

## **Trans-Pacific Transpositions: Continuities and discontinuities in Chinese North American Protestantism since 1965**

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When Rev. James Y. K. Tan arrived in Boston on Nov. 19, 1958 to lead the Chinese Christian Church of New England's ministry to recent immigrants from Toishan, he had been warned about its minister. This pastor's "doctrinal and theological beliefs and his ministerial style were very different from ours," evangelist Newman Shat confided with him earlier.<sup>1</sup> Rev. Tan was not at all certain the congregation would embrace him. He was not sure he could supply the required five reference letters. Providentially, the church and its "theologically-suspect" pastor called him and processed his immigration papers.

At the time, the Chinese Christian Church of New England was the only Chinese ministry in the Boston area (today there are more than seventeen). But its senior minister could not speak the dialects of the Cantonese and Toishanese population. When he asked Rev. Shat to recommend a minister for these communities, James Tan, then a pastor at a Chinese church in Yokohama, Japan, was tapped. Tan noted that only about 8,000 Chinese lived in Boston's tiny Chinatown, not including the dozens of students enrolled in Boston's famous colleges and universities. From the outset, Rev. Tan felt that the senior minister's motive for bringing him to Boston was to establish a financially independent congregation rather than attending to the spiritual needs of the Chinese people. "The Sunday morning services were held in Cantonese with about thirty or forty people in attendance," Tan observed, but "the evening services were held in English and were attended mostly by non-Chinese." These evening services were a revelation to him:

"The atmosphere was not that of a worship service. It turned out that this pastor organized and held seminars about China and its culture, such as customs, marriages, politics, and other related topics...Oriental crafts and chopsticks were sold after these seminars and a Chinese dinner usually followed. Tickets to these seminars and dinners were sold to American churches and organizations. Churches were also welcomed to invite this pastor and his wife to give these seminars and, as a result, they were kept very busy doing this. In addition, this pastor

would rent a hall at the John Hancock Building to hold celebrations for Chinese New Year and other Chinese festivals. Tickets, again, were sold and usually, these events were well attended since there were many people who were interested in the Chinese culture."<sup>2</sup>

According to Tan, the senior minister was not in touch with the Cantonese and Toishan people and received little sympathy in return. He also felt that the church had neglected the many overseas Chinese students in Boston area universities and colleges. "I found that [the students] were very lonely here in America," Tan noted. "They were having a difficult time adjusting because of differences in the language, culture, and customs. In addition, they felt that their spiritual needs were not being met. The American churches they attended were doctrinally sound but the students just did not seem to be able to have a close fellowship with the rest of the congregation, probably because of language difference."<sup>3</sup> Pastor Tan worked with Chinese campus minister Ted Choy to help form a Chinese Bible Study ministry.<sup>4</sup> This ministry soon grew to an average weekly attendance of over fifty and drew students from the universities and colleges around Boston.

At this point the differences between the senior minister and Tan were revealed dramatically. According to Tan, the pastor often argued with the students at these meetings over "doctrinal differences and his liberal interpretation of the Bible." For instance, the students were impressed by the Gospel accounts of Jesus healing the sick and casting out demons. But the senior pastor refuted these "miracle" accounts, chastened the students for their ignorance of Jewish culture, and offered naturalist explanations. As a result of these debates, the leaders of the Bible Study group decided to stop holding their meetings at the Chinese church for the sake of doctrinal purity.

After only two years into his ministry, James Tan concluded that he could no longer stay at the church. He believed that neither the Chinese community nor the students wanted to join the church, so he was unable to help increase its membership. Furthermore, the senior minister felt that Tan's theology was thirty years behind the times. Tan's only reason to stay was to provide financial support for his family. Claiming that he and the senior pastor left on good terms, he resigned and embarked on a new church plant in Boston's Chinatown in 1961. From this effort emerged the Boston Chinese Evangelical Church, a vibrant ministry that continues to minister among working class immigrants and affluent suburban commuters. This church, along

with seventeen other Boston-area Chinese evangelical congregations that sprung up in the 1970s and 1980s, has captivated the hearts and spirits of many post-1965 Chinese immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

If pastor Tan was better acquainted with the senior minister, he did not reveal it in his autobiography. Dr. Peter Shih was actually quite passionate about Chinese Christianity. In 1953, he was appointed by the National Council of Churches research bureau to conduct a survey of Chinese churches in the United States and Hawaii.<sup>6</sup> According to a promotional flyer, Shih graduated with "first honors" from Nanking Theological Seminary and pastored "the largest church in Hangchow, China" for three years where he preached "to over one thousand people every Sunday morning." Between 1935 and 1939, Shih was a "missionary fellow at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City" and a "Chinese Missionary to America sponsored by the World Fellowship for Christian Evangelism." During those four years, he toured the United States and Canada, "traveling over one hundred thousand miles appearing before countless audiences." Before coming to Boston, he was "for eight years Dean and Professor in West China Union Theological Seminary in Chengtu." Described as a "profound student of Chinese history and philosophy" and "one of the best scholars in Chinese classics," Shih was also considered a gifted orator who addressed "U.S. Senators and House of Representatives" in Washington, D.C. over breakfast.<sup>7</sup> Dr. Shih's gregarious personality and networks among mainline Protestants may have been an asset for him among the older Chinese American churches, but it scarcely impressed Rev. Tan and his evangelical peers.<sup>8</sup>

James Tan's unhappy entry into an existing Chinese church with historic ties to mainline American Protestantism, his subsequent separation, and his successful efforts at planting an independent and evangelical congregation is paradigmatic of the transformation of Chinese Christianity in North America since World War II. In the 1950s, Chinese American Protestantism was a mere handful of small Chinatown missions in large urban centers. Most of these congregations depended heavily upon "mainline" denominational support. Their ministers studied at "mainline" seminaries and some of them became denominational leaders. Though the Chinese population in the United States had increased from a low of 85,000 in 1920 to over 237,000 in 1960, most of the growth was attributed to the American-born Chinese population rather than immigration.<sup>9</sup> Many assumed that the American-born would quietly assimilate into the mainstream of American religious life and questioned whether the ethnic Chinese (i.e. Chinese language) congregations would survive after integration.

But by 1998, there were over 1,000 Chinese churches and Christian organizations in the United States and Canada (785 congregations in the United States alone).<sup>10</sup> While most mainline denominations have also experienced an increase of Chinese congregations, the majority of the Chinese churches are independent or affiliated with evangelical denominations.<sup>11</sup> Even those within the mainline denominations are becoming increasingly “evangelical” in orientation. Paralleling the emergence of Chinese wealth in the Pacific Rim, many congregations have developed large memberships (over 500) and have become very affluent and highly educated.

This impressive growth is usually attributed to the large number of Chinese who have migrated to the North American shores in recent years.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the 1950s and 60s, refugees, immigrants, and students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and other countries with significant Chinese populations (i.e. the Chinese Diaspora) trickled into the United States and Canada.<sup>13</sup> But after the 1965 Immigration Act placed the number of migrants from Asian nations on equal footing with the European quota and after the thawing of Cold War tensions between the Peoples’ Republic of China and the United States in the 1970s, Chinese immigration surged and fueled the growth of Chinese American Protestantism.

But numerical growth and elevated economic status offer limited insight into the internal transformation of Chinese Protestantism in North America. One of the most significant changes has been the “transposition” of Chinese Protestant ethos and theological identities from one that was mainline and ecumenical to one that is overwhelmingly evangelical. Chinese Protestant congregations have always been the most socially active, and perhaps, the "predominant religious institutions among the Chinese in America."<sup>14</sup> But unlike the past, most congregations today adhere to biblical inerrancy and require their pastors to be trained at “acceptable” evangelical seminaries. Many are apathetic towards or suspicious of mainline Protestant organizations such as the National Council of Churches of Christ and Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Rev. Tan and his colleagues would not be disappointed by this development, for they sought to emancipate the "pure" gospel from a Chinese Christian liberalism that allied itself to the social, political, and religious elite in China and the United States.

What accounted for this movement of Chinese Protestantism in the United States away from mainline denominational affiliation towards an independent and evangelical orientation?

Some may note the similarity between the rise of Chinese American evangelicalism with the growth of American evangelicalism since the 1960s. There are, indeed, parallels between this Chinese "transposition" and Christian Smith's account for the continuing viability of American evangelicalism. Smith contends that:

Evangelicalism capitalizes on its culturally pluralistic environment to socially construct subcultural distinction, engagement, and tension between itself and relevant outgroups, and this enhances evangelicalism's religious strength. The evangelical movement, we have claimed, flourishes on difference, engagement, tension, conflict, and threat. Its strength, therefore, should be understood as the result of the combination of its socially-constructed cultural distinction vis-à-vis and vigorous socio-cultural engagement with pluralistic modernity.<sup>15</sup>

Fenggang Yang's sociological study of an evangelical Chinese congregation in Washington, D.C. supports this view. The church provides a context for the construction of a distinctive subcultural identity that blends traditional Chinese culture with elements of American evangelicalism.<sup>16</sup> Such a distinct identity thrives in a contemporary setting of political uncertainty in China (I would add the Chinese Diaspora) and American cultural modernization. The social climates where contemporary Chinese find themselves favor the success of evangelical institutional outreach efforts.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly the construction of a distinct religious identity has been a major factor in the success of Chinese evangelicals. Rather than rejuvenating the denominationally affiliated Chinese church or joining mainline denominations, the path chosen presumed significant enough differences between evangelical and mainline Protestant Chinese to warrant separation. In the case of a number of older Chinese churches such as the Chinese Christian Union Church in Chicago and the Chinese Christian Church and Center in Philadelphia, conservative evangelicalism has become the dominant theological ethos.

But Yang's study focuses on one congregation in the early 1990s and ignores the implications of historical changes and theological differentiation. He is right to posit the changing Chinese context and changing Chinese Diasporic identity as external factors that have and are shaping a distinctive Chinese evangelical identity, but he does not explore the internal history of the Chinese Protestants themselves or the historical contexts. Furthermore, while Yang

gives some attention to developments in China, his research (like most sociological literature of immigrant religious communities) remains “America-centered” and does not given enough attention to the Diasporic contexts out of which most of the Chinese Protestants that he studied come.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, scholars of Chinese Christianity also tend to ignore the Chinese Diaspora. Studies of religious Chinese in the Diaspora are rare. Yet one cannot fully understand the transformation of Chinese North American Protestantism without understanding how deeply ingrained the Diasporic experiences were for the post-1965 Chinese immigrant.

### **Trans-Pacific Transpositions: Relocating Chinese Nationalism**

Sociological studies notwithstanding, I argue that the Chinese Communist victory in 1949 was a decisive catalyst which “transposed” Chinese Protestant nationalism in the Diaspora into a “different key.” The Communist triumph shattered the hopes of mainline Protestants who sought to accommodate Christianity to Chinese society while making China Christian. Before 1949, Chinese Protestant leaders in China and the Chinese Diaspora were among the most active nationalists.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, recent studies have noted the central role that religion (and Protestantism, in particular) has played in the formation of nationalist sentiment and the drive for modernization in several Asian countries.<sup>20</sup> The religious nationalism of Chinese Protestants was a trans-Pacific ideology that helped galvanize efforts to topple the Ching regime at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to build a modern China under Kuomintang rule in the 1930s. Among the predominantly Mandarin-speaking and well-educated leaders, there was a tendency towards theological liberalism. Chinese Christian liberals tended to blur the distinction between culture and state, thus, gave relatively uncritical support of the Chiang regime while fundamentalists sharpened it. But strong anti-imperialist and nationalist sentiments were present even among theologically conservative Christians. All felt pressured to support a state-centered nationalism under the Kuomintang and some actively promoted it.<sup>21</sup>

For the Chinese outside of China who had acquired “pariah capitalist” status in their host societies, the Communist victory was undesirable. Their situation was made precarious as Chinese Diasporic communities found themselves squeezed into a three-way political vise. Communist animosity towards capitalism and religion in general (and Christianity in particular) made it impossible for Diasporic Chinese to return home. Though exiled to Taiwan, Chiang Kei-shek’s Kuomintang efforts to control the Diasporic Chinese communities was also distasteful.

Finally, the rise of Southeast Asian nationalism and Cold War anxieties in North America put Chinese in a precarious relationship with their host societies. Hence the political consciousness and nationalist fervor of Diasporic Chinese communities was muted in the 1950s and 1960s. After 1949, state-oriented sense of Chinese identity gave way to one that was more culture-centered. Wang Gungwu believes that Diasporic Chinese have recently started to “distinguish between Chinese culture and the Chinese state, and many now identify with the culture and not the Chinese regime.”<sup>22</sup> The transposition of the trans-Pacific Chinese nationalism into a “cultural key” is a particular Diasporic contribution to an evolving trans-national Chinese identity.<sup>23</sup>

This change was certainly true of Diasporic Chinese Protestants as well. During the anti-Christian movements in the 1920s, the costly struggle against Japan in the 1930s, and the devastating loss to the Communists, “state-centered” religious nationalism all but vanished in the Chinese Christian Diaspora by mid-century.<sup>24</sup> The Communist victory left a vacuum of liberal and state-oriented leaders and created opportunities for conservative and “separatist” evangelicals to thrive. Since 1949, Diasporic Chinese Protestants have focused their energies on proselytizing and building Chinese congregations. The exclusive attention to the “Chinese people” underscores the continuity of a nationalist sentiment altered only by its focus on Chinese cultural identity and a self-consciously apolitical posture. With the “loss” of China, many Chinese felt like “abandoned orphans” amidst the newly created Asian nation-states, British-controlled Hong Kong, KMT-dominated Taiwan, and North America. Thus, it is understandable why many were attracted to the “world-denying” features of separatist evangelicalism. Separatist evangelicalism was best suited for the tremendous dislocation experienced by Chinese all over the world. In sum, socio-political dislocation led to religious relocation among Chinese Protestants.

### **Before Transposition: Chinese North American Protestants before 1949**

Because there was a history of Chinese Protestantism in the United States prior to the Communist victory, the transformation of the Chinese church was quite dramatic, if not painful. Had immigrant pastors such as James Tan exhibited more sympathy towards the history of the North American Chinese churches, their development may have been completely different. One can only speculate what might have happened if he had seen Rev. Shih as not merely a flamboyant elitist leader, but as someone who cared deeply enough about the Chinese Church in

America to expend hundreds of volunteer hours and to travel thousands of miles to help the National Council of Churches Department of Urban Ministries conduct its survey of the Chinese Churches in the United States in 1955. The only Chinese Christian woman leader Rev. Tan was probably aware of was Christiana Tsai, who was lived with returning missionaries in Pennsylvania. He probably did not know about Dr. Mabel Lee of the Chinese Baptist Church of New York City who earned a Ph.D. in economics at Columbia in 1923. He was probably not aware that she had been an outspoken suffragist during her college years at Barnard College, had “hobbed-nobbed” with renown liberal literati Hu Shih, and tried to develop her congregation into a social service ministry.

Prior to 1949 North American Chinese Protestants were vocal advocates of democracy and modernization in China. In the late 19th century, they appropriated pre-fundamentalist evangelical theology for revolutionary politics and socio-political reform. They also collaborated with mainline American Protestants to struggle for civil rights through the U.S. legal system. Influenced by radical abolitionist biblical hermeneutics and the ideology of Victorian domesticity, Chinese Christians considered themselves the vanguard of China's awakening from feudalism. Through mainline Protestant lenses, they urged China to join the world of modern nations.

By the time Pastor Tan arrived in Boston, Chinese Protestantism in the United States and Canada had undergone a remarkable transformation from overwhelmingly male missions to family-centered congregations. The “bachelor missions” themselves did not really exist until after the Chinese were segregated into urban Chinatown enclaves in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. By then, Chinese women were barred from immigrating to the United States and Chinese immigrants were barred from naturalization.<sup>25</sup> Anti-Chinese discrimination in the United States, recognition of the Ching regime's impotence in the face of Western imperialism and its defeat at the hands of Japan in 1894 awakened a revolutionary consciousness among “bachelor” Christians. They utilized the missions as centers for organizing and mobilizing support for revolutionary goals and the 1905 boycott of United States goods. Chinese Protestants found allies in sympathetic white Protestants who helped voice their concerns and gain some political clout.<sup>26</sup> North American Chinese Protestant men were iconoclasts. Not satisfied with the Baohuanghui's reformist agenda, they were the among the first in the Chinese Diaspora to advocate replacing China's monarchy with a democratic, modern, and Christian political



system.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, considered by Communist and Nationalist Chinese alike as the father of modern China and a fugitive from Ching dynasty for his revolutionary activities, found Chinese “bachelor” missions in North America welcome places of refuge, political activism and fund-raising.

Though they were revolutionary iconoclasts, their organizational structure was not novel to these men. All-male associations flourished throughout China’s halting, yet turbulent, struggle to enter the modern world. Such fraternal associations were especially popular among men who were marginalized from the Chinese family structures in China and the Diaspora. Looking at Chingqing, China, in the 1940s, Lee McIsaac notes that

For men living in a society that validated few alternatives to marriage and family life, widespread bachelorhood had deep emotional and practical ramifications and contributed to the growth of sworn brotherhood organizations. Their association with a long and glorious tradition, as well as their popular image as a refuge for just and righteous men who found themselves pushed to the margins of society, meant that fraternal organizations were uniquely suited to playing an important role in helping to fill this void.<sup>28</sup>

Many fraternal associations were both religious and rebellious, thus, perceived as threats to the Chinese state.

By providing an alternative to the models of kinship and society defined by Confucian ideology and promoted by the Chinese state, and by glorifying the bonds of loyalty and commitment to righteousness that had brought them together, fraternal organizations inevitably weakened the ties of loyalty to the family and the state that were the cornerstone of Confucian ideology. Moreover, sworn brotherhood constituted a powerful bond among men that enabled them to resist the intrusion of more formal forms of state power.<sup>29</sup>

It is not surprising that Chinese Protestant “bachelor missions” appeared similar to the politicized and religious fraternal orders indigenous to China, especially in a setting where marriage and family life were drastically limited.<sup>30</sup>

If the “bachelor missions” at the turn of the century helped awaken a muscular and masculine revolutionary nationalist consciousness among North American Chinese, the “domestication” of these missions in the 1920s and 1930s engendered both Chinese woman’s social awakening and the identity discourse of second generation Chinese Americans. This later development, in turn, generated a greater sense of ambivalence towards China among Chinese Protestants. “Bachelor” Protestants who viewed the missions as vehicles for spiritual and political activism did not invest in them as centers for family life. It would not be until the population of Chinese women and American-born increased when these missions began to resemble family-centered congregations.

Though still ensconced in nationalist discourse, greater attention was given to Chinese Protestant women and the second generation’s experiences between the two World Wars. In part, this was a response to Americanization efforts in the 1920s that pressured all immigrants to demonstrate their “assimilability.” Mainline Protestant women missionaries brought greater public awareness to the plight of many Chinese women prostitutes whose unfortunate circumstances they believed could be redeemed by Christian conversion and assimilation into a “normal” American-style family life. When Chinese nationalism assumed anti-Christian sentiments in the 1920s, missionaries could point to the faithful second generation who were raised in Chinese Christian households and therefore becoming just like “normal” American youth.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the Oriental Sociological Survey in the early 1920s concluded that the second generation Chinese would inevitably assimilate.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, as the promotional efforts that linked Chinese missions in America to the missionary enterprise in China started to fall on deaf ears in the 1920s and 30s, denominational supervision of the missions was transferred to the Presbyterian and Methodist home mission boards. Reflecting the era’s isolationist mood and reeling from the Hockings’ report, many mainline Protestants lost interest in foreign missions during this period and were more concerned about integrating the immigrant population.

As Chinese missions became family-centered congregations, immigrant and American-born women found in them sources of empowerment and leadership development. Most white women missionaries prescribed domestic roles for Chinese women, yet their very presence and leadership roles in the congregations and community inspired a generation of civic-minded Chinese women. Judy Yung and Peggy Pascoe, for instance, have noted the importance of the

Chinese congregations in the cultivation of Chinese women's leadership and family life in San Francisco's Chinese community.<sup>33</sup> Though most women supported the Chinese nationalist efforts during the Sino-Japanese war, it became clear that their interests were better served in North America rather than in China. Unlike the men, whose nostalgia for China included the benefits of a relatively traditional and patriarchal family, Chinese Protestant women had more to gain in the United States. They had greater personal choices and better opportunities to build families and community life free of the male-dominated Confucian ethos. Thus, their presence and eventual dominance in mid-century Chinese Protestant congregational life contributed to the decline of state-centered Chinese Protestant nationalism.

Because American immigration laws excluded Chinese until 1943, both the female and second-generation population grew proportionally. A generation of American-born Chinese had come of age in the 1920s and 1930s and outnumbered the immigrant population by 1940. They helped create a more stable Chinese American family life. The American-born Protestants also organized youth conferences in Lake Tahoe, California and Silver Bay, New York, which helped affirm their ethnic identity and cultivated a new generation of church leaders. Mainline Protestants applauded and supported these efforts, for most of these American-born young people appeared to have assimilated into American life despite growing up in Chinatown. In addition to recreation, the American-born Chinese found opportunities in these conferences to discuss current social issues, matters of "Chinese-American identity," and theological questions. The Chinese Christian Youth conferences provided an arena for "Americanized" Chinese who were conscious of job and housing discrimination to reflect on their place in American life. The youth were exposed to a brand of religious liberalism that encouraged the youth to devote their lives to civic service in China or the United States.<sup>34</sup> Few actually went to China because the Sino-Japanese conflict and the Chinese Civil War exacerbated the already difficult conditions there. Though most felt warmed by calls for patriotism, even more were inspired to integrate American society by seizing post-World War II opportunities to work and live outside of Chinatown. The East Coast conferences ceased operation by 1963 and were displaced by the fundamentalist Eastern Chinese Bible Conference. The West Coast conference continues to meet, but, like the East Coast conference, it appears to have lost its religious orientation. Nevertheless, these conferences were instrumental in shifting the focus of the Chinese churches in the United States away from a China-centered nationalism.

### **Interlude: Mainline Chinese American Protestants since the Communist Revolution**

By mid-century the change from revolutionary bachelors' missions to family-oriented congregations was undermining a nationalism that focused on the Chinese nation-state and placed China as the geographical center of Chinese identity. But so long as China existed as a supportable nation-state, it was impossible to completely suppress this type of nationalism. This was especially true for congregations historically affiliated with mainline American Protestantism. Mainline Protestantism inculcated a concern for civic life and nation as an essential part of one's religious responsibility. Therefore, many mainline Chinese Protestants considered the support of China a part of their religious duty until the Communist victory. Today, the focus on China has waned considerably among mainline Chinese Protestants, but the concern for civic life remains one enduring feature that distinguishes it from evangelical congregations.

The Chinese Communist victory and subsequent expulsion of missionaries delivered a crippling blow to an already faltering mainline foreign mission enterprise in China. As interest in the China missions waned in the 1930s, so did interest in ministering to Chinese in the United States. In Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston, for instance, Chinese union congregations were created from the merger of Chinese Sunday Schools or missions supported by different denominations. Since the drastic reduction of all immigration in 1926, mainline Protestant home mission policies also began to view segregated ethnic congregations as temporary and undesirable enclaves. Mainline Protestants advocated racial "integration" in the 1950s and pressured Asian American congregations to erase their ethnic identification. For instance, the Methodist Oriental Provisional Conference, which was comprised of Chinese, Filipino, and Korean congregations was disbanded in 1956 as was the Pacific Japanese Provisional Conference in 1964. The member congregations of these ethnically distinct conferences then merged into regular Annual Conferences.<sup>35</sup> The American Baptist Home Mission Board did not replace Dr. Charles Shepherd, Superintendent of Asian American Baptist ministries, when he retired in 1956. After the concentration camp experiences, Japanese American Protestants who abandoned their ethnic communities and entered into the mainstream of American Protestantism were accorded great recognition and praise for modeling integration. In their efforts to combat racism, mainline Protestants supported uni-directional integration policies that they sought to

erase racial identities. This, in turn, led to a period of benign neglect of Chinese American Protestants in the 1950s and 1960s just as Chinese immigration started to grow again.

Ironically, these policies effectively disenfranchised a generation of Chinese church leaders and pastors. Despite the promise of integration, very few Chinese seminary graduates became ministers in pre-dominantly Caucasian congregations. Virtually no denominational resources were made available to start new congregations that could effectively minister to the growing Chinese immigrant population. Hence, Chinese American seminary graduates found few pastoral positions in mainline Protestant affiliated congregations. According to Jonah Chang, the assimilation policies of the United Methodist churches were so devastating that

there was no single new church organized, no single new minister recruited, no single gathering of clergy and laity of fellowship or encouragement held. There was a total absence of plan or goal for ministry. The morale of Asian American ministers and lay people was very low, their sense of isolation pervasive.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, Chinese American church leaders could no longer look to China as an outlet for their ministerial and missionary zeal as they did before World War II. The Chinese Communist government was becoming openly hostile towards religious institutions, particularly those with European or American roots.<sup>37</sup>

Complicating matters for Chinese American Protestants in the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a suspicion of Chinese in the United States after the People's Republic of China entered the Korean conflict. The Cold War climate contributed greatly to the suppression of Chinese nationalism and pressured the Chinese Americans to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States. It was therefore not surprising when the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States sponsored a survey of Chinese congregations in 1953, the first since Protestant home mission boards had sponsored the "Oriental Race Relations Survey" in response to a renewed nativism in the 1920s.<sup>38</sup> The 1953 survey relied on the sociological theories that guided the earlier survey and also sought to prove Chinese loyalty to America, cultural assimilability, and the inevitable erasure of Chinese ethnicity in the United States. The end of the Chinese American experience was "assimilation" despite the growth of English-speaking Chinese. The study registered 43 Protestant Chinese congregations in the United States, most of which were believed to be on the decline. As the American-born integrated into mainstream society and the

suburbs, it appeared that the Chinatown churches would be rendered superfluous. Only among those who recently migrated from China such as refugees from the Chinese Civil War would there be a continuing need for a distinctive Chinese church.<sup>39</sup>

When the study was presented to a national Chinese Christian Conference in San Francisco in 1955, its conclusions about the continued viability of the Chinese Church in the United States left the delegates in stunned silence.<sup>40</sup> Only one-tenth of the 118,000 Chinese in the US were Christians, the report asserted.

Few of the churches are self-supporting; few exert much influence in the Chinese community. No more than a dozen of the 60 ministers are American-born – this after a century of Christian work, during which at least three generations of young people have grown up within the churches. That few of them choose the ministry as a life work can perhaps be explained by the further facts revealed in the survey: the Chinese churches are inadequately staffed, housed and financed; their programs are generally weak and ineffective; their ministers are expected to live on barely a subsistence income.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the pressure from the denominations to assimilate the Chinese American church, the pastors and lay delegates at the conference decided to form an ecumenical organization called the National Conference of Chinese Christian Churches, Inc. CONFAB, as it was called, sought to carve out a space where Chinese congregations could continue to receive the attention and support of mainline denominations. It has met on a triennial basis and continues to draw participation from Chinese churches affiliated with mainline Protestantism.

Mainline Chinese American church leaders were clearly not receptive to erasing their ethnicity and merging with “neighboring Caucasian churches” at the 1955 conference. Memories of past racial discrimination were not easily forgotten. “Wary of ventures” that would result in the “loss of identity and...sense of security which comes from having their ‘own’ organization,” they worried that

overtures stressing ‘brotherhood’ may prove fickle; they cannot forget the unbrotherliness of Christian Americans who thrust all people of Japanese descent from their west coast homes at the onset of World War II.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, the Chinese representatives recognized that the suburban exodus and cultural assimilation of their American-born children was contributing to the decline of Chinatown ghettos. Yet, this came at a psychological cost to the American-born who exhibited “symptoms of disorganization of personality and of family loyalty and unity.” They also recognized the “influx of China-born or China-raised immigrants, many of them refugees of the communist revolution.” Because these refugees had greater social status and education than the earlier immigrants they did not relate well to the established Chinese. These challenges illustrated the need to maintain viable ministries for Chinese immigrants and the American-born.<sup>43</sup>

At the next CONFAB gathering, Rev. Edwar Lee (1902-1996) gave a presentation that questioned the belief that the “exclusively” Chinese church would disappear. Though he noted that racial difference was one factor for the slower rate of “integration and amalgamation” among the Chinese when compared to European immigrants, he offered Chinese cultural tenacity and the continuing stream of Chinese immigration as the most important reasons. The heart of his defense of cultural particularity was a theological justification for non-Western indigenous expressions of Christianity, something that mainline Protestant missionaries affirmed as early as 1938. “It is antagonistic to Christian philosophy that all should subscribe to the doctrine of uniformity,” he noted. “Christianity is one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth, and it is a fellowship in the unity of diversity.” Furthermore, many feel that American Christianity seeks to do little more than preserve the “American Way of Life. “Such can hardly be said to be truly Universal Christianity.” Lee’s point was that the proliferation of different cultural expressions of faith actually makes American Christianity better. Perhaps reflecting his sentiments about the recent disbanding of the Methodist Oriental Provisional Conference, Lee sounded a theme that seemed a decade before its time: “Integration is desirable so long as it is truly voluntary.” He then speculates that perhaps “one of the reasons why the Chinese churches in America are a small minority group among the Chinese in America is because we are too American. The Chinese Christian church has been looked upon by the Chinese community as a foreign institution, and its impact on the culture of the Chinese in America has, therefore been small.”<sup>44</sup>

The irony was that Edwar Lee was an American-born Chinese pastor. He was one of the first English-speaking Chinese ministers in the United States. Trained in a liberal Protestant

seminary, he became a prominent United Methodist leader among the Chinese Protestant community. Lee's calling to ministry was a response to the neglected American-born generation in Chinese churches in the 1930s. He was one of the founders of the Lake Tahoe Chinese Christian Youth Conferences and CONFAB.<sup>45</sup>

Lee influenced a younger generation of American-born Chinese ministers who valued their Chinese heritage highly. The Rev. Dr. James Chuck, senior minister for over forty years at the First Chinese Baptist Church of San Francisco, mastered the Chinese language and continues to conduct field research among the Chinese in the San Francisco Bay Area. Rev. Dr. David Ng (d. 1997) was the first Chinese senior minister in a predominantly Caucasian Presbyterian congregation. Later he became a Christian Education curriculum specialist for the Presbyterian Church, USA. Though Ng's ministry career was devoted to service in his denomination, much of his energies went to developing Christian education curricula that was sensitive to Asian Americans.<sup>46</sup>

CONFAB and the English-speaking Chinese American Protestant leadership helped many Chinese congregations resist their denominations' assimilation policies in the middle decades of the twentieth century. But their resistance to assimilation was not a declaration of independence from denominations that could no longer see the viability of ethnic-specific ministries. It was motivated by past experiences of racial discrimination, the practical reality of a steadily growing Chinese immigrant population, and a vision for a Christian unity without cultural erasure. Many leaders were also influenced by the Civil Rights movement and Asian American activism.<sup>47</sup> By working with other ethnic Asian Protestants, Chinese American Protestants helped create caucuses within the mainline denominations and groups such as the Ecumenical Working Group of Asian Pacific Americans, the Pacific American Center for Theology and Strategies at the Graduate Theological Union (Berkeley, California), and Pacific American and Canadian Christian Education project in the 1970s.<sup>48</sup> None of these endeavors sought to separate from the mainline denominations. Rather, they struggled to make their denominations more responsive to Asian American representation and ministry needs. In general, these efforts have succeeded at reversing mainline assimilationist policies. Most mainline Protestant organizations now have significance Asian American presence and provide programs for Asian American ministries.



What many white Protestants could not see at the time was that Chinese American resistance to assimilation was itself a very American democratic practice. Chinese and other Asian Protestant demands for self-determination and representation demonstrated how thoroughly assimilated they were to the mainline denominational contexts. Though Edwar Lee and other Chinese American Protestant might have resorted to the defense of Chinese culture, their willingness to engage their denomination's structure and process illustrates how Americanized they truly were. Indeed, one of the largest challenges facing mainline Asian American caucuses today is integrating new immigrants who have not had the same history with their denominations as the previous generations of Asian Americans Protestants.

This point was not lost to the Chinese evangelicals who migrated to the United States in the 1960s. While Edwar Lee defended the continued existence of exclusively Chinese churches, the new evangelicals planted many congregations that were not merely exclusively Chinese, but also separatist in outlook.

### **The Emergence of Chinese American Evangelicalism**

To understand the origins of Chinese American evangelicalism, one must look to the populist revivals that swept through China during the early Twentieth Century and through the Chinese Diaspora by mid-century. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the predominant mainline Protestant missionary strategy had centered on gaining the approval of Chinese elites. Thus, mainline Protestant missionaries focused their work on education and hospital care in urban settings. By contrast, a number of more theologically conservative missionary agencies, notably Hudson Taylor's Chinese Inland Mission, entered rural communities and continued their focus on winning converts. Canadian Presbyterian Jonathan Goforth embraced Pentecostal fervor as a leader in the 1908 Manchurian revivals and eventually separated from his sponsoring Presbyterian mission agency. Though spurred on by European and American missionaries, this evangelical revivalist tradition was in fact an indigenous form of Chinese Christianity. The revivalists were able to tap into the millennial yearnings and popular religiosity of ordinary Chinese people. They spoke to the "heart" during turbulent times through affective sermons.<sup>49</sup>

This is not to suggest that mainline missionaries and their Chinese co-workers stopped proselytizing. Notable evangelists from mainline settings such as John R. Mott and Sherwood Eddy of the Y.M.C.A. effectively evangelized Chinese students in the 1910s and inculcated

many with a social gospel orientation. By the 1920s, however, there was noticeable cleavage between mainline and revivalist Chinese Protestants that mirrored the growing chasm between American fundamentalists and liberals. As mentioned earlier, the mainline orientation remained open to religious engagement and care for the civic and political arenas, thus, creating a theological “bridge” for Chinese Protestants to participate in public life. These Christians embraced China’s modernizing projects and were open to liberal theologies despite their evangelical orientation.<sup>50</sup>

Among the revivalist Chinese, separation from the public arenas became a mark of one’s Christian identity. Separatism appealed to the rural masses, in part, because it reinforced their sense of spiritual superiority in the face of actual social and political marginalization. These dynamics were also to be found among the Diasporic Chinese revivals during the Sino-Japanese conflict and after the Communist Revolution. Evangelical separatism comforted the Chinese in Diaspora who felt alienated from China and their host country. Politically, most detested Chinese Communism, were not very enthusiastic about the Koumingtang in Taiwan, and felt ambivalent about the British colonial rule in Hong Kong. As refugees and exiles, separatist evangelicals during mid-century were assured that they were a chosen remnant that yearned for the conversion of Chinese to their brand of Christianity.

The “loss” of China to the Communists in 1949 greatly deflated the “civic” voice among Chinese Protestants throughout the Diaspora and brought about an anticlimactic end to years of patriotic zeal. European colonial withdrawal from a revolutionary Southeast Asian situation after the Second World War resulted in the formation of several new nation-states. Nine million Diasporic Chinese who had played ambiguous roles as merchants and laborers under colonial rule now found themselves in precarious political positions in the face of Southeast Asian nationalism. This situation was exacerbated by waves of Chinese refugees fleeing Communist rule. Between the 1930s and the late 1970s, however, migration from China was still “extremely limited.” Historian Lynn Pan observes “movements from peripheral Chinese territories, Hong Kong and Taiwan began again in earnest in the late 1970s.” By 1980, 21.8 million Chinese lived in the Diaspora (not including Taiwan and Hong Kong). The population would reach 30.7 million by 1990, mostly in Southeast Asia.<sup>51</sup> Though often perceived as a “pariahs” in their host societies the Chinese Diaspora developed strong merchant networks which eventually led to a large accumulation of capital and engaged in different levels of political participation. But,

whether they lived under the defeated Nationalist Regime in Taiwan, the British-controlled Hong Kong, the United States, or in societies ripe for ethnic conflict such as the Malaysia, Indonesia, or the Philippines, Diasporic Chinese were indeed a people without a nation they could call their own. This experience alone sharply differentiated the Diasporic Chinese experience from those on the mainland.<sup>52</sup>

From the ashes of failed religious nationalism emerged a vibrant young cohort of evangelicals who pinned their hopes on the Chinese Diaspora rather than China for their vision of the future for Chinese Protestantism. While this vision centered on Chinese people rather than the nation, there always remained a hope that China's doors would once again be open to the free proclamation of their gospel. Most of the revivalists and pastors who eventually came to the United States spent a significant amount of time in the Diaspora even if they were born and raised in China. Through the middle decades, as nation state-centered Chinese identity in the Diaspora was being transposed to a culture-centered one, revivalists such as John Sung, Andrew Gih, Torrey Shih, Thomas Wang, Moses Chow, and Christiana Tsai defined a generation of Chinese Protestants who had little interest in politics or mainline Protestant institutions. Rather, because their nationalism was politically circumscribed, any nationalistic expression was channeled through a focus on evangelizing exclusively to the Chinese in the Diaspora. This separatist ethos was instrumental in shaping a religious community that resisted engaging with its surrounding social settings and contexts. Thus, post-World War II Chinese Protestant immigrants have had little interest in contemporary Chinese Protestants or their history.

The Diasporic experiences of these Protestant leaders and those who migrated to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s undoubtedly shaped of the character of Chinese evangelicalism in North America. Though the Chinese population in the United States was not large in the 1950s, the revivalists saw an opportunity to build a support base for their Diasporic ministries among Chinese Protestants and the growing American Evangelical networks there. Andrew Gih [Ji Zhi-wen] (1901-1985), probably the best-known Chinese Diaspora evangelist, honed his revivalist preaching skills with the "Bethel Worldwide Evangelistic Band." Between 1931 and 1935 the band "had traveled over 50,000 miles, visited 133 cities, and held almost 3,400 revival meetings."<sup>53</sup> The Bethel band was a ministry of the Bethel Mission in Shanghai, "an independent and self-sustaining holiness enterprise... founded by Phoebe and Mary Stone, two Chinese sisters who were medical doctors, and by Jennie Hughes, an American." All three

had separated from Methodist “modernism” to start the mission, which developed a hospital, church, and Bible training school for evangelists and pastors. A number of members of the Bethel Band became successful pastors in the United States. Torrey Shih (d 198?) started the Overseas Chinese Mission, the largest Chinese congregation on the East Coast. Philip Yung Lee (1911-1993), a gifted musician and minister, was pastor of the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles (now True Light Presbyterian Church) in the 1940s and the Chinese Christian Union Church in Chicago in the 1950s, important years in the histories of these churches as they distanced themselves from their mainline Protestant origins and became decidedly evangelical.<sup>54</sup> Though John Sung [Song Shangjie](1901-1944) was a more famous member of the band, it was Andrew Gih’s organizational skill which distinguished him from Sung and the other band members. During the Sino-Japanese conflict and after the Communist Revolution, Gih devoted himself to evangelizing the Chinese in the Diaspora. His missionary organization, Evangelize China Fellowship, Inc. (EFC), built churches, orphanages, and schools while creating a vast network of Chinese Christians in the Diaspora. His notoriety placed him in the company of fellow revivalists J. Edwin Orr and Billy Graham.<sup>55</sup> Eventually ECF established its main headquarters in the Southern California.<sup>56</sup>

Though itinerant revivalism among the Chinese was inspired by Anglo-American evangelists, it took on a different character as a result of Gih’s endeavors. Here, the evangelist was also a networker, church planter, and an organizer. In the 1960s, Moses Chow and Thomas Wang would employ a similar model and build the two largest Chinese para-church organizations in North America. Unlike the historic Chinese churches that originated with the support of mainline denominations and white missionaries on the Pacific West Coast, these indigenous ministries were started in Detroit, Michigan and Washington, D.C. Ambassadors for Christ, Inc. (AFC) started as a campus ministry that targeted the growing number of Chinese students from Hong Kong and Taiwan. One of its founders, Rev. Moses Chow, had been a pastor among the Chinese in Shanghai, Indonesia, and Japan before his call to help start the non-denominational Chinese Christian Church of Greater Washington, D.C., a Mandarin-language congregation. The itinerant networking required of campus ministry work often clashed with the demands of local church ministry. So after five years of work with both the church and AFC, Chow left the congregation and devoted his energies to the campus ministry. Under Chow’s

leadership, AFC took Christiana Tsai's ministry under its wings and expanded its work to that of providing resources and conferences for Chinese congregations.<sup>57</sup>

Chinese Christian Mission (CCM) was originally a small congregation led by Thomas Wang in Detroit, Michigan. In 1964 CCM merged with the Chinese Bible Church of Detroit. This freed "brother" Wang to promote missions among Chinese churches and Christian campus groups. That year, he toured the Northeast in a white Rambler with a large sign affixed on it that read in Chinese and English: 'CHRIST RETURNING - REPENT, BELIEVE.' At Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts, he reflected on the meaning of America with a unabashed conservative Christian Jeremiad:

In 300 years God had made this nation the strongest, the richest and the greatest in the world. There is hardly any country which has not been directly or indirectly helped by this Republic. Yet, in recent years, which the up-rise and advance of sin, unbelief and secularism, there is a sharp decline and retreat of the influence, honor and integrity of America.

God's blessing is being forced to withdrawing. We as Chinese Christians feel it is our obligation to do everything we can to sound out the warning and to call AMERICA TO REPENTENCE.

We believe, in spite of sin and vices, today, America is the only (or the last) stronghold of freedom, justice, democracy and Christian principles. If America sinks, the Free World follows. Christians! Awake!<sup>58</sup>

Over the next two years, Wang traveled thousands of miles across the United States to deliver his prophetic, if not apocalyptic, message. In CCM's English language newsletter, Challenger, he denounces the ecumenical movement, liberal theology, the new morality, Roman Catholicism, the removal of prayer from public schools, and a host of other signs of American spiritual complacency.<sup>59</sup> Remarkably, by 1967, the tone of Wang's pronouncements changes considerably. A more sophisticated analysis of the missionary relationship with Chinese people is made:

One of the things that annoy Asian intellectuals is the very subtle but insistent refusal by westerners to accept Asians as Asians and as equals. Unfortunately, this has also been one of the fatal inconsistencies of western missionaries as a whole. Having the Gospel first does not presume superiority over the ones to whom the Gospel is imparted. It should be a state of obedience to the One Who gave the commission and privilege.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that such inequality accounts for at least some of the basis for anti-western feeling in Asia today. The Communist regime in China didn't need much to arouse pent-up emotions against the west.<sup>60</sup>

Wang remarks that the missionary must identify with the other by crucifying the self and wonders why “westerners always try to absorb and engulf Chinese Christians into their own patterns and program?” Declaring proudly that 85% of CCM expenses is supported by Chinese Christians, Wang declares that Chinese Christians are no longer satisfied with a “sit-listen-follow pattern” of relationship and “want a share of the action in worldwide missions in general and a major role in missions to their own people in particular.”<sup>61</sup>

This particular issue of Challenger marks a turning point in CCM and Wang's story. Like Ambassadors for Christ, Chinese Christian Mission experienced significant growth in the 1970s and 1980s. Both para-church organizations provide local church resources, but CCM has placed greater emphasis on sending missionaries to the Chinese Diaspora. The pages of Challenger rarely ever became as polemic or apocalyptic as it was during its early years. Since 1967, Thomas Wang has become more involved with mainstream evangelicalism and is recognized as one of its leaders.

By the 1970s the Chinese itinerant evangelists and organizers discovered that the congregations they served were no longer as conservative, separatist, or homogenous as an earlier generation of dislocated Chinese were. Though many were refugees in the 1950s, by the 1960s, younger Chinese in the United States had become better educated, more sophisticated, and more affluent. The trickle of immigrants in the 1940s and 1950s became a tide of well-educated and highly skilled professionals from several Asian countries. Campus Chinese Bible Study Groups in the 1960s and 1970s were transformed into congregations filled with wealthy families in the 1980s and 1990s. Many Chinese congregations have been planted in suburban

enclaves diminishing the urban focus of earlier congregations. Furthermore, the influx of Chinese immigrants from a diversity of Asian nations (and more recently from mainland China) is diversifying these younger Chinese churches and adding another layer of complexity to the growing inter-generational tensions.

Despite changes since the 1970s, Chinese evangelicalism has left an indelible imprimatur on Chinese American Protestantism. "Separatist" evangelicals have helped defined Chinese American Protestantism as a strongly pietistic and independent faith community. Consequently, their suspicious of mainline or denominational Protestantism extends even to their American-born children and is affecting Chinese congregations with historic ties to mainline denominations. One repeated Chinese evangelical critique of mainline Protestantism is its doctrinal impurity and lack of religious zeal. Evelyn Shih did not like social gospellers and the older ministers who preached cold, rationalistic messages. Leland Chinn recalled that the many of the members of the Chinese Union Church in Chicago attended merely to socialize in the early 1950s, though he was conscious of the anti-Chinese backlash that had occurred in the wake of the Korean War. Bernadine Wong grew up in a mainline Baptist church, but required a more full conversion before she could claim her faith.<sup>62</sup>

The "separatist" outlook also conformed to the independent and anti-denominational spirit that pervades Chinese Christianity. James Chuck's detailed study of the growth of Chinese congregations in the San Francisco Bay Area is very revealing. Before 1950, there were only 15 congregations. By 1996, the number of churches has grown ten-fold to 158. This growth is not surprising. Nationwide, there were over 1,100 Chinese churches and Christian organizations in 1995 reflecting an almost twenty-fold growth.<sup>63</sup> What was surprising was that over one-third of the Bay Area Chinese churches have no denominational affiliation. Furthermore, these congregations attract more than 50% of the Chinese worship attendance.<sup>64</sup>

Despite these tendencies, Chinese American evangelicals have attempted to build towards some unity. In the 1970s, evangelicals set themselves apart from the CONFAB-related churches and organized their own "ecumenical congress." The first North American Congress of Chinese Evangelicals (NACOCE) met on Dec. 25-30, 1972 in California. Over 300 Chinese church leaders participated in this meeting whose theme was "Spiritual Unity and Awakening."<sup>65</sup> Three additional congresses were held in 1974, 1978, and 1980 before NACOCE was integrated into the Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism (CCCOWE), an umbrella

organization serving Chinese evangelical churches worldwide. Despite the early excitement over NACOCE, efforts to bring about greater unity and cooperation among Chinese American evangelicals failed.<sup>66</sup> Tensions between advocates for Presbyterian or Baptist congregational governance in many newly formed Chinese congregations created a divisive atmosphere among Chinese church leaders.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the English-speaking Chinese leaders sought greater voice within NACOCE in 1974 resulting in inter-generational dynamics that continue to persist.<sup>68</sup> Since the 1980s, the vision for a united Chinese evangelical effort has fragmented. Though Chinese church splits are rare these days, inter-generational conflicts and the diversity of Chinese sub-groups have made it very difficult for any unity on a national scale.

### **Conclusion: Another Transposition?**

Despite separatism's ability to help Diasporic Chinese weather the storm of socio-political dislocation, it has not been able to generate any unified Chinese Christian public witness and fails to appreciate the significance of the historical development of the Chinese mainline Protestant experience. One of the consequences of the transpacific transposition of Chinese Protestantism has been a singular focus on Chinese people in the Diaspora to the exclusion of the historical and social realities they inhabit. In other words, separatism supplies the ideological structure for the formation of distinctive ethno-religious identities during periods of great turbulence but offers few resources for Chinese evangelical engagement in their host societies.

In 1970, James Chuck offered a similar assessment in his presentation before the Chinese Christian Union of San Francisco. Noting the promise of the new Chinese evangelical presence, he also warned of its potential divisiveness over theological differences. In an effort to reconcile the Chinese evangelical with Chinese mainline Protestant, he suggested that the central function of the church was evangelism, which is “nothing less than the totality of all that the church does.” The church's main task is to call people “to respond in love and trust to God through Christ,” a “deeply personal, even mystical” relationship with the Divine. At this point, Chuck offers a telling critique of separatist evangelicals. Although “faith is intensely personal,”

it is never private. Much harm has been done to the Christian cause with the uncritical identification of the personal with the private. True faith always seeks to find ways of expressing the love of God in love for neighbor. The Christian lives a “separated” existence only in the sense that his life is different from, or distinguishable from that of



the world; but the Christian never lives apart from the world. He is in the world but not of it. He relates to the world as salt, light, and leaven.

Chuck recognized that the church was criticized for not being “sufficiently concerned about the large social issues such as injustice: war, the pollution of the environment, etc.” and being “preoccupied exclusively with personal morality and the salvation of the individual’s soul.” He attributed this to the unfortunate fundamentalist-liberal controversy where “commitment to Jesus Christ in a deep personal sense and concern for the world and its needs are seen as opposites.” “Why could we not have said,” he ponders, “that the more deeply we are committed to Christ, the more we will be committed to the world and its needs? And conversely, the more we are committed to the world and its needs, the more we will see the need for the new life in Christ.”<sup>69</sup>

Chuck’s call for a more wholistic Chinese Christian ministry in the 1970s probably fell on deaf ears among those who viewed separation as a fundamental Christian tenet. However, since the late 1980s, Chinese evangelicals who are more sensitive to historical and social contexts have started to reclaim “civic duty” as a part of Christian responsibility. In part, this increased sensitivity is related to the recognition that the growth of Chinese wealth and social status demands Christian response to the poor. Despite continued political uncertainties around the future of Chinese in China and the Diaspora, Chinese congregations (especially in North America) have grown large and secure enough to begin to engage the evils of poverty, according to Peter K. Chow. Assuming that Jesus’ bias is for the poor, Chow asserts that “in building predominantly middle-class churches, we must be missing out a lot of blessings of the Kingdom... In seeking the next great shower of blessings, should we not consider an approach which can more effectively bring the gospel to the poor?” Chow’s remarkable article includes a biblical study of poverty, an economic analysis that critiques the U.S. dominated global capitalism, and offers models of ministry and Christian education that incorporates these critical issues.<sup>70</sup>

Chow’s article illustrates that the separatist ethos within Chinese evangelicalism may be waning as many of its leaders now encourage civic responsibility. For example, the influential First Evangelical Church Association in Southern California publishes a magazine that incorporates a call for social engagement. Some leaders from this association have also formed Chinese Christians for Justice, an educational ministry that advocates for Chinese evangelical

participation in social justice issues. At every Ambassadors for Christ triennial missionary conference, there are speakers and workshops that address social justice issues. There is even room among Chinese evangelicals for a discussion about gender equality and the ordination of women.<sup>71</sup>

Part of the reason for this development can be attributed to the popularity of socially conscious Evangelicals such as Tony Campolo, Jim Wallis, Stephen Mott, and Ron Sider.<sup>72</sup> The 1979 opening of Communist China to the West, the 1989 T'ienaman Square incident, and the 1997 return of Hong Kong to China have also played a part in awakening the social consciousness of many immigrant Chinese evangelicals. Though China's return to international prominence has sparked intense debates over the Diasporic Chinese Protestant relationships with the Chinese Christian Council and the "house churches," there is no doubt that China as a nation-state is once again emerging as a concern. Chinese evangelicals are beginning to reflect on their history and role in China and North America.<sup>73</sup> Second-generation Chinese evangelical leaders have not, in general, exhibited a similar social consciousness.<sup>74</sup> But among immigrant Chinese evangelicals, this renewed interest in "civic duty" confirms the argument in this chapter that links nationalism and social responsibility. It is possible, therefore, that a new transpacific transposition is underway which may reconcile Chinese evangelicalism with a history and tradition of Chinese Protestant social responsibility.

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"...on a more collective level – that of the nation rather than the individual or even the subnational group – Protestantism's interaction with China and Japan was antagonistic, precluding any chance of there being a positive identification between the religion and either nation." (121) Why? The history

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→ Chou Yu-min, "The Role of Overseas Chinese Capital in the Economic Integration of East Asia," (111-119)

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Fenggang Yang, Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

### **Millenarian Influence**

Jonathan D. Spence. God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan. New York: W. W. Norton, 1996.

“From [the third and sixth centuries] forward, both in China and Europe, the millenarian and apocalyptic strains of belief stayed vigorously alive. And in both China and Europe, the

proponents of these beliefs came to link them to radical political and egalitarian programs that brought numerous new followers from among the poor, and also led them at intervals into violent conflicts with the state. In China, across the whole span of time from the tenth to the nineteenth century, the state often blamed such uprisings on the followers of the “White Lotus Teachings,” but in fact there was no one central teaching, rather a host of conflicting and competing centers of revelation and resistance.” (xxiii-xxiv)

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<sup>1</sup>James Y. K. Tan, Grace Upon Grace, trans. Vitus Cheng (Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1993), 132, 133.

<sup>2</sup>Tan, Grace Upon Grace, 140-141.

<sup>3</sup>Tan, Grace Upon Grace, 144.

<sup>4</sup>Choy later distinguished himself for his campus ministry among Chinese students which eventually led to the founding of Ambassadors for Christ, Inc., one of the larger and well-known Chinese parachurch organizations. Ted Choy (with Leona Choy). My Dreams and Visions: An Autobiography. Winchester, VA.: Golden Morning Publishing, 1997.

<sup>5</sup>Tan, Grace Upon Grace, 148-149.

<sup>6</sup>Horace R. Cayton and Anne O. Lively, The Chinese in the United States and the Chinese Christian Churches: A Statement Condensed for the National Conference on the Chinese Christian Churches (National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1955); Wilber Wong Yan Choy, "Survey Needs of Christian Chinese," Christian Century, 72 (June 15, 1955), 14-15.

<sup>7</sup>"Doctor Peter Y. F. Shih" Promotion Flyer, Edwar Lee Collection, Box #2, folder 4. Asian American Studies Library of the University of California, Berkeley (Berkeley, California).

<sup>8</sup>Mainline Protestantism refers to the historical denominations which initiated the Protestant mission efforts to China in the 19th century such as Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodists, and Baptists.

<sup>9</sup>Bill Ong Hing, Making and Remaking Asian America Through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 48.

<sup>10</sup>Ambassadors for Christ, 1998-1999 Directory: Chinese Churches, Bible Study Groups, Organizations in North America (Paradise, PA: Ambassadors for Christ, Inc., 1999). Ambassadors for Christ, (1994-1995 Directory: Chinese Churches, Bible Study Groups, Organizations in North America, (Paradise, PA: Ambassadors for Christ, Inc., 1995).

<sup>11</sup>Fenggang Yang, Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>12</sup>Impressive as it is, Chinese growth pales when compared with Korean Protestant growth in North America. In 1970, there were only 75 Korean churches in the entire United States. Astonishingly, more than 2,200 congregations could be identified in 1998. Won Moo Hurh, The Korean Americans (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), [page?](#)

<sup>13</sup>One could say that North America is also part of the Chinese Diaspora, but for our purposes, it will refer to countries other than China with provide significant Chinese immigration to North America.

<sup>14</sup>Fenggang Yang, Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>15</sup>Christian Smith. American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 153.

<sup>16</sup>Fenggang Yang, Chinese Christians in America.

<sup>17</sup>Fenggang Yang, "Chinese Conversion to Evangelical Christianity: The Importance of Social and Cultural Contexts," Sociology of Religion (Fall, 1998)

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<sup>18</sup>By posing the “oriental problem” as a question of whether Asians could overcome their “foreignness” and assimilate into American life, missionaries and sociologists betray their “American-centric” biases. Timothy Tseng "Ministry at Arms' Length: Asian Americans in the Racial Ideology of Mainline American Protestants, 1882-1952." Union Theological Seminary, May 1994; Henry Yu, Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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- <sup>19</sup> Timothy Tseng, "Chinese Protestant Nationalism in the United States, 1880-1927," New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans, edited by David Yoo (University of Hawaii Press, 1999): 19-51. Wing-hung Lam, Chinese Theology in Construction (Pasadena, Ca.: William Carey, 1983). Lam employs H. R. Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture" categories to interpret the various Chinese Christian responses to the "Chinese Renaissance" and nationalism. For more historically grounded studies, see Jun Xing, Baptized in the Fire of Revolution: The American Social Gospel and the YMCA in China, 1919-1937 (Bethlehem, Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 1996) and Samuel D. Ling, "The Other May Fourth Movement: The Chinese 'Christian Renaissance,' 1919-1937" (Ph.D. dissertation: Temple University, 1981).
- <sup>20</sup> Jon Thares Davidann, A World of Crisis and Progress: The American YMCA in Japan, 1890-1930 (Bethlehem, PA.: Lehigh University Press, 1998); Peter van der Veer and Hartman Lehmann, eds., Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Anthony D. Smith, Nationalism and Modernism: A critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism (New York: Routledge, 1998).
- <sup>21</sup> For a discussion about how state-centered nationalism transformed Chinese definitions of womanhood from one subject to 19th Century Chinese kinship systems to one circumscribed by the Communist state see Tani E. Barlow, "Theorizing Woman: *Funü, Guojia, Jiating*," in Body, Subject, and Power in China edited by Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 262-63.
- <sup>22</sup> Wang Gungwu, "Among Non-Chinese," in The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today, edited by Tu Wei-ming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994): 145. See also Wang Gungwu, China and the Chinese Overseas (Singapore, 1990); Wang Ling-chi and Wang Gungwu, eds., The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays. Volume 1 (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998); Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee-Beng, eds., The Chinese in Malaysia (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid, eds., Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).
- <sup>23</sup> Kevin Doak advocates broadening recent theories on nationalism which have focused on the concept of nation as a socially constructed, invented, or imagined identity. Citing Homi K. Bhabha's The Location of Culture (London, 1994), Doak suggests that a national culture may be located in places other than the state - at least in the case of Japan. I think this can be said of Chinese cultural nationalism in the Diaspora, too. Kevin M. Doak, "What Is a Nation and Who Belongs? National Narratives and the Ethnic Imagination in Twentieth-Century Japan," The American Historical Review 103:2 (April, 1997): 283-309.
- <sup>24</sup> This form of nationalism, however, was demanded of all people by the Chinese Communist government. Chinese Protestant leaders, for the most part, successfully negotiated these demands. Philip L. Wickeri, Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China's United Front (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).
- <sup>25</sup> Sucheng Chan, ed., Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991)..
- <sup>26</sup> Charles J. McClain, In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California, 1994).
- <sup>27</sup> L Eve Armentrout Ma, Revolutionaries, Monarchists, and Chinatowns: Chinese Politics in the Americas and the 1911 Revolution (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), who gives more detailed coverage of Chinese Protestant involvement via the Chung Sai Yat Po. Him Mark Lai, "The Kuomintang in Chinese American Communities before World War II," in Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, Sucheng Chan, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 174.
- <sup>28</sup> Lee McIsaac. "'Righteous Fraternities' and Honorable Men" Sworn Brotherhoods in Wartime Chongqing," American Historical Review 105:5 (December, 2000): 1653.
- <sup>29</sup> Lee McIsaac. "'Righteous Fraternities' and Honorable Men" Sworn Brotherhoods in Wartime Chongqing," American Historical Review 105:5 (December, 2000): 1654. David Ownby, Sworn Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China: The Formation of a Tradition (Stanford, Ca.: University of Stanford Press, 1996).
- <sup>30</sup> Similar dynamics in study of Chinese Handlaundry association. Renqui Yu, To Save China, to Save Ourselves ()
- <sup>31</sup> Note Charles Shepherd's two works, The Ways of Ah Sin and Yim Yuk Loy as illustrations of this.
- <sup>32</sup> Henry Yu, Thinking Orientals.
- <sup>33</sup> Judy Yung, Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Peggy Pascoe, Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

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- <sup>34</sup> Paul Louie, "Chinese Christian Youth Conferences in America, with a Focus on the East Coast," History and Perspectives 2001: Chinese America (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 2001), 47-58.
- <sup>35</sup> Jonah Chang, "Movement of Self-Empowerment: History of the National Federation of Asian American United Methodists," in Churches Aflame: Asian Americans and United Methodism edited by Artemio R. Guillermo (Nashville: Abingdon, 199), 136.
- <sup>36</sup> Jonah Chang, "Movement of Self-Empowerment," 136-137.
- <sup>37</sup> Philip L. Wickeri, Seeking the Common Ground, Op. Cit. gives a fairly balanced account of Chinese Communist attitudes towards Chinese Christianity.
- <sup>38</sup> Henry Yu, Thinking Orientals
- <sup>39</sup> Horace R. Cayton and Anne O. Lively, The Chinese in the United States and the Chinese Christian Churches: A Statement Condensed for the National Conference on the Chinese Christian Churches (National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1955), pp. 69-73.
- <sup>40</sup> This conference for Christian workers among the Chinese population in North America was organized by a core of San Francisco-based Chinese clergy. Chinese clergy in San Francisco have worked collaboratively since 1916. Chinese Christian Union of San Francisco, U.S.A.: 80th Anniversary Souvenir Book (Chinese Christian Union of San Francisco, 1996).
- <sup>41</sup> Wilbur W. Y. Choy, "Survey Needs of Christian Chinese," Christian Century, 72 (June 15, 1955); 14.
- <sup>42</sup> Wilbur W. Y. Choy, "Survey Needs of Christian Chinese"
- <sup>43</sup> Wilbur W. Y. Choy, "Survey Needs of Christian Chinese"
- <sup>44</sup> Edwar Lee, "The Future of the Exclusively Chinese Churches in America" Chinese America: History and Perspectives, 2001 (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 2001): 59-62.
- <sup>45</sup> Interview with Edwar Lee in Oakland, California (July 5, 1996). Moonbeam Tong Lee, Growing Up in Chinatown: The Life and Work of Edwar Lee (Fong Brothers Printing, Inc., 1987).
- <sup>46</sup> Interview with James Chuck, Berkeley, CA (Oct. 5, 1998); David Ng, People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture, and Community (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1996). R. Stephen Warner's New Wine in Old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a Small-Town Church (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) gives some account of Ng's ministry at the Caucasian congregation.
- <sup>47</sup> William Wei, The Asian American Movement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).
- <sup>48</sup> Jonah Chang, "Movement of Self-Empowerment: History of the National Federation of Asian American United Methodists," in Churches Aflame: Asian Americans and United Methodism edited by Artemio R. Guillermo (Nashville: Abingdon, 199), 135-154.
- <sup>49</sup> Daniel Bays is one of the leading authorities in Chinese Evangelicalism See "The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900-1937," Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present, edited by Daniel Bays. (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 307-316; "Christian Revival in China, 1900-1937," Modern Christian Revivals, edited by Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer (Urbana, IL.: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 161-179; and "Chinese Popular Religion and Christianity Before and After the 1949 Revolution: A Retrospective View," Fides et Historia: Journal of the Conference on Faith and History XXIII:1 (Winter/Spring, 1991), 69-77.
- <sup>50</sup> Many Chinese Christian leaders studied at New York's Union Theological Seminary in the 1920s-1940s. For a discussion of Chinese students in North America, see Timothy Tseng, "Religious Liberalism, International Politics, and Diasporic Realities: The Chinese Students Christian Association of North America, 1909-1951," Journal of American-East Asian Relations 5:3-4 (Fall-Winter, 1996): 305-330.
- <sup>51</sup> Lynn Pan, ed. The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 58.
- <sup>52</sup> Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid. Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997; Wang Ling-chi and Wang Gungwu, eds. The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays, vol. 1. Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998; Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee-Beng, eds. The Chinese in Malaysia. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- <sup>53</sup> Daniel H. Bays, "Christian Revival in China, 1900-1937" op. Cit., 172.
- <sup>54</sup> Lily Lee, The Life and Times of Reverend Philip Yung Lee. (Nanjing: Nanjing Amity Printing Co., Ltd., n.d. 1994?).
- <sup>55</sup> Orr was also the chronicler of Billy Graham's Los Angeles crusades. Joel A. Carpenter, Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 211-231.
- <sup>56</sup> Paul Szeto, ed., Higher Ground: ECF 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Jubilee Celebration. Monterey Park, CA.: Evangelize China Fellowship, Inc., 1997.



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- <sup>57</sup> Moses C. Chow (with Leona Choy), Let My People Go! Autobiography (Paradise, PA: Ambassadors for Christ, Inc., 1995). See also Ted Choy (with Leona Choy), My Dreams and Visions: An Autobiography (Winchester, Va.: Golden Morning Publishing, 1997). Fenggang Yang studies the Chinese Christian Church of Greater Washington, D.C. in his Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).
- <sup>58</sup> Challenger (May 20, 1964).
- <sup>59</sup> Gleaned from 1964-1966 issues of Challenger.
- <sup>60</sup> Challenger (Mar/Apr 1967).
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup> Evelyn Shih, Love is Forever or Torrey Shih: God's Servant – need to get citation; Leland Chinn, "Abounding in the Work of the Lord for Seventy-five Years," Diamond Anniversary Commemorative Issue of the Chinese Christian Union Church of Chicago: 1915 to 1990 (Chicago: Chinese Christian Union Church, 1990); Interview with Bernardine Wong (July 1, 1996).
- <sup>63</sup> 1994-1995 Directory: Chinese Churches, Bible Study Groups, Organizations in North America (Ambassadors for Christ, Inc., 1995).
- <sup>64</sup> James Chuck, "Growth of Chinese Protestant Congregations from 1950 to Mid-1996 in Five Bay Area Counties," History and Perspectives 2001 (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 2001), 63-73.
- <sup>65</sup> Though its organizers conceived of the idea of NACOCE at the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship sponsored missions conference in Urbana 1969, evangelicals had been involved with "conciliar" type efforts since the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin (1966) and the U.S. Congress on Evangelism (1969). These efforts culminated in the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism (1974) and have continued since.
- <sup>66</sup> NACOCE Update, vol. 3 (Jan. 1980).
- <sup>67</sup> Fenggang Yang documents some of this tension in his study of a Chinese congregation near Washington, D.C. Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).
- <sup>68</sup> The formation of the Fellowship of American Chinese Evangelicals (FACE) in 1979 was a direct result of efforts to give English-speaking Chinese evangelicals greater voice. Dialogue and debate was carried by Chinese Christian Mission's Challenger Magazine and FACE's About Face. Some of the articles were compiled in A Winning Combination: Understanding the Cultural Tensions in Chinese Churches (Chinese Christian Missions, 1986).
- <sup>69</sup> James Chuck, "Where are the Chinese Churches Heading in the 1970's?" Private paper presented before the Chinese Christian Union of S.F., Feb. 28, 1980.
- <sup>70</sup> Peter Chow, "Good News to the Poor: A Perspective on Church Growth, Social Ethics, and Christian Education" Chinese in North America (Jan.-Feb., 1989), 3-10.
- <sup>71</sup> For example, see the Social Concern issue of the Bulletin: First Evangelical Church Association (April 1999); Dr. Paul Sui, "The Social Responsibility of the Church," in the newsletter of the Chinese Bi-cultural and Pastoral Ministries Program of the Alliance Theological Seminary (Spring, 2000); Cecilia Yau, Dora Wang, Lily Lee, A Passion for Fullness: Examining the Woman's Identity and Roles from Biblical, Historical, and Sociological Perspectives [in Chinese]; Grace Ying May & Hyunhye Pokrifka Joe, "Setting the Record Straight: A Response to J. I. Packer's Position on Women's Ordination," Priscilla Papers, Volume 11, Number 1, Winter 97.
- <sup>72</sup> Janet Furness and Timothy Tseng, "The Reawakening of Evangelical Social Consciousness" in The Social Gospel Today, edited by Christopher Evans (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2001): 114-125.
- <sup>73</sup> Wing Ning Pang, "The Chinese American Ministry," in Chinese in North America (Jan. Feb., 1989): 11-17; Rudolf Mak, "The North American Chinese Church and Missions: Lessons from a Historical Analysis," Chinese Around the World (May, 2001): 4-13; See also Samuel D. Ling, "The Other May Fourth Movement: The Chinese 'Christian Renaissance,' 1919-1937" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation: Temple University, 1981) and Wing-Hung Lam, Chinese Theology in Construction (Pasadena, Ca.: William Carey Library, 1983).
- <sup>74</sup> The ambiguity that surrounds American-born or raised Chinese can be seen in Clarence Cheuk, "Our Enigmatic Generation: A Second Generation ABCX Perspective," The "Chinese" Way of Doing Things by Samuel Ling (San Gabriel, CA.: China Horizon, 1999), 3-14.