

**Co-optation and its Discontents:
The Seventh-day Adventism in Maoist China**

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Introduction

Many studies of Christianity in Maoist China have focused on the politicization of religious practices, explaining how the Christian faith provided people with strengths and resources to cope with confusions and uncertainties in an authoritarian society. These studies define Christianity against the state's visions of revolutionary socialism and secular modernity.¹ But in practice both the Maoist state and Christians invoked ideas about transcendent power and moral purpose, blurring the boundary between secularity and religiosity. The state-sanctioned religious doctrines and practices greatly impacted the political and religious orientations of Chinese Christians and the church-state relations in the People's Republic.

This paper explores the complicated relations between the Communist state and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the post-1949 era. It highlights the longstanding impacts of the Three-Self Reform Movement (renamed as the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in 1954) upon the religious practices of the Chinese Adventists. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement was a state-controlled mass organization designed to sever the churches' ties with the Western missionary enterprises and to co-opt native church leaders into the socialist order during the early 1950s. Through this mechanism of co-optation, the Maoist state proclaimed to establish a self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-administrating church

on Chinese soil, even though the real purpose was to bring all the highly diffused Protestant denominations under the state's control. In addition, the state launched countless political campaigns to demonize foreign missionaries and persecute Christians whose views of church-state relations differed from the government.² In this hostile environment, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was the first Protestant denomination to be denounced by the state in 1951. When the state intervened into the Adventists' church affairs, some pro-government Adventist leaders played a dual role in the church-state interactions. They implemented the state's Three-Self policies, partly out of self-protection and partly in the hope that they could meliorate the harshness of the anti-religious policies and work towards the establishment of a truly Chinese-run Adventist Church. But most of the Adventists resisted the state and organized themselves into a diffused network of religious groups for mutual support throughout the Maoist era.

Thematically, the significance of the state-led co-opting process can be assessed at two levels. First is the mode of coalition politics, which was to align with some Adventists sharing similar interests with the state and to incorporate them into the socialist order. This was typical of grassroots mobilization as Odoric Y. K. Wou argues that the Communists often formed temporary alliances with various interested groups to gain power and influence in the revolutionary struggle.³ Second is the mode of performative politics, which was to politicize rituals, ceremonies and mass campaigns in order to consolidate the regime. This is best illustrated in Julia C. Strauss' study of the Maoist denunciation movement throughout the 1950s.⁴ These different modes of mobilization overlapped in the Three-Self Reform Movement and impacted the state's intervention into the religious sphere. This paper draws on these conceptual insights to explore the various power-building tactics that the state employed to infiltrate the Seventh-day Adventist institutions, and the accusation meetings that the government staged to denounce Chinese Adventist leaders and propagate socialist ideology among ordinary church

members. As the Communists succeeded in incorporating the Adventists into the Three-Self, a symbiotic relationship developed between the state and the Christian population.

With respect to the Communist policy toward the Adventists, this paper relies on the unpublished archival materials compiled by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Religious Affairs during the 1950s and the testimonies of several Adventist leaders. The Chinese official records are problematic because the archival system was an instrument of control used by the Maoist state against dissenters in all political purges. The official reports concerning the Adventists are no exception: they were compiled to provide Communist officials with information to control the church. They consist of controversial evidence about the “political crimes” of foreign missionaries and native church leaders. The political nature of the reports presents two methodological problems for historians.

The first problem concerns the controversial nature of the materials. All the materials were written in the orthodox Maoist discourse and intended for Communist officials in charge of religious affairs. They characterize the church leaders as “counterrevolutionaries” and “reactionaries.” and “class enemies.” These labels are not hollow slogans. They accuse the church leaders of acting like “class enemies,” those who had been socially and politically dominant under the former Nationalist regime and were unwilling to surrender their privileges to the People’s Government after 1949. Such accusations justify persecution by all available means, including state violence, against them.

Another problem concerns factual discrepancies in the reports. From the 1950s onwards, the Communist Party had implemented a bottom-up strategy of coalition-building by recruiting some church members as informants and collaborators. Most accusations concern individual church leaders’ connections with Nationalist government officials before and after the Communist Revolution. However, in the 1950s, China was in perpetual flux, and the views of Adventist church leaders toward the Communist Party changed from time to time. Their views about the one-party state recorded in the

official reports—what was said in public—might differ considerably from opinions expressed in private. Instead of making generalizations about the subject, it is important to highlight the complexities of Communist religious policy and the diverse responses of the Adventists.

Nevertheless, these problems are not sufficient reasons for rejecting the Chinese official records completely. For one thing, the Communist state has not completely released all archival materials about the Three-Self Reform Movement and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These reports give us valuable information about the Adventist expansion into different parts of China before and after 1949, its organizational structure, geographical mobility, and nationwide networks, as well as its responses to the Three-Self. All these details are unavailable in any other sources, and these very features had aroused the state's suspicion towards this tiny fraction of the Christian population.

Beginning with a brief account of the Seventh-day Adventist missionary expansion into China, this paper examines the fluid and complex political environment that the Adventists experienced and the ways they interacted with the Maoist state. A critique of the state persecution of Chinese Adventists under the cover of the Three-Self Reform Movement follows. Then, this study discusses several survival strategies that the Adventists employed to empower themselves and rebuild their churches.

The Seventh-Day Adventist missionary expansion into China

Seventh-day Adventism began as a religious revival in mid-nineteenth-century United States. It held the spiritual writings its prophetess, Ellen G. White as the doctrinal authority. Reverencing the seventh-day Sabbath, known as the biblical Sabbath (i.e., the original seventh day in the Judeo-Christian calendar), was an important marker of Adventism. With the improvement in printing technology and postal services, the Adventist movement was built on the flow of written communications. Adventist editors published the church papers and pamphlets to spread the doctrines. Itinerant preachers baptized

new converts by immersion and instructed them to preach Sabbath-keeping, the second coming of Jesus Christ, and biblical prophecies. The educational level, religious commitment, and organizational ability of early Adventists were essential for the growth of the movement. Otherwise, not everyone could remain in such a loosely organized group. The spread of Adventism attracted many Scandinavian and German migrants in the Midwest and on the West coast, who used family ties and business networks to spread the faith to Europe, Middle East and China.⁵

As a latecomer to the China mission field, the Adventists reaped the fruits of other Protestant missions. They converted “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” who kept the Christian Sabbath instead of the Jewish one. Many missionaries criticized the Adventists sheep-stealers. But the Chinese joined the Adventists for very complex reasons. In 1914, American Baptist missionary Ellison Hildreth reported that the Adventists had “succeeded in unsettling a good many of Baptists” in Dengtang market (登塘) outside Chaozhou city (潮州市) in South China. As one Baptist woman explained, “I am a member of this [Baptist] church and I am faithful to it; but if it is necessary to keep the sixth day to be saved, I am willing to keep that as well as the worship day; is there any objection to doing that?”⁶ Reverencing the seventh-day Sabbath gave this woman an assurance of salvation that she lacked. The Adventists also recruited Hong Zijie (洪子杰), a former Baptist preacher in Shantou. Hong had good biblical and doctrinal knowledge and excellent organizational ability. Although he was “deficient in some of his morals” and left the ministry, he maintained good contacts with the Baptists. At the turn of the twentieth century, Hong met Timothy Zheng (or Timothy Tay), a young Singaporean Adventist. They debated the doctrines and Zheng converted Hong.⁷ Hong then became an Adventist evangelist and worked “to win away Baptists and Presbyterians from their allegiance.”⁸ Evidently, desire for salvation assurance and discontent with outdated dogmas were the reasons for the Chinese conversion to Adventism (Figure 1).



Figure 1: An Adventist's meeting flyer, Beijing, 1910s

In structure, the Adventist missionary movement in China was highly centralized and hierarchical. By the mid-twentieth century, all the congregations, schools and institutions were divided into seven regional unions under the China Division, the Adventist mission headquarters in Shanghai. Funded by the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists in the United States, the China Division and most regional unions were chaired by the missionaries. This administrative hierarchy created a subordinate relationship between the missionaries and Chinese staff when most of the missionary enterprises indigenized their leadership and became more self-supporting. A major strength of this centralized model was that Chinese Adventists could easily access American missionary

resources and seldom needed to cooperate with other denominations. The drawback was that the Adventists became isolated in the Protestant circle. Nevertheless, the strong American ties shielded them from the Nationalist government's interference before 1949. With respect to its membership, the Adventist movement attracted people from widely diverse backgrounds. In 1945, the 261 Adventist churches had a total membership of 22,940.⁹ In 1951, the 270 Adventist churches had a membership of 21,168. In 1950, the Adventists run 112 elementary schools, 14 middle schools, 1 junior college, and 15 hospitals and sanatoriums, and employed 134 ordained ministers, 213 preachers, and 156 school teachers.¹⁰ In half a century, the Adventists established a visible presence in China.

An important part of the Adventist strategy was to make their publications easily accessible. The Signs of the Times Press (時兆報館), a national Adventist publisher in Shanghai, was remarkable (Figure 2). Besides publishing religious and health care literature, its monthly periodical, *Shizhao yuebao* 《時兆月報》 [The Signs of the Times], was the most widely circulated Chinese Christian publication in the mid-twentieth century.¹¹ In 1937, over 70,000 copies of each monthly issue were sold.¹² This success was owed to the effective use of postal network to reach areas not yet visited by the missionaries and to the dedication of the colporteurs who promoted subscriptions among other denominational churches.¹³ The Adventist emphasis on Sabbath observance and spiritual discipline, and their belief in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ spoke to the sense of fear and insecurity pervasive in Chinese society during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-45) and the Civil War (1946-49). But these features aroused the suspicion of the Maoist state.

Figure 2: A Chinese Adventist Publisher, 1900s



The Communist Infiltration of the Adventist Church

After the Communists seized power in 1949, they launched the Three-Self Patriotic Movement to integrate the diverse Protestant denominations into the socialist order. The term “Three-Self” was coined by Rufus Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission and Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society in the nineteenth century to describe a mission policy that made Christians in Africa and Asia self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. The Chinese government replaced the “Three-Self” slogan with “Three-Self Patriotic Movement” in order to sever the churches’ ties with foreign missionary enterprises and co-opt native church leaders. The state also

launched countless campaigns to persecute Christians whose views of church-state relations differed from those of the government.

Change in global politics badly affected Chinese Christians. The Korean War led to the state's expulsion of foreign missionaries from China, which ended the missionary era. But favorable political conditions did not guarantee the smooth implementation of the Three-Self policies. The Communists needed to control the churches from within by recruiting supporters and neutralizing any Three-Self opponents. The official infiltration into the Adventist institutions began at the China Training Institute and the Signs of the Times Press, where students and printing workers were more receptive to communism than church leaders. The students and workers' involvement was essential for building an incipient party structure within the Adventist circle.

The China Training Institute was a junior college founded by Denton E. Rebok (李博) in 1925. Located at Qiaotou town (橋頭) in northern Jiangsu province, about 160 miles from Shanghai and 30 miles from Nanjing, this college trained many preachers, school teachers, and medical and nursing staff.¹⁴ The Communists planted underground party members among the teaching staff during the Civil War. In early 1950, the local authorities destabilized the China Training Institute from within by forming pro-government worker unions. The labor union was composed of construction workers from Subei. These workers demanded salary raises and threatened to attack the administrators. In 1951, the government stepped in and sent a working team to restructure the China Training Institute. The leaders of the working team were Yan Kequn (嚴克群), a former underground party member in Nanjing, and Ren Wantao (任萬濤) of the New Youth Army, both natives of Jiangsu province.¹⁵ They used personal and territorial ties to build alliances among the Subei workers and students. Their first task was to politicize the students by mobilizing them to support the Korean War and the land reform. The political rhetoric deeply moved the students. Another task was to control the student union by replacing those

Cantonese college seniors, who intended to be church workers, with the communist-influenced Subei students.¹⁶

The Communists employed the same divisive tactic to infiltrate the Signs of the Times Press in Shanghai. Most of the printing workers were from Anhui province whereas the managers and senior editors were Cantonese and Shanghaiese. In 1950, the Shanghai municipal government urged the Adventist printing workers to unionize themselves but none of the editorial staff supported unionization. The union organizers recruited Gu Changsheng, a native of Subei and a junior editorial staff in his early thirties. Gu came from a humble Adventist family and received help from the missionaries to attend the China Training Institute. He interpreted for the American soldiers in wartime Chongqing. After the Second World War, he joined the Signs of the Times Press in Shanghai. When the tide turned against the missionaries, Gu switched to the anti-Christian camp.¹⁷

Once the Communists infiltrated the Adventist institutions, they forged alliances and channeled preexisting grievances into anti-imperialist sentiments. It was an irresistible attraction for college students, printing workers and junior church staff to align with the state. As they were motivated by the war psychology to display their loyalty to the new regime, they became radicalized and learned new political vocabularies to express their grievances against the missionaries. Another important Communist power-building tactic was to organize the frustrated church workers to form a new leadership. In July 1951, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement sent a working team led by Liu Liangmo, to the Adventist headquarters in Shanghai.¹⁸ The team created a new organization, the Chinese Seventh-day Adventist Three-Self Reform and Accusation Committee, and assigned Nan Xiangqian (南祥謙), a typesetter in the Signs of the Time Press and a union organizer, to be the chair, and Gu Changsheng, the secretary. Other committee members included Cheng Buyun (程步雲), a clerk of the China Division, Jiang Chongguang (姜重光), an ordained Adventist minister, and Peng Xiangsheng (彭湘生), president

of the China Training Institute's student union.¹⁹ The Communists employed a strategy of attacking and co-opting simultaneously (*youda youla* 又打又拉). During the committee meeting, Liu Liangmo criticized Gu Changsheng as being too pro-American because of his previous interpretation work in Chongqing. Afterwards, Yao Piaoting taught Gu Changsheng to display his class consciousness and anti-imperialist sentiment by publicly denouncing the Adventist movement. The working team identified Gu as an important collaborator and participant in the accusation campaign.

The Accusation Meetings against the Adventists

On May 15, 1951, Liu Liangmo published an article titled “How to hold a successful accusation meeting?” in the Three-Self periodical, *Tianfeng*. Liu clearly explained the reason for holding an accusation meeting within the church, “Big accusation meetings constitute a most effective means of helping the masses of believers to comprehend the evils wrought in China by imperialism, to recognize the fact that imperialism has utilized Christianity to attack China, and to wipe out imperialist influences within the churches.”²⁰ Liu politicized the role of the churches in Maoist China. He urged Christians to accuse “imperialist elements and their helpers as well as other bad elements hidden in the churches,” to expose the imperialists’ sin of utilizing the churches to attack Chinese and deceive believers, and to identify those church leaders working as the “special agents of America and Chiang Kai-Shek.” But in the initial phase of the accusation campaign, many church leaders refused to participate partly because they were skeptical about the state’s politicization of the church and partly because accusing fellow Christians contradicted their faith.

In order to mobilize the Christians, Liu pointed out several conditions of conducting a successful accusation meeting. The first step was to remove the thought barriers of many Christians because they had been taught not to accuse other people. But once that moral barrier was removed, Liu stated, “The

anger and charges of the masses of the people towards imperialism, bandits, and wicked tyrants will arouse the righteous indignation and accusations of Christians towards imperialism and bad elements in the churches.”²¹ The second step was to do preparatory work among the congregants. “Every church and the city-wide church federation ought to first organize an accusation committee. They should first study whom they want to accuse, and whom to invite to do the accusing.” After this, they should invite the participants to study the reasons, methods, and procedures of accusation meeting. The third step was to hold a rehearsal so that church members learned to express their opinions against the missionaries. In this way, the accusation committee members could identify people “who accused with the greatest power,” and invite them to come to the large accusation meeting; they could also revise and sharpen the accusation speeches.²²

The next step was to control and manipulate the atmosphere of the accusation meeting. According to Liu, the order of the accusation should be arranged as follows: “first high tension, then moderate, then another of high tension, etc.; only so can the accusation meeting be a success.” When the accusations succeeded in stirring people, clapping and applause should be used as a form of expression.²³ According to Julia C. Strauss, this political tactic was designed to accomplish three different goals at once: “crushing individuals, striking fear into the hearts of their sympathizers, and soliciting the chorus like participation of the masses.” Through the interactive, participatory spectacle of the accusation meeting, the church was forced “to vicariously participate in the state’s imposed terror and collectively reaffirm its popular legitimacy.”²⁴ In the summer of 1951, Liu Liangmo put his ideas into practice by staging three accusation meetings among the Seventh-day Adventists in Shanghai.

On June 10, 1951, the working team organized a public accusation meeting against American imperialism in Shanghai. On the morning of June 9, Xu Hua, president of the China Division, was told to go to the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Religious Affairs. Upon arrival, Xu saw many mainstream

church leaders. The officials kept these church leaders at the Bureau on June 9 and ordered them to prepare their accusation speeches for the following day. Xu Hua was instructed to draft an accusation speech against William Henry Branson, former director of the China Division and current president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Li Shoubao (李壽葆) of the YMCA revised Xu Hua's speech by accusing William Henry Branson as an imperialist and all Chinese Adventist colporteurs as American intelligence agents.²⁵ Under tremendous political pressure, Xu Hua had to read that speech publicly.

Throughout the summer of 1951, Liu Liangmo orchestrated three public accusation meetings among the Adventists. Instead of attacking the missionaries, the Chinese Adventist leaders were to be accused.²⁶ The first accusation meeting was held at the Adventist Church in downtown Shanghai on August 26. The accusation committee members took turn to denounce the prominent Adventist leaders. Peng Xiangsheng (彭湘生) and Wu Fangcheng (吳方誠) of the China Training Institute's student union accused He Bingduan, director of the Adventist education department, as anticommunist. They criticized He Bingduan for stopping students to post "Oppose America, Aid Korea" banners on campus and opposing the government's policy of religious property registration. Other students accused Shen Xucheng (沈緒成), former president of the China Training Institute and treasurer of the China Division, for opposing the land reform in Qiaotong. Another student condemned David Lin for his criticisms of evolutionism, communism, and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. At the end of the accusation, the participants shouted slogans, "He Bingduan, Shen Xucheng, and David Lin do not deserve to be Christians and church ministers," "Chase them out of the Church," "Completely purge the church of any imperialist influences," "Expose the bad elements inside the church." Despite the hostile atmosphere, the first meeting failed to generate a strong and positive response from ordinary church members. It was partly because of sympathy that many church members had for their leaders, and partly because of fear

that they decided to remain passive. At the end, Chen Jianzhen (陳見真), an Episcopalian bishop and president of the Accusation Committee of the Shanghai Municipal Christian Churches and Organizations, and Shen Derong (沈德溶) of the YWCA concluded the first meeting by singing revolutionary songs and shouting political slogans.

The second accusation meeting was held at another church in Shanghai on September 3, 1951, and the Signs of the Times Press became the target of criticism. Xu Hua, president of the China Division, and Li Suliang (李素良), manager of the Press, were publicly humiliated. Gu Changsheng condemned Xu Hua as a divisive leader. Gu recalled that when the printing workers attempted at unionizing themselves, Xu Hua founded the Association of Improving Workers' Livelihoods to counter the labor union. Several female and elderly printing workers complained about low wages, poor benefits and bad treatment by the managers and editors. Two workers criticized Li Suliang for opposing China's intervention into the Korean War. But political issues like the Korean War, patriotism and anti-imperialism were too vague and had little appeal to ordinary church members. The accusers were instructed to talk about their own hardships in order to gain public sympathy. They emphasized the unfair treatment under the American missionaries and Chinese church leaders. The Communists were eager to politicize the frustrated masses and to unleash anger and anguish among the church members. Wu Yaozong, the national Three-Self leader, chaired this meeting and praised the Adventist Church as a model for other Christians to follow in the accusation movement.

The third accusation meeting was held at Watchman Nee's Local Assembly in Shanghai on October 14, 1951 and opened to all Christians. Two thousand people attended the meeting. The students of the China Training Institute publicly accused Shen Xucheng. The accusation committee employed the tactic of divide and rule. They first allowed Wang Xiantong (汪先桐) and Li Jiaoan (李覺安), both junior church staff, to make self-criticisms and admit their mistake of working for the Americans. Then

they permitted He Bingduan and Gu Shouzhi, who had been accused in the first meeting, to confess and ask for lenient treatment. Other church leaders like Xu Hua, David Lin, and Shen Xucheng did not yield to the pressures even though the accusation committee terrified them by verbal and physical threats. Some Three-Self leaders even advised Xu Hua to counter Gu Changsheng's accusations by denouncing Gu a former Nationalist agent, but Xu Hua refused to do so. Then they criticized Xu Hua for misappropriating the church funds. They arranged Shen Binzhong (沈斌忠) and Hong Shenghuang (洪聲璜), the eldest son and daughter-in-law of Shen Xucheng, to bring charges against Shen. When they turned to David Lin, they instructed Peng Xiangsheng to criticize Lin for propagating the Adventist millenarianism. At the end, Liu Liangmo concluded the session by calling on other Protestants to organize their own accusation meetings.

According to Frederick W. Mote, the typical tactic in these meetings was to charge prominent church leaders with fabricated crimes and to mobilize their relatives against them. It was rather easy to accuse because no proof was required and defense was prohibited. By publicly humiliating the church leaders, the government could isolate them from their families and fellow Christians, diminish their prestige and authority, and intimidate the church members.²⁷ The officials' desire for bureaucratic control and popular participation dictated the accusation process. Before each meeting, Liu Liangmo arranged a rehearsal among the Adventists. He carefully reviewed the accusation speeches (*kongsu gao* 控訴稿) and ordered the accusers to memorize the contents and to shed tears when talking about their sufferings. He constantly reminded the participants to shout anti-imperialist slogans and sing revolutionary songs. The purpose of rehearsals was to ensure that the persecutors and denounciators fully mastered their performative roles in the meetings. It was remarkable how readily some Adventists gave up their religious identities and wholeheartedly accepted the subservient roles assigned by the state.

The Survival Strategies of the Adventists

After the accusation meetings, the state formed the Seventh Day Adventist Preparatory Committee of the Three-Self Reform Movement to take over all the Adventist institutions. Nan Xiangqian chaired the preparatory committee; Jiang Chongguang became the associate chair, and Gu Changsheng, the secretary. The pro-government Adventists implemented the Three-Self policies, partly out of self-interest and partly in the hope that they could meliorate the hostile anti-religious measures and establish a truly indigenous Adventist Church. Skeptical of the Three-Self agendas, the ordinary church members learned to live a contradictory life; there was the public need to support the state and the private life of carrying on religious activities at home. Most of the accused Adventist leaders upheld their faith and initiated new pastoral strategies to counter the Communist influence. For example, David Lin, an American-trained theologian, recognized the need to create a self-sustaining religious community. He translated most of the spiritual writings of Ellen G. White into Chinese, and the translated texts standardized the interpretations of Adventism and instilled a sense of spiritual autonomy among his followers.²⁸ The readers acquired an eschatological lens through which to interpret their experience in Maoist China under a tripartite framework: justification by confessing their faith, sanctification by enduring religious persecution in the present, and gaining the promise of salvation in the future.²⁹

One unintended consequence of the accusation campaign was the growth of activism among the Adventist youth in Shanghai. Jiao Hongzhi (焦洪志), son of a prominent Adventist minister, gave up his medical education to assist David Lin's translation project. He also took up pastoral duties, visiting fellow church members and conducting Bible studies in their homes. In 1958, he was arrested by the police with David Lin and both were imprisoned for decades.³⁰ Another youth leader was Robert Huang, who organized clandestine cell groups and revival meetings throughout the 1950s. He was imprisoned

with Jiao and Lin at the same time.³¹ His youngest brother, Norman Huang, was jailed for mocking Chairman Mao, Lin Biao, and Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution.³² It was indeed risky for these young Adventists to proselytize in metropolitan cities.

But in rural areas with relatively weak government control, many Adventists continued the evangelistic work after their ministers were imprisoned. Chen Youshi (陳友石) used to chair the Southern Zhejiang Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventists. In 1952, Chen retired and became an independent evangelist in his hometown, Pingyang district city in southern Zhejiang. In 1955, the Pingyang District Bureau of Religious Affairs ordered Chen to attend the political study sessions. Chen publicly defended his faith and criticized the local Three-Self leaders for corrupting the church.³³ In the old Wenzhou Mission in southern Zhejiang, many Adventist farmers were inspired by Chen's courage to become active evangelists. They founded forty new village congregations and expanded the church membership from 1,049 in 1949 to over 2,000 in 1956. According to David Lin, "In these brief years of progress, this mission has baptized hundreds of new converts, kept their meeting places in repair, acquired two new church-buildings, and are in the process of building another one this year [1956]. And this was all done in the tense atmosphere of land reform and rural organization."³⁴ On many occasions, local women led the congregations after the ministers were arrested.³⁵ In Xi'an, church elder Cui Jingwen (崔景文) not only helped those Christians in financial difficulty but also catered to their spiritual needs.³⁶ These lay leaders sustained the Adventist movement at the grassroots level. What motivated their evangelistic zeal was the belief in Almighty God to deliver them from evil, continuing the Christian tradition of resisting a hegemonic power in the most oppressive conditions. Even though the Communists were capable of infiltrating any Christian institution, they failed to penetrate into the highly diffused and decentralized Adventist church network.

Conclusion

Entering the twenty-first century, the Seventh-day Adventism has established a visible presence in China. The failure of the Maoist state to control the Adventists has given rise to a “Four-Self” Adventist church (i.e., self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating, and self-theologizing) on Chinese soil. This development prevented the Adventists from falling apart under the attack of the Maoist state. Politically, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and its accusation campaign of the 1950s reveal that the state-initiated co-opting process was characterized by a combination of top-down and bottom-up power-building tactics. The top-down tactics referred to the central government’s deliberate efforts to build alliances with and recruit pro-Communist church leaders for the Three-Self. When the Korean War broke out, the Communists intensified the anti-imperialist rhetoric and forced the churches to sever their ties with foreign missions. By undermining the economic basis of the churches, Beijing only had to deal with a native church more vulnerable to political pressures. The bottom-up tactics included infiltrating the Adventist institutions and radicalizing students, printing workers, and church staff members. Once the Communists established a foothold in the Adventist circle, they trained their supporters to form a new core leadership against the existing one. They launched a series of accusation meetings to dehumanize the Adventist leaders and to impose the revolutionary agendas on the church. These violent tactics were designed to politicize the religious sphere and justify the state’s intervention into the church affairs. Meanwhile, the imminent threats to China’s security in the Korean War, the gradual consolidation of the Maoist regime, and the politicization of Chinese society contributed to the state’s takeover of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In this hostile environment, the state utilized the threat of violence to subdue the Christian population. The socialist propaganda and the accusation campaign succeeded in remolding some Adventists into atheistic revolutionaries. The reasons for collaborating with the state had to do with the need to show loyalty to the new regime and the

opportunity to gain influence in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Once the collaborators' interests coincided with the state's revolutionary agenda, the Communists had no trouble controlling the churches and monopolizing the religious sphere.

Nevertheless, the re-emergence of the Adventist communities in the Reform era points to the utter failure of the state to exercise absolute control in the religious sphere. Many Adventists are reluctant to accept the subservient role that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement had assigned them. As with other Protestants, they liberated themselves from official religious institutions and established autonomous worshipping communities according to their needs, despite persistent interference and systematic control from the state. Their religious commitment, their active involvement in evangelization and church implantation, and their willingness to share with others the gospel message helped to spread Christianity into areas not formerly reached by foreign missionaries.³⁷

The Adventists' experience highlights the impact of history and memory on Chinese Christianity today. In an authoritarian society where the government equates religious identification with political and ideological loyalty, the act of conversion is a challenge against the state. The Communists have always been hostile towards any ideology and effective organization outside the control of the one-party state. Given the impetus to place religious communities under state control, tension and conflict always remains an integral part of church-state relations in China.



Figure 3: During the Reform era, most of the Adventists have organized their activities under the umbrella the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

Endnotes

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²² *Ibid.*, p.50.

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