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Denominationalism in China

ChinaSource Quarterly

Summer 2018, Vol. 20, No. 2

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Editorial
Let's Be Honest about Denominationalism in China

By Mary Li Ma, Guest Editor

When it comes to discussions on denominations or denominationalism in China, Christians easily get stuck on the basic questions: Are there now denominations among churches in China? Isn't China on the post-denominational end of the continuum? Should there be denominations? If so, how should they work?

The first two are factual questions, and the last two are more theological or missiological. This issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly* seeks to address these ongoing questions but also to extend the discussion beyond what meets the eye on the China scene. (For example, many of these issues boil down to the problem of leadership.) With the exception of one, the contributors to this issue are all Chinese nationals who have lived the experiences of the phenomenon in China.

The word "denominate" means "to give a name to," and denominations simply mean groupings by certain features. In today's China, "networks" or "teams" are more often synonyms used by the Chinese in referring to their quasi-denominational groupings. When asked about their views on "denominations" and "denominationalism," a typical answer among Christians in China today is that the former "reflects the richness of the body of Christ," while the latter "grew out of human self-righteousness." In comparison, most overseas Chinese churches take pride in identifying themselves as "nondenominational," implying a largely negative conception of what "denominations" imply.

While a trend of quasi-denominational, self-acclaiming identities is emerging among preachers and members of the Chinese church, such as Pentecostal, Reformed, and Reformed Baptist, still more cling to the non-controversial "non-denominational" tag. Nevertheless, by claiming to be "non-denominational," different people may imply different things. Sometimes it can become an excuse for a lower degree of commitment with one's local church, or a gesture of criticism against more established identity groups. A Christian educator said to me that whenever he heard a preacher boasting of "supra-denominationalism," he would become cautious; it sounded like the beginning of a new denomination to him. So just like in the West, denominationalism is not without controversies, one of which is church splitting over nonessential elements of the faith.

Jin Li's article traces issues around denomination/denominationalism to their state of affairs in the missionary phase. He also explains how indigenous, quasi-denominational identities evolved in both rural and urban China. They were not linear processes. Like Christians in the West, believers in China tend to repeat the same problems along with this kind of development.

Jin Li's "third way" of "inclusive communities" reminds me of Richard Mouw's concept, "convicted civility." As an advocate for inter-faith dialogues, Mouw encourages Christians to hold both conviction and respectful civility as integral, complementary features. It seems that this principle also applies to inter-group dynamics among Christians. Even with denominational leanings, one can still speak with passionate intensity and gentle respectfulness at the same time, for truth shall not lead us to divide. As the "called out" of God, the church carries a biblical figure of a "body" with many different members or parts. This image has both unity and diversity in it. The admission of diversity among Christians gives them the freedom to differ. The warning against sectarianism is indeed a timely one.

Jesse Sun presents a more sophisticated and in-depth historical case study comparing two Chinese leaders' views on denominationalism before the 1940s. Two forms of anti-denominationalism grew out of vastly different concerns. One was out of "pragmatic cosmopolitanism," and the other decisive localism. Christians in contemporary China can draw lessons from these differing views. First, leaders' stances on denominationalism are often reactions to the *status quo* in the church and its immediate cultural environment. Second, reflections on not taking Western denominationalism for granted are part of the growing process in becoming a church of the Chinese people. Third, narrowly-defined, anti-denominationalism does not solve the problem.

Wei Zhou writes about how denominationalism becomes a realistic concern when churches find themselves in need of both theological and organizational resources to reorganize with continued growth. Some leaders resort to a trial and error method by "piecing together a system of governance." This has been the predominant model among unregistered churches. Others try

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Denominationalism or Nondenominationalism: Is There a Third Way?

By LI Jin

Churches in China have evolved from small-scale home gatherings in the 1980s to the current diverse range of organizational forms. There has been much discussion within the church about denominations. In the modern history of Chinese Christianity, the concept of denomination is not something entirely new.

Legacy of Denominationalism

As early as the 1920s, denominations from the West not only set up churches and mission organizations, but they also divided up regions for particular services. Although early cooperation between church and independent missions reached a collaborative agreement on respecting others' sacraments and traditions, they introduced to China (and Asia) a mosaic make-up of denominationalism which often impressed new believers more with external differences than internal similarities on the faith continuum. So from her baby steps, Chinese Christianity had to learn a nuanced dance informed by denominational characteristics. In addition to how to be new followers of Christ, they also had to learn how to be Methodists, Presbyterians, or Baptists. Western and Chinese Christians had heated debates about how denominations should collaborate together and resolve conflicts. These discussions have shaped the relationship between Western churches and China's indigenous churches.

Chinese theologian T. C. Chao, known as "the foremost interpreter of Christian faith to Oriental minds," said in 1935 that "denominations will ultimately die out, in spite of human efforts to conserve them."[1] In Chao's time of western mission expansion in China, the charge that denominationalism more or less diverted the attention of Chinese converts from the basic elements of Christianity is largely legitimate.

In the West, the lasting presence of a rich spectrum of Protestant denominations is due to the fact that the gospel has interacted with a variety of cultures in different historical contexts. For example, historically, some countries had an established religion, and those that separate from the establishment later formed distinct denominations or sects. In general, Western denominations followed two trajectories: mainline denominations pushed by nation-states (such as Lutherans, Reformed, and Anglican), and sects formed after spontaneous populist movements (such as radical Anabaptists and Wesleyans). The case in China is more like the latter.

Resisting the downside of western denominationalism, indigenous churches (such as Watchman Nee's non-denominational Local Church) placed much emphasis on indigenization or sinicization. (Even today, the understanding that denominationalism is not what God originally intended the church to be, and would eventually die out, still captures many Chinese Christians.) Regrettably, even these efforts, countering the trend of denominationalism, eventually gave rise to new denominations.

After the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, most churches were dominated by a Party-controlled system and theology, which distinguished itself as a new church governance model. Do denominational imprints left by western churches on churches in mainland China still persist today? A worship theology scholar told me that during her recent visits to China's different Three-self churches, she could easily tell the lineage of each church (Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, etc.) from the architecture and liturgy practiced there.[2] Some very old hymns, ways of chanting, and other liturgical elements are still being practiced in these state-sanctioned churches. Admittedly, such ritualistic marks of denominationalism were a result of western import. But according to another long-term communicant member in Shanghai's Three-self church, these are only ritualistic vestiges of the old traditions that were effectively abolished in the 1950s. "Without mission-sending societies or seminaries supported by traditional denominations, how do we even speak of 'denominations'?"[3] He even refused to call the Three-self system a "denomination" because it was "forcefully reorganized" by a political party.

Contemporary Indigenous Denominations as *Tuandui* 团队

Since the 1990s, in rural areas such as Henan and Anhui provinces where Party control has been weak, home-gathering churches have grown into large-scale networks of mission teams. Such social networking has been, in fact, an institutionalized denominational form with vertical hierarchies to coordinate offerings, dispatch preachers, standardize sermons, and allocate members between evangelistic teams and local churches. These rural mission networks have been closed groups, and their communication with the outside has been limited. Some even had acute conflicts with regard to church-planting and the mobility of believers.

From the 1980s to around 2000, because of their secrecy, closed stance, and political persecution, some evangelistic teams even strayed away to form emerging cults such as Eastern Lightning. Other groups migrated to the cities as the speed of urbanization increased. They formed organizations that preserved the key teachings and denominational features in their urban mission. However, because the word "denomination" has negative connotations in the Chinese language, hinting at cliquishness or partisanship, these groups often identify themselves with the name of a place or "China Evangelical" (*zhonghua fuyin* 中华福音). They commonly referred to themselves as "teams" (*tuandui* 团队).

During the past three decades, as churches in China have grown, there has been increasing diversity within them. Such diversification is a natural process when Christian groups claim the faith as their own and form collective identities. It is true that more and more churches started by calling themselves "independent," broadly "evangelical," or "non-denominational." But over time, each church would always accumulate cultural elements that distinguished them from others. Numerical growth demands more bureaucratic complexity through leadership structures or church-planting which then forms quasi-denominational and bureaucratic features. Especially in urban churches, more educated leaders increasingly developed clear characteristics for their group in comparison to others. Such distinctiveness may be theological or organizational. Faced with growing pastoral needs and questions about how to do church liturgy together, leaders of urban, unregistered churches are seeking resources to support or update their practices. Thus today sacramental and liturgical theologies are much in need.

The broader themes of spiritual pursuits in Chinese churches have undergone changes in response to the larger political and cultural forces. Before the 1990s, piety was the primary theme—knowing Jesus Christ as one's personal savior. Then from the late 1990s to mid 2000s, theology became a more prominent theme—what does the Christian faith mean? Chinese Christians are seeking deeper understanding about their newfound biblical faith. Since the late 2000s until now, quasi-denominational identities have come to the forefront—what does it mean to be one certain type of church? Although the Christian faith often provides a solid anchor for individual identities, such a faith is not nurtured in a social vacuum, and churches as organisms provide realistic collective identities for believers to live out in the world.

The realistic concerns of new converts in China often transition from "What does it mean to be a Christian?" to "What does it mean to be a church?" According to many preachers of urban churches that I interviewed, in the mid to late 1990s, there was a strong "wind" of cult activities that pulled leaders and members out of local churches. This forced churches to sharpen their apologetics. Many began to think and ask deeper questions about what makes a church.

A great number of new converts, a few years after getting a Christian identity, begin to wonder further about what kind of Christian they are becoming. Individual trajectories may be guided by various styles of mentorship and theology. Increasing social mobility enables them to interact with Christians from other groups. Internet resources and Christian books on church history familiarize them with more layers of ecclesiastical reality. Higher levels of education enable them to ask harder questions about the church. For a Chinese Christian who was converted first by a preacher with Baptist leanings, then nurtured in the faith in a Pentecostal group, and later felt strengthened by listening to reformed sermons by evangelists such as Stephen Tong, his or her identity has drawn from a diverse, and even conflicting, range of sources. Ten years after conversion, this person may want to switch to a church that is more in alignment with his or her current theological persuasions.

There are also returnees who come to faith in other countries bringing with them denominational backgrounds and find it hard to commit to a group in the Chinese reality. So the denominational question may pose a very real difficulty for Chinese converts to answer with clarity.

Congregational studies scholars agree that the longer one stays in a denomination, the stronger one's denominational identity grows. This also explains why churches in China have now formed quasi-denominational identities—urban church groups have had two decades of relative freedom to develop their leadership hierarchy, theology, liturgy, and sacramental practices. These past two decades of growth and expansion also accompanied a pattern of ecclesiastical fragmentation—church groups are disconnected from each other even within one locality. What is lacking now is an ecumenical awareness of respect for each other's differences. For example, sacraments and other liturgical elements are main areas of disputes. The way leaders "do church" has been passed on to new converts, creating new liturgical norms. For example, some urban professional churches are taught by elderly spiritual leaders to use the term "breaking bread" instead of "communion," because the former was the biblical and correct way to say it during a communion service.

When we position ourselves as the orthodox group with the best interpretations of the Bible, we ought to be alerted that such statements easily introduce spiritual pride. So as Christians, we ought to watch our use of language in portraying "them" and "us," along with the misuse of polemics, propaganda, or the aggrandizement of differences in hair-splitting ways. This is when theologies and doctrines tend to evolve into exclusive ideologies. For example, a few months ago there was a debate among Reformed leaders on whether or not to sing only Psalms in Sunday worship services. One can appreciate a growing seriousness about the importance of Sunday worship liturgy, compared to the "everything-goes" free style of worship in some unregistered churches. However, once claims are pushed too far (such as the exclusive use of the Psalms), walls are erected that distinguish "us" and "them."

Churches as Inclusive Communities

Churches as evangelistic communities ought to open themselves up to the outside. A recent relevant discussion in the West is the relationship between emerging churches and traditional establishment churches. The former advocates for more communal involvement and downplays denominational characteristics. But in reality, these emerging churches often lack depth in their teachings. The same applies in the Chinese context. Theologian Stanley Hauerwas' view of the church as God's new language is a good metaphor for the role of the church in today's world.[4] The church in itself is a set of ethics, and it is also a community that receives strangers. The inclusiveness of the church and a pure gospel message are not mutually substitutable parts. On the contrary, the gospel itself is inclusive, able to receive all sinners who choose to follow Jesus Christ, love God and love others. This challenges the closed stance of institutional churches. Opening up in the gospel means practicing the ethics of the gospel, which also challenges the emphasis on personal piety and repentance in traditional Chinese churches. Such openness or inclusiveness also guards churches from internal corruption or forming personality cults.

Churches ought to be catholic and unifying. Although the catholicity of churches has been a politically correct slogan, in reality, such an ecumenism is less than ideal. In fact, openness and catholicity are two things that are interrelated and inseparable. Openness indicates the church's embrace of the gospel, and catholicity first of all requires churches to know each other through dialogue. Many times, Chinese Christians hold on to caricature stereotypes about their own denominations and others' denominations: reformed people have correct doctrines but they lack lively spirituality; Pentecostals emphasize spiritual gifts but lack understanding of truth; traditional house churches stress piety but neglect hermeneutics, and so on. Because of isolation from and lack of dialogue with each other, churches in China are far from living out their unifying witness. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost nullified human segregations due to ethnic or linguistic barriers. This teaches us to become unifying channels of God's grace.

Like our self-identity as human beings, our loyal attachment or identification with a certain church denomination is understandable. Nevertheless, our love for Christ and his church, which grows out of authentic piety, can subtly be transferred to love for a certain denomination. When such attachment begins to overdo itself and becomes a hidden allegiance, the temptation of sectarianism (*zongpai zhuyi*) sets in.

Sectarianism is the exclusive attitude of declaring that a certain group is *the* true church. This is not something new. Regrettably, sectarianism is an ever-present reality, and churches in China are no exception. Sectarians are often blindly prejudiced against certain groups and take no pleasure in connecting with those who worship God in ways different than they do. In response to this, exposure to a variety of church settings can reduce a sense of self-correctness in identifying with only one denomination. With a humble attitude and deep trust in God's own works, one begins to see beyond their own denomination and appreciate different practices.

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[1] T. C. Chao, "Christian Unity," in *The Chinese Recorder*, vol. 66, no. 4, April 1935, 212-19.
[2] Interview with EB, March 12, 2018.
[3] Interview with G, March 10, 2018.
[4] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*. Duke University Press, 2001.

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to identify with a denominational tradition, but church leaders and members are often "out of sync with each other." Both practices create conflicts, sometimes even schism. Zhou emphasizes that the whole church should be involved in the theological education process in order to make a smoother transition to a sustained church order.

Absolutism of leaders' theological positions led to leader worship and fanaticism. Admitting the cultural legitimacy of denominational presence does not mean that the forming of new denominations can always be seen as natural. In many instances, the branching of new denominations today is often due to church splits caused by internal conflicts. In his insightful article, Andrew Qie discusses how maturing in theology has led to the growing pains of labeling, the mechanical use of the formula "right doctrines equal godly living," inter-group hostility, and the mutual passing of judgment. He points out that the practice of labeling is aggravated by the residual influence of Chinese political culture. Theological positions can be weaponized to divide the church. True humility before God and fellow believers is needed to avoid these dangers.

Two book reviews provide both Chinese and Western perspectives on *Surviving the State, Remaking the Church: A Sociological Portrait of Christians in Mainland China*. Jun Wang's review focuses on the external and internal challenges facing Christians in China. Richard Cook details the structure of this book and commends its attempt to "move beyond a one-dimensional picture of churches in China."

In the Resource Corner, we include the collected works of Watchman Nee, a man who's thought and experiments in indigenous church-planting still serve as valuable resources.

We hope this issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly*, "Denominationalism in China" will trigger more helpful discussions.

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The Waning of a Pragmatic Cosmopolitanism: Western Denominations in the Views of Cheng Jingyi and Ni Tuosheng

By Jesse Sun

In his speech at the 1910 Edinburgh conference, Cheng Jingyi (Ching-Yi Cheng) called for "a united Christian church without any denominational distinctions."[1] Stating forthrightly that "denominationalism has never interested the Chinese mind," Cheng's presentation signaled the determination of a new generation of Chinese Christian leaders—better trained and connected—to launch a truly indigenous church in China.

However, together with other Chinese leaders in what Daniel Bays calls the "Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment" (SFPE), Cheng's disapproval of Western denominations was markedly different from the later and more militant anti-denominationalism of Ni Tuosheng (Watchman Nee).[2] Founder of Local Churches (or Assembly Halls, *juhuichu*), Ni, in his revolutionary spirit, guided this independent Protestant group which grew to be the second largest in China prior to 1949. His theology has exerted a lasting influence on the Chinese house church and its antipathy towards denominations.

Cheng's view of Western denominations, though by no means favorable, could be understood as a kind of "pragmatic cosmopolitanism." Given his interdenominational experience and a general reformist spirit, Cheng saw denominations as pragmatic barriers that needed to be overcome to reach church independence. Yet in the end, all this work towards independence was not for its own sake but for ecumenical cooperation. This view was also reflected in his ambivalent relationship with missionaries: on the one hand their paternalism was to be resisted and shaken off; yet they were nonetheless deemed as equal and worthy partners in the church universal for evangelism.

By the time of Ni, such reformist confidence, along with emphasis on transition and negotiation, gave way to revolutionary fierceness and decidedness. In the aftermath of the anti-Christian movement, the foreign aspect of Christianity became a pure liability. Ni no longer saw denominational churches as worthy partners for cooperation but as sinful corruption to be cleansed. For Ni, incredible spiritual and moral clarity was needed to separate light from darkness as he sought to respond not only to his own personal crisis but also to the crisis of national dignity.

Cheng, the visionary reformer

Having returned with his multi-denominational experiences from the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow and the Edinburgh conference in the early 1910s, Cheng set out to devise his "ground plan" for establishing the Chinese Christian church. At the time, it was clear to him that both the church and the nation were in a time of transition. The Chinese church was in-between two major periods: the China Mission and the China Church. For Cheng, the former was the period when ministry was by necessity in the hands of Western missionaries, while the latter would see the Chinese church taking up its own responsibility embarking on world evangelization. The critical in-between juncture, however, called for "joint action and the united efforts" of Christians from both the East and the West.

From the beginning, Cheng saw Western denominations as essentially "church divisions" or sectarianism.[3] If the West, given its current circumstances, could no longer roll back such historical "divisions," then the Chinese church, young and teachable, should not settle for a mere "imaginary vision" of unity but needed to "turn over a new leaf" and achieve actual church union. This was, according to Cheng, the proper way of remembering "the saints and fathers of the old world who formed the various church organizations"—by not making them a stumbling block for people now. Even if the future Chinese church could not avoid the necessary evil of such "divisions," says Cheng, the pragmatist, let it be the outcome of the consciousness of the Chinese church itself rather than the result of foreign imposition.

When political and nationalistic tensions heightened significantly after the May Fourth movement of 1919, Cheng found himself having to talk more explicitly on the "indigenous church" rather than a generic "Chinese church."[4] Nevertheless, for Cheng an indigenous church did not equal a nationalistic church. In fact, since Christianity transcends national boundaries, it ought not to rely on nationalistic feelings for support, but on life within the church that transcends racial or national prejudices. Cheng remained convinced of the universal adaptability of the Christian religion to the needs of different people. Yet the native believer must be allowed to own the faith, with the burdens, responsibilities, and joys that come with it. As long as the Chinese church has control over its own affairs, the church will, by definition, be indigenous.

Such effort to claim the church meant disowning Western denominations, for while Christianity is universal, denominations are historically a Western construct. For Cheng, why not shed this foreign import for something Chinese that is beautiful and also in line with Christianity? Again, Cheng did not so much see denominations as intrinsically evil but as extrinsic barriers to evangelize the Chinese people and to empower the Chinese church. The church being independent, or non-denominational, is really a necessary means towards equal cooperation with world churches "for the transmission of truth, of light, and of ideals… toward the meeting of the deepest religious and spiritual needs of mankind."[5] Essentially, the ultimate vision of Cheng was a unified and financially independent church in the ecumenical community with ministry covering both personal salvation and social services. This constituted Cheng's ideal response to the charge of Christianity as a "foreign religion" (*yangjiao*).

Meanwhile, Cheng's critique of the missionaries' paternalism came into clearer focus by the 1920s. To Cheng, the missionaries were certainly friends with China and the Chinese church. Yet, together with their Christian faith, they also carried Western culture and institutions into China that have "delayed devolution" and often "obscured the good and beautiful in the Chinese tradition."[6] Their entanglement with the unequal treaty system could also be offensive to the Chinese people. In the end, such ambivalence toward the missionary establishment led to both Cheng's critical observation of their recalcitrance towards reform and devolution as well as his hope that the Chinese church might rise in cooperation with world churches.

Ni, the fiery revolutionary

The common self-identification among contemporary house churches that they are "post-denominational" can be readily traced back to Ni Tuosheng. Ni represented the revolutionary force in Chinese Christianity which, using near absolute spiritual and moral clarity, sought to cleanse the "corruption" of the mission churches.

Out of many things that Ni Tuosheng gained from the British independent missionary Margaret Barber (Chinese name *He Shouen*), the introduction to the Brethren movement was of far reaching implication. It formed the most fundamental theological source to his anti-establishment thinking.[7] With little appreciation for high-church rituals after his time at Trinity College in Fuzhou, Ni found in the works of the Brethren—John Nelson Darby in particular—the fullest and purest expression of the gospel. This tradition rejected ecclesiastical hierarchy or church government for a strong preference for local churches, deeming the Church of England as having been corrupted by the world.

For Ni, the denominational churches in China lent themselves too well to similar charges. In an early essay published in 1923, Ni rehearsed, in church language, much of the anti-Christian rhetoric. He denounced "certain pastors and evangelists" as Jesus-betraying Judases. Theirs were the churches, Ni decried, "with hymn singing from gramophone" but "without life in it," and the Western missionaries as those who "came to China in the name of saving people without themselves being saved."[8] As Ni began encouraging Chinese Christians to leave mission churches, the massive exodus in the following years poured into Ni's vision of "one church in one locality."

Shortly after the second of his "Overcomers' Meetings" (*desheng juhui*) that attracted many zealous souls in Shanghai, in December 1932, Ni recounted his early years, which included his rejection of denominations. The reason, as given by Ni, was nothing pragmatic but overwhelmingly scriptural. If Paul admonished the Corinthians against church division, Ni asks, how could he settle with his extraneous Methodist identity? After soliciting spiritual support from Barber, Ni convinced his parents and the whole family took their names off the church roster to avoid the "sin" of denominations.

When a few Western missionaries visited them concerning their withdrawal, Ni explained this act of defiance not in terms of antipathy towards the practice but as mere obedience to the Bible.

It is truly remarkable how both Cheng and Ni saw denominational affiliations as sectarian divisions (*fenmenbiehu* or *fenmen bielei*). Yet Cheng, in the spirit of progressive reform and ecumenical missions, objected to denominations as a Western-imposed organizational approach. Ni, however, in his revolutionary and non-conformist spirit no longer rejected denominations extrinsically but intrinsically. Cheng was willing to work with the complexities of the transitional period and even entertained the future possibility that the Chinese church might have denomination-type divisions of its own. Ni, in contrast, was more resolute in ushering in biblical condemnation of denominations as well as the command to have only one church per locality. Essentially, the younger generation of revolutionaries no longer accepted the earlier framework of "how to indigenize." Instead, they began forming and answering a new set of questions of "what is true and scriptural." It became their response to the then deepened national crisis.

Assessment and conclusion

Despite the tumultuous nature of the first thirty years of 20th century China, the first decade or so saw a group of new Chinese church leaders—better educated, more visible and confident than their forefathers—coming from the treaty ports. Like their prominent example, Cheng Jingyi, many of them were able to take advantage of the Western education offered through mission schools. It enabled them to put their strong belief in patriotism and modernizing progress into practice in various social fields, even though the nexus of Christian institutions was still largely directed by foreign missions. Chinese church leaders like Cheng, with their lifelong pursuit of church independence and autonomy, were often frustrated at how slowly things were going.

These early decades also represented a slide towards a precipice. The May Fourth movement in 1919 rewrote the urban landscape intellectually and politically, setting off powerful currents of nationalism that found their targets in Western imperialism. Christianity, though perceived desirably at first as a modernizing force, would become labeled cultural imperialism, casting a long shadow on Western missionaries and Chinese Christians alike. Such a drastic turn of history helps explain the marked differences between Cheng and Ni in Chinese Christianity. Both of them came from Christian families and mission schools. Yet Ni Tuosheng, in his transformed context, was probably under greater pressure to disassociate himself from the missionary establishment—for national as well as religious reasons. When social and institutional reforms paled before the surging sociopolitical chaos, ways to live as an overcomer (*desheng*) became imperative despite external disturbances.

For people like Ni, there was no longer a need to salvage the Western religion for Chinese use in order to arrive at equal status with the West, for his followers believed that they had found the true way and would certainly rise above the mission churches. Yet ironically, Ni's vision of transcending church division actually led to the formation of a prominent sectarian Chinese church. It would, compared with Cheng's continued vulnerability within the Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment, enjoy a greater degree of autonomy and vitality until the turbulence of history found it again in the 1950s.

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[1] On the Edinburgh Conference, see Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).
[2] For the idea of SFPE and a general history of Chinese Christianity, see Daniel Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).
[3] Later Cheng refers to denominations as *fenmen biehu*, essentially equating them with sectarianism.
[4] Before 1922 Cheng rarely used the term "indigenous church" (*bense jiaohui*), preferring much more the generic term of "Chinese church." This is especially true in his Chinese writings.
[5] See p. 383 in Cheng, C. Y., "The Development of an Indigenous Church in China," *International Review of Missions* 12, no. 47 (1923): 368-388.
[6] Cheng Jingyi, "Zhongguo de jiaohui" [The Church in China] *Qingnian jinbu* 52, (1922): 16-26.
[7] On the theology of Ni, see Lin Ronghong, *The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee* (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology, 1989).
[8] See p. 45-46 in Ni Tuosheng, "Youda niyong qinzui mai renzi me" ["Judas Selling the Son of Man through Kissing"] *Shengjingbao* 11, no. 60 (1923): 44-47.

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The Influence of Denominations on Church Organizational Structure in China

By Wei Zhou

In recent years, as the Chinese church has grown, more urban churches have begun promoting church organization and structure. This has not always been the case. For a long time, continued government persecution drove the church underground and cut off connections between denominations. In addition, many churches grew out of student fellowships and interdenominational mission organizations that downplayed "denomination" and "structure." As a result, traditional Chinese churches today, likewise, downplay the denominational backgrounds of their theologies and default to an almost patriarchal system of governance.

As far as the purpose of church organizational structure is concerned, many churches today need to return to a proper theology of the church. They need to build biblical churches with standard church governance that can properly shepherd believers. Though "denomination" and "structure" are apparently two different things, the need for structure does not seem to immediately imply a need for a denomination. However, denominations are invariably distinguished by two things: a specific theological stance and a structure for church governance. Any conversation about church organizational structure must take denominations into account, and every church that is establishing church structure—even those that declare no denominational affiliation—must consider the presence and practices of denominations.

There are two archetypes for how a church might respond to denominationalism. One church might embrace it wholeheartedly, in which case their denomination's stance on governance will provide a clear way forward as they create their church structure. Or, a church might reject it wholesale, in which case their way forward will be halting and hesitant. In either case, a church will need to face the challenges of their chosen response.

Those churches that reject denominations often have not moved beyond basic doctrines and have very simple theological foundations. Denominations, meanwhile, differ on all sorts of nuanced theological questions and positions. Faced with complex, theological debates about topics beyond the core of Christian doctrine that they have never even thought about, these churches have trouble clarifying their own stances let alone choosing between the many denominational stances. In the end, these theological questions and positions are shelved through a simple rejection of denomination in connection with a lack of clear knowledge of their own identity. That is, they do not know whom to identify with because they do not know who they are.

When a church rejects a denomination on theological grounds, then it cannot directly adopt that denomination's system of governance. Instead, that church has to piece together a system of governance from looking at various models and from trial and error. Such a makeshift structure may not have the soundest theological foundation. Even if the resulting model of governance has some biblical principles, it is not connected to any larger tradition. It runs the risk of being a form without substance, appearing to be a good structure while missing the heart of church governance.

Furthermore, by committing to trial and error, the church all but guarantees that they will experience frequent conflict and confusion as they try to clarify their own standards. Not infrequently, this can lead to one leader simply taking over and steering the ship as he pleases. I know of a church where the pastor preached something that contradicted the church's statement of faith. When the congregation questioned him about it, his reply was that his views on that particular issue had changed, and there was no need to worry—the statement of faith would be revised accordingly. Some in the congregation, who took faith and church governance very seriously, were appalled and actually left the church because of this.

Church governance and organization are not limited to simply creating a structure. All members of the church must be in unity about the underlying theology and a common vision as a church, and out of that comes the unity of a deeply connected, spiritual community. Individually speaking, we cannot expect everyone to have the same position on every doctrine. As humans, we are limited, and people's doctrinal differences do not change the fact that every person is a brother or sister in Christ. But corporately speaking, it is difficult to maintain a congregation where people hold many different theological positions. It may look like a rich, diverse, and inclusive fellowship, but it will not go very far. Different stances inevitably lead to different visions and ways of doing things, and those differences will inevitably be manifest in church structure. Churches that reject denominationalism may have some success making a system of church governance effective to some degree, but they will have a hard time achieving its real purpose.

What challenges do churches face that embrace denominationalism? One is that many churches join a denomination with no denominational background and no process for determining the church's theology and governance. In choosing a denomination and church structure, it is easy for the church to default to the leaders' positions with the decision heavily influenced by the leaders' own theological preferences. Whichever denomination they identify with becomes the one whose theology and governance the church adopts.

However, church members and church leaders are often out of sync with each other when it comes to identifying with a denomination. Some members who know little about denominations may not care which one they join, while others, like the churches mentioned above, may see denominations as a sign of narrow-mindedness and reject them. Ironically, it is easy for this rejection of denominations in itself to become a sort of "denominational" stance. These church members, along with those who disagree with the leaders over the denominational stance, end up becoming active opponents of church organizational structure. They may protest, "Why do the leaders get to decide our church structure based on their personal denominational preferences?"

This touches on the more fundamental problem of establishing order and leadership in a church—a problem that is especially difficult to solve if people do not trust and support each other. If the leaders are weak, the process of establishing church structure comes to a standstill. If the leaders are strong, some members will be discontent and there will be conflict, even schism.

All of this means that the timing for starting a model of organizational structure is crucial. If people, whether supporters or opponents, do not have a sufficient understanding of denominations, then neither their support nor their opposition will have much substance or meaning. It is important that the whole church be involved, and that the whole church arrive at a common understanding of theology and governance as they study and discuss it together. This must be done before the church begins establishing an organizational structure. To put it another way, a common understanding among all church members is a prerequisite for establishing an organizational structure. Only in this way can they avoid simply reverting to the leaders' personal leanings, and instead let the whole church initiate, guide, and drive the process.

Translated from Chinese by ChinaSource.

Wei Zhou is the founder of First Fruits Reading Society and the author of various articles and a recent book, Thirty Concepts that Relate to Eternity.

Denominationalism: A Double-edged Sword

By Andrew Qie

fog and swords by jules_shanghai via Flickr.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of intellectuals among Christian communities. The traditional emphasis of the Chinese church on a believer's spiritual life no longer satisfies the intellectual desires of this entirely new faith community. Naturally, as people's desire for the systematic study of theology grows stronger and stronger, how to understand the Bible and "truth" with a deeper knowledge has become the pursuit and priority goal of this new generation of urban Christians. The pursuit of godliness is, of course, a good thing, but I have discovered some dangerous tendencies with this which I will discuss in this article.

Nowadays, theological studies are not only becoming increasingly systematic but also more and more common as an ordinary person can easily access various theological resources because of the advancement of technology and increase in theological publications. Training once available only at a seminary or an educational organization is now accessible to every believer. With the rise of new urban churches, especially where there is a higher level of education, many believers who engage in either formal or informal studies of theology speak harshly towards one another or even become enemies because of the differences of understanding on certain doctrines. Both sides believe that only they stand on the truth, and each makes waves in the church which causes confusion and puts a stumbling block before immature believers. Many people label themselves by this or that school of theology, thinking that by being a part of this or that denomination, they have no worries and the truth is with them. They have no respect for other denominations and do not put effort into understanding the history and development of them. They act rashly on their own opinions, harming both others and themselves.

Many believers in the church keenly realize that doctrine is not enough. The right doctrine must work together with a godly life. Just as the Reformation emphasized doctrine, Pietism added depth to the Reformed Movement. Many people have clearly realized that knowledge and doctrine are only the first step to orthodoxy; some even say that knowledge that does not produce a godly life is not true knowledge. These are all valuable insights. Just as the book of James says, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" (James 2:14) Therefore, many people pursue some kind of godly theology, continually set up models and goals for themselves (such as the Puritans), and continually romanticize the representations and actions of these "godly" examples, creating a self-presumed orthodox theology in their own minds. They use this set model and standard to evaluate other believers and denominations; those who match the model and standard are called orthodox, and those who do not match—they do not even want to have anything to do with them. This so-called "godliness," is not the true godliness spoken of in the Bible. Moreover, Peter said, ". . . add to your faith . . . godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love." (2 Peter 1:7)

This judgement and hostility against other denominations is first expressed in the mutual passing of judgement among believers within the church. In the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, the elder son's speech and action expressed his inner thoughts. When he heard that his brother received the father's forgiveness, he was instantly angry and refused to enter the house to see his father and returned brother. (Luke 15:11-32) It is not hard to conclude that the elder son passed judgement in his heart on his brother. He thinks that he has been loyal to the father and has never disobeyed the father's commands, whereas his brother was a complete prodigal who had betrayed the father. Likewise, believers often pass judgement on themselves and others—whether one is "godly" or "ungodly," "conservative" or "liberal," "true Reformed" or "false Reformed," a "true believer" or a "false believer." This is most directly expressed when believers give their churches names such as Bible Church, Evangelical Church, Reformed Church, Baptist Church, as well as numerous others.

The danger is that such labelling of faith is eerily similar to the traditional political culture of China. Partisan politics and

different sides frequently used ideological propaganda to manipulate the hearts of people, either "leftist," "rightist," "capitalist," "revisionism," or "liberalism." The various ideologies were merely weapons and tools in the hands of those in power; as long as the enemy was labeled properly, killing them off was perfectly justifiable. Denominational and theological differences can easily become ideological tools. Seemingly godly theological positions can become powerful weapons for murder. The new generation of Chinese believers often lack sufficient understanding of the political environment and have not carefully considered the political fanaticism and worship of leaders from the previous generation, so it is easy for them to fall into another kind of leader worship and fanaticism after entering the church.

Their blindness and extremeness sideline the clear-thinking believers. Their blind worship of church leaders causes them to lose any ability for critical thinking and reflection. They view the leader's words as law. Opposing the leader is equal to opposing God. Believers who can think clearly are easily marginalized in these circumstances.

Ever since the Reformation, the reformers have emphasized the "Freedom of a Christian." In short, on certain questions, believers have the right to choose freely. This can also be compared with politics: democratic countries with rule of law draw a clear line between national law and morality to protect the citizen's freedom to the greatest extent. On the other hand, totalitarian countries confuse law and morality, not for the purpose of benefiting citizens but to highlight the will of the leader. Believers and church leaders complement one another and equip one another. Blind worship frequently causes church leaders to be carried away, exerting their personal influence on the congregation, even in areas where Christians have freedom of choice. So, we often see believers with similar views regarding all areas of life: female believers wearing dresses; male believers wearing suits; families with many children; house purchases taboo; women staying home to care for the family; and so on.

Blindness inevitably leads to narrow-mindedness and isolation. Believers who think themselves godly and believe "the truth is on my side" are unlikely to humble themselves and patiently listen to the "ungodly" and "truthless" denominations. Once they see others have different labels from themselves, they immediately cover their ears, afraid that their "godliness" might be tainted. They live as life-long inmates in prison who do not know the taste of freedom. Not only are they incapable of self-reflection, but they view open attitudes and thought as unbiblical rebellion, as if God had hidden all truths bountifully among them rather than in the Lord Jesus.

Denominationalism in thought and action is very popular in the current Chinese church—and very harmful. Churches are dividing and falling apart because of it as well as undermining one another and accusing one another. How to assist and respect one another, learning humility to carry out Christ's work, is a question that urgently needs to be answered. As Augustine reminds us, "humility, humility, humility." Only when we are truly humble before God and man can we avoid the dangers brought by denominationalism.

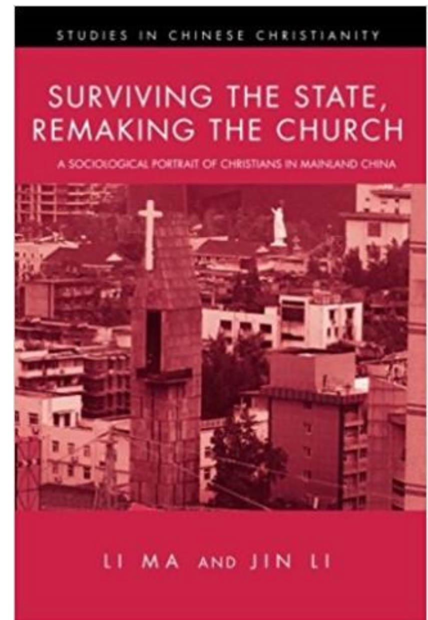
Translated from Chinese by ChinaSource.

Andrew Qie (pseudonym) is a Christian educator receiving theological education in the United States.

Book Review

The Shaping of Christianity in China Today

Reviewed by WANG Jun and Richard Cook



Surviving the State, Remaking the Church: A Sociological Portrait of Christians in Mainland China (Studies in Chinese Christianity) by Li Ma and Jin Li. Pickwick Publications, 2017, 226 pages. Paperback, ISBN-10: 153263460; ISBN-13**:** 978-1532634604; $27 at Amazon.

The following two book reviews give Eastern and Western perspectives on a recent publication that looks at the external challenges, internal struggles, and responses to faith of Chinese Christians in Mainland China since 1949. The book, *Surviving the State, Remaking the Church: A Sociological Portrait of Christians in Mainland China* by Li Ma and Jin Li. being reviewed was selected by the editor of the *International Bulletin of Mission Research* as one of the ten outstanding books of 2017 for Missions Studies.

Review by WANG Jun

After the change of power on the Chinese mainland in 1949, massive political events happened frequently, guided by ideology. However, these events have slowly faded into oblivion because of cover-ups by the authorities as well as fear experienced by individuals. People are even less concerned with the connection between these political events and their spiritual lives.

As Christianity experiences a revival in China, a historical continuity of spiritual lives is something Chinese believers deeply desire. In reality, however, such continuity is broken up, suppressed, and distorted by historical political events so that the truth is not presented. Foreign believers and researchers are even more at a loss concerning these events, and this directly affects their knowledge and understanding of China, especially after the so-called 30 years of economic boom.

So, how can we look into spiritual lives behind the major political events in China since 1949? How do we construct a history of spiritual lives from what is covered up, distorted, and forgotten? How do we present Chinese Christians in their choices and struggles concerning their faith in the political social environment? How do we present the choices and struggles in the reshaping of the Chinese church and Chinese society? These are all questions that Chinese believers with an academic calling should be concerned with and working on.

With the publication of *Surviving the State, Remaking the Church: A Sociological Portrait of Christians in Mainland China* (referred to from here onwards as *Surviving and Remaking*) the newest work of husband and wife team, Jin Li and Li Ma, a brief history of the spiritual lives behind the ideological shadows begins to be presented. The central goal of the book is very clear: to explore the history of spiritual lives in mainland China since 1949 using oral history; to narrate the faith choices and struggles of Chinese believers in a distorted political social environment; to reflect on the current condition and future direction of the Chinese church; and to display God's work in China.

Lively descriptions and interviews open this book to which are added the authors' reflective narratives. It is very readable and richly inspiring. Not only does it fill in the breaks and gaps in Chinese spiritual life, but it also invites concern for and reflection on contemporary Chinese spiritual life. This book is greatly worth recommending as an excellent work on contemporary Chinese church history.

This book can be best understood as looking at the external challenges to faith, and the internal struggles and responses. Since 1949, the mainland Chinese church has not only been reshaped by its outward environment, but also reshaped by the faith within the faith community. The outward challenges come from the unusual political social environments, that is, the hostility, division, suppression, annihilation, oppression, and pressure caused by the political ideology towards the Christian faith. The inner struggle and response mainly refer to the reactions within the mainland Chinese faith commu-

nity: some cooperated with the political ideology and some did not; some abandoned faith and some held firm to their faith; some passively sought to avoid the struggles and some actively responded; and so on. The reshaping of the church is not finished. One might say that it has just begun. While we wait to see, it is worth reflecting on how God will shape the Chinese church in the future, and how Chinese believers will witness further reshaping.

In this book, ideology is like a phantom, haunting every aspect of the question. Ever since the power change in mainland China in 1949, the ideological phantom has haunted the social and spiritual lives of the Chinese people. Their words and actions cannot escape the control of ideology, and their thoughts are censored as well. Even clothing, eating, drinking—all of living—is closely tied to ideology. This ideology is completely contrary and opposed to Christian faith which insists on believing in one God, opposing idol worship, and living according to the Bible. A spiritual war thus unfolds.

While this book does not directly explain the opposition between this ideology and Christian faith, it is presented through the authors' background introductions as well as interviewees' narratives and the difficulties this ideology has caused believers. If we say that believers with their faith choices, struggles, and responses are the main plot of the book, then the challenge of political ideology is its subplot. Even though it is the subplot, it is no less important than the main plot, because if we do not understand this subplot, then we have no way of understanding the main plot. If we do not understand the unique faith environment that exists under this ideology, then we cannot understand the choices, struggles, and responses of Chinese believers.

Even though the Chinese economic reform has caused earth-shaking changes to economic life in mainland China, and urbanization has not ceased progressing, the ideology-based political propaganda, brainwashing education, cultural censorship, and so on, have hardly changed. This has brought many challenges and pressures—and even oppression—to Christian believers in terms of education, culture, charity, marriage, and other aspects. Concerning these, *Surviving and Remaking* has lively and focused discussion.

In short, political ideology is the background to the questions and narratives in this work and is the main outward environment that causes the difficulties of mainland Chinese believers. In *Surviving and Remaking*, this theme is either expressly or subtly treated, thus creating the particular perspective the book has. The political ideology cannot be neglected in understanding this book and understanding the history of spiritual lives in mainland China since 1949.

The vibrancy of Christianity in China does not mean that believers are full of faith and free from struggle. On the contrary, in the post-totalitarian, atheist ideology, it is still very difficult to choose Christian faith and live according to the Bible. This is full of challenges of all sorts. In *Surviving and Remaking*, the authors record the pressures experienced by Chinese Christians from the political party and nationalism, those of marriage and educational choices, of career, and others.

Chinese Christians face the test of whether or not to join or withdraw from the Party; they face the threat of oppression by nationalists who think Christianity is foreign; in marriage they must decide whether or not to choose an unbelieving spouse; they must choose whether or not to participate in abortion; whether or not to accept public, ideological education; whether or not to take a civil post in which ideology takes control; and many other choices. *Surviving and Remaking* uses many lively stories to present the outward difficulties and inner struggles of Chinese Christians. Faith has given these Christians new values, but within the political environment of mainland China, living by faith is difficult every step of the way and every situation tests their faith.

Translated from the Chinese by ChinaSource.

WANG Jun is a university faculty in Nanjing who writes and speaks about traditional Chinese ethics and Christianity.

Review by Richard Cook

Surviving the State, Remaking the Church by Dr. Li Ma and Jin Li offers remarkable light on Christianity in China today. The book provides insight into the growth of Chinese Christianity within the cultural, political, and commercial context of the tumultuous changes since 1949. Ma and Li chart the impact of the changes within Chinese society on the Christian churches.

The book is based on "a rich pool of around 100 individual interviews," collected by the authors "using our personal networks from 2010 to 2015."(xiv) Access to that interview material makes this book a gold mine, but it is even more than just a collection of interviews. Dr. Ma brings incisive sociological insight to the presentation of the interviews. The authors are thoroughly familiar with current literature in both sociology and modern Chinese Christianity, and they use that literature to help guide their study. They also offer a helpful bibliography, but it is focused primarily on English language literature. While most of their English readers will find that sufficient, some readers might wish they had included more of the literature that is only available in Chinese.

The heart of the book is the extensive interview material, but those intimate and personal stories are carefully positioned in a well-built structure. The book consists of twelve chapters, each given a simple one- or two-word title, such as "Worldview," "CCP," and "Marriage." Although the titles do not reveal much about the development of the book, the chapters are carefully ordered to provide a systematic examination of Christianity through the volatile changes of the past seventy years.

Chapters 1 and 2 start with the formation of the Three-Self campaign in the 1950s, cover the severe persecution of church leaders during the Cultural Revolution, and chart the emergence of secretive house fellowships during the 1980s. Chapters 3 and 4 move into the 1990s, discussing mass conversions and the reentry of foreign Christians into China. Chapters 5 through 12 discuss the churches after 2000 looking through various lenses. For example, Chapter 5 highlights the critical importance of local variations within China (such as the difference between large urban centers and remote rural districts) and therefore also within the development of the churches. Chapter 8 covers the civic engagement of Christians through charity, Chapter 9 examines theological developments, and Chapter 10 offers insight into the challenges of marriage and family living for young urban Christians.

The book has a simple yet profound purpose. It attempts to move beyond a one-dimensional picture of "churches in China as either persecuted or revived," which, the authors note, "obscures the complexity and fluidity of the whole picture." (xii) In one sense, this thesis is self-evident. However, the value of the book is not a groundbreaking thesis, but rather fleshing out the lived reality of Christianity in China today. As the authors write, "It is our hope that this book will acquaint readers with the real lives of Chinese Christians in their authentic context." (xii) In this goal, the authors are successful.

The book is a welcome addition for both students of Chinese Christianity as well as students of modern Chinese history. It fits comfortably within a tradition of firsthand accounts in modern Chinese studies with the addition of sociological insight and a focus on Christianity. At the same time, both China and Christianity are endlessly complex, and as much as the book enlightens, it also demonstrates that there is a screaming need for additional research. For example, there is an almost endless myriad of regional variations, and in each area the "challenges of marriage and family living" certainly vary immensely. A valuable research project might focus exclusively on Christian marriage and family in one particular social setting.

Also, even during the year the book was published, there continued to be profound changes in the Chinese government's attitude toward Christianity. In that sense, the book already needs to be updated. The continued story of the Christian churches needs to be told, and this book offers a substantial contribution.

Richard Cook, MDiv, ThM, PhD, has served as Associate Professor of Church History and Missions at Logos Evangelical Seminary in El Monte, California since 2011. Prior to that, he served as a missionary and seminary professor in Taiwan for over ten years, and from 2003 to 2011 taught Missions, Missions History, and Chinese Church History at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago. Richard and his wife, Pei Fang, have three adult children and live in Glendora, CA.

ChinaSource Perspective
Questions Beneath the Surface

Brent Fulton, Editor

In this issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly*, husband and wife team, Mary Li Ma and LI Lin, bring together valuable perspectives, primarily from mainland Chinese Christian thinkers, on the emergence of denominations within the contemporary Chinese church.

Swirling beneath the surface discussion of denominations—how they are defined, their relationship to the indigenous Chinese church, and whether or not they are needed—are some core questions regarding the fundamental nature of Christian community. Depending on where the discussion goes, various ones of these questions tend to bubble to the surface. In this sense the topic of denominations functions somewhat as a divining rod, drawing out the core issues facing the church.

Leadership emerges as one central issue. (In fact, as they compiled these articles, our guest editors suggested that a future *Quarterly* ought to focus on this issue alone, as it figures so prominently in the current discussion.) Who is empowered to decide what the church will believe, and where does this authority come from? What to do when the leader goes off track theologically or morally?

Church culture constitutes a related issue and can touch on everything from worship style to norms for family life, dress, and gender relationships in the church. A strong leader can impose a certain culture, while a more passive leader may relegate the establishment of cultural norms to others within the church, creating uncertainty and conflict.

Differences over theological perspectives highlight the question, "What do we really believe as a church" and bring to the fore the dilemma of how believers in a particular congregation should deal with the inevitable conflict that arises over these differences.

Labeling results when conflict is not handled well and believers split into camps. Wanting to view everything in black and white terms, they "weaponize" theological positions and denounce the opposing camp as unspiritual, theologically incorrect, or even heretical. As Andrew Qie points out,

> *Such labeling is eerily similar to the political culture of China…. Denominational and theological differences can easily become ideological tools. Seemingly godly theological positions can become powerful weapons for murder. The new generation of Chinese believers often lack sufficient understanding of the political environment and have not carefully considered the political fanaticism and worship of leaders from the previous generation, so it is easy for them to fall into another kind of leader worship and fanaticism after entering the church.*

As the contributors to this issue suggest, denominational structures can either bring clarity to the concerns facing China's church or can serve to mask deeper questions lurking beneath the surface.

In addition to their treatment of these and related questions in the current issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly,* Ma and Li deal with them in further depth in their book, *Surviving the State, Remaking the Church*, which is reviewed in this issue by two scholars, one Chinese and one American.

Brent Fulton is the president of ChinaSource, the editor of ChinaSource Quarterly *and the author of* China's Urban Christians: A Light that Cannot be Hidden.

Resource Corner
The Collected Works of Watchman Nee

Wikimedia

Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng, 1903–1972), who came to Christ during high school, was a diligent student of the Scriptures, and a tireless witness for Christ. He was an early proponent of separation from Western denominations and advocate for independent local assemblies. One outworking of this was that, with others, he started and co-led a network of local churches known as the Little Flock Movement.

Literature was a major part of his ministry and Nee left a considerable legacy of written works. Through these, he continues to exercise enormous influence among Chinese Christians today. Copies of his books, articles and sermons number in the millions, and these have circulated widely throughout Chinese churches, both official and unofficial. Likewise, his example as a man dedicated to God, immersed in the Scriptures, and willing to suffer for Christ provides inspiration for countless Chinese.

His theological emphases continue to shape both congregations and individuals. These include: the unique authority of the Bible for all Christian teaching and theology; the necessity of being "born again" through repentance and faith in Christ; the primacy of the inner spiritual life of each believer; the presence and power of God the Holy Spirit to transform lives; the central role of the gathered congregation as the locus of God's work in this world today; the absolute independence of the church from the world and especially from the state-sanctioned religious organization; and the expectation of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. As a consequence, those impacted by Nee's theology do not have much hope that this world will be transformed by human action, and they do not favor formal, organizational church involvement in political or social action.

Some of Nee's most influential works are *The Normal Christian Life*; *The Normal Christian Church Life*; *Sit, Walk, Stand* (an exposition of Ephesians); and *Changed into His Likeness*.

The collected works of Watchman Nee are available:

in Chinese at *倪柝声文集 (Collected Works by Watchman Nee)*

in English at Books by Watchman Nee, *Living Stream Ministry*

The introductory material about Watchman Nee was provided by G. Wright Doyle, the editor of the Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity *(www.bdcconline.net), the co-editor of* Studies in Chinese Christianity *published by Wipf and Stock, and the General Director of the Global China Center (www.globalchinacenter.org).*

For further information on the life and ministry of Watchman Nee, see the Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity.