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A Messianic Deliverance for Post-Dynastic China

The Launch of the True Jesus Church in the Early Twentieth Century

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This article explores the rise of the True Jesus Church (TJC) as part of an emerging indigenous Chinese Christianity. Begun in 1917 under the influence of American Pentecostalism, the TJC developed into a lively popular sect with more than a million members by the 1990s. The birth of this independent and often antiforeign group coincided with, and was aided by, the surge of patriotism in the early Republican period and arguably constituted a religious expression of Chinese nationalism. More importantly, the TJC—with its messianic proclamations and bold displays of Pentecostal power—helped shape a twentieth-century Protestant millenarian movement in China amidst political disintegration, foreign aggression, and widespread suffering. Its growth signaled an evolution of popular religion in which Christianity joined local beliefs in supplying the core ideology of sectarian movements.

Keywords: *True Jesus Church; Chinese Christianity; Pentecostalism in China; popular religion in modern China*

From its beginning in 1807 to the early years of the Republican period (1912–1949), the Protestant movement in China was manifestly a Western affair—one in which foreign missionaries, "backed by the power of European arms and trade," worked to transmit a religion distinctively Western (and primarily Anglo-American) in doctrines, practices, and institutions (Fairbank, 1985: 6; and Rawlinson, 1927: 168).[1] Although it was the

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missionary administrators themselves who first articulated the principles of "self-government, self-support and self-propagation" in the late nineteenth century (Wickeri, 1988: 37), realities in China led to a century of foreign dominance and sustenance of the nascent Protestant church. To pursue the goal of autonomy was to risk forfeiting protection offered through the post–Opium War unequal treaties concluded with the Western powers—and most often through the person of a resident foreign evangelist. The financial predicament of most congregations, whose members were typically drawn from the lower class, also made self-support a risky and generally unlikely quest. By and large, missionaries "remained the authoritative tutors in doctrine and they assumed most administrative responsibilities" (Lutz and Lutz, 1995: 214). Not surprisingly, Chinese churches that emerged in the late Qing dynasty were for the most part mere extensions of Western denominations and societies, of which there were about a hundred on the eve of the Revolution of 1911. These were typically foreign in name and organizational structure, and conventionally evangelical in theology. Together they represented a small body of baptized converts, totaling about 170,000 in a land of 450 million (CMYB, 1912: 369).[2]

In contrast, the Republican era saw both a vigorous growth of the Protestant body and the first significant development of indigenous churches free of foreign domination. By the end of this period, independent church groups boasted of some 200,000 followers in all, more than one-fifth of the Protestant community in China. As the largest and perhaps the best-organized indigenous church, the True Jesus Church (TJC) accounted for half of Chinese Christians outside the mission establishment by the late 1940s (see Bays, 1995: 125–26; Bays, 1996: 309–10; and Lian, 2004).[3] It also survived the harsh repressions of the state during the next three decades, resurfaced in the post-Mao era and, with a membership of over a million, continues to flourish today both as a state-sanctioned Protestant group and as a component of the spirited, if sometimes unruly, underground church.

The TJC emerged as an end-time sect that separated itself from the allegedly corrupt form of mainline Christianity represented by Western denominational missions. Under charismatic lay leadership and on the basis of direct revelations about the impending apocalypse, it claimed to restore Christianity to its primordial essence. As calamities and suffering intensified, signaling the approaching destruction of the world, the TJC, like the Taiping movement of the nineteenth century, promised exclusivist salvation to all who would repent of their sins and errors and join it in anticipation of the coming of the heavenly kingdom, albeit in a nonrevolutionary manner.

Meanwhile, for the sick, the poor, the displaced, the deaf, and those "possessed by demons" or afflicted with fear, despair, or opium addiction, the TJC offered mutual support (at times through communal life) as well as spiritual encouragement and the intimate experience of the divine. Through "tongues," visions, "raptures," prophecies, and miraculous healing—many of which recalled the practice of the Taiping Christians—the TJC found a way to open the floodgate of divine power, to channel its flow, to deluge the world and its evils, and to drench oneself in heavenly ecstasies as one awaited the return of the Savior.

As an autonomous, self-supporting church, the TJC sprang up at a time when Protestant missions in China came under increasing pressure to transfer ecclesiastical power to indigenous leaders and to the make the church more Chinese. In the wake of the Boxer Uprising of 1900, there had been several attempts within the Christian community to found independent churches and to sever the much-resented ties with foreign missions. The TJC turned out to be the most lasting of those early attempts.[4] Its birth and rapid growth (mostly at the expense of Western mission churches) largely coincided with—and was aided by—the rise of a nationalist tide symbolized by the May Fourth Movement, and arguably constituted a religious expression of Chinese nationalism in the early twentieth century. Like several other independent Protestant groups that appeared in the Republican period, the TJC drew considerable energy from the antiforeign sentiments that also helped fuel secular nationalism. In proclaiming a divine scheme of universal salvation that was unveiled in China, it also exhibited the assertiveness (and at times the ethnocentrism) found in the broader patriotic movement. As we shall see, decades before another Protestant sect in China adopted the name Dongfang shandian ("The Lightning out of the East," or "Eastern Lightning")—which reveals both apocalyptic gloom and nationalistic cheer—the TJC already appropriated that metaphor in reference to itself.[5]

On the other hand, the TJC remained a sect oriented toward religious pursuits and dismissive of worldly solutions to the political disintegration, foreign aggression, and social upheavals in China. While the nationalists sought to mobilize the people for collective survival as a state, the TJC foretold an impending catastrophic end to this world and promised messianic deliverance for its followers—beginning with the Chinese people and extending to the rest of humanity. Such beliefs were accompanied by an intensely emotional form of worship that was influenced by the modern Pentecostal movement started in America. Theologically, the teachings of

the TJC were centered on the Second Coming and descended from a long tradition of the pursuit of the millennium in Western Christianity. As Norman Cohn points out, messianic expectations among the Jews predated and precipitated the rise of Christianity and were reshaped—from the very beginning of the religion—by its followers into an anticipation of the imminent return of Christ and the establishment of a heavenly kingdom on earth. Closely associated with such eschatology was ecstatic religious experience as old as Christianity itself, of which Pentecostalism was but a modern incarnation (Cohn, [1957] 1961: 5–9; Cox, 1995: 90).[6]

Just as significant, the eschatology of the TJC was also Chinese in temperament and shared many features of traditional millenarian sects.[7] Though informed by a different theology, popular millennialism in Chinese history has also included anticipation of a period of great cataclysms followed by the coming of a perfect new world. Often distinguished by charismatic lay leadership, revealed scriptures, miraculous healing, and mass penance, sectarian messianic movements were centered on a divine deliverer— the indigenous Queen Mother of the West (Xi Wangmu) of the Han period, Maitreya (the Buddha of the future) from the Yuan dynasty on, and, after the sixteenth century, the Venerable Mother of No-Birth (Wusheng Laomu). According to the last of these traditions, as the end of time (kalpa) approached, with chaos and destruction about to break loose, the Mother of No-Birth would take pity on the tortured mortals who were mired in wickedness, send down the Maitreya Buddha, and provide a final chance for the faithful to be saved and to live a blissful life in a transformed world (Overmyer, 1999: 4; Naquin, 1976: 10).[8]

In his pioneering study of the TJC a decade ago, Daniel Bays underscored the "correspondence" between the Pentecostalism embraced by the group and the essentials of the "popular sectarian" religious tradition in China. Bays's profile of the TJC also highlighted the "missionary progenitors" of Chinese Pentecostalism and saw the latter as a "legitimate part of the twentieth-century Pentecostal/Charismatic movement" and a "transnational phenomenon" (Bays, 1995: 128, 137).[9] My own attempt here, besides reconstructing a broader history of the TJC beyond what Bays examined, is to delve further into the Chinese side of the story and to explore the process in which converts, caught in the political, social, national, and environmental crises of the early twentieth century—including warlordism, banditry, foreign aggression, and natural disasters—and often in the depths of personal distress, adapted an alien religion and fashioned it into a vibrant indigenous faith that could respond to the chaos and the sufferings of modern China.

The Rise of a Sectarian Leader

Like almost all the leaders of major indigenous Protestant groups in China, the founder of the TJS, Wei Enbo (1876?–1919), began his religious career at a foreign mission church (Wei, 1947: M2). In 1902 Wei, a poor farmer from the county of Rongcheng, some sixty miles south of Beijing, migrated to the capital and started a business dealing in silk and foreign merchandise. By his own accounts a "quarrelsome" man of "impetuous temperament," Wei got into a street fight one day during which he was helped by a member of the local London Missionary Society (LMS). Through the latter, Wei came to know and then to join the LMS church at Ciqikou. In line with a growing aspiration among Chinese Protestants in the aftermath of the Boxer Uprising to distance themselves from symbols of Western domination in China, that congregation was soon to mobilize its members toward self-support, and it appears that Wei played a significant role in its push for financial independence from the LMS in 1912: he donated some three thousand silver dollars (*da yang*), thereby becoming one of the founders of the subsequently independent church. Wei's career as a respectable church activist was disrupted, however, when he, in his own words, "broke the Seventh Commandment against adultery" and was expelled from the church (Wei, 1947: C3, M8–M9). His religious fervor was not dampened, and he would later help organize an evangelistic band that took him to the Temple of Heaven (opened to the citizens of the new republic after 1912), where local Protestant churches often joined forces to set up preaching booths and tents at the great annual temple fairs. Meanwhile, Wei continued at his silk business (Wei, 1947: M8; CMYB, 1917: 102).

In 1916, a personal crisis precipitated a new burst of religious energy in Wei and led eventually to the founding of the TJC. Early that year Wei became sick with tuberculosis (whose effective treatment was three decades away), which led him to an encounter in autumn with a person from a local Pentecostal mission. The latter laid hands on Wei and performed faith healing. Wei was initiated into Pentecostalism and received the gift of the Holy Spirit and "tongues" (Wei, 1947: B20, M6; Bays, 1995: 130–32; Chen, 1999: 3–5).[10] At the time, the transmission of that small Pentecostal flame could hardly have caught anyone's attention. The Pentecostal missions were themselves new and small in China. Made up of a handful of largely independent evangels from the United States, those missions were only found in less than half a dozen places in and around some of the treaty ports. Yet that small flame of "tongues" and divine healing, passed along by Wei, would soon meet dry timber in China.

The Coming of Pentecostalism to China

The Pentecostal movement emerged from the late nineteenth-century Holiness Revival in America, where radical evangelicals believed that as the Second Coming of Christ approached, the faithful were experiencing the "latter rain"—an outpouring of the power of the Holy Spirit prophesied by Joel (2:21–32) in the Old Testament—that corresponded to the "former rain," the signs and wonders described in Acts of the New Testament. Started in 1901 among students at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, Pentecostalism, which claimed the gifts of "tongues" and divine healing, came to the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles in 1906 and turned it into what Sydney E. Ahlstrom calls "the radiating center of Pentecostalism" (Ahlstrom, 1972: 819–21; Wacker, 2001: 3). By and large, Pentecostals combined a conservative stand on the inerrancy of the Bible and a Puritanical moral code with a theology of dispensational premillennialism, according to which Christ would return after the fearful Last Days to establish a thousand-year reign on earth. Philip Jenkins has pointed out that in its early days, "as a movement associated with the poor, rural dwellers, and racial minorities, Pentecostalism was beneath contempt and chiefly featured in the mainstream media as a source of humor or shock value" (Jenkins, 2000: 64–65). After 1906, however, the movement flourished across the United States and by the early 1910s had claimed between fifty thousand and one hundred thousand converts (Wacker, 2001: 6).

Meanwhile, the movement also quickly turned into an international phenomenon, when Pentecostal missionaries, armed sometimes with hardly anything more than the conviction of their baptism by the Holy Spirit and their millennial hopes, sailed overseas. Some were empowered in fact by a belief in "missionary tongues"—the ability to speak unstudied languages—out in the field. Sometime around the end of 1907 a Pentecostal named Sophie Hansen went to China as a missionary. On July 26, 1908, six months after arriving in Shanghai, she found herself suddenly able to preach a sermon in Chinese, and later claimed that the "Holy Spirit . . . speaks Chinese through me from heaven, without learning it" (Wacker, 2001: 45–47; Bays, 1995: 129).

By the end of the nineteenth century, China had surpassed India and the entire Near East as the most promising of America's mission fields (Field, 1974: 35). Therefore the choice of China for many Pentecostal missionaries was not unusual. In China, however, those missionaries, commonly referred to at the time as Apostolic Faith missionaries, were a novel phenomenon. By 1909, the Apostolic Faith Mission was already a recognized missionary group in China with a total force of twenty-six—even though it

appeared to be merely a loose association of mostly freelance missionaries (CMYB, 1910: "Statistics"; CMYB, 1911: "Statistics"). These were unusually energetic new members of what Kenneth Scott Latourette has characterized as a "usually picturesque, sometimes eccentric, and occasionally very able" group of independent foreign evangelists. "While some of them introduced a bizarre and often highly emotional type of Protestantism repulsive to the more intelligent and better educated Chinese," Latourette added, "many held their converts to exacting moral standards and emphasized an inward religious experience and a complete change of life" (Latourette, 1929: 601–2). As we shall see in the development of the TJC, it was those converts, not the foreign missionaries themselves, who turned Pentecostalism into a popular religious movement in twentieth-century China.

The Founding of the TJC

After the ailing Wei Enbo encountered Pentecostalism in Beijing, he went through only a brief period of tutelage under the Pentecostal mission before launching into an independent prophetic career of his own. In March 1917 Wei was "led by the Holy Spirit" to a river outside the city where a loud voice from Heaven commanded him to receive a "face-down" baptism by immersion. He promptly went down into the icy water unassisted by any clergy and, emerging from the river, declared both his body and spirit "cleansed." Thereafter, in a revelation that recalls the Heavenly Father's command given to Taiping founder Hong Xiuquan (in his state of delirium) to exterminate the Manchu demons, God announced that he would give Wei "a whole-body armor . . . and the sword of the Holy Spirit to kill the demons" (Wei, 1947: B18).[11]

In his vision, Wei was then given command of tens of thousands of heavenly soldiers, and he went on to fight with many "ferocious and . . . indescribably ugly demons," shouting and dancing and chasing them around "heroically." It was a busy warfare, for "all those walking on the streets of Beijing were demons." In the meantime, he went through a thirty-nine-day fast—discreetly one day shy of Jesus' record—at the end of which he had sightings of Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and the twelve disciples. Wei heard again the voice of the Lord, this time commanding him, in slightly ungrammatical Chinese, to "correct the [Christian] Church (*ni yao gengzheng jiao*)" (Wei, 1947: B18, M4). He also received his new name, Wei Baoluo (Paul Wei), the "end-time apostle." Soon he was bringing his prophecy about the imminent return of Christ ("between four and five years") to the mission

churches in and around Beijing, denouncing the corruptions of Western Christianity, and calling for repentance and separation from foreign missions.[12] He cited as evidence of the degeneration of Western Christianity the wealth of denominational churches supported by the rich and powerful, "the pampered wives" and "precious sons" of foreign Christians, the "silk and satin" that they wore, as well as their "extravagance and arrogance"—in contrast to the egalitarian communalism and simplicity of Jesus' followers at the time of the apostles. World War I, then raging in Europe among Christian nations, was further proof, he cried, that this corrupted, ungodly world was coming to an end (Wei, 1947: B19).

Closer to home, Wei found parallel signs of the impending apocalypse. The death of the strongman Yuan Shikai in 1916 (after a failed attempt at crowning himself emperor of China) had led to political chaos in the capital. The ensuing power struggle between the warlord prime minister Duan Qirui and the embattled president Li Yuanhong led in the summer of 1917 to the invasion of the "Queue Army" and the brief restoration of the deposed Qing emperor. As Beijing residents found themselves perilously caught in the political whirlwind, Wei and his handful of followers saw signs of the end time beyond the earthly turmoil around them and were busy proselytizing among local Protestants and printing thousands of copies of a leaflet about his revelation titled "Articles of the Correction [Church]," which were sent out to mission churches across the country.[13] Although he was treated by many as insane, and was twice jailed briefly on charges apparently brought by some irritated missionaries,[14] Wei soon attracted dozens of followers from defections from denominational churches in the Beijing-Tianjin area, many of whom were apparently drawn to the new teaching that promised "instant healing of any disease upon baptism."[15] In the winter of 1917 the group published its own "Hymns of the Holy Spirit" and raised a thirteen-foot-long banner bearing the characters "Zhen Yesu Jiaohui" (The True Jesus Church) (Wei, 1947: C3–C4, F12, D8).

In spreading the new teaching, Wei discovered that proselytizing among existing members of mission churches was far more effective than preaching to those outside the Protestant community. He also decided that mass mailing using the directory in the *Zhonghua Jidujiaohui nianjian* (China Church Year Book) was an efficient way to reach beyond the capital and build a following. In late 1918, Wei began working on the official publication of the TJC, which he called *Wanguo gengzhengjiao bao* (The Universal Correction Church Times). He lived to put together the first two issues of the paper, published in the spring and the summer of 1919, in which he outlined the teachings revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.[16] These included the

correct "face-down baptism," the baptism of the Holy Spirit (confirmed by the gift of "tongues"), the seventh-day (Saturday) observation of the Sabbath, the power of healing and exorcising demons, foot-washing among the members, and the offering of at least 10 percent of one's income. The last of these would promote the principle of "sharing [material possessions] among the haves and the have-nots" (*youwu xiangtong*) (Wei, 1947: F1–F2, F11; and Bays, 1995: 134–35).[17]

In addition, the Universal Correction Church (an alternate name for the TJC) was to institute both lay leadership and a degree of egalitarianism. "Let there be no autocratic domination of meetings and prayers by any man," the church rules read. "Let all take turns to preach; let all pray aloud in meetings" (Wei, 1947: F2). Having been "instructed by the Holy Spirit" to become "bishop" (*jiandu*) of the TJC, Wei decreed a church organization with bishops, elders, and deacons—but no salaried clergy (Wei, 1947: C4). The new sect preached an uncompromising exclusivism: only those who joined the TJC and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit could enter Heaven; all other churches on the face of the earth belonged to the Devil. Wei also called on the mission churches in China to drop their denominational titles, follow the teachings of the TJC and adopt its name, replace the clergy with lay leadership, reject the teaching of the Trinity (in a return to the original "true" Christian belief in an undivided God), share material possessions, and "not rely on the foreigners' money and power" (Wei, 1947: F2, B19; *Shengling bao*, Aug. 1926: 2–3).[18]

It is likely that Wei's unhappiness with foreign missionaries and the denominational churches they controlled had roots in personal grudges.[19] About one year after the founding of the TJC, Wei had broken with the Pentecostal mission, citing the arrogance of its members, who were probably increasingly annoyed by Wei's aggressive proselytizing, which came at the expense of the mission (Wei, 1947: B20, B4). At the same time, Wei's denunciation of missions probably reflected the sliding deference—and growing resentment—on the part of many converts toward Western missionaries and church leaders whose authority had rested in large measure on the popular belief in the superiority of Western civilization. As World War I dragged on, that belief was increasingly eroded, thereby preparing the ground for the swelling of anti-imperialist sentiments in the May Fourth era soon to dawn in China. In fact, Wei cited "this bloody war in Europe" that "has claimed tens of millions of lives" as "proof that [the missionaries] have got the [Christian] religion wrong," and he marveled that the Westerners were still "shameless enough to preach in China" (Wei, 1947: F2–F3). Meanwhile, the new church was able to fit both its own rise and the

perceived decline of Western churches into an eschatological scheme: the TJC proclaimed that just as "the Lord Jesus had said, 'the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west'" in the Last Days, he was "fulfilling his word" and was "revealing the truth about Jesus' salvation in the Republic of China in the East." He had also raised up an "unparalleled great man in the Chinese church. . . . The Lord Jesus has bestowed a sacred name on [Wei Enbo], saying, 'you are the second Paul'" (Wei, 1947: M7).

The first foothold that the TJC gained outside Zhili (renamed Hebei after 1928) was in Shandong province. While proselytizing in Tianjin in the fall of 1918, Wei met a Pentecostal of some years' standing from Weixian, Shandong, by the name of Zhang Lingsheng ("Zhang born of the Spirit") and won him over to the TJC. Soon Zhang was back in Weixian, where he recruited new members, including his relative Zhang Dianju (later renamed Zhang Banaba [Barnabas Zhang]), an antiques dealer, who exchanged face-down baptism with him. By spring 1919, Wei himself was in Weixian, where he engaged in his characteristically aggressive proselytism among members of the Presbyterian churches there and set up local branches of the TJC, naming Zhang Lingsheng as the TJC Bishop of Shandong and Zhang Dianju as an elder. The new church reported an outpouring of the Holy Spirit: in the midst of public confessions of unmentionable sins and of fasts that lasted for weeks came "tongues," "visions," "spiritual singing," and "spiritual dancing." Some were "caught up to the third heaven" where they remained for hours, visiting paradise and hearing voices telling them to "go down to spread the teaching" of the TJC.[20]

The growth of the sect was aided by the relentless energy of Wei and his followers. By the fall of 1919 it had reached beyond the provinces of Zhili and Shandong to Shanxi, Jiangsu, and parts of Manchuria and claimed more than a thousand followers, made up largely of former members of independent churches, Pentecostal missions, and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, as well as some mainline denominations. At about the same time, some sixty TJC member churches scattered throughout those provinces united into one collective family, with all the members "offering their belongings to the Lord" and changing their family names to Ye (from "Yesu," a transliteration of Jesus) (Wei, 1947: B17–B19, C4–C5, J1, J3; Jones, 1962: 17). Zhang Dianju, for instance, became Ye Banaba Shensheng (Barnabas Ye Born of God) (Wei, 1947: F13 [2]). In one village near Weixian, Shandong, all the TJC members reportedly sold their belongings and moved to live together in a "Jesus Compound" (Yesu dayuan)—an event that foreshadowed the start of the Jesus Family, another indigenous Protestant group, in the western part of the province a few years later (Wei,

1947: J1). In southern Zhili, the sect members also began sharing their possessions, and the sound of their "singing in the morning and bells in the evening" could be heard in the neighboring villages. The practice, as well as the use of the sectarian surname Ye, appeared to have been broadly adopted within the TJC in 1920–21, when drought and famine in North China left close to 20 million people destitute. Millions lived on ground wheat husks, ground leaves, corn cobs, roots, bark, and sawdust (CMYB, 1923: 242–43).[21]

In spite of the bleakness around them, TJC members were able to keep up an exuberant spirit by sharing testimonies of the efficacy of the new faith: the sick were healed, prophecies were made, demons were exorcised, and an illiterate farmer and night-soil collector would develop the uncanny spiritual gift—rivaling the ability of fortune tellers—of enumerating people's past sins merely by holding their hands. According to a report of the first general conference of the TJC that met in Beijing in 1920, a deaf and mute man under the power of the Holy Spirit poured out "many words of repentance" (in the form of "tongues" that were interpreted by one endowed with such a gift) before "returning to the state of dumbness" (Wei, 1947: J1–J2, M12, D2, F14; *Shengling bao*, Feb. 1927: 16).

The Spread of the TJC

Wei himself did not live to see all the fruits of his labor. He died of tuberculosis in October 1919, three years after he contracted the fateful disease that had plunged him into Pentecostalism (Wei, 1947: M2, M7, M8–M10). However, in his two and a half years as the founder and leader of the TJC, Wei had set in motion a lively Chinese Pentecostal and millenarian movement that defied both the derision and opposition of mission church leaders and the scarcity of its means. By the early 1920s, the new faith had also spread to the North and Central China provinces of Henan, Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, and Anhui; it had reached down south to Fujian and up north to Jilin—often by way of mass mailings that targeted particularly the Seventh-Day Adventist churches, which could be found in many large cities in China (Wei, 1947: C2, C21).

Compared to most denominational missions, the Adventists were a late arrival, having reached China only after the turn of the century. The first Adventist missionaries to China arrived in Hong Kong in 1902, but it was in the hinterland North China province of Henan in 1903 that the Adventists built their first mission stations. By the late 1910s, perhaps in part because

of the outbreak of the war in Europe, the Adventists' message of the imminent return of Christ was gaining an audience in China, and their churches were already found in at least ten provinces in the country, with a total following of some three thousand. In spite of the negligible size of its membership (which would total barely over twenty thousand after half a century), the Adventist church published a disproportionately influential and widely circulated monthly, *Shizhao yuebao* (Signs of the Times), which began spreading the church's apocalyptic prophecies in 1907 (Seventh-Day Adventist Encyclopedia, 1976: 10.267–76; Latourette, 1929: 598; Gu, 1987: 11, 22–23).[22] Although the exact connection between Wei Enbo and the Adventists is unclear, it is almost certain that Wei derived many of his revelations from the latter—including Sabbatarianism and the eschatological teachings.[23] Therefore the TJC was able to speak the language intelligible to members of the Adventist churches, a language that was accentuated with nationalistic intensity. In several of the provinces where the TJC gained the largest followings, the spread of the new sect often began when members of local Adventist churches responded to free TJC publications like *The Universal Correction Church Times* and asked for a missionary to be sent to explain the new teaching. In due time, many of those Adventists defected to found TJC branches, which became new centers for the sect (Wei, 1947: C2, M19).

In Hunan, the TJC sprang up by virtue of its efficacious Pentecostalism: when some members of an Adventist church in the provincial capital Changsha received the first issue of *Wanguo gengzhengjiao bao* in the spring of 1919 and started praying for the Pentecostal power according to the prescribed methods therein, "the Holy Spirit" broke loose on one of them, so that "his body shook violently and his 'tongues' rattled together with the earthen pots." Awed by the incident, the group chose one among themselves, an Adventist evangelist called Li Xiaofeng, and sent him to Beijing, where he acquired the faith in person from Wei Enbo and brought it back to Hunan (Wei, 1947: C11, M9, M13). Within a few months the new teaching spread beyond Changsha into neighboring counties even as the area was ravaged by rivaling warlord armies and many Roman Catholic churches were burned during the fighting (Wei, 1947: C12). In that hinterland area where peasants had for centuries sought the protective power of deities ranging from the Buddhist Guanyin to apotheosized historical figures like Baogong and Guan Shengdi—as Mao Zedong pointed out in his famous investigative report on the peasant movement in Hunan (Mao, [1927] 1991: 32–34)—the TJC followers proclaimed a more potent divinity who could heal the sick, summon rain, lightning, and thunder, bestow

the gift of "tongues," and make prophecies through the mouths of virgin girls and boys. One group reported that several of such girls and boys aged seven to fourteen "swooned and fell to the ground, crying out repeatedly in unison that the world would soon perish" (Wei, 1947: C14–C15).[24]

In neighboring Hubei, which the TJC reached in late 1919, many rural substations and "prayer houses" were established when the word spread that the "True Lord" preached by the TJC could "dissolve calamity and remove misfortune" (*xiaozai jie'e*), "cure a hundred diseases" (*xiaochu baibing*), and relieve people of "evil habits." Among those who joined the sect were opium addicts and people possessed by "disease demons." Most of the local groups held "Spiritual Gifts Meetings" (*ling'en dahui*) twice a year, in spring and fall, during the slack farming seasons to make new converts. Many TJC congregations in Hubei established distinctive baptismal rituals: in one area, new converts had to abstain from meat, wine, and smoking for seven days prior to baptism (Du, 1988: 141–46). In another, two white flags, each bearing a red cross, were planted in a pool to form a "sacred gate" through which the convert passed. Two deacons stood behind the "gate," one on each side, to receive him and then to plunge him face down into the water. Then the neophyte emerged from the water to receive his "sacred name," which replaced his birth name (Deng and Sheng, 1988: 183).

In Shanxi, the TJC soon won over an able Confucian scholar and educator by the name of Gao Daling. According to TJC records, Gao, a "presented scholar" (*jinshi*), had been a Chinese-language teacher for the influential British missionary Timothy Richard and had assisted the latter in the establishment and supervision of what became Shanxi University (Wei, 1947: C18, M10).[25] After the Revolution of 1911, Gao became an advisor to the Shanxi warlord Yan Xishan and also emerged as a prominent church leader in Taiyuan, the provincial capital, where he headed the local Independent Chinese Church, which had arisen with the financial support of Yan. Later, around the time when Wei formed the TJC, Gao also founded a New Jesus Church (*Xin Yesu jiaohui*) in Taiyuan with some three hundred members who had broken away from mission churches. By 1920, Gao had joined the TJC, bringing his entire congregation into its fold (Wei, 1947: M10; Latourette, 1929: 775–76; CMYB, 1924: 486). In time, more than a hundred branches of the new church, with over ten thousand members, would be found in Shanxi alone (Wei, 1947: C19).

In converting members of mission churches, TJC evangelists were able to harness the rising nationalism of the 1920s to their advantage. In 1922, Wei Yisa, son of the founder Wei Enbo, led a small group of TJC missionaries and went through the Seventh-Day Adventist churches in Henan

province, where the American sect had opened their first missions in China in 1903. Within three months, the TJC won over eighteen out of the twenty-five churches that the Adventist missionaries had labored to build over a period of two decades. When an Adventist missionary confronted an erstwhile church leader-turned-TJC elder and accused him of "stealing the sheep," the latter allegedly turned to the congregation and cried: "Whichever one of you is a foreign sheep can go back with him!" (Wei, 1947: C34, C2; Gu, 1987). The following year, *Wanguo gengzhengjiao bao* reported that an illiterate peasant woman in Henan was inspired by the Holy Spirit to compose the following hymn:

> Salvation comes only from the spirit of Christ,
> The Republic of China is leading the way;
> The sun rises in the east and shines onto the west,
> The Holy Spirit sends down blessings and the true Word carries the day. . . .
> (Wei, 1947: N9).[26]

In the southeastern province of Fujian, which became one of the most important centers of the movement, the arrival of the new teaching followed a pattern seen in several other parts of the country. As early as 1919, the targeted mailings of *The Universal Correction Church Times* to Seventh-Day Adventist churches in Fujian had elicited inquiries and invitations for missionaries from many parts of the province. In October 1923, Barnabas Zhang, probably the most effective evangelist of the sect, came to Fuzhou, the provincial capital, where within a few months he baptized hundreds of people to the "True Church," a variant name its members increasingly used as the new teaching throve. A fifteen-year-old boy "ascended to the third heaven" and then became possessed by the Holy Spirit for several days, during which he poured out a stream of prophecies calling on people to repent as "the fire of the Last Days" and calamities were approaching. As in other cities, the TJC's proselytism among fellow Sabbatarians and independents was particularly fruitful. Before long an entire Adventist congregation in the city converted to the TJC, a move that was likely helped by nationalist sentiments as antimission propaganda spread across the country after 1922.

After its establishment in the provincial capital, the sect began to reach down south along the coastal area, where a significant number of the new converts—particularly those who later became local TJC leaders—joined it when they heard of its miraculous power to cure hopeless diseases like tuberculosis (Wei, 1947: C39–C41). In the county seat of Xinghua (now Putian), Zheng Chun'an, a well-to-do peddler and activist in the local Methodist Episcopal Church who was battling TB, was converted by a TJC

evangelist from Fuzhou in 1925. After his recovery through the power of prayers (not unaided by good nutrition, including eggs, milk, and beef), he built the first TJC church in Putian in the back of his own house and started a small congregation. Zheng went on to become a TJC elder and was renamed Zheng Danyili (Daniel Zheng, after the biblical prophet) because of his ability to uncover the meanings of dreams and strengthen the faith of those in distress.[27] Among the appeals of the new church was its ability to dispense "holy water" (made sacred through prayers), which was used to cure the diseases of the believers and their poultry and pigs (Yu, 2002).

The popularity of the new sect in coastal Fujian stemmed also from its reputed ability to rid people of opium addiction (Wei, 1947: C39–C41). In the late Qing period, Chinese efforts to combat the narcotic had culminated in the antiopium imperial edict of 1906, which was followed by a decade of remarkably effective suppression of the drug. It also helped to bring about the end of the British opium trade in 1917. Yet recrudescence of poppy cultivation was found in areas where government control was weak (Lodwick, 1996: 117, 178–79). The erosion of central authority after the late 1910s exacerbated the problem. According to *The China Mission Year Book*, by 1923 China was producing no less than ten thousand tons of opium annually, about three times the production of the rest of the world. With the political disintegration of the country, many regional military authorities were promoting opium cultivation since "heavy taxation on poppy land, transit taxes, taxes for sales, permits, opium smoking den licenses, and taxes on individual pipes" became a major source of revenue to support military campaigns. In Fujian, where the situation was "desperate," opium cultivation became compulsory as "the military authorities were endeavoring to raise $15,000,000 by opium taxes" in the south of the province (CMYB, 1924: 399–403; see also Madancy, 2003: 361–69). In the counties of Fuqing and Xinghua, where opium addiction was particularly widespread, many TJC churches doubled as opium refuges where broken addicts were cured of their "evil habit" through the "power of the Holy Spirit"—most likely a kind of shock treatment that utilized a combination of Pentecostal prayers, "tongues," and "spiritual singing and dancing." Likewise, in the county of Zhangpu in southern Fujian, the sect gained more than a thousand followers in the early 1930s after many opium addicts—some of whom had turned to the drug to alleviate pain from lingering illnesses—sought to "follow the religion to stop the opium." The TJC was accordingly dubbed "The Religion to Cure the Black Smoke" (as opium was called) among the local people (Huang, 1990: 164–65; see also Chen, 1999: 12–15, 31).[28] As in the case of Shanxi and neighboring provinces in the 1880s, where the opium refuges (called "Heavenly

Invitation Offices") of Pastor Xi Shengmo were conduits to swift evangelism, the TJC's bold tackling of the opium problem along with a spectrum of ailments and demon possessions in coastal Fujian in the 1920s–30s resulted in rapid growth and the establishment of more than a hundred churches (Wei, 1947: C1, C43; Chen, 1999: 12–15).[29]

One of the most important gains that Barnabas Zhang made in Fuzhou in 1923 was the recruitment of a physician and former deputy head of a local hospital named Guo Duoma (Thomas Guo), who would soon emerge as a national leader of the TJC at a time when the fledgling plebeian movement desperately needed educated and articulate spokesmen. On the initiative of Guo and several other local elders and deacons named by Zhang, the TJC faith would spread not only to the rest of the province but also to Fujianese communities in Taiwan and Southeast Asia, and beyond them to Japan and India—which to its followers "fulfills the biblical prophecy that the true Word flashes like lightning out of the East and shines onto the West" (Wei, 1947: C1, C39–C40). In 1931, a year after the TJC was brought to a Chinese immigrant community in Hawaii, Guo would be sent to Honolulu as its first missionary to plant churches in the United States (Wei, 1947: C59).

Perpetuating the End-Time Revelation: The Institutionalization of the TJC

In retrospect, the early death of the founder and leader of the TJC as well as the sect's emphasis on direct communication with the Holy Spirit resulted in a tendency toward decentralization and democratization of the movement that in the long run helped its survival and growth. Efforts to counter the centrifugal forces of personalities and a wide range of Pentecostal practices following Wei's departure also led quickly to a collective formulation of TJC principles, rules, and governance. On his deathbed, Wei had laid hands on three of his closest followers including Zhang Lingsheng, bishop of Shandong, and told them to carry on his "sacred work" (Wei, 1947: M9). However, in a society that looked up to the leadership of the educated elite, none of the three had any significant education to qualify as a member of the intelligentsia. It is therefore understandable that at the first general conference of the fledgling TJC that met in Beijing in May 1920, Gao Daling from Shanxi, a new convert but one with unrivalled credentials (the lone holder of a *jinshi* degree) within the sect, was named to the top leadership circle. At the second national meeting of the TJC held in Wuchang, Hubei, in 1922, Gao was elected "General Elder" of the church (Wei, 1947: D2–D3, K3). He

apparently played a central role in hammering out the basic teachings of the TJC that later helped preserve the unity and identity of the church even as the spirit of the movement constantly defied any form of control. The emerging doctrines included most of the revelations of Wei Enbo and reaffirmed the position that as the Last Days approached, there was "no salvation" outside of the TJC. The principle of "self-support, self-government, and self-propagation" was instituted for all local TJC churches, which nevertheless required recognition and approval from provincial branches (Wei, 1947: H1, H4).

In 1924, in an effort to develop theological discipline to contain unruly Pentecostal practices in some of its constituencies, particularly among its members in southern Zhili, the TJC began its first formal theological training program. It opened a "Truth and Holy Spirit School" in Tianjin, with Jesus as the president and Wei Yisa as his deputy. Such programs, under various names, were later conducted irregularly at several urban centers of the TJC and typically lasted from one to three months (Wei, 1947: G2, G14). By 1926, the sect had developed a constitution that spelled out a five-tiered organizational structure starting with "prayer houses" at the bottom, and reaching up through local churches, provincial assemblies, and national assemblies all the way to "the General Assembly"—in line with the sect's global claims and ambition—which would oversee the envisioned international operation of the church. A corresponding ecclesiastical hierarchy included deacons, missionaries, elders, bishops, and a "general bishop." All bishops were to be produced through elections held among church elders. At the local level, members would elect officers to manage daily affairs, although their preacher, or "missionary," would be appointed or dispatched by the TJC elder responsible for the area. In finance, a more sustainable practice of tithes and special offerings replaced the initial call for "sharing [material possessions] among the haves and the have-nots." However, in many areas it was largely the donations of a few individuals with means that constituted "self-support." In rural Hubei, many TJC substations developed when a member donated or lent part of his property to be the prayer house, which would be renovated and furnished collectively by the group, and maintained with the help of tithes, which were also known as "membership fees" (Wei, 1947: H5–H6; Du, 1988: 138–48).

Two Roads That Diverged: The TJC and the National Christian Council of China

In 1922, when the China Continuation Committee (CCC)—which had been formed in 1913 as the central "consultative and advisory" organ for

Western mission churches in China—called the National Christian Conference to promote cooperation among denominational missions and indigenization of Christianity in China, it extended an invitation to the TJC, probably the newest of all Protestant bodies, to send delegates to Shanghai for the meeting. By then, only five years since its founding, the sect had claimed a membership of more than ten thousand, about three times the size of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and rivaling the total of forty-two smaller Western missions. The TJC leaders saw in the conference "an exceptional opportunity to spread the [teachings of the Universal] Correction Church." In line with a plan of representation spelled out by the CCC, they sent three representatives (Gao Daling, Wei Yisa, and Barnabas Zhang) to the meeting (CMYB, 1923: 329–31; Wei, 1947: B21, D2–D3). The CCC claimed that the chief agenda for the conference was the organization of an interdenominational National Christian Council of China (NCC), which was to foster "unity of the Christian Church in China," to "study the development of the Church in self-support, self-government, and self-propagation," and to promote its eventual "full autonomy" (CMYB, 1923: 329).

The three TJC delegates to the conference, representing what they themselves called "the only truly indigenous church in China," appeared to have had a more ambitious agenda. To them, what the National Christian Conference proposed for the future was already a reality among them. It would only take the correction of all mission churches—adopting the way of the TJC—to achieve that end. Therefore the three launched a spirited crusade at the conference, "seizing the opportunity to preach the true way" and "bearing a beautiful testimony," as they put it, "among the 1,189 delegates" (Wei, 1947: C22). That "testimony" was a euphemism, however, for their public denunciation of mission churches, which would be consistent with the TJC's customary invective that numerous foreign churches in China were "hanging up a sheep's head but selling dog meat, and were being used by the imperialists as the vanguard of their invasion, as proven by the 'church case' [Boxer Uprising] of 1900" (Wei, 1947: C27).

The radicalism of the three delegates must have embarrassed the Chinese church leaders who helped organize the conference. According to TJC sources, the latter tried to silence them and threatened to expel them from the conference (Wei, 1947: C22). By 1922, a new generation of Western-educated Chinese Protestant leaders had emerged within the missionary enterprise. Among them was Cheng Jingyi (1881–1939), graduate of a Bible institute in Glasgow and secretary of the China Continuation Committee after 1913, who chaired the conference in Shanghai and who would be named general secretary of the NCC. Other organizers of the

conference included Liu Tingfang (Timothy Tingfang Lew, 1892–1947), who held a Ph.D. from Columbia University and was dean of the Divinity Faculty of Yenching University in Beijing, and Yu Rizhang (David Z.T. Yui, 1882–1936), a Harvard graduate and then General Secretary of the National Committee of the Chinese YMCA, who would become NCC's chairman (Latourette, 1929: 798; "Dr. Cheng Ching-yi," 1939: 693; Cha, 1983: 241; "Dr. Timothy Tingfang Lew," n.d.). By and large, those church leaders favored a gradualist approach to church independence, one that would win the sympathy and support of most Western missionaries rather than alienate them. They took care to temper their criticism of the "tendency . . . for the missionary to . . . adopt an attitude of superiority" with their appreciation of the "altruistic motives" of "Western Christians . . . [who] have furnished men and money for the preaching of the Gospel in China" (NCC, 1926: 164).[30] In contrast, the TJC delegates were not predisposed to, and had little use for, such diplomatic language. They lamented that those presiding over the conference "were all born of Western mommies and could not stop singing praises to them" (Wei, 1947: C22, C27).

From its inauguration in 1922 through the remainder of the Republican period, the NCC, the majority of whose members were indigenous, would serve as the most visible symbol of Chinese Protestantism. Though it did not have legislative or mandatory authority over denominational missions, it did claim to play an "advisory" role and to "act on behalf of the cooperating churches and missions," which included practically all the major mission churches with the notable exception of the Southern Baptists and, a few years later, the China Inland Mission (CMYB, 1923: 329).[31] Once established, the NCC adopted an organizational structure modeled on the missions and an agenda that reflected the progressive social concerns of influential liberal members on the council. It set up more than a dozen committees to deal with such issues as emerging industrial problems, rural life, international relations, education, antinarcotic campaigns, and work for the blind. The committee on "the Indigenous Church" sketched out on paper a few years later its definition of a naturalized Chinese Church with all the urbanity and cosmopolitanism of a mellow liberal Christianity unhurried by any eschatological exigencies: the "Indigenous Church" would aim at "bringing into fusion the best elements of both the Western and the Eastern civilization, after the draining out of the dross." The committee's specific recommendations included the "building [of] the House of God . . . in bona fide Chinese architecture," the use of "Chinese hymnology and Chinese tunes" in church services, and the "promotion of a modified Christian form of ancestor-worship" (NCC, 1926: 163–69; Lian, 1997: 160).

The Spillover of TJC Revelations

For its part, the TJC apparently had no time for such perceived trivialities. Those who had rallied to the doomsday call of Wei Enbo—in fact all the other major Protestant sects and independent evangelists as well that arose outside the missionary establishment in the Republican period—preached a Christianity that was very different from what the NCC was contemplating, one that was licked by the flame of an impending apocalypse. Frustrated by its lack of success in converting mission churches en masse to their teaching at the NCC in Shanghai in 1922, the TJC withdrew into itself, cut off its contacts with the NCC, and continued its crusade against mission-supported churches, vaunting its independence and self-support and mocking those mainline Protestants who used to boast about their membership in mission churches but had grown sheepish about their reliance on foreign money at a time of rising nationalism (Wei, 1947: B4, B23). In the aftermath of the May Thirtieth Incident of 1925 and during the Northern Expedition (1926–27), mission churches (particularly the "British-flagged" ones) came under increased nationalist pressure and often attracted anti-imperialist propaganda and harassment. Many of them rushed to declare independence from Western missions and to organize Chinese Christian unions (Chao, 1986: 204–9). In contrast, the TJC was in a coveted position of long-established autonomy and freedom from foreign domination. As a whole, it lay outside of the interest of the anti-Christian students of the 1920s who were chanting slogans against the more visible mission churches and their leaders and calling them the "running dogs" of British and American "imperialists" (Latourette, 1929: 819).

Throughout the 1920s, the TJC was rocked by its own explosive energy generated by a profusion of "revelations of the Holy Spirit" which, after the death of its founder, continually shook up the organization. At least fifteen splinter groups sprang up over the next two decades, under such impeccable names as "The Church of God," "The Church of Lord Jesus" (led by a self-styled "Joseph, the King of the Jews"), "The Church of Jesus Christ," "New Jerusalem Holy City Church," and "The Church of the Heavenly Mother" (*Tianmuhui*), led by a woman who was apparently trying to fashion a Christian variant of the millenarian White Lotus belief in the Mother of No-Birth. There was also a "New Religion for World Salvation," which worshipped Jesus along with the Buddha, Laozi, Confucius, and Mohammed and was practically indistinguishable from the many other eclectic religious groups that mushroomed across China in the turbulent post-Qing years (Wei, 1947: J1–J9, C4; Chan, 1953: 162–68). Most of

these breakaway groups led by alleged "heretics" were formed in the wake of power struggles within the TJC leadership. Zhang Lingsheng, the only TJC "bishop" named by Wei Enbo and a veteran Pentecostal who had sometimes contended for the title of the founder of the sect, left the TJC himself following its sixth national meeting held in 1929, when he lost his position within the church.[32] Other "heretics" denounced by the TJC included those who had tried to "fish in muddled waters," as some would say—people like Ye Fusheng ("Jesus Reborn"), a Shandong farmer and night-soil collector who started a "Jesus Compound" in his village and later instituted the novel ritual of the "crucible" (*lianlu*) whereby women of all ages, especially the young, were to sleep with him (Wei, 1947: J1–J2).

By far the most serious internal crisis of the TJC came in the mid-1920s when Barnabas Zhang, the TJC's most prominent and energetic evangelist, who had built up a large following in the South, sought to marginalize Gao Daling and Wei Yisa, the other two leaders, and take control of the entire sect. In 1926, following the TJC's fourth general conference in Nanjing, a new headquarters of the sect—headed by Zhang—was established there. With Gao and Wei holding out in their separate head office in Tianjin, the church was effectively divided into southern and northern factions. Zhang's downfall came in 1930, when another general conference of the TJC stripped him of his position, excommunicated him, and reunited the movement under a collective leadership that included Gao Daling, Guo Duoma, and Wei Yisa, son of the founder Wei Enbo (Wei, 1947: D5–D12, D21, J6; Bays, 1995: 136–37; Chen, 1999: 48). Having regained its unity, the TJC continued its vigorous growth in the 1930s. *The China Christian Year Book* of 1934–35 reported that Central China was much affected by the spread of the TJC. In the city of Changsha, for instance, where most denominational churches had suffered at the hands of anti-Christian activists of the late 1920s and were "sparsely attended" during the hot summer of 1934, "there were over a thousand people packed into a building where this sect was holding its worship." The report added that in its aggressive proselytizing, the TJC had "the advantage of being a purely indigenous movement, not depending upon any foreign funds for support" (100–01).

Prophecy and Power in War-torn China

Japan's full-scale invasion of China after 1937 caused serious disruptions in the work of mission-supported churches in the country and forced the evacuation of most of the church organizations along with an estimated

50,000 Protestants to the hinterland provinces in the west (Lacy, 1941: "Preface"; Grubb, 1949: 127). In occupied China, denominational churches increasingly came under Japanese domination and were eventually forced into Japanese-supervised "Christian Unions" following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and the confinement of most Western missionaries (Brook, 1996: 331–33). In general, the TJC as well as the majority of independent evangelists and church groups were better able to carry on their work in the occupied areas because of their flexible organization and low visibility, and because they were already practicing self-support before the war (Lian, 2004: 888). The main difficulties experienced by the TJC during the war were the suspension of its official periodical *Shengling bao* (The Holy Ghost) in occupied Shanghai (as a result of Japanese censorship) and the forced removal of its headquarters from that city to Chongqing (Wei, 1947: F6, I10). In his flight from advancing Japanese armies, Wei Yisa displayed a resilience that was perhaps characteristic of the spirit of his sect: he "followed the directives of the Holy Spirit" and proselytized along the way. In fact, he and his associates succeeded in founding new TJC churches in the hinterland provinces of Henan, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Yunnan after 1938 (Wei, 1947: C2–C3, I10). In the central province of Hubei, many rural TJC stations reported a flood of new members, most of whom were urban refugees, during the years of Japanese occupation in the early 1940s (Du, 1988: 141–46). By then, the sect had also developed a significant presence in the provinces of Hebei, Shandong, Anhui, Hunan, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong as well as in parts of Manchuria. In 1942, dedicated TJC evangelists from Taiwan even succeeded in bringing the end-time message of the sect to Japan and established branches in Tokyo and Osaka (Wei, 1947: C2–C3).

Apparently, the apocalyptical salvationism and prophecies of the TJC assumed a new relevance and urgency as the war engulfed much of the country. By the mid-1940s, in their effort to systemize the eschatological teachings of Wei Enbo, the TJC theologians had arrived at the "revelation" of a four-stage divine dispensationalism (hitherto hidden in the biblical story of Jacob's four wives) that started with the Pentecost in Acts. The fourth and the final stage—which began precisely in the year 1917, when Wei founded the TJC, and which was represented by Rachel (listed as Jacob's fourth wife)—would culminate in the Second Coming of Christ (Wei, 1947: B3). It was a time of special grace, for God had "sent down the Holy Spirit to establish the True Jesus Church as the end-time refuge" for humanity so that whoever joined the TJC "would be spared the catastrophe of the Last Days and enter into the Heavenly Kingdom of eternity" (*Shengling bao*, Aug. 1926: 7).

The Tide of Revolution and the Ebb and Flow of the TJC

During the civil war years between 1946 and 1949, like most other indigenous churches in China, the TJC continued to thrive (Lian, 2004: 888–89). In 1947, it held its eleventh general conference in Nanjing to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of its founding. By then, the church claimed more than one hundred thousand members and over one thousand churches and meeting places, including several in southeast Asia, India, Hawaii, and Japan (Wei, 1947: B24, C2–C3, J1). Among those who joined in the celebration of the achievements of the indigenous group was Li Zongren, soon to be the acting president of the Nationalist government, who wrote, "Since the European wind began sweeping the East, Christianity has thrived [in China] and the missionaries . . . have rivaled one another in attacking the traditional faith of our country." As he lamented the low self-esteem of Chinese converts who rushed to "curry favor with the foreign churches," Li lauded "Wei Baoluo [who] succeeded in melding Chinese and Western traditions and, in the spirit of independence and self-determination, accomplished the pioneering deed of founding the autonomous [True Jesus] Church" (Wei, 1947: AZ6).

Having secured the recognition and protection of the Nationalist government (the same conference did not neglect to pass a resolution to "salute Chairman Jiang [Jieshi]"), the TJC was poised to embark on long-term institutionalization and expansion of its work, which would include the consolidation of its publication endeavors, the founding of an educational commission, and the establishment of theological schools at local and national levels (Wei, 1947: D19–D21). However, as the sect was about to settle into an uneventful leg of its journey from revelation to institutionalization, it was jolted badly by the Communist victory in 1949. With the outbreak of the Korean War the following year, the new government decreed the policy of "Self-Government, Self-Support, and Self-Propagation" ("Three-Selfs"), which forced all the Protestant churches to sever their ties with foreign missions and to come under tight government supervision and control. Like most of the other indigenous churches that grew up in the same period, the TJC's initial response was to seek the tolerance—even court the favor—of the government by openly supporting the Three-Selfs campaign (and gingerly citing its long-established practice of self-support). With the help of an abject public "self-examination" written by its leader Wei Yisa, the sect was largely left alone in the first crackdown on suspected counterrevolutionaries in 1950–51 (Wei, 1952: 60–65; Gu, 1999: 155–58).

As the new government's successive mass campaigns to eliminate enemies of the state and to consolidate its rule unfolded relentlessly through the 1950s, it became clear that homegrown churches like the TJC were not exempt from the party's determined efforts to weed out independent, organized religion. After all, most of them had prophesied the coming of a different kingdom from what the Chinese Communist Party ushered in. By the late 1950s, they no longer had the sufferance of the state. During the Anti-Rightist Campaign unleashed in late 1957, most of the top leaders of the TJC, including Wei Yisa, were thrown into prison on vague charges that the apocalyptic teaching and Pentecostal practice of the sect had been unruly and reactionary, and that their faith-healing practice had resulted in many deaths—accusations that foreshadowed those brought more recently by the government against the Falun Gong. Those who remained in the sect after 1958 were driven underground (Chao and Chong, 1997: 44, 102; Jones, 1962: 109–10; Jones, 1963, 19–20; Chen, 1999: 17–18).

Outside of mainland China, scattered TJC churches gradually converged around its new headquarters based in Taizhong in Guomindang-controlled Taiwan ("Zhen Yesu jiaohui jianjie," n.d.: 6, 10–12). By far the most significant overseas TJC community was found on the island, where the sect was particularly successful in evangelizing the "mountain people." In the two decades after the mid-1950s, its membership rose from 15,500 to 35,000. TJC's growth in Taiwan slowed after the 1970s, but the sect also developed new strengths, including increasingly sophisticated "managerial structures" and theological education, centralized publication, and an expanded societal base (Rubinstein, 1991: 126–28). In 1985, the Taiwan head office was moved to Los Angeles, where it has operated under the name "The International Assembly of the True Jesus Church" and currently claims to represent some "79,000 members in the free world" (International Assembly of the True Jesus Church, n.d.).

In China itself, the post-Mao decades have seen a spirited comeback of the TJC that is consistent with the broader revival of religion during the same period. According to official estimates, in Hunan, one of TJC's strongholds, the sect's members accounted for 110,000 out of a total of 150,000 Protestants in the province in the mid-1990s (*Bridge* 75, Feb. 1996: 3, 8–9). By that time, its national membership was "over one million people, ten times the pre-Liberation figure" (*Bridge* 80, Dec. 1997: 17).[33] While the TJC on the whole has been forced to mute its apocalyptic fervor and to be absorbed into the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" along with other Protestant groups, at least one major spin-off group trumpeting messianic messages has emerged underground. Styling itself "Linglingjiao"

(The Spirit-Spirit Sect) and led by a primary school teacher-turned-"Savior" and the "second Jesus," the Jiangsu-based new sect grew decidedly eschatological in the early 1980s when local officials attempted to crack down on its over-zealous Pentecostalism. By 1990, it had defied government repression and spread to more than ten provinces as far as Gansu and Yunnan, prophesying flood and fire as well as the collapse of heaven and earth. Specific dates for the cosmic catastrophe were announced, when "Fire will burn out the old world, the Kingdom of Heaven will come" (*Bridge* 80, Dec. 1996: 17–18; Chen, 1999: 63–65; Li and Fu, 2002).[34]

Concluding Remarks

In several ways, the TJC has been a product of the upheavals of modern China. Its Pentecostal origin points to the broader incursion of Western influence in the aftermath of the Opium War. Likewise, its emergence from under the shadow of mission churches reflects the evolution and sinification of Protestant Christianity after the turn of the century. In fact, its challenge to the missionary establishment echoed, and was emboldened by, the broader nationalistic stirrings of early twentieth-century China. From its very beginning, the TJC has been able to generate its peculiar energy by opposing a supposedly pure, original Chinese revelation—directly from Christ—to the presumably corrupt ecclesiastical traditions introduced from the West. In this way, the rise of the TJC became part of the popular revolt against foreign dominance in China during the early Republican period. It represented a significant strand of Chinese nationalism within the Christian community, one that has hitherto been little studied. In some ways it was also a more sustained, articulate, and exuberant form of nationalism compared to some of the virulent outbreaks of antiforeignism in the first quarter of the twentieth century.[35]

On the other hand, it is important to note an earthy side to TJC's nationalism: much of its opposition to Western missions was grounded in local rivalries with established denominational churches over ecclesiastical power and the recruitment of followers from the existing Protestant community. In that sense its patriotism often failed to transcend its more immediate sectarian interests. More importantly, there are intrinsic limits to the ability of a religious sect to participate in nationalist pursuits. Neither the establishment of a sovereign state nor the construction of a just social order on the foundation of political unity approximated the millenarian visions of the TJC. As Ernst Troeltsch reminds us, because of its revolutionary principle of "unlimited individualism

and universalism," Christianity "has a disintegrating effect upon all undiluted nationalism and upon every form of exclusively earthly authority" (Troeltsch, 1931: 1.82).[36] In the case of an end-time Christian sect, such a disintegrating effect will hardly be mitigated.

As a Chinese form of Protestant Christianity, the TJC represented an important development in the indigenization of Christianity. In the Republican period, mission churches with Chinese personnel in (mostly nominal) leadership positions—and utilizing an increasingly standardized Chinese Protestant vocabulary as well as local art and music in their rituals—were eager to proclaim the birth of a Chinese church.[37] Compared to missionary Christianity, the TJC and other independent Protestant groups that grew up in the same period went much farther in accentuating genuine Chinese leadership and revelation—which spawned an apocalyptic teaching in keeping with the millenarian teachings of traditional heterodox sects (see Ma and Han, 1992: 66, 673; Qing and Tang, 1994: 43–45).[38]

The rise of the TJC appears to conform to a pattern in the evolution of what C. K. Yang calls "diffused religion" in Chinese history. According to Yang, in times of civil strife, economic deterioration, and social disintegration, neither the once-dominant orthodox ideology nor the traditional pattern of social institutions remained adequate. Such circumstances were "conducive to the development of popular movements" in which "superhuman powers, miracles, and a host of other supernatural ideas and phenomena . . . transcended the limits of man's earthly abilities and efforts to wrestle with overpowering situations" (Yang, 1961: 354–55). The TJC was only one of several of such popular religious movements—Daoist, Buddhist, and Protestant (and often syncretic)—that took shape in the interval between the Qing and Communist eras.[39]

In the midst of the widespread chaos, suffering, and anxieties of post-Qing China, the TJC and similar Protestant groups succeeded in harnessing Western Pentecostalism to popular Chinese religious practice, which often focused on the efficacy of a specific god or ritual and featured spirit mediums. The latter typically incarnated the deity in a state of trance and performed "dramatic rituals of exorcism" to cure the sickness and to dislodge the demons who were responsible for the "disorder" of disease, suffering, and death (Overmyer, 1986: 52). In fact, both Daniel Bays and Paul A. Cohen have pointed out that twentieth-century Chinese Pentecostalism that expressed itself in "tongues," trances, and other extraordinary manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit betrayed a strong affinity to the local tradition of spirit possession (Bays, 1995: 141n27; Cohen, 1997: 329n71). While some kind of "sectarian-Christian fusion" (to borrow Bays's words)

had been seen in the nineteenth century[40]—most notably in the Taiping religion that sprang from the messianic revelations of Hong Xiuquan and operated through a collective leadership of spirit mediums—it was only during the Republican period that such fusion produced viable Protestant sects. In the case of the TJC, a millenarian group led by "middle layer" charismatic leaders and made up of predominantly lower-class members breathed Chinese life into the alien faith without thrusting it onto the path of a violent revolution.[41] In this sense, the emergence of the TJC and other indigenous churches in the Republican period points to an evolution of popular religion in modern China, when Christianity joined local beliefs in supplying the core ideology of sectarian movements. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the vigorous comeback of the TJC and similar sects inside China—and the appearance of their spin-off groups that often give vent to a flamboyant Pentecostalism along with fiery eschatological proclamations[42]—suggests that such an evolution is well under way.

Notes

1. In the words of Rawlinson—a veteran American missionary and editor-in-chief of *The Chinese Recorder*—"For present-day China Christianity is mainly an Anglo-Christian Movement" (Rawlinson, 1927: 168).

2. The figure of a hundred denominations and missionary societies includes small independent or "faith" missions and other Christian organizations. In 1910 there were 167,075 baptized Protestant communicants, fewer than one out of every 2,500 Chinese people. The total Protestant community, which included children, numbered 324,890. For a detailed list (in both Chinese and English) of denominations and missionary societies in China, see Stauffer, 1922: 11–13.

3. For statistics on the memberships of denominational churches at the end of the Republican period, see Bingle and Grubb, 1952: 141–43. A total of 936,000 baptized Protestants were reported in 1950. The TJC claimed a membership of more than one hundred thousand by 1947.

4. Those attempts at independent churches include the Chinese Christian Union, formed in 1902, and the China Christian Independent Church, founded in 1906. For details, see Lian, 2004: 856–58.

5. On Dongfang shandian, see Li and Fu, 2002; and Dunn, forthcoming. The name is derived from the following biblical passage: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27).

6. Cohn shows that the millenarian tradition continued in medieval and Reformation Europe. See also Wacker, 2001; and Boyer, 1992 for eschatological beliefs in Western Christianity.

7. For general characteristics of traditional Chinese sectarian millennialism, see Yang, 1961; Overmyer, 1976, 1981, 1982, 1986, 1999; Naquin, 1976; Chesneaux, 1971; as well as Ma and Han, 1992.

8. The earliest popular millenarian visions that inspired sectarian movements were contained in a second century (C.E.) Daoist work titled *Taiping jing* (The Scripture of Great Peace).

It prophesied both doom and deliverance by way of a renewed cosmos. The text helped precipitate the Taiping Dao (The Way of Great Peace) sectarian uprising in 184. See Overmyer, 1976: 74, 145–46; Liu and Shek, 2004: 39, 43.

9. In his study of the Protestant community in Taiwan, which includes the TJC, Rubinstein (1991: 130–32) also argues that "congruence" is the key to understanding the rise of the TJC in modern China.

10. According to Wei, the Pentecostal mission was Xinxinhui, which is quite likely the abbreviation of Shitu Xinxinhui, or Apostolic Faith Mission, a name that appeared in the "Directory" of the first issues of the CMYB (1910–14) in reference to the group of loosely associated Pentecostal missionaries that began arriving in China in 1907. Wei Enbo was baptized into the Apostolic Faith Mission by Ben Dexin, which is likely the Chinese name of the Pentecostal missionary B. Berntsen (spelled "Bernsten" in CMYB directories mentioned above), who arrived in China in 1904 and was initially listed as an Apostolic Faith missionary working in south Zhili. He later appeared in Boynton (1917) as an Assembly of God (a label used interchangeably with "Apostolic Faith Mission") missionary stationed in Beijing, which helps explain his contacts with Wei in 1916.

11. For Hong's vision of his heavenly battle against the Manchu demons, see Michael, 1971: 2.11–23.

12. Wei Enbo's new name "Baoluo," which he claimed was given to him by Jesus, signified his succession to the biblical apostle Paul (Wei, 1947: B19–B20, B22–B23, M6).

13. The leaflet titled "Gengzheng tiaoyue" (Articles of Correction [Church]) was published in May 1917 (Wei, 1947: C1, F21). According to Chen (1999: 5), Wei mailed out "Teachings on the Correction Church," likely a similar leaflet, to about four dozen mission churches in April, 1917.

14. On the first occasion, probably in the second half of 1917, Wei was jailed in Tianjin when the foreign secretary of the local YMCA became annoyed with Wei's intrusive and unrelenting "debates" and called in the Tianjin police. In late 1918, Wei was again jailed briefly in Beijing because of his aggressive and irritating proselytizing style (Wei, 1947: M6–M7).

15. One such convert was a member of a Congregational church in Tianjin. He came to TJC in search of cure for his tuberculosis, but eventually died from the disease (Wei, 1947: C6).

16. The paper was published irregularly. TJC's list of its publications dates the initial issue of *Wanguo gengzhengjiao bao* to February 1, 1919. Wei worked on the first issue of the paper in late 1918, which may explain the fact that a photograph of this issue actually bears the date "A.D. 1918." Zhang Lingsheng, whom Wei met in Tianjin in late 1918, might have played some role in the publication of the second issue of the paper in the summer of 1919. In all, however, it appears that Wei himself was responsible for the main teachings of the TJC, which were already found in the first issue of the paper (Wei, 1947: F1, F11, H1). Wei financed the paper and other publications in part by selling his real estate (Wei, 1947: F4). I have used here the English translation of *Wanguo gengzhengjiao bao* provided by Daniel Bays (1995).

17. The source of the teaching on face-down baptism is unclear. The explanation given by Wei Enbo himself cites a divine revelation received by a TJC elder named Zhang Tianjun that since "all human transgressions are committed from the front of the body, only the face-down [body forward] baptism is correct" (Wei, 1947: B17).

18. Wei probably derived the Unitarian teaching—in a significant departure from the mainline Christian belief in the Trinity—from the American Pentecostals. See Wei, 1947: D7, J4, M21; Anderson, 1979: 177, 180.

19. Wei was expelled from his church which, though nominally independent after 1912, remained under the influence of the nearby LMS church at Dengshikou. It is therefore conceivable that his bitterness might have been directed ultimately against the LMS. In addition,

Wei appeared to have some financial disputes with Ben Dexin (Berntsen), the missionary who led him into Pentecostalism (Wei, 1947: M9). And apparently Wei's relations with foreign missions, including the Pentecostal mission, were further strained after he reported his visions and founded the TJC in 1917 (Wei, 1947: B20).

20. Zhang Lingsheng's original name was Zhang Bin. It appears that before he met Wei in Tianjin in 1918, Zhang had already organized a small, independent group in Weixian, calling it Xinxinhui (Faith Society, or Faith Union), which practiced Pentecostalism that he claimed he had acquired from a Pentecostal mission in Shanghai. Zhang Dianju had been an activist in that group before he followed Zhang Lingsheng into the TJC. Zhang Lingsheng was later also called by the name Ye Bide Lingsheng when the TJC adopted the communal surname of Ye. (The second issue of *Wanguo gengzhengjiao bao* was put together in Weixian while Wei was there.) Most of the new recruits were former members of the local Presbyterian churches, one of whom, Guo Sitifan (Steven Guo), became an important TJC missionary like Zhang Banaba. In a reflection of the growing militant antiforeignism of the sect, the TJC referred to the pastors and other officials of Presbyterian churches in Weixian as "guizi nu," or "slaves of the [foreign] devils" (Wei, 1947: C7–C11, M6). See also Bays, 1995: 134.

21. TJC records provide few details on the adoption of communalism between 1919 and 1922 other than *youwu xiangtong*. In general, the practice appears to have stopped short of an all-out selling of properties and the institution of a common treasury that characterized the Jesus Family. The use of the sectarian surname "Ye" was discontinued in 1922 along with the experiment in communalism (Wei, 1947: M12, F13 [2]). For details on the communitarian life in the Jesus Family, see Tao, 2004.

22. The earliest Seventh-Day Adventist mission in China can be dated to the late 1890s when a lone determined layman reached the country, but the mission ended soon thereafter. The first regular Adventist missionaries were sent in 1901. They arrived the following year. In 1905, the Adventist Church began publishing its periodical (renamed *Shizhao yuebao* in 1908) from its base in southern Henan. The press was moved to Shanghai in 1908 following the church's decision in 1907 to relocate its headquarters there. According to Gu (1987: pp. 22–23), *Shizhao yuebao* was the "largest periodical in modern China, with a circulation unrivaled by any other journal published by either the Chinese or foreigners." In 1949, its subscriptions totaled more than one hundred thousand.

23. According to Niu Ziyin, an early TJC leader from Manchuria, Wei Enbo initially observed Sunday as the Sabbath day but "as a result of the advocacy of the [Seventh-Day] Adventist Church started observing the Sabbath and closed his shops [on Saturday]" (Wei, 1947: M12). In addition, TJC sources cite the wavering of Ben Dexin on the issue of Sabbath observance, accusing him of switching back to Sunday after adopting Sabbatarianism (Wei, 1947: B4). Since Ben Dexin was the one who baptized Wei Enbo into Pentecostalism, it is also possible that Wei's teaching on the Sabbath came from him. Wei may also have encountered both the apocalyptical and Sabbatarian teachings of the Adventists by reading *Shizhao yuebao*. According to Bays (1995: 132–33), the "revelation" about the Sabbath day worship possibly came through Zhang Lingsheng sometime before 1916.

24. Other sources also show that in rural Hunan regular TJC meetings on the Sabbath were characterized by "tongues," "spiritual singing and dancing," wailing, laughing, and violent shaking of the body. In finance, the churches in Hunan supported themselves with donations, revenue from TJC-run businesses, and rental income (Xiong, 1985: 253–54).

25. TJC teachings first reached Shanxi in 1919 when an unnamed student at a university in Beijing was won over to the sect and carried the new faith back to his home province. See also Richard, 1916: 310.

26. Likewise, the TJC came to Jiangxi in 1923 after a wealthy merchant and member of a Methodist Episcopal church from that province was attracted to the exuberant singing in a TJC church in Changsha where he was visiting. On discovering that the new church was "run by the Chinese themselves," he went in and made a large contribution on the spot. After his conversion, he went back to his hometown in Ji'an, Jiangxi, broke with the mission church, and single-handedly directed and paid for the construction of a "stately church" for the new faith (Wei, 1947: C37).

27. According to Zheng (2003), there were "many tribulations in those days and people dreamed dreams." They would come and ask Zheng Danyili—whom they called "Teacher"—to explain their hidden meanings. See also Chen, 1999: 11–12.

28. In Xinghua, the TJC was also dubbed "The Religion with Access to Heaven" (*Tongtianjiao*). The Chinese original of "The Religion to Cure the Black Smoke" is *Gaiwuyanjiao*. The latter represented an interesting evolution in the popular view of the relation of Christianity to the opium problem in China. Lodwick (1996: 34–35, 136) points out that in the late nineteenth century, both opium and the medicine prescribed by medical missionaries to treat its addiction (which in most cases contained opium) were often referred to as "Jesus opium." See also the account in Brewster (1909: 8) where a Methodist businessman in Xinghua confessed to the sin of stocking "opium-cure pills" containing morphine. Although the available sources in this regard do not spell out the specific treatments used by the TJC in the 1920s, it is most likely that the group resorted to sudden withdrawal to combat addiction, unassisted by opium derivatives or morphine injections.

29. On the ingenious evangelism of Pastor Xi Shengmo in Shanxi in the 1880s, see Taylor, 1903: 29, 45, 271–72, 289; and Austin, 1996: 22.

30. Jonathan Chao (1986: 201–3) also shows that most of the Chinese leaders in mainline denomination churches adopted the gradualist approach.

31. In 1926, the China Inland Mission and the Christian and Missionary Alliance, alarmed at the perceived dominance of modernist theology among NCC's leaders, both withdrew from the organization, dealing it a severe blow (Lian, 1997: 159).

32. Zhang Lingsheng later joined an obscure Pentecostal group called Yiwei Shenzhaohui (The Assembly of the One Undivided God), allegedly founded by Ben Dexin, the missionary who had brought Wei Enbo into Pentecostalism (Wei, 1947: D7, J4, M21).

33. This figure largely accords with the estimate of close to 1.1 million given by Chen Guangzao (1999: 69). According to Chen, most of the new growth of the TJC has been reported in areas where the sect was well established before 1949, including Hunan, Hubei, Henan, and Fujian, each of which claims well over one hundred thousand in current membership. Jiangsu province, also a former stronghold of the sect, now boasts of three hundred thousand members.

34. Linglingjiao's founder and leader Hua Xuehe was a primary school teacher in Huaiyin county, Jiangsu province, and a TJC activist in the 1970s. He became a fugitive in 1981 after the Jiangsu provincial Religious Affairs Bureau started investigating his activities. Hua was arrested in 1990. It must have appeared as no coincidence to the sect's members when most parts of northern Jiangsu were inundated in 1991.

35. The TJC form of nationalism has clearly been more sustained than the sporadic boycotts of foreign merchandise in the early twentieth century. Almost a century after its founding, the TJC continues to place itself at the heart of God's salvationist scheme. "Although this church originated in China, her mission is an international one," runs the official line on the TJC's website. "She has been commissioned by God to preach the Gospel to all nations until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ" (International Assembly of the True Jesus Church, n.d.).

36. Chan Wing-tsit (1953: 59) also observes, "It is amazing that while modern China has become nationalistic in more ways than one, Buddhist religion has remained aloof from nationalism."

37. Among the symbolic achievements in the efforts toward indigenization was the publication in 1919 of the Union version of the Chinese Bible, a result of the collaboration of leading denominational missions. The definition of indigenization was, and remains today, problematic. Among the more recent attempts to address the contested issue are Ryan Dunch's comments (2001: 205–7) that the best approach might be to acknowledge "plural indigenizations. . . . In other words, the problem of indigenization is ultimately a matter of perception rather than 'reality.'"

38. Other major indigenous Protestant groups besides the TJC include the Jesus Family, the Spiritual Gifts Society, and the Little Flock, all of which subscribed to a fiery eschatology and were influenced to varying degrees by Pentecostalism. Even the Little Flock contained significant Pentecostal elements in spite of its largely mystic leanings (Lian, 2004).

39. Outside of the Protestant community, major popular religious societies that emerged in the Republican period include the Society of the Way (*Daoyuan*), the Society for the Common Good (*Tongshanshe*), the Society for the Intuition of the Good (*Wushanshe*), and the Way of Pervading Unity (*Yiguandao*), all of which according to Wing-tsit Chan were "negative in outlook, utilitarian in purpose" (Chan, 1953: 167–68). Still others, like the Union of World Religions (*Shijie zongjiao datonghui*), were openly apocalyptic in their teachings and foretold specific times for the end of the world. For basic information on several of these religious societies, see Wang, 1927: 757–66; Rawlinson, 1927: 154–57; Chan, 1953: 162–67; Chesneaux, 1972: 227–28.

40. Bays (1985: 123) refers particularly to the fact that many from the White Lotus tradition became Christian converts in the late nineteenth century, conceivably bringing with them their own traditions and beliefs.

41. Among the major English-language studies of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom are Michael, 1971; Spence, 1996; and Reilly, 2004. One could argue that in the early twentieth century, independent sectarian Christianity continued the Taiping adaptation of Protestantism to Chinese millenarian pursuits—though apparently on a much smaller scale and in a much more subdued manner. In the long run, it has proven to be a more sustainable messianism because of its failure—so far—to develop into a full-blown revolutionary chiliasm. (In general, the latter course is one that sectarian movements took only as a last resort). For discussion of the role of "'middle layer' charismatic leaders" in traditional sectarian movements in China, see Overmyer, 1976: 194.

42. For a list of major Christian sects in contemporary China that are labeled "evil cults" by the Chinese government—about fourteen in total—see Li and Fu, 2002; Lian, 2004: 896–97. Among these groups is the "Spirit-Spirit Sect" (*Linglingjiao*). The TJC, which since 1979 has gained government recognition as a legitimate "Three-Self" church, disowns Linglingjiao (Chen, 1999: 63–65). A reliable source on contemporary Chinese Christianity is the annual "International Religious Freedom Report" issued by the U.S. State Department (www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/).

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