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Revolution and Religious Reform: The Indigenous Church Movement in Republican China

Cole CARNESECCA

Abstract

What accounts for the occurrence of conservative religious reform in the wake of radical revolutionary change? This paper begins to explore this theoretical question by considering the emergence of theologically conservative indigenous churches in China during the Republican period until the outbreak of war with Japan (1911–1937). During this period, a number of geographically and organizationally diverse indigenous Christian movements emerged. While a change in Chinese law allowing for Chinese established churches seemingly lies at the heart of this change, there are a number of important causal mechanisms which account for the particular relationship between revolution and religious reform that we find in the Republican Era indigenization movement.

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of indigenous Christian churches in China during the Republican Era (roughly 1911–1949) came on the heels of two important moments in Chinese religious history. The first was the 1911 Xinhai Revolution 辛亥革命 which marked the fall of not only the Qing Dynasty but also the millennia old dynastic system. The second event was a change in religious regulatory law in 1912[1] that allowed for Chinese nationals to establish their own churches. Subsequently, a number of churches, networks and broadly constituted movements emerged across the country, fundamentally changing the religious landscape in China.

Given these two conditioning factors, one would be tempted to assume that the legal change primarily or even exclusively accounts for the emergence of these movements. It certainly qualifies as a necessary condition. However, as I will show in the following analysis, it alone was not sufficient for the growing conservative, evangelical and largely Pentecostal Christian movement to both emerge and succeed. The revolutionary change that precipitated the legal change also brought with it a number of socio-economic and cultural changes that produced a context favorable for the eventual emergence of the indigenous movement. This paper, then, seeks to accomplish two things: (1) account for the emergence of the indigenous Christian movement and, (2) more generally, illustrate a number of causal mechanisms, activated by revolutionary change, that can be beneficial to conservative or reformist religious movements.

In what follows, I will first briefly describe the indigenous Christian movement in China in order to provide a sketch of how the movement unfolded. From this, I will then show how, beyond the mere legal change that followed the 1911 Revolution, a number of important causal mechanisms were activated that fueled the movement: the revaluation of social and cultural capital, movement resource production, radicalized cognitive resources, and a crisis of legitimacy.

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[1] The change in the legal status of religion was similar to the current policy of the People's Republic of China wherein there are a set number of "official religions" that ostensibly have equal legal status. All else are considered "superstitions" and are not legally protected and are often suppressed.

OVERVIEW OF INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS

Before considering the specific structural transformations that affected their emergence, it will be helpful to briefly summarize the major indigenous Christian movements that were part of the religious milieu of the 1920s and 1930s.[2] Though similar in the fact that they were indigenous and independent, there was a great deal of variation across groups in terms of structure and intended scope.

Even before that, however, it is necessary to clarify an important point. During this period there were actually *two* indigenizing movements—or, more correctly, there were two ways of conceptualizing how the church in China might indigenize. The first, and the one that I am focusing on here in this paper, was primarily institutional indigenization and fits with what can be, in the context of China, typically understood as indigenization proper.[3] This mode of indigenization involves little concern over theological or ritual content per se and is more focused on the organizational separation of the indigenous church from mission churches and foreign control. The second understanding of indigenization, and one more commonly expressed by Chinese pastors and church intellectuals,[4] was far more content focused. This form of indigenization is more properly understood as a type of Sinofication therein making the rites and rituals of Christianity more culturally Chinese. This included suggestions such as using rice instead of bread in the Eucharist, joss sticks in services instead of other forms of incense or merely to create a more Chinese religious atmosphere, and Chinese instruments instead of organs. In contrast to the more institutional attempts to indigenize, "sinocizing" in

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[2] For more detailed accounts of the various indigenous Christian movements, see Daniel H. Bays, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century To the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); and Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010) and "The Search for Chinese Christianity in the Republican Period, 1912–1949," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2004): 851–898.

[3] By typical, I am referring to this understanding of indigenization as the primary operating mode among missionaries. This version, often referred to as the "Three-Self model" (self-propagating, self-governing, and self-sustaining) and popularized by London Mission Society (LMS) President Henry Venn, was used as the model and goal of most (but not all) denomination-based attempts to indigenize.

[4] Luo Weihong, *Christianity in China* (Beijing: China Intercontinental, 2004).

no way necessitated institutional or organizational change. A church could institute a sinocized service without requiring a split or break from its denomination.

The emergence of institutionally indigenous churches in the first quarter century following the fall of the Qing marked a transformative moment for Christianity in China. Up until the twentieth century, though discourse concerning indigenization was common, practical steps to the effect were rare and the only notable indigenous movement before 1900 was the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom 太平天國, with its highly syncretistic adoption of Christian themes and theology and its social revolutionary agenda. Though arguably one of the most important single historical forces in late Qing China, the Taipings were an exception to the general rule of mission-run Christianity. The Taipings shared far more in common with the long tradition of Chinese sectarian rebellions then they shared with the Christian tradition and thus hardly constitute an example of indigenizing. It was not until the 1910s and 1920s that self-consciously indigenous movements would enter the broader discourse of Chinese Christianity.

Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, there was little that would suggest independence as a viable option for Chinese Christian leaders. Until the fall of the Qing Dynasty, Chinese nationals were barred from establishing their own churches outside of the Western denominations and mission organizations that received favored status through the treaty system. That Western missions and denominations held the purse strings of the church provided both sufficient incentives to maintain ties with those churches and significant disincentives for leaving. As Lian Xi 連曦 notes,

> For their part, most Chinese converts in the nineteenth century saw little need to dissociate themselves from missions or to form separate churches. In fact, affiliation with mission churches would bring tangible benefits in terms of social standing and educational and employment opportunities for the converts.[5]

Additionally, for those educated and trained in mission schools, affiliation with the Christian institutional structure was likely one of the few options available as the Qing state bureaucracy continued to rely on

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[5] Lian, *Redeemed by Fire*, 31.

training in the Chinese classics as a standard for assessment up until the 1905 abolition of the examination system.

This all began to change through a series of important events that altered both the social situatedness of Chinese Christianity and the structure of the Chinese state and society. The Boxer Rebellion (Yihetuan 義和團 Movement) exhibited an overflowing wave of resentment against foreign incursion and control as well as imperialism's agents, whether they were foreign or domestic.[6] The Boxers represented the largest in a series of increasingly routinized expressions of resentment against foreigners and Christianity. The second significant event was the abolition of the 2000-year-old examination system. The end of the qualification examination swiftly and sharply changed the means of social mobility and the process of attaining political office as Chinese classical education suddenly lost its primary utility and was replaced by Western, modern education. The underlying themes driving these two events—nationalism and modernization—were the birth pangs of the coming revolution that finally did away with the most traditional of Chinese institutional systems: the dynastic structure.

The outbreak of indigenous Christian movements in China was preceded by a series of preliminary steps toward independence from the missionary and denominational establishment. However, most of these early moves toward independence still did not lead to completely cutting off connections to the missionary churches or represented more symbolic or rhetorical rather than institutional separation. Lian Xi documents that, in 1910, "Yu [Guozhen 俞國楨] declared the formation of a national network of the Independent Church. Its official English name was the National Free Christian Church of China—deliberately shorn of separatist language that might alienate the missionary community" and that in 1911 a group of "Congregational preachers took the first symbolic step toward autonomy and formed a Preacher's Self Governing Society."[7] A perhaps even more interesting case was that of the Chinese Home Missionary Society, founded in 1918. Its founding date came later (and actually after the 1911 Revolution) and it was headed by Cheng Jingyi 誠靜怡, a prominent pastor in the institutional

[6] The victims of Boxer attacks were overwhelming Chinese. Where there were hundreds of missionary deaths during the uprising, tens of thousands of Chinese Christians are believed to have perished.

[7] Lian, *Redeemed by Fire*, 33, 27.

church in China as well as global Christianity more broadly.[8] Cheng is an interesting case due to not only his prominence in calling early and often for an independent Chinese church, but also for the fact that he never did leave the foreign governed church structure in China.

It was in the late 1910s and on through to the 1930s that the flood gates broke and movements, independent preachers, and indigenous churches sprouted up around the country and gained impressive followings. Among these different movements there was significant structural variation. The True Jesus Church (TJC) 真耶穌教會, founded by Wei Enbo 魏恩波 in 1917, was a highly Pentecostal and extremely sectarian network of churches. The Jesus Family was also rather sectarian and similarly Pentecostal in practice, but their group was dedicated to communal living and the collective sharing of wealth. Jesus Family groupings would live in large houses together—the central one in Mazhuang 馬庄, Shandong—where they would work and worship, much like a monastery. Wang Mingdao's 王明道 single church in Beijing and Watchman Nee's 倪柝聲 network of churches referred to as either the Little Flock or Local Church, were more traditional churches with evident similarities with their Western counterparts.[9] Yet, while Nee's efforts expanded to include a vast number of congregations, Wang never extended his institutional reach beyond his single congregation.[10] Ling'en hui 靈恩會 was more a Pentecostal movement than a church or network and was part of the Shandong Revival of the 1930s that swept through that region. Lastly, John Sung (Song Shangjie 宋尚節) and the Bethel Band could hardly be called an institution or church. They were ultimately more para-church than church. However, their traveling evangelistic work was instrumental in creating new, independent churches and inspiring other established churches to break from their denominational relationships. In all, these movements (whose founding dates and leaders are listed in table 1 below) repre-

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[8] Cheng was present at the 1910 Edinburgh Conference wherein two of his speeches were remembered for the sharpness of their calls for indigenization and the elimination of denominational divisions. See World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission II: The Church in the Mission Field* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), and World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission VIII: Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910).

[9] Watchman Nee borrowed heavily from the Brethren movement and was, for a period of time, loosely affiliated with the movement. The Little Flock kept their Brethren-influenced ritual and structure even though Nee had a sharp break with the Brethren movement after a brief visit to England.

[10] Wang did, however, have a significant influence on a number of different congregations via his sometime itinerant preaching and his regular publications.

sented a sharp and vital break from the tradition of submission to Western church leadership and organizational dependence on denominational resources.

Table 1. Indigenous Churches

Name	Year Founded	Location	Leader
Chinese Independent Church	1906	Shanghai	Yu Guozhen
True Jesus Church	1917	Beijing	Wei Enbo
Christian Tabernacle	1925	Beijing	Wang Mingdao
Jesus Family	1926	Shandong	Jing Dianying
Little Flock/Local Church	mid 1920s	Fuzhou, Shanghai	Watchman Nee
Ling'en hui	1930	Shandong	none
Bethel Band	1931	Shanghai (itinerant)	John Sung, Andrew Gih

REVALUED SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

How, then, was it possible that with the end of the ban on Chinese nationals establishing Christian churches were there so many primed to step into this newly opened political space? One of the key mechanisms brought about by the 1911 Revolution was a shift in the value of important cultural and social capital. With the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the currency of advancement, so to speak, changed. The clearest example of this change came in the field of education and political positions.

Restructuring the educational system was a change long in coming and with the most major ripples emanating from the 1905 abolition of the examination system. That system had, for millennia, determined the placement of political officials throughout the Chinese empire. It was based on one’s knowledge of the Confucian classics and ability to reason morally. While not a test of one’s knowledge of “the law of the land,” it was a test of its logic. Embedded in that logic was a cosmology that made sense of imperial power, social order, cultural practice, and even international relations. High scoring officials garnered both great prestige and powerful positions. The 1905 change ended this system. The historical disjuncture this created was exacerbated by the fall of the Qing and the death of what had been the locus of the previous logic of political mobility: imperial power.

Though Western education was growing in importance throughout the period of the late Qing, it was the end of the examination system and the fall of the Qing that represented its final triumph. Whereas in business the importance of Western education had deeper roots—mass production and industrialization required such technical education—politics required a new government in order for Western education to become a determining factor in acquiring political office. And it was the denomination and mission schools that controlled a significant percentage of Western education in China.

This by no means is meant to imply that all students who came through mission schools were Christian or even sympathetic to the church. However, enough were. Similarly, most potentially influential Christians had almost automatic access to the educational advantages of the church, and not a few eventual church and public leaders were plucked out of poverty and given what was, at the time, the best available education.

The result of this change was a dramatic increase in the number of Christians who had access to positions of high authority in government. In particular, the early years of the fledgling Republic represented a period of disproportionate influence for Christians in economic, social and political life.[11] Chinese Christians could be found in positions of significant influence throughout China, be it as elite Nationalist Party members or leaders, university presidents, leaders of social organizations such as the YMCA or the Anti-Opium Society, and as owners and heads of a number of influential businesses.[12] The social status and social capital available to Chinese Christians grew dramatically during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Early post-dynastic China also saw the rise of what Daniel Bays has termed the "Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment"[13] which reaped

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[11] Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857–1927* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

[12] Zhou Yongming, *Anti-drug Crusades in Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); Qian Yimin 錢益民, *Lidenghui zhuan* 李登輝傳 [Biography of Li Denghui] (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2005); W. W. Yen, *East-West Kaleidoscope, 1877–1946: An Autobiography* (New York: St. John's University Press, 1974); Shirley S. Garret, *Social Reformers in Urban China: The Chinese Y.M.C.A., 1895–1926* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Lee Hamrin Carol and Stacey Bieler, *Salt and Light 2: More Lives of Faith That Shaped Modern China* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010) and *Salt and Light: Lives of Faith That Shaped Modern China* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009).

[13] Daniel H. Bays, "Foreign Missions and Indigenous Protestant Leaders in China, 1920–1955: Identity and Loyalty in an Age of Powerful Nationalism," in *Missions,*

the early benefits of revolutionary change. Mission schools, the YMCA, and other social and political organizations allied with traditional Protestant institutions were the ones who initially found their members gaining access to positions of influence.

While the basis for such change was, as emphasized above, largely due to the practical education Christians received, it was similarly linked to the growing prestige of modern education and modern sensibilities. It is important to note that this did not necessarily mean *Western* leanings, but more generally (and often vaguely defined) *modern* ones. While still viewed as a Western religion inextricably linked with imperialism, many intellectuals in China saw in Christianity a religious and moral system that was fundamentally compatible with a modernizing agenda.[14] Whereas Confucianism and Buddhism were often accused of hindering China's process of modernization, Christianity was viewed as well adapted to modernity.[15] This appealed to intellectuals committed to a rational and scientific strengthening of the nation and helped increase the social capital of Christian leaders. A useful if somewhat over used example would be Sun Yat-sen 孫逸仙 and Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 both deeming it necessary (setting aside for a moment whatever personal beliefs either may or may not have had) to not only self-identify as Christians and receive baptism, but that they also married into what was one of the most prominent families—and prominent *Christian* families—in China.[16]

In the wake of revolution, Chinese Christians experienced a significant increase in their social capital. Previously socially and culturally marginalized, in the wake of the revolution Christians moved toward the structural center of power.

Nationalism, and the End of Empire, ed. Stanley Brian (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 144–164.

[14] Timothy Ting-fang Lew, *China Today through Chinese Eyes* (New York: George H. Doran, 1922).

[15] Sherwood Eddy made a often cited trip throughout China in the early Republican Era for the express purpose of expounding on how Christianity was a modern religion that would help China enter the modern age.

[16] Both married daughters of Charlie Soong, a prominent businessman and Christian, whose third daughter also married H. H. Kung, a prominent Kuomintang (KMT) official.

MOVEMENT RESOURCES

Intimately linked to the changing value of social capital in post-Revolution China was a similar change in resource availability. Successful mobilization of any movement requires the availability of the resources necessary to do the work of activism.[17] Resources (or their lack) had been, until around the 1911 revolution, a significant constraining influence on any discussion of indigenization. Theories of indigenization identified three requirements—self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation—that needed to be met to qualify as an indigenous church. While self-governance was at the mercy of Western denominational and mission organizational leadership and organizational power structures, self-support proved equally constraining. Generally, Chinese pastors and ministers depended on their denominational affiliations for employment and pay. While Chinese Christians did tithe, the bulk of church financing came from foreign sources.[18] The prospect of sustaining a viable income outside of these organizations was not favorable and this was enough to restrain separatist movements in most cases. Work within mission and denominational structures, prior to the revolution, were also an effective means of social mobility.[19] Leaving the denominational system meant the loss of a stable pastoral salary in a time when few Christians went to churches outside the system. Without the availability of financial sup-

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[17] John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (1977) : 121–241; John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "The Enduring Vitality of the Resource Mobilization Theory of Social Movements," in *Handbook of Sociological Theory*, ed. J. H. Turner (New York: Kluwer Academic / Plenum, 2002), 533–565; J. Craig Jenkins and Charles Perrow, "Insurgency of the Powerless: Farm Worker Movements, 1946–1972,"*American Sociological Review* 42, no. 2 (1977): 249–268; Aldon Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984).

[18] While this has not been extensively analyzed in the historical literature, most mission leaders and indigenous pastors explicitly acknowledged the enduring problem of "self-support" as a major obstacle to indigenization.

[19] Bays, "Foreign Missions and Indigenous Protestant Leaders in China." Latter indigenous leaders often pointed to this specific fact as a sign of the corruption at the heart of the Western churches—pastors were overly concerned with social status and not concerned enough with the church itself.

port, it was difficult to conceive of starting an indigenous church or sustaining it.

The dramatic shift in social location did provide the resource base that had been lacking in the pre-revolutionary period. The constraining influence of finances decreased with the rise in the number of urban, highly educated, well employed church members and sympathizers. This trend is evident in the writings of many indigenous church leaders. Though few of them recount details concerning the financing of the churches they led, their autobiographies are replete with stories of significant benefactors who helped advance movement goals. This was particularly true for both Watchman Nee and Wang Mingdao. Both of these pastors maintained regular publishing endeavors with rather extensive circulations which were heavily subsidized by wealthy church members and others who were unwilling to leave the denominational churches but were still willing to support the fledgling movements. On numerous occasions they both experienced "11th hour" financial gifts that helped sustain their publishing efforts.[20] Nee even had a close relative who ran a pharmaceutical company for which Nee worked for a number of years during the Japanese occupation.[21] Jing Dianying 敬奠瀛 of the Jesus Family similarly relied on a handful of supporters in order to sustain their community.[22] Church members among the different movements also had access to positions of substantial influence, with more broad based groups like Nee's Little Flock having an impressive number of members in positions of influence all through the Nationalist government.[23] The change in the status of Christians in post-revolution China provided new resources for these emerging movements.

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[20] Watchman Nee, *Watchman Nee's Testimony* (Anahiem, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1991); Wang Mingdao, *A Stone Made Smooth* (Southampton, Hants: Mayflower Christian Books, 1981).

[21] Dana Roberts, *Secrets of Watchman Nee* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2005); Angus Kinnear, *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee* (Eastbourne, England: Victory, 1974).

[22] Lian, *Redeemed by Fire*.

[23] Joseph Tse-hei Lee, "Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China," *Church History* 74, no. 1 (2005): 89.

RADICALIZED COGNITIVE RESOURCES

The collapse of the dynastic system—the central institution of traditional authority—and the correlated socio-cultural transformations that followed were not unique to China and are part of a more general relationship between structural transformation and ideology. Such wide ranging revolutions—revolutions aimed at reshaping the makeup of society both in its structural composition and cultural logic—are, among other things, strongly influenced by ideology.[24] Revolutionary changes often "tend to be clustered into relatively intense bursts," and involve both "dislocations and transformative rearticulations of structures."[25] The ideology of such revolutions motivates the process of rearticulation and is thus infused into the new structures of state and society as well as the cultural and ideological products of revolution and structure. Robert Wuthnow observes a similar relationship in the emergence of the Renaissance, Reformation, and Communist movements. He argues that,

> Ideology needs to be recognized as a constitutive feature of social order itself. Ideology requires social resources to be produced and maintained, it defines moral obligations which influence the distribution of social resources, and it becomes institutionalized in organizations, in professional roles, in collective rituals, and in relations with the state.[26]

When state and society are reconstituted on new ideological grounds, that ideology is embedded in the institutions and practices that both produce and are produced by new modes of thought and socio-political agendas.

Among pre-Revolution Chinese Protestant leaders, a number were known for their strong stances in favor of indigenization. However,

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[24] William H. Sewell, "Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case," *The Journal of Modern History* 57 (1985): 57–85. Included among these "other things" would of course be state structures.

[25] William H. Sewell, "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society* 25 (1996): 843, 861.

[26] Robert Wuthnow, "State Structures and Ideological Outcomes," *American Sociological Review* 50 (1985): 815.

these leaders remained reluctant to exit the denominational system. Of these leaders, a few should be briefly mentioned. Cheng Jingyi was, up to and beyond the 1911 Revolution, one of the best known and respected Protestant leaders in China. However, he was also one of the most outspoken advocates of indigenization. As a delegate to the 1910 World Missions Conference, Cheng made waves by both giving a strident call for the transfer of power from Western missionaries to local Chinese leadership and also arguing against the very need for denominational differences at all. Yet, Cheng remained a mainstay of the Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment till the end of his time as a minister. Chen Chonggui 陳崇桂 was even more contentious when it came to Western control of Chinese churches.[27] Chen came into conflict with both the local and denominational leaderships with which he worked on numerous occasions throughout his career. In fact, the period of least tension took place when Chen worked with the China Inland Mission and was given significant latitude to run his own programs. However, Chen remained tied to both his denomination or to a sponsoring mission agency (like the CIM) until the end of his career. This contentious fidelity characterized indigenization-minded leaders of the pre-revolutionary era.

The novel willingness to eschew denominational affiliation and start new movements was unique among the leaders of the indigenous Protestant movement. The startling thing about how these leaders spoke of giving up their affiliations with Western-led institutions was how little they said about any need to stay. For most, the desire to break from denomination and mission churches was rooted in theological concerns (to be discussed further below). However, those concerns and the separatist impulses they fostered were in no way constrained by the desire to work within the existing structure (or the assumption that working within existing institutions was somehow predetermined) that characterized the prior generation of indigenization-minded leaders. Acceding to traditional leadership no longer necessarily factored as a motivating principle.

While this way of viewing one’s relationship with the denomination and mission churches was new vis-à-vis pre-Revolution pastors, it was not unique by the standards of post-revolutionary society. The 1911 Revolution had been the cresting of violent swell of dissent that fo-

[27] Bays, “Foreign Missions and Indigenous Protestant Leaders in China.” It seems that Chen, in large part, was mostly concerned about the influence foreign leaders had over him as an individual.

cused on change for the better and toward the future. It was not members of the old guard of the Chinese church (the Cheng Jingyi and Chen Chonggui) that led the break from the foreign controlled churches. Most leaders of the indigenization movement were of a "new guard" of church leaders who had grown up in the context of revolutionary change, modernist restructuring of society, statist transformations of the old dynastic empire, and clear of halting attempts to republicanize the nation. It was this change oriented and radicalized social context that formed similar drives and orientations among the new cadre of leaders.

CRISIS OF LEGITMACY

Yet it was not merely that changes in the state and society fostered a willingness to throw off old, untenable structures and power alignments, moreover the period of change bred a crisis of legitimacy that threatened the logics of certain taken-for-granted authority. Early twentieth-century China witnessed a period of crumbling legitimacy across social, political, and cultural fields. With the end of the examination system in 1905, the collapse of the dynastic system during the Revolution, and the later New Culture and May 4th movements, the authority of traditional practice and belief was severely undermined. In its place came a drive to modernize the Chinese state on all levels.[28] Though there were reformers such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 and Kang Youwei 康有為 who still envisioned some blending of the old and new (in the form of a constitutional monarchy), the tenor and direction of intellectual discourse pressed in very different and far more radical directions. The emerging predominance of modernist thinking in the place of traditionalism helped condition the emergence of an indigenous Protestant church in China by cultivating a suspicion of legitimacy based purely on traditional authority.[29]

[28] However, this conditioning must be understood as part of a generally favorable view of some church and non-church members toward the modernizing potential of Christianity, for the movement leaders were not modernists themselves.

[29] I am using the term "traditional authority" in a mostly Weberian sense. In this case it refers to power and authority vested in traditions or long-held cultural logics as opposed to charismatic or legal-rational forms of authority.

The collapse of the imperial state reflected a profound crisis of the legitimacy of state authority, and it, in turn, fostered questions regarding traditional social structures throughout the country. In this context, the ideology of modernism expressed by a rising class of professionals and liberal politicians gained much greater resonance than would otherwise have been the case. The post-Revolution ideological climate was one of nationalism and anti-traditionalism that undermined the position of authority figures at numerous levels of society. Schools were particularly susceptible to attacks on what was viewed as unjustified uses of authority, particularly in the case of Westerners, but not excluding Chinese who were viewed as ideologically compromised.[30] In the case of churches, aside from the existence of separatist indigenous movements, the way that church leaders prior to the revolution and those who led the indigenous movements spoke of (or failed to) the legitimacy of the denominational and traditional power hierarchies of the church reflected this ideological shift. This is not to say that indigenous church leaders adopted the posture of modernist social critics, but rather that they embraced a general posture of criticism that was instead focused on denominational authority and which was based on either scriptural or revelatory grounds.

The major indigenous movements of the Republican Era shared a central commitment to biblical literalism. In a way reminiscent of the leaders of the Reformation in Europe, indigenous leaders during this period found in the bible both justification for questioning the liberalism of the missionaries they encountered and a new source of legitimate authority around which they could form their movements. The writings of movement leaders are filled with condemnations of liberal leanings and the corruption of mission churches and a repeated assertion of dependence on scripture alone as a source of truth. Wang Mingdao's comments characterize this type of reflection:

> Now why is it that I personally have not accepted these traditions [of denomination churches]. It is because when I studied the truth I had not only never studied at a theological college but also I have never studied any theological books. All I did was to read the Old Testa-

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[30] Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Ming K. Chan and Arif Dirlik, *Schools into Fields and Factories: Anarchists, the Guomindang and the National Labor University in Shanghai, 1927–1932* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Qian, *Lidenghui zhuan*.

> ment and the New Testament over and over again. My beliefs and the message I preached were derived in their entirety from the Bible.[31]

Biblical literalism was one of the ways that indigenous leaders established new sources of legitimacy contra denominational structures and traditions.

Another important source of legitimacy to replace that of the liberalizing mission churches was of a more "spirit versus the world" form that reflected the important impact that Pentecostalism was having as a global anti-liberal (i.e., liberal Christianity), anti-modern religious movement. A number of indigenous movements—the True Jesus Church, Jesus Family, and Ling'en Hui in particular—were profoundly steeped in the beliefs and practices of Pentecostalism. Tao Feiya 陶飛亞 found that "Pentacostalism . . . gave Jing and his followers the confidence to regard themselves as a special category of Christians whom Jing described as the 'vanguard of the kingdom of God.'"[32] While movements like Watchman Nee's Little Flock and Wang Mingdao's Christian Tabernacle were decidedly not Pentecostal in practice (Wang, in particular, was expressly against the practice of the more "showy" spiritual gifts), both Nee and Wang had significant exposure to the movement and its rather extravagant displays of spiritual power. Wang's story is again instructive. He became involved with a Pentecostal fellowship around the time that he was contemplating an exit from the denomination with which he was affiliated (he taught at a mission school). It was the act of being baptized by a Pentecostal pastor that precipitated his expulsion from the school given that this effectively made him a Pentecostal. However, shortly after the incident, Wang left the Pentecostal group to which he was connected and no longer spoke positively of such activities. But, what was clear in Wang's experience, as well as those of other indigenous leaders, was that the charismatic experiences characteristic of Pentecostalism provided yet another alternative source of legitimacy.

The question of legitimacy in the church can be seen as the meeting of a number of forces. Coinciding with the 1911 Revolution and the changing religious laws under the new government were a rising dis-

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[31] Wang, *A Stone Made Smooth*, 111.

[32] Tao Feiya, "Pentecostalism and Christian Utopia in China: Jing Dianying and the Jesus Family Movement, 1921–1952," in *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities,* eds. Ogbu U. Kalu and Alaine Low (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 246.

content among certain Christians with liberalization in the Church, the emergence of Pentecostalism as a viable and powerful alternative movement and cognitive resource, and a general atmosphere critical of traditional systems of authority among the educated. This resulted, in the churches, in indigenous leaders turning away from the denominational church and toward new sources of authority for their spiritual endeavors.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to account for the emergence of the indigenous Christian movement in China in the wake of the 1911 Revolution and subsequent changes to religious regulatory law. It has similarly been my aim to identify a number of mechanisms which that revolution activated that were ultimately beneficial to these religious reform movements. While these findings are still preliminary, a number of mechanisms help to explain the changes that took place during the early Republican Era.

Though the ability of Chinese Christians to establish churches was a necessary change in the political-legal structure, this change alone does not account for the timing and success of the indigenizing movement. The shifting value of social capital in the period both before and after the 1911 Revolution saw Christians move from relative outsiders to positions of considerably more social power. While this did not necessarily have a direct effect on the indigenous movement, it did facilitate the expansion of available resources that underwrote the movement. Elite contacts and fiscal resources provided new sources of support beyond the denomination and mission churches on which the Chinese church had hitherto depended. In addition to these more "structural" mechanisms, a number of cultural changes emerged out of the Revolution and early Republican years. The first was the ideological shift precipitated by revolution-driven structural change. Second was a general crisis of legitimacy fueled by both the fall of the Qing Dynasty (the penultimate symbol of traditional authority in China) as well as concerns over the liberalization of the denominational and mission churches.

These mechanisms are illustrative of an important characteristic of social revolutions. Though the broad ranging changes that such revolu-

tions entail can certainly cause great harm to religious movements (the plight of religion under most communist regimes would be a clear example of this), it is similarly possible that the transformation brought about by revolutionary change may activate causal mechanisms that facilitate the efforts of religious reform movements. This was certainly the case for Christianity in China during the early twentieth century. Indigenization, an oft discussed but only haltingly implemented project in the church in China, had idled without the proper structural and cultural opportunities. With the fall of the dynastic system and the ensuing struggle for power and ultimate ascendance of a (at least in aspiration) republican government, the resources, both material and cultural, necessary to sustain an indigenizing movement became available to a new generation of church leaders. It was in this context, and freed from legal constraints, that the indigenous Christian movement ultimately emerged.