in and outside China. If Chinese Christians can pay the tuition fees and travel expense with their own savings or sponsorships, they can enroll in courses overseas.

Some go to the Philippines, to other Southeast Asian countries, or to the United States if they can study in English. Most of them come to Hong Kong, where they can learn in Chinese. David Wang, a pastor from Hong Kong and president emeritus of the Asia Outreach International<sup>71</sup> and the general director of Hosanna Foundation, has been ministering to house churches since the 1960s. He has organized Master and Doctor of Ministry programs with Jack Hayford's King's University for leaders of house churches in recent years. The degrees are recognized by the Ministry of Education in China and in the United States. He identifies the goal of Hosanna to 'pastor the pastors to pastor; train the trainers to train; lead the leaders to lead' to meet the rapidly modernizing and changing China.<sup>72</sup> These courses attract some affluent house church members from Wenzhou and other cities to attend. Lectures are conducted by Chinese and English teachers from Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and the King's University in either Hong Kong or the mainland.

The majority of Chinese Christians rely on foreign missionaries to come and teach courses for them, especially as the house churches cannot study in official theological seminaries; but most of the time, they consolidate their theological understandings through self-study of the Bible or sermons. However, because of visa issues

<sup>71</sup> Asian Outreach was founded by Paul Kauffman, a missionary from the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, and David Wang from Hong Kong in 1966.  
<sup>72</sup> 'China Connect' (leaflet of Hosanna Foundation, January-February 2011), pp. 1-2.

and financial limitations, voluntary foreign missionaries can only offer some irregular and unsystematic programs. They also have to take the risk of being arrested. If they have planned to come for a long period, they have to enter China to do investment or teach English and thereby reach out to the locals. Increasingly, as Three-Self churches find more cases of healing and exorcism but have not learned about the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts in the official theological seminaries, they invite Pentecostal and charismatic leaders from overseas to provide theological guidance in this regard. Although Dennis Balcombe has been active in supporting house churches for more than three decades, he has also been invited by Three-Self pastors to teach about the Holy Spirit and revival. He has seen that some of these pastors are 'evangelical and Spirit filled leaders', and they have freedom to preach all sorts of message.<sup>73</sup>

Some Three-Self churches which were founded by Classical Pentecostal denominations before 1949 still practice speaking in tongues, healing, and exorcism and hold prayer meetings featured by spontaneous worship but not in Sunday services. The Yuanfeng Church and Pingnan Church in Zhongshan in Guangdong province were established by the Hong Kong Pentecostal Mission in 1917 and 1922 respectively. After the Cultural Revolution, members of these two churches gathered in the nearby Taiping Church for services as their own church buildings had been severely damaged. Their mother church in Hong Kong sponsored the rebuilding of both churches in the 1990s, and the general superintendent preached there occasionally. Older members still firmly believe in the work of the Holy Spirit and the importance of sanctification.<sup>74</sup> Some former Assemblies of God (AG) pastors, who now work in Three-Self churches, still identify themselves as AG pastors and have regular unofficial meetings. The AG's headquarters in Springfield, Missouri, is also involved in theological training and humanitarian support in China through the Northern Asia Network.<sup>75</sup> For more than a century, missionary and theological organizations and

<sup>73</sup> Dennis Balcombe, 'New Wine in New Wineskins - Fires of Holy Ghost Revival Burning in China's Official and Registered Churches', <<http://rcmi.worldpress.com/2012/02/17/new-wine-in-new-wineskins-fires-of-holy-ghost-revival-burning-in-chinas-official-and-registered-churches/>> (accessed May 8, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Interview with members of the Yuanfeng Church, Zhongshan, Guangdong Province, on November 27, 2011.

<sup>75</sup> <[www.northernasianetwork.org](http://www.northernasianetwork.org)> (accessed May 17, 2012).

churches of any denomination in Hong Kong have frequently sent pastors or people with expertise to hold intensive courses on worship, biblical studies, leadership, and counseling training in China. Pentecostal churches like the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul and its branch, Full Gospel Church in Hong Kong, have been ministering to Chinese of Korean ethnicity in the mainland.

Although the government has become more tolerant of foreign missions and house churches, it is still suspicious of them. Since foreign missions and house churches remain illegal, if the government is controlled by conservative communists, severe persecution can be reinforced. House churches still function under this shadow, even though they may have good relationships with local authorities. The China Aid Association, a non-governmental organization in Texas, working for human right issues and house churches in China, has reported that China's government has decided to eradicate Protestant house churches since September 2011. The action is to be completed through three phases in ten years. First, local authorities are required to investigate house churches and file reports from January to June 2011. Second, they will urge them to register as a Three-Self church in two to three years. Finally, those churches which refuse to do so will be cracked down on. Besides, authorities will replace the term 'house churches' with 'house gatherings' on websites or other media as the latter refers to the legal meeting related to the National TSPM. They are also responsible for dispersing large house churches into small groups.

Protestant ministers will be registered or their churches will be forced to close down. Ministers also have to attend 'Training Sessions for Ministerial Certification' held by the National TSPM and CCC, introducing regulations on religious affairs and patriotism. Some of the house churches have been registered. One of the most controversial cases is the repression against the Shouwang Church in Beijing, which caught international attention. This church has neither been able to register nor rent a place for worship successfully as landlords have been under pressure from the security forces, so it can only worship in public areas, which is illegal.<sup>76</sup> From April to December 2011, security authorities caught more than a thou-

<sup>76</sup> Sarah Page, 'China Plans to Eradicate House Churches', *Compass Direct News* (April 25, 2012). <<http://www.chinaaid.org/2012/04/compass-direct-news-china-plans-to.html>> (accessed April 30, 2012)

sand members in 38 weeks; more than a hundred of them were put under house arrest, and some were abused physically and verbally. The church has attracted university students, lecturers, and professionals.<sup>77</sup> One of the members, who is a lecturer at a university, sent a pleading letter to the president, the premier, and the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party's Central Committee. By explaining the charity works that the church has done, such as sending a donation to the victims of the earthquake in Sichuan in 2008 and its positive influence on the degrading moral standard in society, he exhorted leaders of the government to give up its hostile policies against house churches.<sup>78</sup> However, his request did not really bring much change to the situation. From January to April 2012, China Aid recorded members of house churches and foreign workers being arrested in Beijing, Heilungjiang, Henan, and Hubei.

In some cases, church offerings were confiscated, church buildings damaged, and leaders beaten. Moreover, since some of the famous human right lawyers are members or leaders of house churches who are crippling the policy of social 'harmony' from the government's perspective, it justifies the necessity of eliminating house churches. They have been imprisoned, kidnapped, or beaten.<sup>79</sup> A woman who was beaten up by police forces and has become disabled due to her resistance against the local authority's forceful clearance of private residential housing in Beijing was sentenced to imprisonment for two years and eight months in April 2012, despite the protest of the European Union. Her husband who had been faithfully supporting her campaign and looking after her was also imprisoned.<sup>80</sup> A renowned Christian author had been under house arrest and abused along with his family for criticizing the government in his writing. For the sake of his freedom of speech, he ap-

<sup>77</sup> China Aid Association, *2011 Annual Report: Chinese Government Persecution of Christians and Churches in Mainland China, January-December 2011*. <[https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B\\_YUGSyIG6aIZTlmNjNmMmItYzZkNy00OTUyLWlyZjgtNDAA0MWM5NjdmZTk3/edit?pli=1](https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_YUGSyIG6aIZTlmNjNmMmItYzZkNy00OTUyLWlyZjgtNDAA0MWM5NjdmZTk3/edit?pli=1)> (accessed May 9, 2012), p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> Due to the sensitivity of this document, the name of the writer and the source cannot be provided.

<sup>79</sup> China Aid Association, *2011 Annual Report*, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/trad/chinese\\_news/2012/04/120410\\_china\\_lawyer\\_sentencing.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/trad/chinese_news/2012/04/120410_china_lawyer_sentencing.shtml)> (accessed May 11, 2012).

plied for asylum in the United States and left China in January 2012.<sup>81</sup>

Freedom is indeed a luxury in China. True and honest academic discussion requires a space of freedom to be implemented, but this is even more luxurious. Scholars have affirmed the contextual flexibility of Pentecostalism, that there cannot be a single definition for Pentecostalism to be imposed on all groups. If we consider the element of human rights and freedom, its definition can vary from context to context. In the West where freedom is fully embraced as the core value of human dignity and the foundation of law and in some Latin American and African countries which respect religious freedom, Pentecostalism is naturally defined by the manifestations of the power of the Spirit through Spirit baptism and charisms. In the context of house churches in China, Pentecostalism is not just about these manifestations, but more importantly, about suffering for the faith and the praxis of these manifestations and other fundamental doctrines.

If Pentecostalism has been portrayed as a movement bringing biblical healing, exorcism, and raising of the dead into the contemporary world, then Christians of Chinese house churches consider it as sharing the biblical suffering of Christ and the apostles in modern times. If gifts demonstrate the power of the Spirit, then suffering is certainly a gift as it requires the power of the Spirit to endure. The stories recorded in Lukan texts of apostles fleeing from persecutors, being imprisoned, beaten, and killed are not scriptures to be analyzed with hermeneutical techniques but are living texts to be experienced and analyzed with personal experience. Some scriptures giving guiding principles during persecution are not regarded as historical statements but are read literally and practiced sincerely by house church Christians, such as Mt. 10.23, 'But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another'. Wherever they flee, they preach the gospel as the apostles did. They consider persecution as the acts of evil forces rather than human intention, so they organize fasting prayer meetings and prayer walks to fight against spiritual power. They also pray for the officials and learn to forgive and bless them as the Bible teaches.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Due to political sensitivity, the names of these human right lawyers are not mentioned in the article.

<sup>82</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House*, p. 193.

Although they desire theological training provided by foreign efforts, theological knowledge is in fact secondary. What they have already obtained is *theologia prima*, which is unique and personal, developed through their own physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. Biblical passages in the book of Revelation are not to be eschatologically decoded by theologians, but they are the sources of hope and strength during persecution, which was also John's purpose of writing when Christians were anxiously waiting to be caught and taken to the Coliseum under Nero's regime. The charism of martyrdom is accompanied by the faith in the imminent second coming of Jesus and the hope for the new life in heaven. Pentecost is not primarily regarded by the house church Christians as the birth of the church and the beginning of Christian mission accompanied by the work of the Spirit but the prologue for martyrdom throughout church history, as conveyed in one of the songs that house church Christians sang during the Cultural Revolution, *Martyr for the Lord*.<sup>83</sup>

1. Since the Pentecost when the Church was born, followers of the Lord are willing to sacrifice their lives.

Thousands of people died for the gospel. They are rewarded with the crown of life.

2. The disciples who truly love the Lord follow the Lord to walk on the suffering road.

John was imprisoned on the Island of Patmos; Stephen was stoned to death;

3. Matthew was pierced in Persia; Mark's legs were torn by horses and he died;

Doctor Luke was cruelly hung; Peter, Philip, and Simon were crucified;

4. Bartholomew's skin was peeled off by pagans; Thomas was pulled apart by five horses;

James was beheaded by Herod; James the Younger's head was sawn apart from the body;

<sup>83</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House*, pp. 5-6. The quotation is translated by the author from Chinese into English.



5. The Lord's brother, James, was stoned; Jude was bound on a pillar and killed by arrows;

Matthias was stoned and beheaded in Jerusalem; Paul was beheaded by Nero;

6. I am willing to bear the cross, to follow the Lord and apostles to walk on a sacrificial road;

To save thousands of precious souls, I am willing to lay everything down and die for the Lord.

Chorus: Martyr for the Lord, martyr for the Lord, I am willing to be a martyr for the Lord's glory.

This Pentecostal theology and hermeneutic are based on a reconciled acknowledgment that persecution is the cost of revival, just as God is saving people from the devil through his Son's crucifixion. Through persecution, Chinese believers identify themselves with Jesus Christ and so deserve to be called 'Christian', which is glorious on earth and heaven. After being released from imprisonment, they testify to their members about God's protection and miracles in the prison, which strengthen their faith and prepare their hearts for suffering.<sup>84</sup> As Lian Xi suggests, martyrdom is their 'spiritual asset' for self-identification and apprenticing others to be a Christian.<sup>85</sup>

## Epilogue

If Pentecostalism means suffering in Chinese Christianity, then it is not just about persecution but also about division caused by political intervention. The hopeful sign is that more and more Three-Self churches have been open to the work of the Holy Spirit, which brings about common experiences in the Spirit and ushers deeper fellowship and theological dialogue between the Three-Self and house churches. Another trend is that as the younger generation has been taking up the pastoral positions of house churches and while not feeling so strongly about the betrayal and persecution of the TSPM that their older generation experienced, they are more open

towards the Three-Self churches. Certainly, the ecumenical venture between the Three-Self and house churches takes a great risk of being discovered by national security officials. Some Three-Self pastors were arrested because of inviting house church ministers to preach in their churches. It is my hope that these unfriendly twins, the Three-Self and house churches, would lay down the past betrayal and pursue reconciliation like Esau and Jacob.

<sup>84</sup> Yinan, *Sixty Years of Chinese House*, p. 44.

<sup>85</sup> Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, p. 214.