

# Excerpt from *Schism: Seventh-day Adventism in Post-Denominational China*

BY CHRISTIE CHUI-SHAN CHOW

Editor's Note: This follows the original footnote numbering.

## Chinese Adventism from the 1940s to the 1970s

The establishment of the China Division (*Zhonghua zonghui*) in Shanghai in the 1930s marked a milestone of Adventist work in the China mission. Yet, it was not until January 1941 that the missionaries appointed a team of Chinese workers to lead the China Division,<sup>44</sup> and then only out of necessity, in response to the Japanese occupation. After the Second World War, and by November 1945, missionaries returned to resume control of the mission.<sup>45</sup> With “one and a half million dollars in gold” from the GC, the China Division quickly restored the denominational properties that were destroyed during the war.<sup>46</sup> Reestablishing sanitariums, schools, and the printing press reflected the priority the GC gave to institutional evangelistic methods of education, medicine, and literature. Meanwhile, native frontline evangelists worked on the ground to gain new converts during the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949). Once again, Adventist end-time messages did their job. Through visual devices such as charts, pictures, slides, and stereopticons, the fascinating prophecies about the end of the world captivated ordinary minds. Combining new technology and traditional preaching, the Adventists walked the faith inquirers through basic gospel messages and Adventist denominational doctrines. In one meeting, after an audience member remarked that he had already

learned the doctrine of salvation elsewhere, an Adventist preacher urged him to come to the remaining meetings for another “seventy-odd topics.” An evangelist boasted on another occasion about how his presentation of “the depth of Christian doctrines” had amazed a local magistrate.<sup>47</sup>

In the latter period of the civil war, the new bilingual (English and Chinese) gospel radio stood out as an effective evangelistic tool. Originally an independent ministry founded by the American Adventist pastor Harold Marshall Sylvester Richards, Sr. (1894–1985), in 1942 the Voice of Prophecy radio broadcast grew to have national distribution in the United States under the sponsorship of the GC.<sup>48</sup> Fordyce W. Detamore, who joined the Voice of Prophecy in 1941, later launched the Bible Correspondence School, to which listeners could write letters to request Bible lessons.<sup>49</sup> When David Lin (Lin Yaoxi)<sup>50</sup> (whom we will encounter with regard to the two Adventist schisms to be discussed in the next two chapters) was pursuing theological degrees in the United States, he joined this new evangelistic ministry and translated some of the English Bible courses into Chinese. This work provided him with the opportunity to understand how the combination of radio broadcasting and Bible correspondence courses had been an effective evangelist tool in Africa.<sup>51</sup> One month after the Allies’ victory over the Japanese in the Battle of Guadalcanal



# SCHISM

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM IN  
POST-DENOMINATIONAL CHINA

CHRISTIE CHUI-SHAN CHOW

(August 1942–February 1943), the GC voted for Lin’s departure for China. With his experience working in the Adventist “North American Radio Commission,” the GC appointed Lin as the China Division’s first radio secretary.<sup>52</sup> He left America with twenty-six Chinese Bible lessons and went back to Shanghai. Lin was later joined by the veteran bilingual American missionary Milton Lee.<sup>53</sup> In combination called the Voice of Prophecy Bible Correspondence School, the bilingual Adventist radio broadcast and the Bible correspondence course extended the Adventist messages far beyond metropolitan Shanghai. Within one year, the number of local stations that were picking up the Voice of Prophecy

program rose from nine to twenty.<sup>54</sup> Three more stations joined after the radio work was moved to the south to escape the Communist troops. By 1949, the station had added a Chinese musical voice to the program by replacing an album by an American a cappella quartet, the King’s Herald, with a live broadcast of a Chinese quartet and organ music.<sup>55</sup>

The Chinese Voice of Prophecy broadened the scope of evangelism by penetrating into areas that colporteurs and mail were unable to reach. Specifically, the English radio program and English Bible courses drew listeners and students from the middle and upper classes.<sup>56</sup> The Bible Correspondence School’s enrollment depended on student introductions, advertisements in denominational magazines and other periodicals, and radio logs with application blanks attached. Thus, by February 1948, many listeners connected to Adventism through programs such as *Present Truth Lectures* and *Spirit of Prophecy*, all with the denomination’s unique messages. One example of the popularity of the Adventist radio programs was when radio station XNRA asked the Voice of Prophecy to broadcast an English-Chinese translated program entitled *Our Time* each Sabbath.<sup>57</sup> In the spring of 1949, when several radio stations in the Communist-controlled northern cities were being shut down, feeling that “our days are numbered,” David Lin directed the radio ministry team taking refuge in Canton to transcribe the programs speedily. These transcriptions were then sent out to regions that had lost access to the radio programs.<sup>58</sup>

However effective the evangelistic methods were, they required local workers on the ground to reap the results. And indeed, even during the civil war local lay leaders delivered gospel tracts and the Bible Correspondence School enrollment blanks, led Bible studies in their homes, and rallied hundreds of students to come to month-long evangelistic meetings.<sup>59</sup> They raised funds for local evangelistic meetings, diligently

---

In the spring of 1949, when several radio stations in the Communist-controlled northern cities were being shut down, feeling that “our days are numbered,” David Lin directed the radio ministry team taking refuge in Canton to transcribe the programs speedily.

visited their neighbors, and invited potential converts to meetings. The China Division used *Training Light Bearers* and Ellen White's *Gospel Workers* to train the laity in evangelistic skills. Both works gave guidance on basic Bible study, denominational history, the GC organization, and simple missionary work. Ten thousand copies of the Chinese song book were published to support newly established Sabbath meetings.<sup>60</sup>

Though the Chinese proved themselves to be capable evangelists, they did not gain full leadership of the denomination until the missionaries were forced to leave China in the 1950s. The China Division's secretary, Nathan Falcon Brewer (1891–1959), did call for more Chinese workers to be ordained as pastors after the civil war. Comparing the seventy-six ordained Chinese ministers to the twenty-six foreign missionaries, Brewer commented in 1948 that, "Many of our workers have been in the work for years and have received ministerial licenses for ten to twenty years. It would seem that a number of these workers should be ready for ordination if they are ever to be ordained. I believe that the council should give definite study to this item." With a national membership of 21,769 people, Brewer's call for empowering more native agents through ordination reflects a pragmatic concern for growing the China mission, whose political future was increasingly uncertain.<sup>61</sup> And indeed, from 1947 to 1950, over thirty Chinese workers were ordained.<sup>62</sup> In the past, it might have taken years for a worker to become qualified for ordination. But it soon became clear to the missionaries that field experience was less relevant and could be gained after ordination. David Lin, for example, accomplished much in the radio department but lacked frontline experience in pastoral ministry. Yet Lin was fast-tracked to become an ordained pastor on January 24, 1948, less than two years after his return to Shanghai.<sup>63</sup> Another similar case was that of Xu Hua (Hsu Hua 1906–1995). Xu was more experienced in the printing and editing ministry than the grassroots ministry but was ordained in 1950 nonetheless.<sup>64</sup> In Wenzhou, the first Chinese president of the South Chekiang Mission was Pastor Chen Youshi (1900–1974).<sup>65</sup> These precipitous ordinations prepared the Chinese to fill the leadership void after the missionaries left China.

When Ezra L. Longway, John Oss, and their families

departed China in 1950,<sup>66</sup> for the first time in Chinese Adventist history "the leadership of the work was entirely in Chinese hands,"<sup>67</sup> with Xu Hua as China Division's president, David Lin as secretary, and Li Chengzhang (S. J. Lee 1908–1987) as treasurer.<sup>68</sup> The denomination's national membership had grown from just ninety-five baptized members in 1909 to 22,994 in 1950.<sup>69</sup> Despite the small membership in comparison with other denominations,<sup>70</sup> and despite the uncertainty under the new regime, the Chinese leadership encouraged the church "to be courageous and strong, and not to 'draw back' in their work for God."<sup>71</sup>

Yet the missionary-appointed Chinese leadership was short-lived. For in the following months, the regime imposed strict control over the Christian population. Both Catholic and Protestant churches were demanded to demonstrate patriotism by breaking their financial and organizational ties with foreign missionaries. The Communists used the bureaucratic framework of the Three-Self Reform Movement (later renamed the Three-Self Patriotic Movement [TSPM]) to place all Christians under official control.<sup>72</sup> Some politically progressive Protestants responded favorably to the new state,<sup>73</sup> others were suspicious of the communist government, and still others were defiant. The Adventist leaders responded with considerable caution. David Lin reminded the churches that despite being under the Three-Self Movement, Chinese Adventists continued to be "members of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists." Lin wrote, "Neither China nor the United States owns the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Church has its own integrity. It is an organization for all nations." The theology undergirding Lin's statement is unmistakably a global Adventist one. Referring to the first angel's proclamation in Revelation 14:6, which the Adventists interpret as the Church's unique mission to spread the gospel to "every nation and tribe and language and people," Lin called on Adventists to embrace the "world mission" instead of narrowly focusing on evangelizing China. He criticized some politically active Adventists, who quickly embraced the ideological rhetoric of the state and sought to nationalize the churches. Any ecclesiastical reform, according to Lin, should be guided by the "spirit of cooperation, brotherly trust, and mutual love," not by any ideological agenda.<sup>74</sup>

Lin's statements express his worries about the politicized environment that Adventist churches were facing. He published these remarks in 1950, when the Communists had already infiltrated the Adventist mission's school, the China Training Institute, and its printing press, the Signs of the Times Publishing House. The new Chinese leadership headed by Xu Hua strove to resist the disruption of these infiltrations. A heightened sentiment invoking divine intervention to counter the Communist challenges was captured in the June 1951 issue of the denominational magazine cover that urged the Adventists to "Hold high the torch of truth!" and defiantly quoted Paul's epistle to the Hebrews (13:6): "The Lord will help me—I will not fear. What can people do to me?"<sup>75</sup> The infiltrators destabilized these institutions by creating pro-government student and labor unions to undermine the existing Adventist leadership.<sup>76</sup>

Pressure on Chinese Christians to support China's confrontation with the United State intensified during the Korean War (1950–1953). In the name of purging Western imperialism, the Communists launched countless mass denunciations of Christian leaders, forcing them to accuse and demonize the foreign missionaries. This development was a continuation of the contentious church-state relationship from the 1920s, when the Soviet-supported nationalists and communists launched a series of anti-Christian campaigns to foment violence in coastal China. The party activists co-opted those pro-government Chinese church leaders and mission school students to challenge foreign missionaries, exploiting one political crisis after another to bring the idealistic Christians closer to their revolutionary agenda. The radicalization of the Christian youths became part of a broader Communist mobilizing strategy to expand the revolutionary movement and to gain popular support for an imagined Chinese nation-state. This secular state-building process intensified in the

government-controlled patriotic churches after 1949. In particular, the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950 worsened the situation for Chinese churches. The Communist government expelled Western Catholic and Protestant missionaries from China, confiscated mission church properties, and forced Chinese Christians to cut ties with foreigners. It was nationalistic and symbolized the end of foreign imperialism in China. The TSPM was launched to politicize religious doctrines and practices. The movement subordinated the religious mission of the church to the political agenda of the Communist Party. The Christian ideas of pacifism, universal love, and salvation by faith were dismissed as imperialist opiates, while anti-imperialism and class struggle were glorified as Christian virtues. The persistent wave of party propaganda against US military intervention in Korea incited anti-foreign sentiments. Under this sort of everyday clamor, the TSPM became linked to official xenophobia, and as a result, the state went after the Euro- and US-centric Protestant denominations. This kind of war psychology convinced many Christians that the days of missionary work were over, and that any links with foreigners would be unpatriotic.

In 1951, the Adventists in Shanghai were the first group in the denomination to accuse the missionaries.<sup>77</sup> The procedure for setting up the accusation committee was dictated by the Communist officials in charge of religious affairs and by the leaders of the TSPM. The state's agents decided which Adventists to accuse, who should make the accusations, and what content was to be included in the accusation materials. During the accusation meeting, they manipulated the Adventist participants' anti-foreign sentiments and emotions; afterwards, they replaced the existing church leaders with their own protégés and completely integrated the Adventist institutions into the socialist order.<sup>78</sup> A similar model of top-down infiltration was later applied to other Protestant and Catholic groups. The

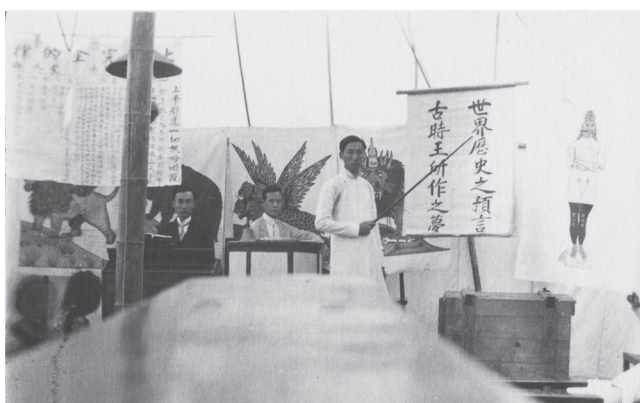
---

The radicalization of the Christian youths became part of a broader Communist mobilizing strategy to expand the revolutionary movement and to gain popular support for an imagined Chinese nation-state.

accusation campaign was a calculated tactic to expel existing church leaders and put pro-government agents in charge of former mission churches. After three accusation meetings, the government formed the Seventh-day Adventist Preparatory Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in 1951 to take over all Adventist religious, medical, and educational institutions. Adventists could keep only a few of the mission properties for religious purposes and were forced to surrender the rest to the state.

When American mission funds stopped pouring in, the China Division faced a serious crisis, for Adventist clergymen left the ministry when they did not receive their salaries. As the division was under the control of pro-regime Adventists, and as government agenda dictated evangelization, dedicated local believers strived to keep the ministry going. In Wenzhou, Adventist ministers and elders decentralized the ecclesiastical structure by dividing South Zhejiang into seven subdivisions, with each unit headed by one young worker.<sup>79</sup> The devolution of church authority gave individual workers greater freedom to move around, bringing them closer to congregants in rural areas, which in turn meant they could better cater to their spiritual needs, and which made intimate pastoral care possible. Reflecting on China's new challenges in the early Maoist era, David Lin appraises South Zhejiang's decentralization model as "the best case" of coping with extreme pressures "under the most difficult circumstances."<sup>80</sup> Lack of mission funds sharply reduced the number of full-time workers from sixty to less than twenty.<sup>81</sup>

Though they struggled, the churches survived and continued to function without much outside help. Local members kept the churches going with regular tithes; they repaired old churches and even built new ones. David Lin reports that in the midst of frenzied socioeconomic changes such as the Land Reform and Collectivization (1950–1953), the total Adventist membership in Wenzhou grew from 1,048 in 1949 to more than 2,000 in 1956, with another 2,000 adherents awaiting baptism. The local workers sent regular reports of church revival to other Adventist national leaders.<sup>82</sup> Daniel Bays traced this mode of decentralized and autonomous house gatherings back to 1955 when Beijing Protestant preacher Wang Mingdao and Shanghai's



Chinese Adventist evangelist interpreting the prophecies of Daniel.  
Credit: Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, courtesy of University of Notre Dame Press

Catholic bishop Gong Pinmei (1901–2000) were arrested.<sup>83</sup> In such cases of ordained leadership absence, laity and dedicated former church leaders often played key roles in rural and urban house churches. By relying on family and peer networks, local house meetings existed outside the control of the religious patriotic institutions and helped sustain many believers.

Amid these church structural changes emerged an important development in the Chinese Adventist literature: the translation and dissemination of Ellen White's writings. Although many of White's works had previously and sporadically been published in Adventist magazines and in book form, it was during the 1950s, when the mission structure was disintegrating, that the indigenous leaders determined systematically to translate and retranslate some of White's key works. The leading figures in this endeavor were David Lin, Chen Min, and Xu Hua. Young Adventists from the Huzhong Church in central Shanghai hand-copied, studied, and circulated these works. This Adventist literature standardized the denominational doctrines and instilled a sense of spiritual identity among believers. They managed to promote and sustain a version of "orthodox" Adventism based exclusively on Ellen White's teachings. Lin's role in this translation project made him an authoritative commentator on White's works, and he would later fight the Adventist schisms by referring to them exclusively to attack those with whom he disagreed.<sup>84</sup>

During the peak of the anti-Christian denunciation campaign, many former mission church workers and ordained pastors were stripped of their ecclesiastical leadership. Even though they were barred from officially



Launching a renewed attack on Protestant denominationalism, the official propaganda condemned the multiplicity of Protestant churches as a mirror of Western Christendom, which deliberately fragmented the Chinese Church with competing denominational structures, practices, and beliefs.

ministering to the churches, they conducted frontline ministry as “free evangelists,” whom the TSPM labeled as “self-styled evangelists” (*zifeng chuandao ren*). They held house gatherings outside the government-run patriotic churches. The many episodes of struggle had estranged the believers from the pro-government church leaders, and the politicized patriotic churches had failed to function as a spiritual body. Those TSPM churches that lacked capable pastors also invited these free evangelists to preach and lead Bible studies occasionally. In Shanghai, David Lin and other Adventist pastors, who were accused of being “imperialists” and therefore “excommunicated” from the church, were some of these “free evangelists” carrying on clandestine meetings at home in 1953 and 1954.<sup>85</sup>

National conditions for Chinese Christians deteriorated between 1958 and 1962, and they referred to this period as the beginning of the “elimination of Christianity” (*miejiao*). Because rural communities had been organized into mutual aid teams with militarized discipline during the campaign of agricultural collectivization in 1953, the redrawing of village boundaries merged Christian households with their non-Christian neighbors. This, in turn, put non-Christian cadres in charge of Catholic and Protestant villagers, and replaced the existing Christian power structure with a socialist one.<sup>86</sup> When Mao Zedong launched the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), a mass campaign designed to mobilize all citizens to participate in collective economic production to compete in short order with Western modern nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States, it established the people’s commune system in the countryside.<sup>87</sup> The communes further divided into production brigands and production

teams, thereby setting specific targets to maximize productivity. The campaign exacerbated an inherent tension between religious practice and pursuit of modernization at multiple levels. Whenever the collective production activities conflicted with Christians’ weekly congregational activities, non-Christian cadres often accused the former of not doing their share to support the Great Leap campaign but reaping the same benefits and consuming the same amount of food as everyone else.

Another level of tension arose from the different understanding of work and labor. The socialist idea of work, labor, and remuneration was a communal one, in which all the outcomes of physical labor were handed over to the local state agents and distributed collectively. But the Christians believed that labor and time should be at their own disposal with regard to church ministry, and that they should be allowed to set aside some of their earnings as tithes to support local ministers. Whenever local pastors received donations from congregants, cadres criticized them as lazy parasites, and as draining resources from the communes. Throughout the Great Leap Forward, local Christian leaders were pressurized to submit public statements in support of the collective production targets, and to urge their congregants to focus on production activities. Even when village cadres turned a blind eye to any clandestine church activities in 1958 and 1959, local pastors had to ensure that the Christians would meet the production quotas.<sup>88</sup> In a subsequent 1960 campaign called “Handing the Heart to the Party Movement,” the pastors were finally forced to abandon the ministry, to join in economic production, and to hand over their church properties to the production teams.<sup>89</sup>

The nightmare for the denominational churches

came in the united worship (*lianhe chongbai*) campaign in the late summer of 1958. In supporting the Great Leap Forward, this campaign called for churches of all denominational stripes to support unanimously the socialist construction of the nation. The discourse of “imperialism” was a powerful rhetorical device to justify this top-down, forceful strategy of church unification.<sup>90</sup> Launching a renewed attack on Protestant denominationalism, the official propaganda condemned the multiplicity of Protestant churches as a mirror of Western Christendom, which deliberately fragmented the Chinese Church with competing denominational structures, practices, and beliefs. The state called on Chinese Protestants to be free from imperialism by forming a unified church body. Therefore, unified worship services signified a unified China, and all churches had to join together—without a denominational name—to reflect this nationalistic sentiment.<sup>91</sup> In Wenzhou, the coercion to eliminate denominations happened step by step. Early on, the Protestants were permitted to keep different forms of baptism and Saturday Sabbath observance, and women followers of the Christian Assembly were allowed to practice head-veiling.<sup>92</sup> In May 1958, six Protestant denominations in the downtown were forced to merge and hold only one Sunday morning service at the Chengxi Church. During the week, the church was forced to be used as a theater to show propaganda movies.<sup>93</sup> Likewise, many church premises were turned over to the state as sites of production. Meanwhile, numerous “struggle sessions” (*pidou hui*) against the “rightists” and “counter-revolutionists” were held throughout Zhejiang Province, and in December 1957, nineteen evangelists, including the seminary-educated Adventists Wu Huanwen and Zhao Dianlai,<sup>94</sup> were arrested and condemned as rightists.<sup>95</sup> Wenzhou was chosen as a laboratory for eliminating all religious activities (*wuzongjiao qu shiyan*). In May 1959, the Wenzhou municipal authorities touted the region as the country’s first site without any organized religion. Clergymen were forced to leave the ministry, church properties were surrendered to the local production brigades, and Christians were forbidden to take a day off for worship. Intimidated believers renounced their faith publicly. Those Christians who refused to do so

suffered humiliation and torture. The people’s commune system eviscerated the organic family units in rural Wenzhou, separating parents and children, husbands and wives. Anyone physically capable was assigned to the production teams, and the strict demand on meeting the mandatory quotas prohibited regular family and religious life. The socialist education campaign (1962–1965), which followed the Great Leap campaign, inculcated the young minds with atheism. Local church leaders and Christian parents found it immensely difficult to pass on the faith to their children.

As Mao’s collectivization efforts encountered serious setbacks, house church activities gradually resurfaced in Wenzhou. One source suggests that the first house meeting since the 1958 ban on religion was established in the centrally located Wuma Street in 1960.<sup>96</sup> Official statistics show that the total number of house churches grew from eight in 1960 to eighty in 1962—a tenfold increase over two years.<sup>97</sup> In Ruian, over seven hundred Christians conducted worship in homes,<sup>98</sup> and a few Adventist families began to hold regular house gatherings in 1962. Liang Yizhen (b. 1940), father of Liang Shihuan,<sup>99</sup> who would later launch the factional “Wheatfield Ministry,” resumed worship at home in Zhangpu Village, Lingxi Town, Pingyang County. Clandestine house gatherings challenged government surveillance. In Wenzhou, the local authorities imposed eighteen prohibitions to constrain evangelistic activities. The prohibitions confined evangelists’ mobility and their communication with outsiders and potential converts, and tried to ban all kinds of Christian activities.<sup>100</sup> Given such restrictions, it was indeed difficult for the pastors to conduct clandestine ministry.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the Red Guards attacked religious activities in the name of destroying the four olds (old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas). As with the Nationalist-run anti-superstition campaign in the 1930s, the Red Guards strove to eradicate violently any remnants of Western and Chinese religious symbols. In September 1966, the Red Guards shut down the Chengxi Church,<sup>101</sup> virtually paralyzing the Three-Self patriotic institution. One byproduct of this brutal repression was that it advanced the rise of lay-led evangelism and the proliferation of clandestine printing activities.<sup>102</sup>

The Adventist-led Phoenix-Mound-Tower Church (*Fenggangta jiaohui*) in Pingyang is an example of this. Widely renowned as the Adventists' mother church in South Zhejiang and the "cradle of Adventist revival" in Wenzhou, the church survived and was revived by Adventists in the region in the mid-1960s. The church building was completely demolished during the Great Leap Forward. Nevertheless, the laity met in secret for Saturday Sabbath. Without any professional ministers to nurture their faith, these Adventists received no formal theological training or doctrinal instruction. What nurtured their Adventist knowledge was the Chinese translation of Ellen White's literature. The Phoenix-Mound-Tower Adventists distributed copies of these mimeographed materials to nearby house gatherings. Together with hand-copied portions of the Bible and the Adventist hymnals, these materials permitted the continuation of Adventism when churches were shut down and when professional ministers were locked up or withdrew themselves from the public. In the mid-1960s, eight heads of households organized themselves to form a preaching band. To avoid surveillance, they took turns giving sermons at different venues. In 1969, over a thousand Adventists from South Zhejiang, Suzhou, and Fujian Province participated in a revival meeting. Local Adventists remember this remarkable gathering as the beginning of the Adventist revival.<sup>103</sup>

Factional rivalries among the Red Guards, workers, students, and armies paralyzed the operation of provincial and county authorities, and this made it difficult for the local state to enforce effective



The two Adventist church buildings at Horizontal Dyke Village: the reformist church (right) and the conservative church (left). Credit: Christie Chui-Shan Chow, courtesy of University of Notre Dame Press

control over the populace. The attacks of religious suppression decreased, and some Christians resumed covert church activities during the early 1970s. While political relaxation enabled some urban Adventists to connect with the Phoenix-Mound-Tower congregation and proselytize in the interior, years of their exposure to abuses at the hands of the Red Guards resulted in widespread revulsion and hatred in the events of disagreement and conflict. Without a national Adventist hierarchical body to mediate intra-church disputes and formulate the rules of nonviolent conflict resolution, rival Adventists often appropriated the correlative discourse of class struggle to attack each other. Public shaming and denunciation got into the pulpits and circulated in writings. This became particularly troublesome for the young Wenzhou Adventists and other like-minded brethren and sisters in Ruian and Cangnan when they were confronted with the problem of sharing power with the older professional clergymen and church workers, who were released from prisons and labor camps to resume leadership in the newly opened patriotic churches.

### Reviving Adventism in Post-Maoist Era

With the deaths of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in 1976, the new leader, Deng Xiaoping, gradually launched economic modernization programs to make the socialist state capable of global competition. To strengthen internal stability, Deng emphasized upholding the party-state's laws and regulations in the private domain. In the religious sphere, the state set out to govern religious activities in the name of "respecting and protecting the freedom of religious belief." The ban on public religious activities was gradually loosened, and a spirit of religious tolerance was institutionalized in a policy statement known as Document 19 in March 1982.<sup>104</sup> The new era, which came to be known as "reform and open," witnessed an influx of overseas Christian visitors seeking to reconnect with the mainland believers. These visitors brought religious literature, visual and audio materials, and financial assistance. There were also new international mission groups who saw China as a promising field in the global East. On the other hand, former mission organizations sought to regain lost ground, and Adventists were among them.



The earliest effort to organize the China ministries by the GC was the formation of the China Evangelism Committee (*Zhonghua shenggong weiyuanhui*) in the mid-1970s in Hong Kong.<sup>105</sup> This indigenous operation, under the leadership of Samuel Young (Yang Jiansheng 1928–2018),<sup>106</sup> the newly appointed president of Hong Kong-Macau Mission, was effective in reinitiating the work in China. Its first order of business was to establish an Adventist radio program targeting the mainland audiences. Regular gospel radio programs began on February 1, 1977 in Hong Kong, with the intention of spreading their ministry in South China.<sup>107</sup> Samuel Young reported that by 1989 Adventist organizations such as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Christian Record Services, Pacific Union College, and other Adventist-run ministries, including Eden Valley Institute and Weimar Institute, had started various kinds of works in China.<sup>108</sup> After the United States and European countries ordered arms and economic sanctions on the Chinese government to punish its brutal suppression of the Tiananmen pro-democratic movement, Adventist organizations such as the Loma Linda University Medical Center and ADRA contacted local Chinese authorities to expand Adventist medical and relief ministries there.<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile, the GC's East Asia Committee took advantage of the British colony's location and set up a branch in Hong Kong. Adventists who emigrated from China to work for the Hong Kong-based East Asian Committee (EAC) supplied the needed workforce to produce Mandarin radio programs. Experienced mainland Chinese immigrant church workers and pastors wrote gospel literature and training materials. Bibles, Adventist hymnals, Sabbath school lessons, and Chinese versions of Ellen White's books were smuggled from Hong Kong to nearby Guangdong and Fujian provinces, and from there to other parts of China. In 1999, the EAC merged with the South China Islands Union Mission to form the Chinese Union Mission (CHUM), signaling the global Church's

more progressive effort to organize the Adventist work in China.<sup>110</sup> The reconnection with global Adventist communities, however, complicated local Adventist divisions in Wenzhou. Interaction between global and local Adventists produced events that took the schisms on a totally unpredictable trajectory.

The reintroductions of peoples, funding, and religious materials aroused the Communist regime's reactions. Beginning in the late 1980s, the government widened its control on religious printing,<sup>111</sup> church-based Bible training, and the circulation of imported literature. Listening to gospel radio broadcasts or any audiovisual programs and receiving funding from overseas religious bodies were all prohibited activities.<sup>112</sup> Despite these constraints, Chinese believers were relatively free to gather at one another's houses until the 1990s. For since there was no national policy to regulate religious gatherings outside designated venues,<sup>113</sup> the status of house churches was ambiguous and was tacitly approved. Nonetheless, to maintain control over Christianity, the regime rebuilt the TSPM system and later created the China Christian Council (hereafter CCC). Both religious associations, jointly called the "two associations" (*lianghui*, hereafter TSPM/CCC), were tasked with rebuilding a Christian organization the regime could trust. In the following decades, the TSPM/CCC reinstated the former TSPM leaders of the 1950s (*lao sanzhi*), elected and ordained new TSPM pastors, rebuilt the regime-sponsored theological seminaries, and reclaimed the numerous confiscated missionary properties. Under the banner of the three-selves, these endeavors had crucial implications for the denominational believers. Denominations had ceased to exist, the TSPM/CCC asserts, and consequently no claim based on a denominational need was legitimated. In the Adventist case, pastoral ordination has to gain formal recognition, Adventists are forbidden to open their own theological seminaries, nor can they reclaim any church property in the denomination's name.

---

Bibles, Adventist hymnals, Sabbath school lessons, and Chinese versions of Ellen White's books were smuggled from Hong Kong to nearby Guangdong and Fujian provinces, and from there to other parts of China.

Statistically, Chinese Adventists have been part of the religious revival in post-Mao China. The national membership has increased from nearly 250,000 in 1998 to 451,070 in 2017,<sup>114</sup> with churches in coastal cities like Wenzhou being one of the major contributors to this growth, even though my informants cautioned that membership growth seems to have stagnated in the past few years. In the midst of sociopolitical upheavals during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Adventism's deep spiritual commitment has sustained the group, enabling its members to continue their faith journeys. What the figures do not reveal is that along with revival there are enough intra-group disagreements, disputes, and divisions to cause rivalries that continue to this day. How the schisms happened is the subject of the next chapters.

## Endnotes

43. S. J. Lee, "Adventism in China: The Communist Takeover," *Spectrum* 7, no. 3 (1976): 16–22.
44. Samuel Young, ed., *Zhonghua shengongshi* [Chinese Seventh-day Adventist History] (Hong Kong: Chinese Union Mission, 2002), 88.
45. General Conference committee minutes, November 1945, 2103–2104, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1945-11.pdf>.
46. W. H. Branson, "Rebuilding," *The China Division Reporter* 12, no. 2 (October 1947): 1–8. Figure is taken from p. 1.
47. Wang Fu-Yuan, "Reports of the 1948 Evangelistic Efforts in China: Northwest China Union," *The China Division Reporter* 14, no. 2 (February 1949): 34.
48. Gary Land, *Historical Dictionary of the Seventh-day Adventists*, 2d ed. (Lanham, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 279.
49. "Evangelist-Pastor Fordyce W. Detamore Dies," *Northern Union Outlook* 44, no. 17 (August 18, 1980): 22. Detamore spent a short time evangelizing in Shanghai. Between 1949 and 1950, he held many evangelistic meetings in English, and at one meeting Detamore collaborated with the gospel music evangelist Henry Meissner, attracting a Russian audience. The meetings inspired a Chinese female participant, who later donated \$7,300 to the Shanghai English Adventist Church. See C. B. Miller, "East China Union," *The China Division Reporter* 14, no. 2 (February 1949): 4–5; Young, *Zhonghua shengongshi*, 739.
50. See Appendix A.
51. One study on the Adventist radio work in Africa is Desrene L. Vernon, "A Historical Analysis of Adventist World Radio's Impact in the East Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: A Case Study of Tanzania" (PhD thesis, Howard University, Washington, DC, 2011).
52. General Conference committee minutes, November 1945, 2013–14, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1945-11.pdf>.
53. Young, *Zhonghua shengongshi*, 776.
54. David Lin, "The Voice of Prophecy: A Scrap of Paper," *The China Division Reporter* 12, no. 4 (December 1947): 8; David Lin, "The Voice of Prophecy in China," *The China Division Reporter* 13, no. 1 (January 1948): 7.
55. David Lin, "The Voice of Prophecy Moves South," *The China Division Reporter* 14, no. 3 (March 1949): 7; David Lin, "Voice of Prophecy News," *The China Division Reporter* 14, no. 9 (September 1949): 8; David Lin, "The Voice of Prophecy: Recommendations—V.O.P. Workers," *The China Division Reporter* 15, no. 2 (February 1950): 1–8.
56. David Lin, "Forward to Faith," *The China Division Reporter* 12, no. 2 (October 1947): 4; Lin, "The Voice of Prophecy in China," 7; Milton Lee, "Report of Signs Bible Correspondence School," *The China Division Reporter* 13, no. 3 (March 1948): 14.
57. Bessie Mount, "With Our Workers in Lanchow," *The China Division Reporter* 12, no. 4 (December 1947): 6; Milton Lee, "First Fruits from Shanghai Effort," *The China Division Reporter* 13, no. 5 (May 1948): 5.
58. Lin, "The Voice of Prophecy Moves South," 7; Paul Wickman, "Adventist Radio Message Circles the World," *Review and Herald* 126, no. 39 (September 29, 1949): 12–13. Quotation is taken from p. 13.
59. E. H. James, "North China Union," *The China Division Reporter* 14, no. 4 (April 1949): 6.
60. Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1892), <https://egwwritings.org>; Home Missionary Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Training Light Bearers: How to Give Bible Readings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945); John Oss, "With Our Department and Institutions," *The China Division Reporter* 15, no. 5 (Fourth Quarter 1950): 4–5.
61. N. F. Brewer, "China Division Secretary's Report," *The China Division Reporter* 13, no. 3 (March 1948): 2–3.
62. See C. H. Davis, "South China Union," *The China Division Reporter* 14, no. 4 (April 1949): 6; "Ordination Services," *The China Division Reporter* 13, no. 3 (March 1948): 16; "Division Notes," *The China Division Reporter* 15, no. 3 (May 1950): 8.
63. "Ordination Services," 16.
64. Xu Hua was ordained in Hong Kong after returning from the 1950 General Conference Session in San Francisco, CA. See Young, *Zhonghua shengongshi*, 667.
65. Claud Conard, comp., *1950 Yearbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1950), 99–100, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1950.pdf>. For a biography of Chen Youshi, see Young, *Zhonghua shengongshi*, 471–73.
66. "New Notes," *The China Division Reporter* 15, no. 5 (Fourth Quarter 1950): 8.
67. Hsu Hwa (Xu Hua), "Let Us Hold Fast the Profession of Our Faith," *The China Division Reporter* 15, no. 3 (May 1950): 1.
68. See some of the photos of the Chinese leadership on the front page of *The China Division Reporter* 15, no. 5 (Fourth Quarter 1950): 1–8.
69. Figures were drawn from *1909 Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination—The Official Directories* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909), 134, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1909.pdf>; *1950 Yearbook*, 98.
70. This is in comparison to other large denominations. For instance, see figures collected by the Religious Affairs Bureau in 1950: Church of Christ in China (176,988), Bethel Mission (125,000), True Jesus Church (125,000), China Baptist Convention (65,000), Christian Assembly (80,000), and Methodist Church (102,693). Cited in Fuk-tsang Ying, "The Regional Development of Protestant Christianity in China: 1919, 1949 and 2004," *The China Review* 9, no. 2 (2009): 77.
71. Hsu Hwa, "Let Us Hold Fast."
72. 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. It describes a mission policy that organized native Christians in Africa and Asia into self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches.
73. Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 159.
74. Lin Yaoxi, "Wo dui musheng de qi wang [My Expectation of the 'Shepherd's Call]," *Musheng* 5 (1950): 1.
75. Cited in Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, "Speaking in the Devil's Tongue? The True Jesus Church's Uneasy Rhetorical Accommodation to Maoism, 1948–1958," *Modern China* 44, no. 6 (2018): 652–82. Quotation is on p. 657.
76. For the Adventists who were active collaborators in denouncing the Adventist church leaders, see Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, "Co-optation and Its Discontents: Seventh-day Adventism in 1950s China," *Frontiers of History in China* 7, no. 4 (2012): 582–607. See also Ying Fuk-tsang, *Jidujiao zai zhongguo de shibai? Zhongguo gongchan yundong yu jidujiao shilun* [Christianity's Failure in China? Essays on the History of Chinese Communist Movement and Christianity] (Hong Kong: The Logos and Pneuma Press, 2008), 111–15. Notably, Gu Changsheng, author of *Chuanjiaoshi yu jindai zongguo* [Missionaries and Modern China], was one of these collaborators. Gu grew up an Adventist and left the denomination in 1956. For Gu's own account of his involvement in the denunciation campaign in Chinese, see his *Yesu kuliao: Gu Changsheng huiyilu, 1945–1984* [Jesus Wept: Memoir of Gu Changsheng, 1945–1984], Yale Divinity School Library, The China Records Project Miscellaneous Personal Papers Collections, Record Group 8, Box 244. See also his English memoir, *Awaken: Memoirs of a Chinese Historian* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2009), 61–68.
77. Lee, "Adventism in China," 16–22.
78. The YMCA general secretary Liu Liangmo laid down these procedures in his article, "How to Hold a Successful Accusation." The article was originally released by the New China News Agency of Shanghai on May 15, 1951. An English translation can be found in Wallace C. Merwin and Francis Price Jones, comps., *Documents of the Three-Self Movement: Source Materials for Study of the Protestant Church in China* (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 1963), 49–51.

79. Young, *Zhonghua shengongshi*, 163.

80. David Lin, "An Appraisal of Administrative Policy and Practice in S.D.A. Mission," December 12, 1956. Document File 3901.8, Heritage Research Center, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, CA.

81. Young, *Zhonghua shengongshi*, 163.

82. David Lin was the national leader of the Adventists at the time and local congregations continued to submit reports to him. Therefore, these statistical figures are credible.

83. Bays, *A New History*, 176–77; Paul Philip Mariani, *Church Militant: Bishop Kung and Catholic Resistance in Communist Shanghai* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

84. Christie Chui-Shan Chow, "Indigenizing the Prophetess: Toward a Chinese Denominational Practice," in *China's Christianity: From Missionary to Indigenous Church*, ed. Anthony E. Clark (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 219–46.

85. Shan Yingmin, "Jielu yincang zai anxirihui nei de yige fandong heibang [Exposing a Gang of Reactionaries Hidden in the Adventist Church]," *Tianfeng* no. 559 (August 25, 1958): 31–32.

86. Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, "Politics of Faith: Christian Activism and the Maoist State in Chaozhou, Guangdong Province," *The China Review* 9, no. 2 (2009): 17–39.

87. For the impact of the Great Leap Forward on local communities, see Ralph A. Thaxton, Jr., *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China: Mao's Great Leap Forward: Famine and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Frank Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–1962* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, Inc., 2010).

88. *Tianfeng* no. 549 (June 1958): 3–13; no. 551 (August 1958): 20–21.

89. *Zhongguo gongchandang zhejiangsheng wenzhou difang weiyuanhui tongzhanbu zhongqiaowei* [The Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee of the United Front Department of the Wenzhou Municipality of the Chinese Party], comp., "Shengwei tongzhanbu guanyu qiaowu, zongjiao gongzuo de tongxun 1960 [Circulars Collected by the Provincial United Front about Religions and Overseas Chinese 1960]." Tongzhanbu [The United Front] Archives. Call No.: 92-8-11, Wenzhou Municipal Archives, Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, China, 1960.

90. Numerous reports in the 1958 *Tianfeng* discuss the church's positive responses to the united worship, two of which are Zhi Xing, "Chedi gaibian zhongguo jidujiao de ban zhimindi mianmao [A Fundamental Change on the Semi-Colonial Outlook of Chinese Christianity]," *Tianfeng* 16, no. 599 (August 25, 1958): 15–16; Dun Yan, "Chedi gaibian shanghai jidujiao de ban zhimindi mianmao [A Fundamental Change on the Semi-Colonial Outlook of Christianity in Shanghai]," *Tianfeng* 18, no. 561 (September 22, 1958): 18–19.

91. In some regions, Seventh-day Adventists were allowed to worship in their own churches. The Nanguan Church in Guangzhou was one of these churches. See *Guangzhoushi Jiu-zhutang Jidufulin anxirihui* [Guangzhou Savior Church of Seventh-day Adventists], *Jiaohui lishi* [A Church History], <http://www.gzsda.net/sub/jhjs-31.html>.

92. Ye Guoqi, "Wenzhou ge jiaohui shixing hebing [The Merging of Churches in Wenzhou]," *Tianfeng* no. 561 (September 22, 1958): 20–21.

93. Chen Fengsheng, "Wenzhou jiaohui yigong fazhan licheng [The Development of Lay Evangelism in the Wenzhou Churches]," *Nanjing Theological Review* 3 (2010): 32.

94. See Appendix A.

95. *Zhongguo gongchandang Zhejiangsheng Wenzhou difang weiyuanhui* [Local Party Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province], "Diwei tongzhanbu guanyu zongjiao, qiaowu gongzuo de baogao, tongbao [Reports and Circulars Collected by the Municipal United Front about Religions and Overseas Chinese in Wenzhou]," Tongzhanbu [The United Front] Archives. Call No.: 92-6-1, Wenzhou Municipal Archives, Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, China, 1958.

96. Ezra Pan, *Zhongguo de yelusang: Wenzhou jidujiao lishi* [An Introduction to Protestantism of Contemporary Wenzhou, China, vol. 1] (Taipei: Taiwan jidujiao wenyi chubanshe youxian gongsi, 2017), 70–71.

97. Zhu Yujing, "Guojia tongzhi, difang zhengzhi yu Wenzhou de jidujiao [State Rule, Local Politics and Christianity in Wenzhou]," (PhD thesis, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2011), 96.

98. Wang Xiaoxuan, "The Dilemma of Implementation: The State and Religion in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1990," in *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism*, eds. Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 272.

99. See Appendix A.

100. The eighteen prohibitions were: (1) Clergy must adhere to the Three-Self principles; Clergy are not allowed to: (2) accept overseas funds; (3) receive books from abroad; (4) communicate with non-local clergy and invite them to preach in local areas; (5) evangelize outside church premises; (6) use visitation as an excuse to hold a fellowship meeting; (7) engage in superstitious activities, such as exorcism and spiritual healing; (8) conduct wedding ceremonies for Christians; (9) use religion as a means to

swindle; (10) hold house gatherings or subvert public order by gathering together; (11) fellowship with church members; (12) emphasize worship on Sunday; (13) convert any individuals; (14) compel others to believe in Christianity; (15) convert people under 18 years old or invite young people to the church; (16) print the Bible in secret; (17) or hold prayer meetings; (18) Clergy must strictly obey the Three-Self principles; otherwise they will be severely punished. Cited in Zhu, "Guojia tongzhi," footnote no. 117, p. 96.

101. Zhi, *Wenzhou jidujiao*, 42.

102. Chen, "Wenzhou jiaohui"; Kao Chen-yang, "The Cultural Revolution and the Post-Missionary Transformation of Protestantism in China," (PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 2009).

103. Miao Changyun, ed., *Bashi zhounian jinian, 1928–2008* [The Eightieth Anniversary, 1928–2008] (Cangnan: Jidufulin anxirihui Fengangta jiaohui, November 8, 2008), 12–15.

104. A copy of Document 19 in English may be found in Donald E. MacInnis, ed., *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 8–26.

105. Samuel Chien-Sheng Young, "The China Evangelism Committee: Its Formation, Organization, and Scope of Work," *China Evangelism Quarterly*, Summer 1977: 2–4.

106. For Young's autobiography, see Young, *Zhonghua shengongshi*, 677–80.

107. Hong Kong-Macao Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, "Triennial Report 1975–77 Hong Kong-Macao Mission of Seventh-Day Adventists," Hong Kong, 1978.

108. Samuel C. Young, "China, part II: What Adventists Can Do to Help?" *Adventist Review* 166, no. 37 (1989): 9.

109. "LLUMC to Staff Hospital in China," *Adventist Review* 167, no. 41 (September 6, 1990): 25–26; Elwyn Platner, "Adventists Conduct Hospital Seminars in Shanghai, Beijing," *Adventist Review* 167, no. 42 (September 13, 1990): 21.

110. Before the merger, the South China Islands Union Mission was responsible for Adventist ministries in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.

111. "Yanli daji feifa chuban huodong de tongzhi [Crackdown on Illegal Publishing Activities]," circular of the State Council, July 6, 1987. Further regulations on publication administrations were issued in 1997 and revised in 2002.

112. "Guanyu zhizhi he chuli liyong jidujiao jinxing feifa weifa huodong de tongzhi [Concerning the Prohibition of and the Dealings with Using Christianity to Engage in Illegal Activities]," circular issued by Religious Affairs Bureau and Public Security Bureau, State Council of People's Republic of China, October 18, 1988. A copy of this circular in Chinese may be found in Luo Guangwu, ed. *Xinzhongguo zongjiao gongzuo dashi gailan, 1949–1999* [New China's Major Events of Religious Work, 1949–1999] (Beijing: Huawen chubanshe, 2001), 391–93.

113. Some regions, such as the provinces of Sichuan, Guangdong, and Xinjiang, did regulate private gatherings. See Human Rights Watch, *Freedom of Religion in China* (New York: Human Rights Watch/Asia Watch, 1992), 55–67.

114. Statistical data is available at Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research website, <http://www.adventiststatistics.org>.



A native of Hong Kong, CHRISTIE CHUI-SHAN CHOW earned her PhD at Princeton Theological Seminary. Her research interests include World Christianity, Chinese Religions, gender, and church-state relations. She is the first female Seventh-day Adventist researcher who combines ethnography and history to investigate the Seventh-day Adventist movement in contemporary China. She has written a number of book chapters and her work also appears in the *Journal of World Christianity*, *Social Sciences and Missions*, and *Exchange*. More recently, she is co-editor of the *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*.